

Lesson Four: The Gate for the Sheep

Main idea: Jesus is the only entrance to salvation.

Teacher preparation:

- Read Scripture references, Psalm 23
- Gather: Bible; dry erase markers or chart paper and markers; hula hoops, carpet squares, or masking tape; ball-pit balls, bean bags, or crumpled paper; craft printables; scissors; glue; crayons or markers
- Take time to meditate on this week's Scripture and think about your own life. Have you allowed yourself to be lead away in any way by any thieves or robbers?

Scripture references:

- John 10:1-10
- Acts 4:12
- Psalm 100:3-4

Game: Sheepfold

The goal of this game is for each team to try to collect the most “sheep” in their “sheepfold” in a given amount of time. Divide the kids into four teams. (Two or three teams will work if you have a small class.) Set up five hula hoops in the room to look like the five side of a die. (One in the center of the room and one in each corner.) These are the “sheepfolds.” If you don't have hula hoops available, mark off the spaces in some other way, using tape, carpet squares, or whatever you have on hand. In the center circle, place a bunch of ball-pit balls, crumpled up paper, bean bags, cotton balls, or whatever else you have available. These are the sheep. There should be enough “sheep” that each child can have one for the game, plus several extras. About three sheep for every two kids should do. Have all the team members start by standing in front of their own sheepfold. Set a timer for five minutes. (Or more or less, depending on how long your kids can enjoy this game.) When you signal, all players will run to the center sheep pen and take one sheep. Players may only hold one sheep at a time. They then put this sheep in their own pen and go to collect another sheep. Players are allowed to steal sheep from other folds. Game play ends when you give the signal. (This can be done either verbally, by playing music throughout the game, or

turning the lights on to start the game and off to finish it.) Each team counts how many sheep they collected. The team with the most sheep wins.

Variation: have one child from each team be the “protector” or “shepherd.” Their job is to be the goalie, or guardian of their team’s sheepfold. They may tag players who are coming to steal their sheep. These players must then bring a sheep from their own flock to put in the one from which they were trying to steal. The shepherd may only tag one player at a time, and must stay within one “regular sized” footstep of their own fold at all times.

Message: Open in prayer, then say, for the past few weeks, we have been learning about the seven I AM statements Jesus made, which are recorded in the book of John. Each time Jesus says “I AM,” we are reminded that he is God. Each I AM statement also reveals to us a new part of Jesus’ character. It tells us a little more about who Jesus is. So far, we have learned that he is the Bread of Life, and fills up all our spiritual needs. We have also learned that he is the Light of the World, and he lights up our spiritual darkness. Today we will learn about Jesus’ third I AM statement, which is found in John 10:1-10. I will read it to you now, and then when I finish, I want you to tell me what Jesus’ third I AM statement is. (Read John 10:1-10.)

“¹I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! ²But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. ⁵They won’t follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don’t know his voice.” ⁶Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn’t understand what he meant, ⁷so he explained it to them: “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. ⁹Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. ¹⁰The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life.”

Who can tell me what today’s I AM statement is? (Allow a student to answer.) That’s right. In this passage, Jesus calls himself the gate for the sheep. This statement may be kind of confusing to us, since we don’t live in a society where there are a bunch of sheep all over the place. Sheep and shepherds

could have been seen in practically every open field in Jesus' day, so everyone would have known exactly what Jesus meant when he said he was the gate for sheep. We however, may need help to get the picture. So let me paint you a picture with words. Close your eyes, and listen to my story.

Imagine you are a sheep. You are a woolly little lamb in a big, big field. All your sheep friends are around you, and you are happily playing and eating and being happy in the green, green grass. You take a big, deep breath, and you can smell all the pretty white and yellow flowers in the field around you. You listen closely and you can hear a stream not far away where your shepherd leads you to drink. You lay down and feel the warm sun on your back, the soft ground beneath your feet, and feel a gentle breeze tickle your soft, sheep ears. You are one happy lamb. Suddenly, you hear a voice that is like music to your ears. It is the best sound in the world, and it makes your heart go thump, thump, thump in your chest. It's your shepherd! He is calling you back to the sheepfold for the night. You leap up and happily follow your dear shepherd back to the pen. You like your pen. It's a small pen, just the right size for just your flock. There is another, bigger pen, closer the city that you sometimes share with other flocks of sheep, but tonight, you are staying in this little sheepfold. You look around at the rock walls and know that you are safe for the night. There is no gate to the sheepfold, no way to lock you safe inside, so after he says good night to each and every one of you, the shepherd puts down his staff and spreads out in the opening of the pen, where you came through for the night. He becomes the gate. He will sleep there all night and make sure no one will come and hurt his sheep. You look up and the sky. The orange sun is just starting to set, making the puffy clouds in the sky turn pink. You give a contented "baaaaa" before laying your head down to sleep. You are safe in your sheepfold, with your shepherd as the gate.

