

Scriptures

John 10:1-11

Psalm 23:1

Guide and Guardian**Jesus identifies himself as our Good Shepherd.**

- ◆ Jesus calls himself our Good Shepherd, and us the good sheep who hear his voice.
- ◆ Older children want to trust the people they follow as leaders, but they are becoming more critical of people as they grow older. People need to patiently earn the trust of older children.
- ◆ In today's session, we affirm Jesus as a guide and guardian group members can safely trust and follow.

Core Session

- ◆ Getting Started (*voice recorder*)
- ◆ Today's Gospel
- ◆ Sheep and Shepherd Walk (*blindfold*)
- ◆ Praying Together

Enrichment

- ◆ Explore the Good News
- ◆ Movement and Psalms
- ◆ Express Yourself: Go with the Flow! (*watercolor sets*)
- ◆ Easter Tree Craft (*branches, flowerpot, sand, eggs, nut pick or manicure scissors, bowl, ribbons; optional: food colors*)
- ◆ Info: Where You'll Find Everything Else

Helps for Leaders

- ◆ More about Today's Scriptures
- ◆ Reflection
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Amen, Amen
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Repentance
- ◆ The World of the Bible: Signs and Wonders

✓ Getting Started (5-15 minutes)

Activity Soundtrack: Play Pachelbel's *Canon and Gigue*. (Open your Spring-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on *Companion Music* for options on obtaining this music.)

As participants arrive, ask each one to read John 10:10b into a voice recorder: "I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness."

When all the participants have arrived, ask one participant to lead participants in the Easter greeting:

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Play the recordings and ask participants to identify each speaker. Discuss:

- ◆ How can you tell who is speaking?
- ◆ Whose voices sounded similar? different?
- ◆ In what way is each voice special?
- ◆ Let's listen to a Bible story about someone's special voice.

✓ Today's Gospel (10-15 minutes)

Participants discuss Jesus' parable of the shepherd and sheep from **John 10:1-11**.

Distribute Bibles and ask group members to find John 10:1-11, explaining that John is one of the four gospels and the fourth book of the New Testament. Begin with a shared meditation. Set a prayerful atmosphere by reading the passage slowly: ask them to listen for the words or phrases that catch their attention. Ask:

- ◆ What word or phrase did you hear in today's reading?

Be sure to share your own response, too. Ask participants to follow along as you reread John 10:1-6.

Discuss:

- ◆ How do the sheep recognize their shepherd?
- ◆ Why do you think the sheep will follow only their shepherd's voice?

Read John 10:7-10 aloud. Discuss:

- ◆ Look at verse 11. Why do you think Jesus compares himself to a gate for the sheep?
- ◆ How does a gate protect sheep?
- ◆ How does Jesus protect us?
- ◆ Who protects you as much as a gate protects sheep? Why?

✓ Sheep and Shepherd Walk (15-30 minutes)

Ask one participant to volunteer to be the first *sheep*; ask this participant to pick another participant as *shepherd*. Blindfold the *sheep*. Ask the other members of the group to use tape and obstacles to create a simple obstacle course that the *sheep* will walk.

The *shepherd* guides the *sheep* through the obstacle course, using his or her voice only; for example, the *shepherd* might give such directions as:

- ◆ Take just one small step.
- ◆ Move to the right; there's a chair in front of you.

When the *sheep* reaches the end of the course, remove the blindfold and ask for new volunteers. The other participants rearrange materials to make a new course. After 5-10 minutes' play, discuss:

- ◆ What was hard about being a sheep?
- ◆ What was hard about being a shepherd?
- ◆ Do you think it is harder to lead or to follow? Why?
- ◆ What leaders do we trust at church? in our families? among our friends? Why?
- ◆ Have you ever felt God or Jesus was leading you to do something? What did you do? How did you feel?
- ◆ How can we help one another follow God or Jesus?

