

Acts 4:5–12

Ps. 23

1 John 3:16–24

John 10:11–18

Shepherd's Voice

Goal for the Session

Tweens will delve into Jesus' teaching about the good shepherd and discern Jesus' voice amidst the clamor of the world.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on John 10:11–18

WHAT is important to know?

— From "Exegetical Perspective," Sarah S. Henrich

As described here, this model shepherd has a task that may surprise the flock as it defines itself. Jesus declares that he (and the Father who directs his work, as in John 8:28; 10:18) has "other" sheep who will recognize him as their leader. The task of gathering the sheep requires that Jesus know them, for they may be hidden, scattered, "other" than humans have anticipated. Jesus' death enables him to return to the Father and send the Spirit that will continue and extend this task of shepherding God's people (John 7:39).

WHERE is God in these words?

— From "Theological Perspective," Stephen A. Cooper

The issue of the oneness of believers arises from Jesus' saying here about the "other sheep that do not belong to this fold" (v. 16). Although in its original setting this verse probably referred to "the calling of the Gentiles"—as Calvin observed—our present, twenty-first-century context requires that we expand this image. The "other sheep" of today must be determined by the setting in which the word is preached and heard. Who are "other" for us? This line of questioning brings the affluent churches of the developed world into discomfiting reflections on the "other" in our midst. The key point is that these "others" are Christ's sheep, just as we are, and they too recognize his voice.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From "Pastoral Perspective," Nancy R. Blakely

Sometimes we go astray, just like sheep. Sheep that are ill may follow the voice of a stranger. Sheep wander off and fall into ravines. 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. In our choices each day as we practice our faith by saying yes to some voices and saying no to others, Jesus is there, going before us and leading us.

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

— From "Homiletical Perspective," Barbara J. Essex

The good shepherd does not merely care for the sheep, but also gathers the flock. Those who see, hear, and believe in Jesus belong to the community; thus, the door is wide open to the outcasts of the day—sinners, lepers, women, Samaritans, tax collectors, and more. Jesus is concerned for the individual welfare of each sheep (knows each by name) *and* for the communal destiny of the flock (gathers into the fold)! Our emptiness and anxiety can be relieved, because we have one who knows us and cares for us, is willing to die for us, and is our constant companion—the Good Shepherd.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

John 10:11–18

YOU WILL NEED

- white cloth
- gold or yellow streamers or ribbons
- Christ candle, matches
- toy sheep (optional)
- Bibles
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- copies of Resource Sheets 1, 2
- pencils or pens
- Color Pack 16, 17, 32, 33

For Responding

- option 1: scrap paper, pencils, copier paper, pens or fine-tipped markers
- option 2: Color Pack 18, poster board or newsprint, tape, markers
- option 3: digital video recorder or smartphone

Alleluia! Allelu!

Alleluia! Allelu! Jesus has been raised!
Alleluia! Allelu! Let his name be praised!
The angel at the break of day
Rolled the giant stone away.
Alleluia! Allelu! Jesus has been raised!

Focus on Your Teaching

Many tweens spend a fair amount of time and energy trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in with their peers. Voices from classmates, friends, teachers, family, media, and celebrities crowd their hearts and minds—telling them who they should be, what they should do, and whom they should follow. As a Christian teacher, take this opportunity to help tweens embrace their identity as God's children. Encourage them to discern the voices of those who truly care for them, who will lead them in safe and faithful ways of living.

Let me hear your voice today, O God. Empower me to guide these children to hear the voice of Jesus, our Good Shepherd. Amen.

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, spread the white cloth in the center of your meeting space and arrange some gold or yellow streamers or ribbons on it. Place the Christ candle and the toy sheep (optional) on it.

Greet tweens as they arrive. Gather around the Christ candle and light it. Announce that this is the fourth Sunday of the Easter season. Sing “Alleluia! Allelu!” (Color Pack 33; track 1 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021).

Review the “All” response, and then lead the following litany:

Leader: Jesus Christ was dead, but he now lives forever and ever!

All: Christ is risen indeed!

Leader: Because Jesus lives, we also will live abundantly and eternally!

All: Christ is risen indeed!

Leader: Come, Lord Jesus, and help us to follow you.

All: Christ is risen indeed!

Extinguish the candle.

Play a game with the group. Choose one learner to be the “Listener” and stand with his or her back to the group. Have the group move around for a moment behind the Listener and then silently indicate another learner to be the “Caller.” The Caller whispers the name of the Listener while everyone else in the group talks to one another. The Caller continues to say the name, increasingly louder each time, until the Listener can name the Caller. Play until each learner has a chance to be the Listener. Ask:

☙ Was it easy or difficult to figure out who was calling your name? Why?

