



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
(MM) 2022–2023

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 8, 8a, 8b, 17,
23

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

green cloth

candle

internet-connected
device

Responding

Claiming

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1; **SCM 8a, 8b**

Celebrating

balloons

Offering

Mediterranean-style
foods such as hummus,
olives, dates, pita,
grapes, other fresh
fruit, and baklava

Extra

copies of **GN 2**

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **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.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” and “Offering God’s Grace” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

B M

Greet the children by name and with the words “The grace of Christ be with you.” Prompt the children to respond with the same words.

Invite children to help set the scene. Provide a Bible, a green cloth, and a candle. Place **SCM 8a** and **SCM 8b** on or near the table.

Ask a few children to help prepare any “Responding in Gratitude” activities you may be doing today. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Ask for several volunteers to practice today’s Scripture reading.

Watch the YouTube video “On Psalm 23 . . . and being a sheep” (bit.ly/beingasheep). Ask the children how they are like sheep. Wonder together what a shepherd might do for them.

Singing

A

Gather around the worship table. Invite the children to name people, places, and things for which they thank and praise God. Invite them to sing a song of praise and thanks.

Play “Let Us Give Praise to God (Alabad al Señor)”—**MM 21**; **SCM 23**. Suggest that the children clap along as they sing the song.

Praying

Turn on the candle. Invite the children to repeat your words as you pray:

Be with us today, God. /
Quiet our minds so we can hear your voice. /
Open our hearts so we can receive your love. /
Create in us grateful hearts that care for your world. /
In Jesus’ name. /
Amen. /

A Adapt any activity to suit your children’s needs. Ask yourself, “How can I change this activity so this child can do it?”

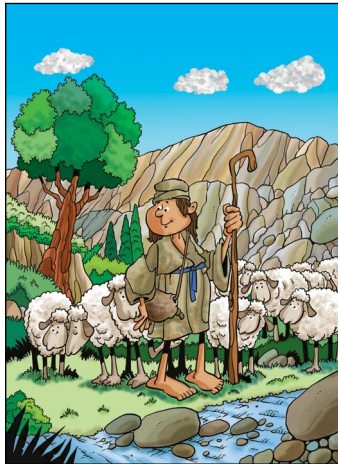


Preparing to Hear the Story

C L LB

Invite children to look at **SCM 8a** and **SCM 8b**. Ask each child to point to the image that he or she feels best reminds him or her of God, and why. After everyone has had a chance to respond, explain that all of the images show ways that God is described in the Bible. Scripture references are included with each image. Note that, while there are additional passages for some of the images, just one reference is provided. For a challenge, have the children to look up these passages in the Bible. Suggest that the different images are ways of helping us know God better.

Invite the children to listen carefully to see how God is being described in today's story.



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.

Hearing the Story

C L

Invite one of the children to find Psalm 23 in the Bible. Ask for several volunteers to read Psalm 23. Conclude the reading by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt the children to say, "Thanks be to God." Place the open Bible in the worship area.

Tell the children that, when you read the story again, you will prompt them to respond with the phrase "I will have everything I need" during different parts of the story. Repeat the phrase with them as needed before you start reading. Read **SCM 8** or play the story audio.

Reflecting on God's Grace

C L

Engage the children in conversation, using the following questions:

- ▼ How does God care for you when you need to rest?
- ▼ How does God guide you?
- ▼ How does God protect you from danger?
- ▼ How does God care for you when you are afraid?
- ▼ How do we know God is with us always?

Cut a long piece of mural paper and hang it on the wall at the children's level. Invite children to draw a scene from Psalm 23. You may want to read **SCM 8** again so the children can choose a scene. The pictures do not need to be in order. After the children have drawn their picture, invite them to tell you about the scene they drew. Ask why they chose that particular scene.

T *For children who struggle with transitions, consider a quick physical activity—such as doing chair push-ups, squeezing hands together, and stretching—before story time.*



Singing



Sing “God Is So Good”—**MM 5**; **SCM 17**—and celebrate how God cares for us. Teach the children two new verses.

God is my shepherd, (*repeat two times*)
and God cares for me.

