



# The Lord Is My Shepherd

**Goal:** To recognize how God cares for us as a good shepherd.

## RECOGNIZING GOD’S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is one of the most beloved passages in Scripture. Its familiar, yet always strengthening, thoughts sustain and comfort us, giving us peace and joy.

“The LORD is my shepherd” (v. 1) assures us that God guides us throughout life. God “makes me lie down in green pastures . . . restores my soul . . . leads me in right paths for his name’s sake” (vv. 2–3). God is with us. Even in the “darkest valley” God comforts us (v. 4). We are assured of always being in God’s presence: “I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long” (v. 6).

God’s loving care for us is the fullness of God’s grace. God fully loves and cares for us our whole life long, day and night. No promise can have deeper meaning. No word can give us more assurance and comfort and call forth our deepest gratitude.

To have a strong sense that God guides us throughout life and that we can follow God’s leading and direction is a deep joy. We know we are never alone. We can trust our shepherd to provide for our needs and lead us in “right paths” (v. 3) into blessed peace.

### . . . In Your Children’s Experiences

Since most children do not have experiences with sheep and shepherds, it would be good to tell them about how important the shepherd is to the sheep, which cannot survive without the help of the shepherd to feed them, guide them, and stay close to them. That’s why the psalmist used the analogy of the shepherd to describe God’s relationship with us. Children can be helped in their spiritual formation to hear this beloved psalm and hear about how God’s love is always with us. Children’s lives are as busy as adults’ and hearing the psalm invites them to pause and consider their own ways of resting in God’s graceful presence in their lives.

In many families, some of the first chores and responsibilities children assume is caring for pets. Children growing up on farms learn very early how to care for animals. Most children enjoy playing with and caring for animals. In some ways, children may be more in tune with the shepherd–sheep relationship than most adults are.

### . . . In Your Relationships with the Children

As a shepherd cares for sheep, we extend loving care for others. Children can participate in caring for others in meaningful ways. Think about the ways people in your congregation care for one another and how children can be a part of that, such as making visits, sending cards, or baking cookies for people who need some care. Think about how to help the children feel that their contributions as young children are important and valuable, because they are.

*Lord God, give me a heart to embrace your children with love and grace that they may be inspired to care for others. Amen.*



## Supplies

### Music & Melodies

[bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies](http://bit.ly/GGGMusicMelodies)

### Stories, Colors & More (SCM) i–iv, 8, 15

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

internet-connected  
device

blanket or mats

snack, if not using food  
from “Exploring God’s  
Grace” choice 1

sheep masks from  
“Guided Play” choice 2

## Guided Play

choice 1: stuffed animals

choice 2: 9” paper  
plates, paper towel  
tubes

choice 3: blankets, soft  
woolen items, **SCM 8a**,  
books about Psalm 23

## Exploring

choice 1: **Grace Notes**  
(**GN**) 1, **SCM 8a**, robes  
or tunics, dish towels  
and rope or ties, two or  
three inflated balloons  
for each child, raisins,  
pita bread

choice 2: copies of **GN 2**

choice 3: See activity  
for suggested ideas.

choice 4: copies of **GN 3**

## GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

### Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Use **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

For “Guided Play” choice 3, gather children’s books about Psalm 23 such as *Psalm 23* by Richard Jesse Watson, *Found: Psalm 23* by Sally Lloyd-Jones, and *He Is My Shepherd: the 23rd Psalm for Children* by David and Helen Haidle.

“Exploring God’s Grace” choice 1 and choice 3 require more prep.

### Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet children as they arrive and say, “Grace and peace be with you.” Prompt them to respond, “And also with you.”

Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers you do not know personally. Explain to them that the children will hear a story about how God cares for us as a shepherd cares for sheep. Invite the children to look at the guided-play activities and pick one to start:

- 1. Caring for Animals**—Provide stuffed animals. Allow the children to play with and care for the animals. Encourage conversation about ways to care for other animals as well.
- 2. Making Sheep Masks**—Help the children draw eyes and a nose on paper plates. Cut ears from construction paper. Attach these to the back of the plate near the top. Glue cotton balls to the paper plate to make fleece. Attach the mask to a paper towel tube with tape. Ask the children if they have seen live sheep. What do they do? Why do farmers have sheep? What is a shepherd? Set aside for “Hearing the Story” and “Exploring God’s Grace” choice 3.
- 3. Book Corner**—Provide blankets, soft woolen items, **SCM 8a**, and books about sheep, shepherds, and caring for animals. Lay chairs on their sides to make a sheep pen. Invite children to make sheep sounds, listen to stories, look at the pictures in the books, or feel the soft woolen things.

**T** Help children focus on the visual schedule found in Stories, Colors & More—a picture of what we are doing now (e.g., activities), the transition activity (cleaning up), or Hearing the Story.



