

## Lesson Five: The Good Shepherd

**Main idea:** Jesus is the good shepherd who sacrificed his life for our lives.

### Teacher preparation:

- Read Scripture references, Ezekiel 34:1-24
- Gather: Bible; dry erase markers or chart paper and markers; white balloons, blown up and with a sheep's face drawn on them in permanent marker (eyes, a nose and mouth, and ears); canes, sticks, long paper tubes, pool noodles, or bats, cheap shaving cream; white glue; thick paint brushes; large bowl and smaller bowls; spoon; markers or crayons; sheep printable
- Optional: Jesus Good Shepherd Coloring Pages
- Take time to meditate on this week's Scripture and think about your own life. Do you listen to the Good Shepherd's voice? In what ways do you need to work on following him?

### Scripture references:

- John 10:11-16
- Luke 15:4-7
- Romans 5:8
- Romans 6:23
- Psalm 23

### Game: Good Shepherd Relay

The goal of this relay race is to be the first team to have each "shepherd" (child) to get their team's balloon sheep to the "green pastures" at the other side of the room and back again. Divide children into equal teams. Give each team a blown up white balloon with a sheep face drawn on it in permanent marker, and a cane or stick of some sort. A cheap, plastic walking stick would be best, or a Christmas candy cane outdoor decoration. If these are not available to you, use hockey sticks, whiffle ball bats, paper wrapping tubes, or whatever stick like objects you have on hand for your children to guide the sheep. If you want to get really fancy, you can use large paper or newsprint to make a green pasture, full of flowers and still waters to place at the opposite side of the room from your students. This is not a necessary step, though. Play one round, watching carefully to see how the shepherds treat their

sheep. Are they in such a hurry that they hit the sheep hard, expecting the balloon to move faster, or are they gentle with their little balloon lamb? After everyone has had one turn, discuss the differences in how they treated the sheep. Have the kids comment on which method worked best. It is easier to get to and from the other side of the room, the green pastures, when they gently guide the sheep. When they whack or push the sheep too hard, it has a tendency to go off in the wrong direction. Remark that this is how Jesus guides us: with a gentle nudge.

### **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. Last week we learned that Jesus is the door to the sheepfold, and the only entrance to salvation. Today we are officially half way through learning all of the I AM statements Jesus made in the book of John! Based on the game we played and what we talked about last week, who thinks they can tell me what I AM statement we are studying today? (Allow students to answer.) That’s right, today we are studying what Jesus meant when he called himself the Good Shepherd. Let’s start by reading the words of Jesus himself, in John 10:11-16. Follow along as I read. (Or have a student read.) “<sup>11</sup> I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup> A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. <sup>13</sup> The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep. <sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, <sup>15</sup> just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.”

There is a lot to learn from this short passage. Let’s start by figuring out what every part of Jesus’ story means. Jesus makes it clear that he is the good shepherd, the one who takes care of the sheep. Can anyone guess then, who the sheep are? (Allow a student to answer.) That’s right, we are the sheep.

(write “sheep/us” on the board, and as you discuss the different aspects of sheep, write them under this heading.) Before we go on and look at the other parts of this story, let’s get a good idea on what sheep are like. When Jesus compares us to sheep, he is not paying us any compliments. Have any of you ever seen sheep at a petting zoo or farm? (Allow a few students to briefly share.) Sheep aren’t the cleanest of animals, are they? They are smelly and dirty. Every time they lay down, they get grass and burs and dirt caught up in their wool. They can’t help it. There are types of bugs that like to live in the wool on top of sheep’s heads, too. And they can’t clean themselves either. If someone doesn’t get rid of these bugs, sheep can go blind. So without the shepherd’s help, sheep stay dirty. Let’s think about us now. Can we clean ourselves of our spiritual dirtiness? Is there anything we can do, all by ourselves, to wash away our sins? Of course not. We have to go to Jesus, our good shepherd, to be cleansed of our sins. (write “dirty and can’t get clean on their own” under the heading “sheep/us.”) Not only are sheep dirty, they are pretty dumb too. I know it seems silly, and “dumb” is not a word I ever want any of you to use when talking about yourself or anyone else. But with sheep, it really is true. Sheep don’t think for themselves. They just follow other sheep who seem to be in charge. This means that sheep will even follow other sheep right over the edge of a cliff without another thought. Can you think of ways we follow others without thinking? (Allow responses.) Sometimes we are so eager to fit in, to be cool or liked that we do or say things that other people do or say without even thinking about it. It is very important for us to think through our actions and words and even our beliefs. I don’t want any of you to follow others just because what they say seems right! Whenever you make a decision about something to say, or do, or believe, be sure to pray and read your Bible on your own, and let Jesus help you decide whether what you are doing or saying or believing lines up with what the Bible says is true. (write “don’t think for themselves” under the heading “sheep/us.”) Another interesting fact about sheep is that they are directionally challenged. The poor things couldn’t find their way out of a wet paper bag. If they wander off from the flock and shepherd, it’s hard, if not impossible, for them to get back on their own. The shepherd has to come and find them. Jesus shares a story about this very thing happening in Luke 15:4-7. It says, <sup>4</sup>“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup>And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. <sup>6</sup>When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup>In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns

to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!"