(After a brief pause to let the story sink in, have the students open their eyes.) Does that story help you to understand what Jesus is saying in John 10:1-10? Would anybody like to explain it to me, in their own words? Why would Jesus call himself the gate for the sheep? (After allowing a student or two to share their perspective, explain.) Back in Jesus' time, shepherds would keep usually keep their sheep in one of two types of pens. One type of pen was a big pen found in cities, where several shepherds could keep their flocks, all of their sheep, all together. This type of pen had a door, which was guarded at night by a gatekeeper. In the morning, the shepherds would come and call their flock out. The sheep would follow only their shepherd because they knew his voice, just like the sheep in our story, and just like Jesus says in John 10:5. "They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know

his voice.” The second type of sheepfold that was common in Jesus’ time was a smaller pen out in the countryside. (Feel free to draw a simple pen on the board, if you are so inclined.) The shepherd would keep his sheep out here in good weather. The walls of these pens were made of piles of rocks, and there was no gate, just an opening for the sheep to enter through. To keep his sheep inside, and to keep wild animals out, the shepherd would lay across the opening to sleep. Jesus is the gate for us. He keeps us safe and protects us from anything that could hurt us.

In this passage in John, Jesus mentions thieves and robbers. In verse 10, he says, “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy.” These robbers, he explains in verse one, sneak in over the wall of the sheepfold! Now let’s keep in mind that Jesus is using a story to tell a biblical truth here. All throughout the Bible, people are referred to as sheep. We’ll get into that a little more some other day. For now, let’s just say that sheep rely on their shepherd for everything in life, from finding water, to staying safe and warm, to getting up when they fall down. They follow the shepherd wherever he leads. So, like in our story, we are sheep. Jesus says there are thieves and robbers who want to come in and steal us away! In John 10:8, Jesus says, “All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them.” What he means by “all who came before me” are the Pharisees, the very people he is talking to. They thought they held the keys to salvation, and they told people that there were all these rules they had to follow to be holy before God, but they failed to do the things that matter most to God, like loving others. Jesus is telling them that they are thieves and robbers, stealing people from God’s kingdom by telling them these lies about how they are to be saved! But the true sheep of God, the people that really know Him, know better than to believe those lies.

Tell me, do you think we have “thieves and robbers” that want to steal people away from God today? We sure do. There are people, for whatever reason, don’t believe that Jesus is the way to get to heaven, and want to do everything they can to convince people that Jesus is not really God. There are other people who say they are Christians, but then, like the Pharisees, they say try to get people to believe things that aren’t really in the Bible. But Jesus says the true sheep do not listen to them. We don’t listen to the people who want to lead us away from the truth because we know the Shepherd’s voice. We know what Jesus says, so we will not let ourselves be confused and taken in by lies. How do we know what Jesus says? (Allow a few students to answer, and write their answers on the board.) Right, we read our Bibles, we pray, we read

devotionals and other Christian books and we come to church! All of these things help us to know Jesus better.

In John 10:6, it's made clear that the crowd still isn't getting it, so Jesus just comes right out and says it: (vv 7, 9) "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep ...⁹ Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. ¹⁰ ... My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life."

When Jesus says he is the gate for the sheep, he is saying he is the way to a good life. A good shepherd takes great care of his sheep, and makes sure they have everything they need. Does anyone want to take a guess at what the "good pastures" are here? The "good pastures" and "rich and satisfying life" is salvation! When we are saved from our sins, it means we get to go to heaven and be with God forever! When Jesus says he is the gate for the sheep, he is saying, loud and clear, so no one can misunderstand, that he is the only way to salvation. Let's have a sword drill to prove that. We'll look up another verse in the Bible that talks about Jesus. Take out all bookmarks from your Bible and hold it over your head. When I say go, look up Acts 4:12. Go!