## Transitioning to Story Time

When you sense the children are ready to move into story time, call them to the story corner, singing “God Is So Good”—**SCM 15**. Repeat words and phrases as seems appropriate.

### Shepherd Says

M L

Play a game of “Shepherd Says,” following the rules of Simon Says. Children can hold or wear their sheep masks (from “Guided Play” choice 2) for this game. Here are some possible instructions the shepherd might give:

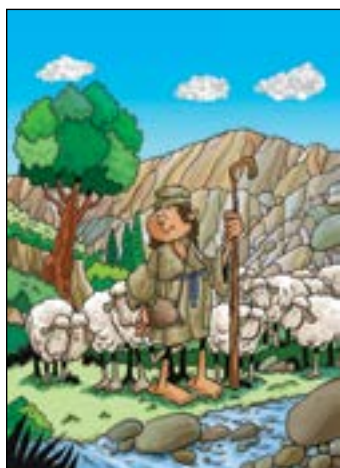
- ✎ Touch your toes.
- ✎ Turn around in a circle.
- ✎ Hold your hands in the air and wiggle your fingers.
- ✎ Say “baaaahhhh” like a sheep.
- ✎ Hop around the field.
- ✎ Lie in the soft grass.

### Come and Listen

C L

Invite the children to sit and repeat each line after you as you sing this simple echo song to the tune of “Are You Sleeping?”:

Come and listen, /  
boys and girls. /  
Listen to the Bible. /  
Hear God’s Word. /



Today’s story can be found in *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), [www.pcusastore.com](http://www.pcusastore.com).

## Hearing the Story

C L

Open the Bible to Psalm 23 so the children know the story comes from the Bible. Tell the children they will hear a story about how God cares for us as a shepherd cares for their sheep.

Read **SCM 8**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

As you read the story again, have the children hold up their paper-plate sheep masks, from “Guided Play” choice 2, when they hear the word *shepherd*. Prompt the children to say, “I will have everything I need,” every time it appears in the story.

Invite the children to talk about pets in their home and how they take care of them.

Talk about the ways people in your congregation care for one another and how young children can be a part of that, such as making visits, sending cards, or baking cookies for people who need some care. Wonder how the children already care for others. Talk about how the children’s contributions are important and valuable.



## EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE



### 1. Imagine Being a Shepherd

FA

*Before the session, blow up two or three balloons for each child. Set up a few chairs to make a small enclosure in a corner of the room.*

Invite the children to put on a shepherd costume, a robe or tunic and a headdress. Assist children with the headdresses. Tell the children they are going to pretend to be shepherds out in the hills watching over their flock to see what a day in the life of a shepherd may be like. Use a copy of **GN 1** to guide the children.

**FA** *Many children have food and other allergies such as peanut, milk, egg, wheat, latex, grass, mold, and others. Be aware of all allergy issues the children may have. Consider using non-latex gloves and blowing them up instead of balloons. Suggest to the children that the fingers represent the sheep's head and legs.*

### 2. "The Lord Is My Shepherd" Banner

TD

Make a banner with all the children. Give each child a paper plate and cotton balls. Have them glue cotton balls to the plate, filling it. Hand out copies of **GN 2** and invite the children to color the sheep head and legs as they wish. Help them cut out the shapes. Have them glue the head to the center of the plate over the cotton balls and the legs to the back of the plate, sticking out from the bottom.

While the children are working, make a banner, using mural paper, with the title: The Lord Is My Shepherd. Cut out a large shepherd's crook shape from brown construction paper and glue it to one side of the banner.

Using tacky glue, have the children glue their sheep to the banner. Invite them to write their name by their sheep. Gather the children around the banner and pray:

Dear God, thank you for being our good shepherd. Thank you for taking care of us. Amen.

Let the glue dry before hanging the banner in your room or in a common space in your church.



### 3. Follow the Shepherd

LG A B L MS TD

*Before the session, create a pathway in a large space that includes water, adventures, and dangers. Place items to represent some of the things a shepherd and sheep might encounter, such as:*

- ▼ Place a shallow box or tray of packing peanuts on the path. You can pretend that it is a muddy place that every sheep has to pass through.



- ✎ Make a gate out of cardboard or set chairs up to create a kind of turnstile.
- ✎ Put a narrow piece of brown paper across the path. Pretend it is a ditch you have to jump over.
- ✎ Place a piece of blue paper beside the path to represent a pool of water or stream. Set a bucket of water, cups, and ladle at this spot so the children can get a drink of water.
- ✎ Set up two concrete blocks or a small balance beam only a couple of inches off the ground. That could be a dangerous ledge.
- ✎ Put a stuffed animal, like a wolf or a bear, somewhere you won't see it until you turn a corner. When you see the animal, the shepherd stands between the animal and the sheep.
- ✎ Put a one-step stool in the middle of the path. You step up; you step down. It could represent a big rock in the path or a small hill.
- ✎ Put a green towel or blanket on the floor to represent the meadow. You have arrived. Invite the children to sit down and share a snack, having reached the place where the sheep would graze.