We are the sheep, (*repeat two times*)
and God cares for us.

Turn off the candle.

RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and for the time available.

Claiming God’s Grace

Explain that there are many ways to think about God. Psalm 23 uses two images for God: *shepherd* and *host*. The Bible includes many more images for God. Have the children find some examples, drawing them from the images on **SCM 8a** and **SCM 8b**. They may look up the passages noted on the pictures.

Like the psalmist who wrote Psalm 23, invite the children to choose two images from **SCM 8a** and **SCM 8b** or make up images of their own. Have the children work alone or with a partner, as they wish, using the psalm prompts on **GN 1** to compose their own psalms.

Display the finished psalms or publish them in the church’s newsletter in print or online, with the children’s permission.



If your group has children with latex allergies, non-latex gloves could be blown up. The fingers would be the head and legs of the sheep.

Celebrating God’s Grace



Before the session, blow up six to ten balloons for each child. Either use a different color of balloon or draw symbols with permanent markers to designate each shepherd’s sheep (balloons). Mix all of the balloons together in large garbage bags.

Play a game to celebrate how we can be like shepherds caring for sheep. Assign each child a flock (color or symbol). Tell the children that they have been given a flock of sheep (balloons) to care for. Dump the balloons out in an open area. Show the children how to corral their sheep using only a sheet of paper. Hold the paper with both hands and wave it, creating a breeze to direct the movement of the sheep. The object is to find each of their sheep and bring them to their fold. The children should be encouraged to help the other shepherds as well.

SD *Some children with sensory issues have difficulties with sound, such as the squeaking of balloons. Provide advance warning to children.*



Praying God's Grace

SD

One way we care for one another is to pray. Invite children to sit in a circle together on the floor. Ask them to hold hands or touch elbows.

Invite the children to think about someone or something about which they are concerned. Have one person say a short sentence about her or his thoughts. When that person is done, he or she squeezes the hand or taps the elbow of the person to his or her right. That person then shares his or her thoughts and squeezes the hand of the next person, and so on.

If anyone does not wish to say anything aloud, he or she can simply think silently for a moment and squeeze the hand or tap the elbow of the next person.

When everyone has had an opportunity to share in the circle, end by leading an echo prayer:

Dear God, /
Make my heart happy, make my heart glad. /
Help me to care for whatever I have. /
Help me to know you, help me to pray. /
Let my heart praise you all through the day. /
Amen. /



Offering God's Grace

FA

Wonder together ways we can tell other people about our God who is like a shepherd. Accept all answers. Suggest that one of the ways is to do what the shepherd does—feed the sheep.

Invite the children to wash their hands and prepare the food for serving. Provide Mediterranean-style foods, such as hummus, olives, dates, pita, grapes, other fresh fruit, and baklava.

Using newsprint and markers, make signs that say “God is our shepherd,” “We will follow God,” and so on. Add drawings of sheep and shepherds. Decorate the fellowship area of your church building with the signs the children made to encourage others to celebrate God our shepherd. Put food on a table for people to enjoy.

Extra Activity

Provide copies of **GN 2**, scissors, and glue. Explain that the letters at the bottom of the page will finish the sentence. Have the children cut out the letters (help if necessary) then arrange them in the open squares. Glue the letters in place when they have solved the puzzle. Allow time to color the sheep. For a challenge, ask the children to count the sheep (18).

GN 2 Solution:
God cares for us.



LOVING AND SERVING GOD

Gather the children and lead them in cleaning up the worship space.

Wonder together how we can be like shepherds and help God care for others as God cares for us. Invite the children to repeat your words as you pray:

Loving God, /
you care for us as a shepherd cares for the sheep. /
You feed us and make sure we are safe. /
May we be like shepherds and care for your sheep. /
May we find ways to help others, /
so that they know they are part of your flock too. /
Amen.

