

Acts 4:5–12
Ps. 23
1 John 3:16–24
John 10:11–18

Model Shepherd

Goal for the Session

Tweens will investigate the characteristics of the model Shepherd and come to a deeper understanding of how we all belong to Jesus.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on John 10:11–18

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Sarah S. Henrich

Jesus is identified as a *kalos* shepherd. This Greek word, most often translated “good,” is frequently understood by Americans as the opposite of “bad.” While not inaccurate, *kalos* means “good” more in the sense of model. Jesus is the good shepherd insofar as he is a model shepherd as revealed in Israel’s Scriptures. *Kalos* shepherding will protect at any cost those followers who are intimately known to the shepherd. At the end of this passage, we hear that Jesus knows the cost of being a good shepherd and willingly pays it, in accord with God’s goal of the ultimate protection of the sheep.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Stephen A. Cooper

Christ is the Word of God, the message of the self-giving love of God, who did not want the world to perish. The voice of Christ calls out to us; thus now is the time to examine our attitudes, practices, and behaviors that keep us safe from the concerns and needs of Christ’s other sheep. To the extent that we decline to enter into the world of these other sheep due to discomfort or limited perceptions of our advantage, it is we who are refusing the voice that insists “one flock” is a correlate of the principle “one shepherd.”

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Nancy R. Blakely

Sheep must be led. Sheep will not go anywhere that their trusted shepherd does not go first, to show them that everything is all right. The shepherd’s voice is key. As Jesus says, “I know my own and my own know me” (v. 14). Sometimes we go astray, just like sheep. There are many voices out there vying for our attention. Many distractions lure us from the path. Jesus promises that he will never let us go. His voice will bring us back. We belong to him. This is a strong word of reassurance to us in our struggles to be faithful.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Barbara J. Essex

John makes it clear that the work of gathering the flock belongs to Jesus and God—we are to provide a space where all are welcome. The community that John envisions is open and celebrates its diversity as a gift from God. The Good Shepherd is a powerful image for us—who hunger for connection in a society that values individualism and secularism. In our moments of loneliness, isolation, alienation, and hopelessness, the Good Shepherd responds to our deepest yearnings for community by offering an alternative to our fears, separation, and insecurities.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

John 10:11–18

YOU WILL NEED

- ☐ white cloth
- ☐ gold or yellow streamers or ribbons
- ☐ large white battery-powered candle
- ☐ copies of Resource Sheet 1, 2
- ☐ Color Pack 17, 34
- ☐ Bibles
- ☐ newsprint, markers
- ☐ sticky notes, pens
- ☐ masking tape
- ☐ bowl of water
- ☐ *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024; CD player

For Responding

- ☐ option 1: newsprint, markers
- ☐ option 2: self-hardening clay
- ☐ option 3: Color Pack 18, 19; assorted art supplies for drawing; drawing paper; scissors; tissue paper scraps; glue sticks

One definition of *role model*: a person whose behavior is considered to be a good example for another person to follow.

Focus on Your Teaching

Most tweens are growing in their sense of self, and gaining social acceptance is important to them. They desperately want to belong and be a part of a group, so the assurance that we all belong to Jesus is important for them. Hopefully your group will have developed a strong sense of cohesion and friendship; however, sometimes such group spirit can act as a barrier to exclude newcomers. As you prepare for the session, think about how you might encourage your group to be an open and welcoming community.

God of love, open my ears to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, and help me create a welcoming and open community for the tweens in my group. Amen.

■ LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

As tweens arrive, greet each by name, saying, “(Name), the Lord is risen!” As needed, prompt learners to respond, “Christ is risen indeed!”

Invite tweens to work together to arrange the white cloth in the center of your meeting space, placing the candle on it and arranging gold or yellow streamers in a festive design. As you light the candle, say, “The light of the risen Christ is with us!” Pass the candle from person to person, inviting tweens, as they hold the candle, to tell about a high point or low point during the past week. Offer this prayer:

Shepherding God, send your Spirit to teach us more about the welcoming love of Jesus. Amen.

Work as a group to come up with a definition of *role model*. Invite tweens to name persons they think are good role models. Ask:

- ✂ Why do you think these people are good role models?
- ✂ What characteristics do these people have in common?

Comment that you will be meeting a role model in the Bible passage today.

EXPLORING

Show Color Pack 17, and invite tweens' comments and observations. Ask them to tell what they know about looking after sheep and the work of shepherds. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Shepherding 101) and ask for volunteers to read it aloud. Have tweens write six-word stories about good shepherds on sticky notes and place them on Color Pack 17.

Tell tweens that in the Bible passage for today, Jesus uses the imagery of shepherds and sheep when teaching his followers. Explain that Jesus' followers would have been familiar with this imagery, as it is used often in the Hebrew Scriptures. Also, they would have known shepherds in their communities. Distribute Bibles, form three groups, and have each group read one of the following passages: Ezekiel 34:11–16, Psalm 23, Isaiah 40:11. Ask each group to tell:

✠ Who is the shepherd in this passage? Who are the sheep?

Ask tweens to turn to John 10:11–18. To read this aloud as a group, start by having one person read the first verse, and then have another person join the first reader to read the second verse. Continue in this fashion, adding more voices to each verse, so that by the last verse everyone is reading in unison. Point out that the word translated as “good” is a Greek word that does not mean good as in the opposite of bad, but rather as in a good role model.