✓ Praying Together (5 minutes)

Light the candle decorated in the session for the 2nd Sunday of Easter. Invite participants to continue experimenting with using scripture verses as prayer. Help the participants memorize the words of **Psalm 23:1**: *The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need.*

Memorize the verse together by saying it together slowly and rhythmically several times. Pause and say:

- ◆ Think about a need of yours that you want Jesus to take care of.
- ◆ Use your own words to tell Jesus what you feel.

Pause, then slowly repeat once more the scripture verse above. Close by praying:

- ◆ Lord Jesus, thank you for giving each one of us what we need. *Amen.*

Note: Distribute this week's *At Home with the Good News* to group members (or e-mail it to families).

□ Explore the Good News

(5-15 minutes)

On page 1 of today's *Explore the Good News* group members will find a mock classified ads activity that further explores today's gospel.

On page 2 group members will find an activity called Amazing Appearances. This ongoing activity is designed to help older children practice scripture skills as they explore the variety of resurrection stories in the gospels.

□ Movement and Psalms

(10-20 minutes)

Activity Soundtrack: Play Pachelbel's *Canon and Gigue*. (Open your Spring-A Seasonal Resources folder, then click on *Companion Music* for options on obtaining this music.)

Group members use movement to explore the poetry of the psalms. In today's session, we explore the device of extension. Future sessions will explore the devices of reversal and echo.

First invite group members to make shapes that are different from the standing or sitting shapes they usually make during the day. Ask for a high shape (stretched out), a low shape (crouched, squatting, etc.) and a shape in the middle. Ask them to vary their shapes in other ways:

- ◆ Make an open shape.
- ◆ Make a closed shape.
- ◆ Make a stretched-out shape.
- ◆ Make a tense, tight shape.

Then ask group members to form pairs. Explain:

- ◆ First, one of you will make a shape.
- ◆ Then, the other will make a shape that responds to your partner.
- ◆ Remember to keep enough space between you so that you aren't touching, but your bodies together make one new shape.

Invite participants to try this response several times.

Then ask:

- ◆ Can you make a shape that extends your partner's shape? That is, take one basic element of your partner's shape and exaggerate it or develop it. If your partner's shape is stretched toward the wall, you can make a shape that will move even closer to the wall, or a shape that is even more stretched-out.

Then explain that Hebrew poetry in the psalms uses a unique way of building a poem. When English poets wrote poems long ago, they might make words rhyme, as they do in nursery rhymes. Invite group members to think of rhymes they know.

But rhyme only works well in its original language. The poetry of Hebrew psalms works in any translation because they "rhyme" thoughts instead of words. Read group members this verse:

Your presence fills me with joy
and brings me pleasure forever.

—Psalm 16:11

Explain that the second line echoes the first one. It has the same basic idea, said in a slightly different way. Now read another verse:

I call to the Lord for help,
And from his sacred hill he answers me.

—Psalm 3:4

This time, the second line extends the first one, just as we extended movements in our warm-up. You don't know the whole idea until you hear both parts. Here's one more verse:

The Lord will take away the strength of the wicked,
but protect those who are good.

—Psalm 37:17

This time, the second line reverses the first. The whole verse tells about two events that are opposite to each other. Ask group members to read together **Psalm 23**, which has many examples of *extension*. Ask them to look for verses in which both halves of the verse are needed to complete one thought. (This includes the first verse of the psalm.)

□ Express Yourself (15-30 minutes)

Go with the Flow!

Begin by playing Pachelbel's *Canon*. (Open your Spring-A *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Companion Music* for options on obtaining this music.) As the music begins, invite group members to close their eyes and listen to the music. Explain:

- ◆ This piece is called *Canon*. A canon is a musical form in which successive parts begin with the same melody.
- ◆ This is music of comfort. It's considered so comforting, in fact, that it's often recommended for people who need help relaxing or falling asleep.
- ◆ Listen. Pay attention to what images come to mind. Attend to how you feel as the music continues.