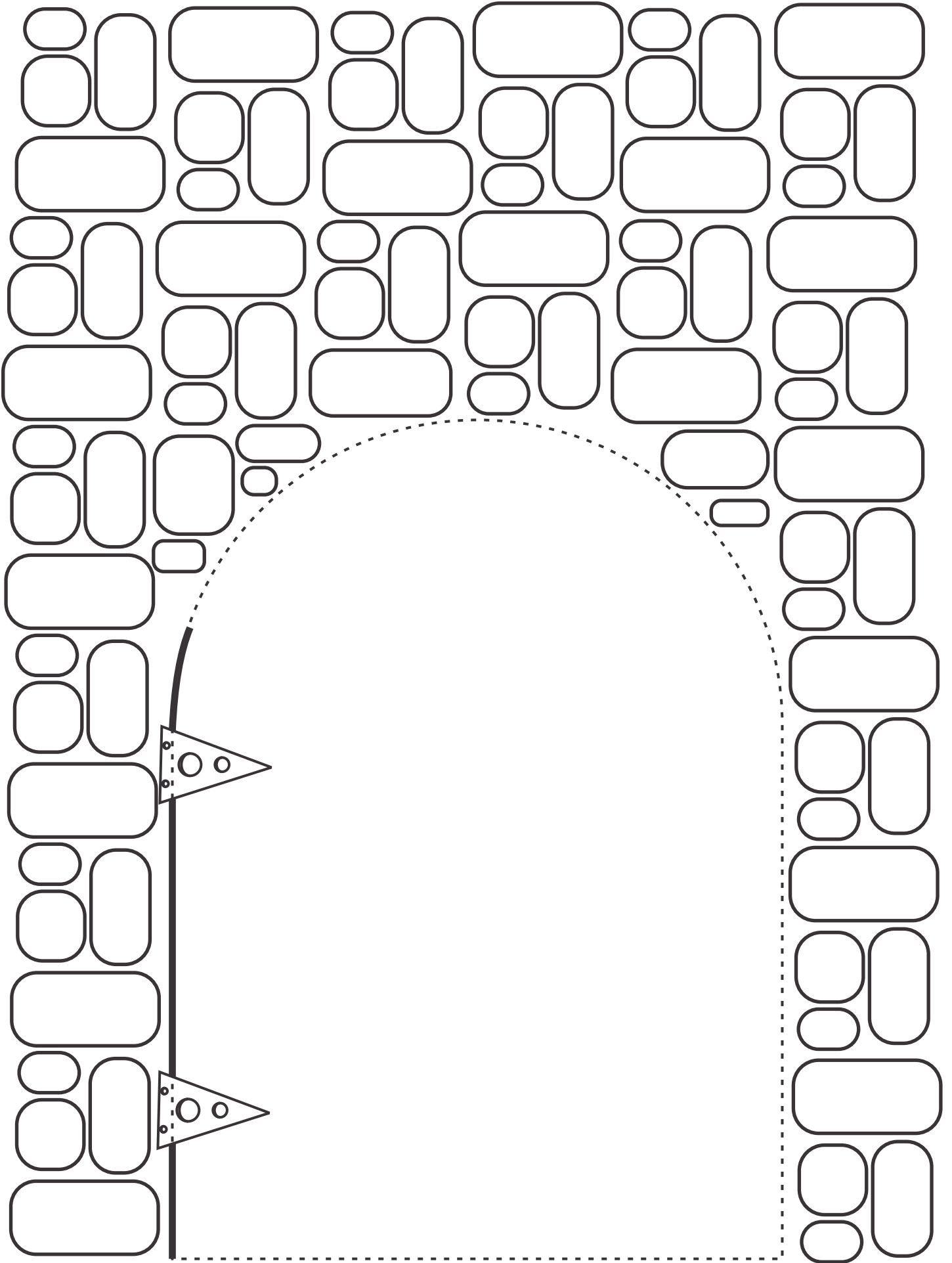
(Read or have a student read Acts 4:12.) "There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved." It doesn't get any clearer than this. Jesus is the only way to salvation. There is no other way to get to heaven, no matter what anyone says. We are saved only when we enter through the Gate of the Sheep, when we follow Jesus. When we know his voice and follow him, our lives are filled with good things. That is great news! When we go through Jesus and into a rich and satisfying life, we can say with the psalmist in Psalm 100:3-4, "Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and praise his name."

End in prayer.

Craft: The Gate coloring page.

Make copies of the gate coloring page and bible verse page for each child. Have them color both pages. On the gate coloring page, cut along the dotted lines to make a "gate" that opens along the flap. On the Bible verse page, put a thin line of glue along the dark line. Make sure you do not put glue at the

bottom, or you will glue your door shut! Place the gate coloring page over the Bible verse page. Let dry.



"Yes,
I am the gate.
Those who come in
through me will
be saved. They will
come and go freely
and will find
good pastures."
John 10:9, NLT