Invite the children to pretend they are a flock of sheep following a shepherd. Have the children hold up their paper-plate sheep masks (from "Guided Play" choice 2). Tell them you will be their shepherd, and you'll take care of them and lead them to a safe meadow to eat. Warn the children to be very careful and do exactly what you tell them to do.

As you make the trip, explain to the children what they are encountering. For example, "Oh, look! Here's a ditch we have to jump across." You might play again with a child being the shepherd.

Help reinforce for the children the notion that God cares for us wherever we go because God loves us. Wonder aloud ways to care for others because God cares for us.

Use "wonder" questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.

#### 4. Coloring Page



Hand out copies of **GN 3** and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture. Engage the children in conversation as they color, using the following wondering questions:

- ✎ I wonder, "How many sheep are in a flock?"
- ✎ I wonder, "What is the shepherd's crook (staff) used for?"
- ✎ I wonder, "Where do the sheep go at night?"

**T** *This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as squeezing hands together, stretching, and so forth.*



## LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Encourage the children to help clean up by using this simple rhyme:

Child of God, child of grace,  
clean your place.  
Child of God, child of grace,  
make a clean space!



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so that you can provide them with the link to [www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads](http://www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads), where they can download coloring pages, *Grace Sightings*, audio stories, and songs (see p. vii).

Have each child put away one toy or object. Invite everyone to sit around a table or on the floor.

If you did not serve a snack during “Exploring God’s Grace” choice 1, serve one now.

Celebrate the story by giving thanks for people who take care of us. Remind the children that God is our shepherd and cares for us all.

Ask the children to think of ways people take care of them. Tell them that you will pray by thanking God for these people and the things they do. You may want to give an example: “Thank you, God, for my dad because he plays with me.” Encourage the children to think of one way they will care for others this week. It can be something helpful for a family member or for a pet. Close the prayer.

As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), like a good shepherd, God loves and cares for you.”



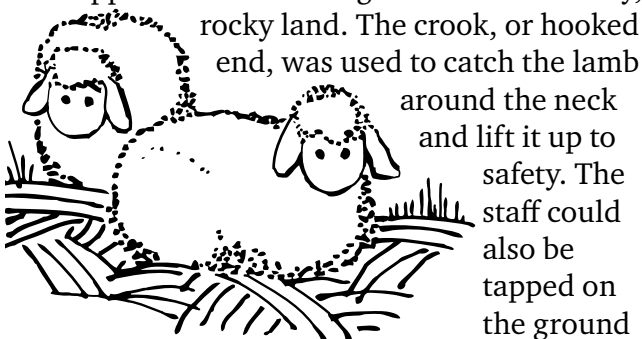
- Talk about the clothing a shepherd would wear and the accessories a shepherd would need to have as the children put on a robe or tunic and a headdress.

A shepherd's clothing would most likely have been made from sheepskin or goatskin and wool.

Wool was, and is, a wonderful fabric because it would keep the shepherds cool in hot weather and warm in cold weather, which was good for the hills of Palestine.

Point out the headdresses that you are wearing. A large piece of fabric over the head or wrapped around it protected the shepherd's head from the hot, direct sun. It also could be wrapped over the shepherd's face to shield it from sand, dust, and wind.

- Show **SCM 8a**. Point out that a staff or crook would be used when sheep, especially young lambs, wandered off from the flock and got trapped or fell off a ledge of rock in the hilly,



or rocks so that the sheep could follow the sound, or used as a weapon to fend off animals.

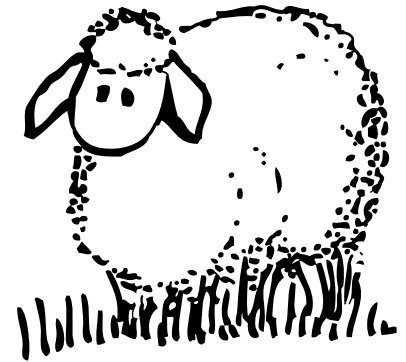
A thick branch would be used as a club or rod to protect the sheep from wild animals.

- Give the children a paper lunch bag, and have them put their name on the bag and then put some raisins and pita bread in it for a snack for later.

A leather pouch would hold food and other items. The bag might also hold stones for the shepherd's sling, used not only in defending themselves against wild animals, but also to keep the flock from straying.

- Give each child two inflated balloons for sheep.

