

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

by Luke Wagner and Carol Duerksen

KEY VERSE:

When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. John 10:4

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

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me – just as the Father knows me and I know the Father – and I lay down my life for the sheep." John 10:14-15

FAITH STORY:

John 10:1-18

FAITH FOCUS:

Jesus is telling a story that illustrates the relationship between the people and himself. He uses the analogy of a shepherd and his sheep throughout the story. Jesus is represented by the shepherd while the people are represented by the sheep. In the first version of the story, Jesus explains that the shepherd enters through the gate (and not some other way), and his sheep listen to his voice. After calling them out, he goes ahead of them and they follow. When the crowd of Jews don't understand the first version, Jesus proceeds with a second. In this second story, Jesus cuts right to the chase, explaining that he is the gate for the sheep, saving all who enter through him. Unlike the thief who acts like the shepherd but comes only to steal and destroy, Jesus came to provide life. Next, Jesus calls himself the "good shepherd", the one who is willing to die for his sheep. Jesus repeats this fact while at the same time using his relationship with the Father as an example of his relationship as the shepherd with the sheep. In the last few verses Jesus proceeds to tell the Jews that it is because of his willingness to lay down his life for his sheep that his Father loves him. He is the only one with the authority to do so, and states this as a command received from his Father.

SESSION GOAL:

To help students hear the call of Jesus as opposed to the call of the "worldly thieves" that are competing for their attention.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Hear why Jesus used the story of the shepherd and sheep to illustrate his point.
- Identify what the call of Jesus sounds like in their life
- Identify what the call of "the thief" sounds like in their life
- Have opportunity to respond to the call of Jesus

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bibles for everyone
- 2 Adult helpers "planted" along the route you will be taking students at the beginning

of class—this can be either outside or inside the church building. These adults will ask students to stop and talk with them, perhaps pick up a snack, etc—anything to distract them from following you on your walk. As much as possible, the “adult distractions ” should appear to be natural and not contrived.

- 3 A “call” used by hunters. If there are any hunters in your congregation, they may have one you can borrow. Best-case scenario is if you have a student that can demonstrate how a call is used.
- 4 A curtain or blanket and a way to suspend it in the room
- 5 Copies of the student worksheet for each person

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (10 minutes)

After welcoming students, say that you are going to begin the class time by going for a walk, you will be leading, and they are to follow you. As you walk and students come in contact with the adult distracters, call the names of the students and keep walking. Don’t pause. Make the students decide whether to stop, pause and try to catch up, or stay with you.

CONNECT: (5–10 minute)

Gather back together in your classroom and process what you just experienced.

Discuss:

- Were you confused?
- Did you stop when people asked you to? Why or why not?
- What did you think was going on? What do you think was the point of this activity?
- How did this activity relate to real life? Give examples. (Such as parents telling them one thing and friends telling them another thing to do.)

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (20–30 minutes)

Ask three students to read the passage: one will read John 10:1-6, the second will read verses 7-13, and the third will read verses 14-18. Break the group into three different groups, having each one focus on the three groups of verses. If you have a large group, you may break it down further, with multiple groups working on the same verses.

The first group should discuss what Jesus was trying to say to the Pharisees and why they might not have understood it the way Jesus said it.

The second group should discuss the differences between the shepherd and the hired hand.

The third group should discuss the relationship between the shepherd and his flock compared to the relationship between the shepherd and his father (God).

Ask groups to report on their discussion. Continue the lesson by giving a mini-lecture based in the information in Insights from Scripture.

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Say: Remember the walk we did at the beginning? Different people were calling you and you had to decide whom to listen to. Another example of a “call” is one that hunters use to bring in the animal they are hunting.

(Demonstrate the call device.)

In the case of a call device used by a hunter, the animal has to decide if what it’s hearing is the “real thing” or not. The result will often mean the difference between life and death for the animal.

Now, let’s think about this in relationship to Jesus. If Jesus is the shepherd and we are the sheep, we need to recognize his voice and follow him when he calls. There will be other people and things that will call us too. We’ll have to decide which is the “real voice” to follow.

Suspend the blanket or curtain in the room. Divide the class in half, with half on each side of the curtain. Ask side A to think of “calls” they can send to side B that sound appealing but don’t represent what Jesus would be saying. (Note: Side B should not know your instructions to side A.)

Ask side B to think of calls to send to side A that represent what Jesus would say. (Side A should not know your instructions to side A).

Give each side time to prepare their calls, and then do the activity. Calls should be offered one at a time, to an individual, and that student should decide whether to go over to the other side.

Here’s how it could work.

Ben on Side A calls out to Jose on Side B: “Hey Jose, come on over here. I’ve got a huge amount of money here for you.”

Jose decides whether to go or not.

Then Becca on side B calls out to Jason: Jason, come over here. I’d like to get to know you better, but you need to know up front: I’ve set some sexual boundaries that I plan to respect until I get married.

Play this game as long as students have “call” ideas. Then talk about it. What are the calls that students are hearing from friends and society around them? Is it sometimes hard to recognize Jesus’ call in the midst of all the other noise? How do they know when it is Jesus call? (We discern Jesus’ call by reading the scriptures and processing it within our faith community, the church.)

RESPOND: (7–10 minutes)

Hand out the student worksheets and ask students to find places alone where they can think about the question and spend some time praying. Bring them back together and close the class with the following prayer:

Good shepherd Jesus, we are a bunch of straggly sheep. Some of us are right there with you, hearing your call and eager to follow. Some of us are hearing lots of calls, and your voice gets lost in the midst of it. Some of us hear you but we don’t want to follow right now. Be with us, Jesus. Don’t give up on us. Keep calling. We know you love us. Thank you. Amen.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE:

Throughout the New Testament stories of Jesus, time and time again Jesus uses parables and illustrations to help people understand him and his purpose. The story here in the book of John is really no different. In the case of this story or illustration, the primary discourse of verses 1 – 18 is on a shepherd and his flock. This passage can be broken down into two parts with verses 1 – 6 being the story, and verses 7 – 18 being the meditation on it.

The Jews understood what was being said about sheep, yet they did not understand what was being said to them. Because of this, Jesus tells the story again. This time Jesus refers to himself as the gate and the keeper, who manages the access the shepherds have to the sheep and later the access the sheep have to pasture. Jesus is saying that he has control of both the ministry and the membership of the church. Secondly, Jesus refers to himself as the “good shepherd” who is willing to die for his sheep, unlike the hired gatekeeper who would flee at the sign of danger. The bond between Jesus and the Father is illustrated by the bond between the shepherd and his sheep. When Jesus says he has other sheep, he is referring to the Gentiles. Lastly, Jesus makes the point that he has the power to lay down his life as the good shepherd, and then take it back up again. But unlike a shepherd, his life would not be lost due to misfortune or helplessness, but because he chose to give it up out of obedience to the Father, he will gain it back again in the resurrection.

STUDENT WORKSHEET:

ARE YOU FEELING SHEEPISH?

When it comes to hearing Jesus' call and following Jesus, what kind of sheep are you?

- a) A leader. I'm at the front of the pack, ready to follow. Let's go!
- b) Just one of the herd. If my friends are following, I am too.
- c) Independent. I'm not sure. I'm thinking about it.
- d) Straying off to the side. Doing my own thing.
- e) Running the other direction.

Talk to Jesus about the kind of sheep you are. What is Jesus saying back to you?