Draw a large circle on newsprint. Ask tweens to write words from John 10:11–18 that tell the characteristics of a good, or model, shepherd around the edge of the circle. Supplement with extra words if needed. Words might include *shepherd, sheep, die, protect, voice, flock, sheepfold, good, care, help, guide, follow, speak, hear, love, willing, know, and one*. Form pairs. Ask each pair to choose any two words and write a sentence that uses both words and tells something about how Jesus is a model shepherd. After several minutes, invite the pairs to read aloud their sentences. Using a different color marker for each pair, draw straight lines across the circle to connect the two words used. Discuss the diagram:

✠ Which words were used most often?

✠ Why might these words be important to Jesus' followers today?

Use masking tape to create a rectangular sheepfold on the floor. Form two groups; ask one group to pretend they are sheep inside the pen and the other to pretend they are sheep outside it. Read aloud John 10:11–18, asking tweens to listen carefully for the verses that describe their group. Give a copy of Resource Sheet 2 (Something to Talk About) to each group. Ask each group to move into a huddle to discuss and answer the questions.

Gather back together around the sheepfold as each group reports their answers to the questions. As you discuss the questions, print the tweens' responses on sticky notes and place them inside the sheepfold. Ask:

✠ In what ways is Jesus like a good shepherd?

✠ How might Jesus' teaching influence the way we treat those who are not a part of our faith community?

✠ How might we welcome others into our church?

EASY
PREP

Encourage tweens to take on tasks that suit their gifts and personalities. Extroverts might volunteer to buddy up with newcomers; those who are shy might be responsible for welcome bags, snacks, music, or decorations.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

- Welcome Plan** John's Gospel reminds us that the work of gathering the flock belongs to God; our challenge is to provide a space where all are welcome to encounter the Good Shepherd. Brainstorm ways your group could become more welcoming. Consider things such as the physical layout of your space, decorations, music, welcome rituals, and group dynamics. How might the group welcome a friend, someone facing physical challenges, or a person who is not liked by many in the group? Record ideas on newsprint. Create a plan of action. Implement any suggestions that can be done immediately, such as room arrangement, creating welcoming rituals, or deciding who might be "welcome buddies." Plan how other suggestions for things such as decorations or music might be accomplished. How might each tween invite a person to visit your group?
- Shepherd Sculpture** John's description of the Good Shepherd helps tweens imagine what it means to belong to Jesus. Invite tweens to read John 10:11–18 again, and then work with self-hardening clay to create shapes or symbols that express what it feels like to them to belong to Jesus' flock. Leave the clay in a safe place to harden.
- Shepherd Images** The loving, caring characteristics of Jesus, the model shepherd, have brought comfort through the ages. Show Color Pack 18 and 19, inviting tweens to notice the different styles of artwork. Explain that these are all visual depictions of Jesus the Good Shepherd. If you have any artwork in your church building that incorporates this shepherd imagery, go see it. Invite tweens to use the art materials provided to create their own pictures of the Good Shepherd. Display the pictures in a hallway or on a bulletin board with a title chosen by the group.

CLOSING

Gather the group and light the candle. Place a bowl of water on the white fabric. Dip your hand in the water, letting water splash back into the bowl, as you say, "In baptism, we are called by Christ Jesus into a new and changed life." Invite tweens to take turns dipping a hand in the water as they name one thing they have learned or thought about today that will help them live as followers (sheep) of the Good Shepherd.

Close by singing "I've Got Peace like a River" (Color Pack 34; track 12 on *Singing the Feast*, 2023–2024).

Extinguish the candle.

As you say good-bye to tweens, encourage them to invite others to join your group.

I've Got Peace like a River

I've got *peace like a river*,
I've got peace like a river,
I've got peace like a river in
my soul.

I've got peace like a river,
I've got peace like a river,
I've got peace like a river in
my soul.

I've got *joy like a fountain*,
...

I've got *love like an ocean*,
...

Shepherding 101

Being a shepherd in Jesus' day was not easy. Shepherds faced many dangers, and the work was hard:

- ✓ Shepherds had to locate good pasture and then remove any poisonous plants before allowing the sheep to graze.
- ✓ Shepherds had to check often to make sure the sheep were healthy and free from harmful insects. They cared for any cuts or scrapes on the sheep.
- ✓ Water was in very short supply, so shepherds worked hard to find good watering spots. They led their sheep to the water. Sometimes there would be more than one flock at the watering spot, and the sheep would get mixed up. Shepherds could keep whichever sheep followed them.
- ✓ Shepherds had to make sure that their sheep recognized their voice and followed them, so they wouldn't lose any. Shepherds would sing and talk to the sheep from the time they were born. This way, the sheep grew up knowing their own shepherd's voice.
- ✓ Wild animals would attack the sheep, and shepherds had to protect the flock from harm. A good shepherd would not run away when danger threatened, even if it meant being attacked by a wild animal.
- ✓ At night, a shepherd would gather the flock into a sheepfold or pen for protection. A good shepherd would lie across the entrance of the fold and act as a gate, so that any predators would have to get past the shepherd first.



Something to Talk About

Our group was:

- ☐ inside the sheepfold
- ☐ outside the sheepfold



How did it feel to be standing where you were, either inside the sheepfold or outside it?



Read again John 10:14–16. What words seem most important to your group?



What do you hear in this passage about your group? What do you hear about the other group?



What might the sheepfold represent?



Who might the sheep inside the fold represent?



Who might the sheep outside the fold (John 10:16) represent?