This is what our good shepherd, Jesus, does with us when we start to wander away from him. He comes after us and carries us back to the fold, and then he celebrates that we are back in right relationship with him. (write "get lost easily" under "sheep/us.") Now imagine if the shepherd didn't come after the little lost sheep. The sheep would probably be okay, right? I mean, if a cat or dog gets lost, it can fend for itself pretty well for a while, can't it? If anything tries to come and attack a cat, the cat will arch its back, hiss, and scratch the living daylights out of anyone who gets too close. And a dog, if it feels it's being attack, will bare its teeth, growl and bite an attacker. So a sheep, if it's going to be attacked by a wolf, will fluff itself up to look big and mean, and then it will start growling all mean, show off its sharp, pointy teeth, and charge the attacker, right? No way! Sheep don't have sharp, pointy teeth or claws. They can't growl or poof themselves up to seem bigger. They can't even run away, they aren't fast enough on those scrawny little legs. If a shepherd doesn't come after a lost sheep, that sheep is destined to become wolf chow. How are we like sheep in this way? When we wander from the flock, when we stop going to church and spending time with other Christians, we have a harder time living like Jesus wants us to. We can't protect ourselves from the dangers and temptations of the world. If we want to be like Jesus, which is what life is all about, then we need to spend time with Jesus and others who are learning to live like him. (write "can't defend themselves" under the heading "sheep/us.") The last fact I want to share about sheep is pretty funny, and also a good picture of us. If a sheep falls down and ends up on its back, it can't get up again on its own. It will just lay there, flailing its little legs, until either someone helps them up, or they die. When we get into a place in life where we feel like we are flat on our backs, either through our own sins or through tough times, we can't save ourselves. We are totally dependent on Jesus Christ to save us, to lead us, and to keep us clean. (write "NEED OUR SHEPHERD" under the heading "sheep/us.")

Now we see how much we are like sheep, let's look at shepherds and hired hands. The crowd Jesus was speaking to would have understood all about bad shepherds and what they meant spiritually. The Old Testament talks a lot about good and bad shepherds. If Jesus is the good shepherd, who do you think that bad shepherds were? (write a new heading on the board: "bad shepherds.") At that time, they were the Pharisees. Before the Pharisees were in charge of the church, there were others that had power to care for the church of God, and even today there are bad shepherds. Bad shepherds are

the people who don't really care for the sheep, but for what they can get from the sheep. (write "church leaders who don't care for sheep" under the heading "bad shepherds.") They want the sheep's wool and their meat and their milk, but they don't want to put in the work required to help the sheep grow. The Pharisees probably knew that when Jesus called himself the good shepherd, he was calling them the bad shepherds. There is a very big difference between the good shepherd and the bad shepherds. Jesus points the difference out twice in today's passage. Can anyone tell me what Jesus says the good shepherd does? Look back at your Bibles, at John 10:11-16, to remind you. (Allow the students to respond after looking up the reference for themselves.) Twice in this passage, Jesus says that the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (Write a third heading on the board: "the Good Shepherd." Write "lays down his life" under it.) He says it twice because it is so, so important for us to remember. In fact, this may be the most important thing we ever learn. Jesus, our good shepherd, sacrifices his life for ours. Based on everything we have learned about sheep, and how much we are like sheep, why do you think we need Jesus to lay down his life for us? (Allow responses.) Sheep are dirty, dumb, directionless and defenseless. We too, are full of dirty sin, we make wrong choices instead of trusting and following Jesus, we easily get lost, and there is nothing we can do to protect or save ourselves. Without our good shepherd, we will die. The wolves, or temptations and sin, come in and threaten to kill us, but then Jesus our good shepherd steps in and dies in our place. He did this without us getting ourselves clean, and hopping up on our feet all by ourselves first. He did it while we were still lost sinners. Let's have a sword drill to prove this. Remove all bookmarks from your Bible and hold it above your head. When I say go, look up Romans 5:8. Go! (Read, or have a student read, Romans 5:8.) "But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners." The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep because we cannot take care of ourselves. Jesus knows that if he doesn't protect us, we will die because of our sins. Romans 6:23 says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord." You see, someone has to die for sin. It should be us. We are the ones who do wrong things. We are the ones who sin and choose to walk away from Jesus instead of faithfully following him. We should be the ones to pay the price for our sins. But you know what? We can't. The price is too high. The punishment we deserve is death. But we can't die ourselves to be made right with God. That's why Jesus came. This is the greatest news ever! Jesus chose to lay down his life for us! The best part is, he didn't just come and live a life all alone and grumpy and then die. He came and lived a perfect life. He came as our Shepherd. He came to lead us and teach us and keep us safe and give us everything we

need to live a good and healthy life. He came and served with his whole life. We are happy sheep, because our God, our shepherd, laid down his life for us, and then picked it up again! Jesus is alive today, and he lives in us when we choose to listen to and follow him. John 10:3 tells us that the sheep know the shepherd's voice and follow him. We need to listen to Jesus voice by reading the Bible, coming to church, and praying. We are his well loved and well cared for sheep when we follow him.