Send each child with a blessing, saying, “(Name), like a shepherd cares for the sheep, God cares for you.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

od is my

(first image)

od


(statements of how God works in your life)

Even when

(something difficult or hard that happens)

Even then, God

(what God does in those circumstances)

od, you are my

(second image)

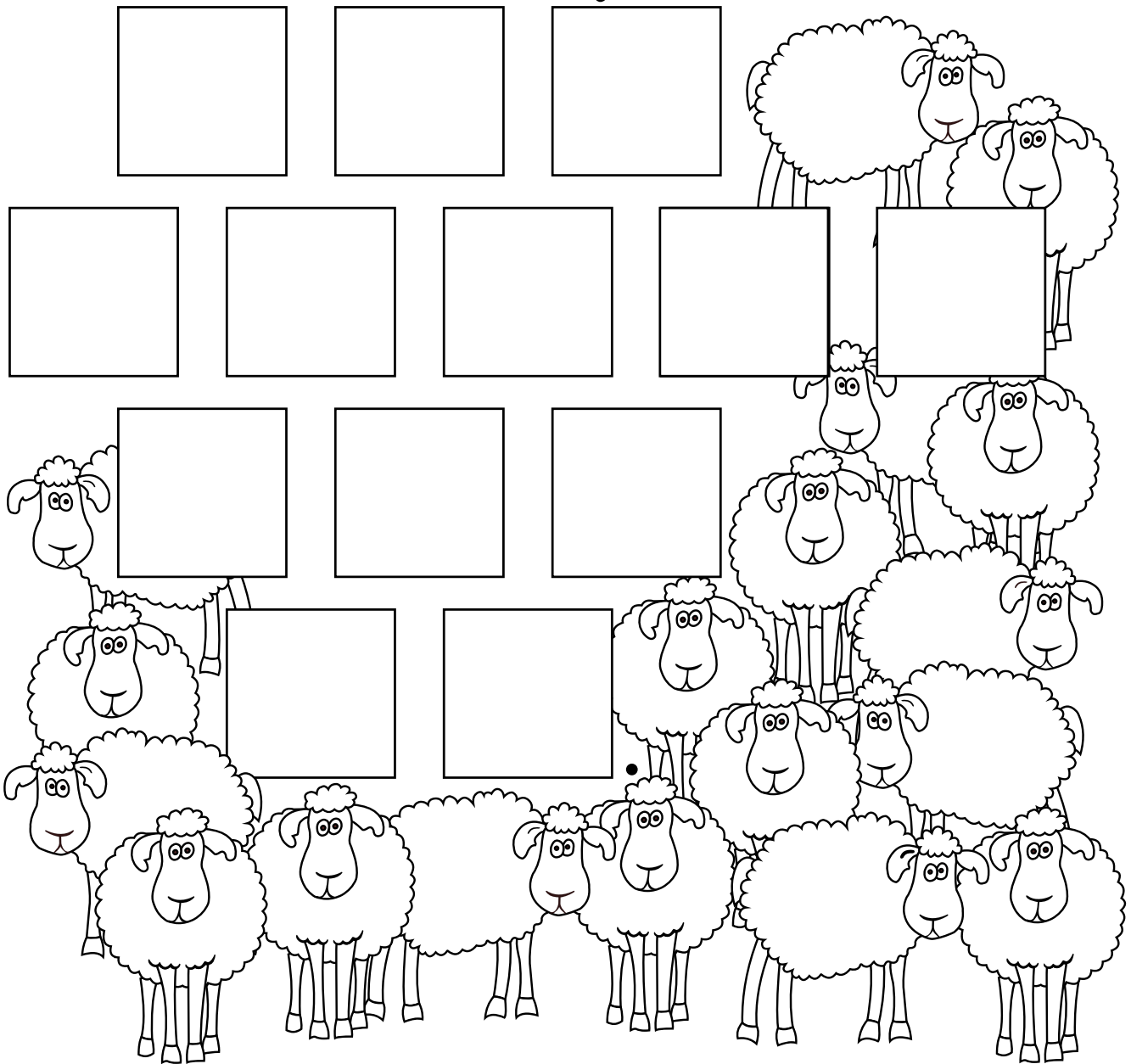
You

(statements of what God does)

Because of you, O God, my hope is this:

Amen.

Like a shepherd . . .



S	F	E	R	G	R	O
O	C	D	U	S	A	