Then gather group members around the *Express Yourself... Go with the Flow* poster, attached to this document. Invite group members to follow the directions under the heading *Color Flow* to create a work of art based on words of comfort from scripture. Group members can choose words from today's gospel or from Psalm 23.

Play Pachelbel's *Canon* again as group members letter their words and paint loose designs of color over them. Invite volunteers to share their finished work.

Note: View *Fountain in front of St. Peter's*, attached to this document.

□ Easter Tree Craft (15-30 minutes)

Participants continue decorating the Easter tree begun in the session for the 2nd Sunday of Easter.

Help participants find **Psalm 23:1-4**. Help participants follow along as you read the verses aloud.

After the reading, discuss:

- ◆ Have you ever heard this psalm before? When?
- ◆ Why do you think the writer compares the Lord to a shepherd?
- ◆ How could we rewrite verse 1 if we compared the Lord to a coach? to a mother? to a best friend?
- ◆ In what other ways could we rewrite verse 1?

Ask participants to read the psalm aloud with you, replacing the words *the Lord* or the word *he* with the name *Jesus*; for example:

- ◆ Jesus is my shepherd; I have everything I need.

Invite participants to decorate eggs with words from Psalm 23. *Directions to the participants:*

- ◆ Use a nut pick or pair of manicure scissors to make a tiny hole in each end of the egg. Blow through one end to force the egg into a bowl.
- ◆ Use felt pens (*or colored pencils*) to decorate the eggs with words from Psalm 23. (*The eggs may be dyed first. Make each dye by mixing ¾ cup water, 1 teaspoon vinegar and 10-20 drops food color in a cup.*)
- ◆ You can add any other pictures or decorations that you like to the egg.
- ◆ Use ribbon to hang your finished egg from the Easter tree.

INFO Where You'll Find Everything Else

- ◆ Attached to this Session Plan you will find:
 - Backgrounds and reflections for today's readings, titled *More about Today's Scriptures*.
 - An optional (and ongoing) *Faith Skills* activity exploring Baptism.
 - A helpful article looking at *Older Children and the Gospel*.
 - The *Express Yourself... Go with the Flow!* poster, to be used in today's Express Yourself activity.
 - Lessing's *Fountain in Front of St. Peter's*, to be used in today's Express Yourself activity.
 - A family paper, *At Home with the Good News*, to print and distribute *or* to e-mail to families for use at home.
- ◆ Open your Spring-A *Seasonal Resources* folder, then click on *Seasonal Articles* to find:
 - Information on Spring-A's *Models of the Faith*.
 - A printable article looking more closely at *The Gospel of John*.
 - A printable article exploring the possibility of *Using the Arts to Bring Different Age Groups Together*.
 - The *Introduction for Intermediate* for **Living the Good News**.

More about Today's Scriptures

Today's readings exalt Jesus as our shepherd-leader. In Acts, Peter's testimony moves the people to repent and be baptized, acknowledging Jesus as Lord and Messiah. 1 Peter points us to Christ as a suffering servant, a leader who is both redeemer and example. In the gospel, Jesus compares his relationship with God's people to a shepherd's care for the sheep.

Acts 2:42-47

These verses give an overview of the Church's life and growth. Verse 42 mentions four aspects of that life. The "apostles' teaching" was carried on both in public and within the community.

The "fellowship" (Greek, *koinonia*) was apparent especially in the sharing of resources. This probably meant not an automatic divestiture of all possessions, but the placing of one's assets at the disposal of the community to be used as needed.

The "breaking of the bread" probably indicates a common meal that included the Lord's Supper at which the table-fellowship of the apostles with the risen Lord was extended to the community. Likewise the community continued to offer "the prayers" both at the temple and in the community.

1 Peter 2:19-25

The author recognizes that the practical ramifications of faith are often difficult since we continue to live in a world that does not acknowledge God's sovereignty. In this world, we are called to the patient endurance of unjust suffering, for that is the example given by Christ. But Christ's own endurance of suffering is not only exemplary, it is redemptive. The fact and the consequence of atonement are stated, but not explained.