Sheep will not drink from running water, so the shepherd would need to find a calm pool of water or draw water from a well. Often,



shepherds would herd their sheep together, with several flocks blended. Shepherds knew their sheep, and sheep knew the voice of their shepherd. The shepherds would give each sheep its own name and talk to it.

Have the children gather their "sheep" together by waving their hands and moving their "sheep" together. Ask the children what they think the shepherds said to the sheep.

- Explain that at the end of the day, the shepherds would bring their sheep back to the sheepfold, usually a stone enclosure with four walls and a doorway or gateway, but no roof. Have the children move their "sheep" to the sheepfold enclosure you prepared.

The sheepfold would protect the sheep through the night from wandering off or wild animals.

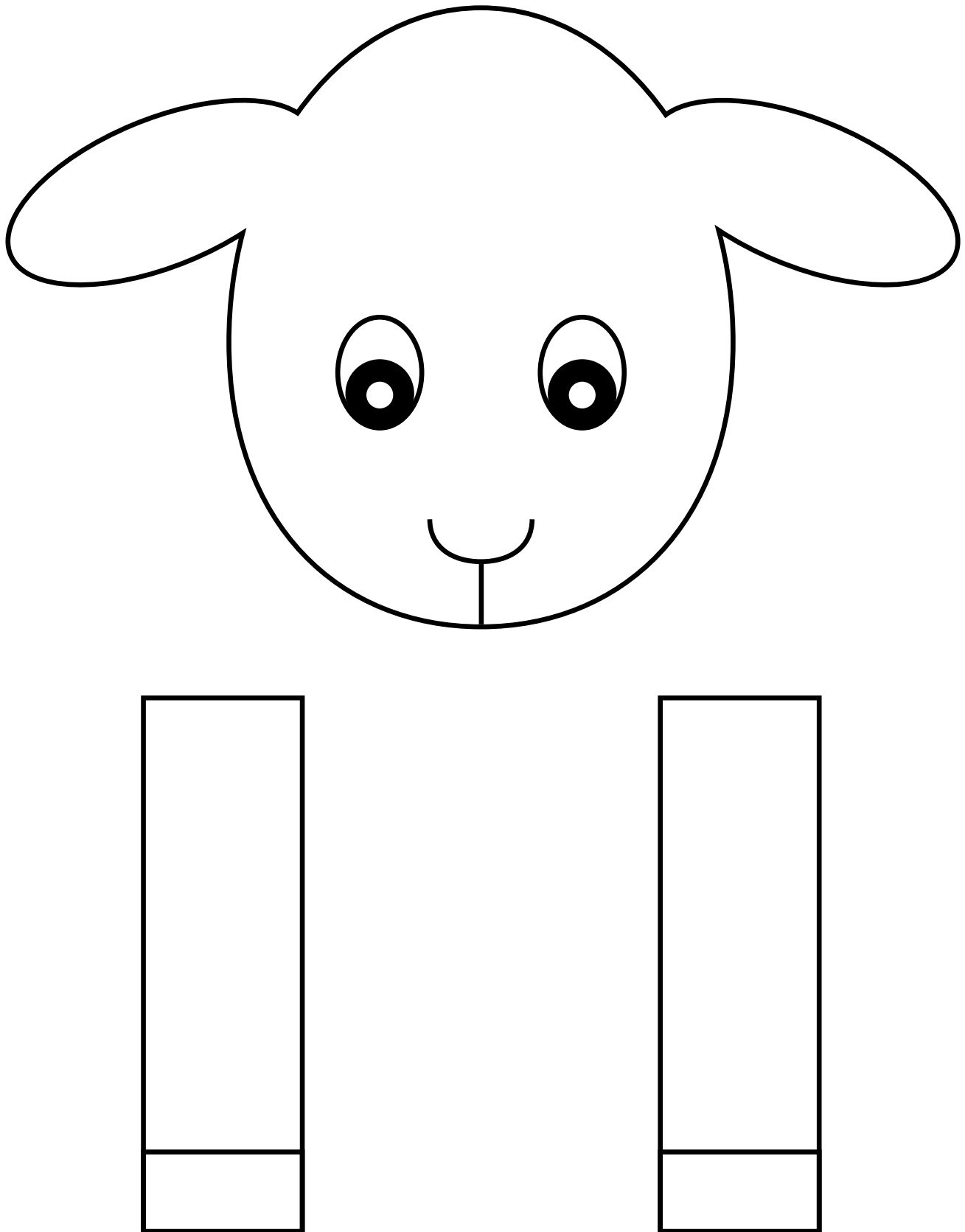
The shepherds would have a small camp there with a fire burning. They would have their meal.

- Invite children to get their snack bags and sit around the sheepfold to have a snack. Say a prayer giving thanks to God for a good day, sheep, and food to eat.











# The Lord Is My Shepherd



**A shepherd cares for the flock.**