There is one more verse I want to look at before we close today. It's the last verse in our passage: John 10:16. It says, "I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd." Who are these other sheep, from another sheepfold that Jesus is talking about? That's us! At the time, Jesus was talking to a group of Jewish people. They all believed that savior was coming to save them all. They had no idea that it would be Jesus, and they had no idea that God's good and wonderful plan is to save not only the Jewish people, but everyone in the whole wide world! Jesus is saying here that anyone can believe in him and follow him, and that all of us together, no matter where we are from, what we look like, or what kind of church we go to, we are all together in the same flock, the same family, if we follow Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd.

Today we are going to close in prayer in a slightly different way. I am going to read Psalm 23, which is a song that praises God for being our good shepherd and tells of the great things he does for us. Bow your heads and praise God as you listen.

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd;  
I have all that I need.  
<sup>2</sup> He lets me rest in green meadows;  
he leads me beside peaceful streams.  
<sup>3</sup> He renews my strength.  
He guides me along right paths,  
bringing honor to his name.  
<sup>4</sup> Even when I walk  
through the darkest valley,  
I will not be afraid,  
for you are close beside me.  
Your rod and your staff  
protect and comfort me.

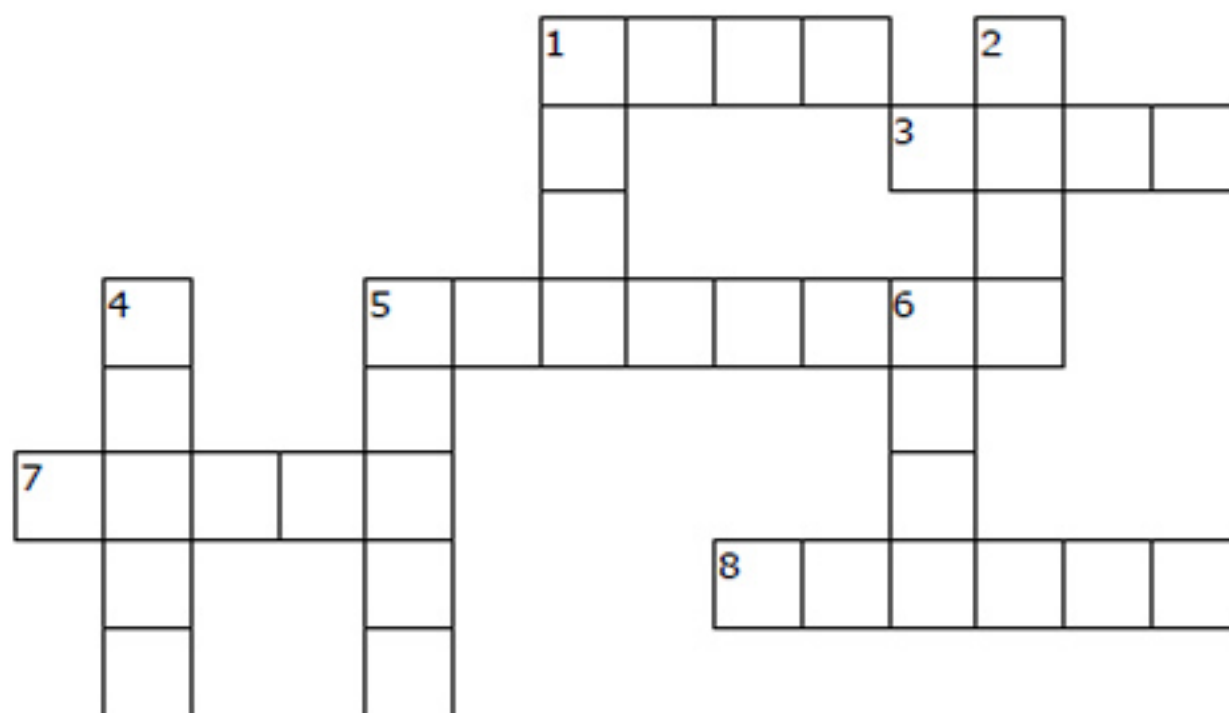
<sup>5</sup> You prepare a feast for me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You honor me by anointing my head with oil.  
My cup overflows with blessings.

<sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me  
all the days of my life,  
and I will live in the house of the Lord  
forever.

# The Good Shepherd

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11 (NIV)

Puzzle is based on John 10:11-18



## ACROSS

1. The period from birth to death
3. A wild animal that look like a dog and hunts in a pack
5. One who takes care of the sheep
7. What we use to speak
8. To hear or pay attention to something

## DOWN

1. A strong feeling of affection
2. The opposite of bad
4. A group of sheep herded together
5. Wooly animals which are similar to goats
6. Goes faster than walking

SHEPHERD  
FLOCK

GOOD  
RUNS

LIFE  
VOICE

SHEEP  
LISTEN

WOLF  
LOVE



Jesus is my  
Good Shepherd!