As God was called *Shepherd* in the Old Testament, so now is Jesus. The language of shepherd and flock also became standard terminology for describing those ministering within the Church.

John 10:1-10

John 10:1-21 serves as a transition from the Feast of Tabernacles and its theme of light (chaps. 7-9) to the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple, *Hanukkah*, which closes the series of feasts used as the context for Jesus' teaching. This passage, based on Ezekiel 34, is a figurative attack on the leaders of Israel.

John's identification of Jesus as shepherd and gate is similar to the synoptic gospels' portrayal of Jesus' ministry in terms of shepherding. In Luke 15:3-7, the parable of the lost sheep is told in response to the Pharisees' lack of care for the outcast.

The Pharisees' inability to accept Jesus' challenge provokes further teaching. Jesus is "the gate" (v. 7), the way the true shepherd approaches the sheep and the way the sheep go in and out. Jesus provides freedom, refuge from sin, true sustenance and life itself.

Reflection

Some urbanites groan (or tune out) when Good Shepherd Sunday rolls around again. But in his book *The Mystical Way in the Fourth Gospel*, L. William Countryman points out that our association of shepherds with an idealized country life comes more from English pastoral poetry than John's gospel. It is more likely that "shepherd imagery here is royal imagery." Ancient Latin translations of "the Lord is my shepherd" were "the Lord rules me" (p. 78).

What does that mean in our day? If the Lord rules me, I look to him for everything and count on his giving what I most need—which may differ slightly from what I think I need. I lose my sensitivity to God's voice calling my name if I am too entangled in anxieties or superficialities.

But when I reflect on my relationship with God, I see its resemblance to a relationship with a friend or a lover to whom I am naturally and gladly drawn. This is neither a blind nor a coerced loyalty, but a deep resonance, a personal bond that recognizes how much the shepherd cares for me. Countryman translates "life in abundance" as "even more than they need," an excess in these green pastures.

The World of the Bible

Amen, Amen

Amen is a Hebrew word that affirms what has been said—“It is true!” It appears often throughout the Bible both in normal speech and in prayer whenever people want to signal their acceptance and affirmation.

In the gospels, Jesus often begins his teaching with the phrase “Amen, I say to you” to emphasize the importance of what follows. And in John’s gospel, when Jesus wants to really stress the importance of what he is about to say, he uses the curious double “Amen, amen” to invite his audience to pay close attention to his message.

The World of the Bible

Repentance

Because we tend to limit the meaning of repentance to being sorry for something, repentance is a somewhat inadequate translation of the Greek word *metanoia*, which describes the more basic change of mind and heart and attitude demanded by personal conversion.

It demands a re-forming of our self and our life by turning toward God and away from the evil forces that dominate our world. It is a lifelong challenge to order ourselves and our world according to the vision and values of Jesus and live out the obligations of belonging to his community of disciples.

The World of the Bible

Signs and Wonders

Although we use the word *miracles* to describe these events, the biblical writers used the terms “deeds of power,” “signs” and “wonders.” These are God’s actions to reorder our world from the domination of Satan and evil powers that frustrate God’s plan for a covenant community.

Jesus’ deeds of power are directly related to his kingdom message. They are the first signs (his resurrection to new life will be the final sign) that God is reordering our world. Like Jesus’ parables and meals, Jesus’ cures, exorcisms, resuscitations and nature wonders are signs of God’s presence breaking into our world to change it forever.

Jesus’ words and actions, including his death and resurrection, are “signs” that help us to know who God is and what God is doing for our salvation. John’s gospel helps us to read the meaning of these signs. He records seven signs that Jesus performed to show that he was indeed the Christ, beginning with the transformation of the water into wine and ending with the resurrection of Lazarus. The signs culminated in the ultimate sign—Jesus’ own resurrection.