Say that today's Bible reading is about hearing who is calling.

EXPLORING

Show Color Pack 16 and invite learners to tell what they know about shepherds and sheep. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Shepherds). Ask for volunteers to read aloud the information. Ask:

- ✂ If you were a shepherd, what would you like best about the job? What would you like least about it?

Say that today's Bible passage is from the Gospel of John. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (The Good Shepherd). Invite learners to follow along as you read aloud "John 10:11–18, CEB." Show Color Pack 17 and explain that many artists have expressed the way they imagine Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Invite tweens to comment on how well they think this artist has expressed this understanding of Jesus' identity. Discuss:

- ✂ Why do you think Jesus says he is the Good Shepherd?
- ✂ What does Jesus, the Good Shepherd, do?
- ✂ How does thinking about Jesus as the Good Shepherd help you to understand why God sent Jesus to earth?

Distribute pens or pencils. Form pairs and ask partners to read aloud "John 10:11–18, CEB" on the resource sheet to each other, alternating verses. Then have pairs follow the directions in "Good Shepherd/Hired Hand." After pairs complete the activity, invite them to compare their summary statements with one another. Ask:

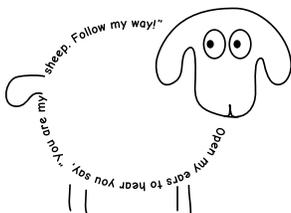
- ✂ What does it mean to know the voice of the Good Shepherd today—how can Christians listen for Jesus' voice? (Welcome a variety of responses, such as: through prayer, by following Jesus' teachings, reading Scripture, listening to what other Christians are saying.)
- ✂ Whose voice speaks the words of the Good Shepherd to you?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Shape Poems** Learners will express their understanding of Jesus as the Good Shepherd through poetry. Review with tweens how poetry often draws on language that is imaginative or uses metaphor. Ask learners to think of themselves as Jesus' sheep and brainstorm some things they might say about how they listen to the voice of Jesus or things they might ask Jesus as one of his sheep. Explain they will write poems about this to form the outline of a sheep. Provide scrap paper and pencils for composing poems and planning the drawing. Have tweens use pens or fine-tipped markers to make a final copy of their poems on copier paper. Invite volunteers to read their poems to the group. Make a display of poems where others in the church can read them.

EASY
PREP



- Voice of the Good Shepherd** Learners will give thanks for people who have helped them to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd. Show Color Pack 17 and invite learners to sit quietly and imagine that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is speaking to them. After a moment, invite tweens to tell some of the things they imagined Jesus saying to them. Ask: Who has helped you to hear the words of Jesus, our good shepherd? Who has helped you to know Jesus' love and care? Tape Color Pack 17 to the center of a piece of newsprint or poster board. Have learners use markers to write the names of the individuals they named around the poster. Gather around the finished poster and offer a prayer of thanks for each person named. Challenge learners to think of ways they can help others to know the voice of the Good Shepherd and his love and care.
- Good Shepherd PSA** Learners will create a Public Service Announcement (PSA) to help people know how to listen for the voice of Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Invite tweens to recall PSAs they have seen or heard, such as those against bullying or distracted/impaired driving. Discuss how these are designed to raise awareness and convince people to act in a certain way. Think together about what a PSA about listening to the voice of the Good Shepherd might be like. What pictures would it have? What would it say? Either work together or in small groups to plan a 30-second PSA. Record it using a video recorder or smartphone. Play it back for the group. Option: Ask other Sunday school classes if you can show it to them.

CLOSING

Gather with learners around the Christ candle and light it. Distribute Bibles and have tweens turn to Psalm 23. Form two groups to read the psalm aloud, alternating verses between groups. Sing "Give Me Joy in My Heart" (Color Pack 32; track 5 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*). Add stanzas to reflect what learners want to ask Jesus, the Good Shepherd, to give to them, such as: "Give me *peace in my life . . . water to drink . . . signs of your love . . . courage to act.*"

Offer a call-and-response blessing. Begin by saying to the person on your right: "(Name), you have been blessed by the Good Shepherd." The group responds: "(Name), remember you are one of Jesus' sheep." Repeat until each person has received the blessing.

Invite learners to exchange gestures and words of peace with one another. Say good-bye to learner by name, saying you hope to see them again next week.

Give Me Joy in My Heart

Give me joy in my heart,
keep me singing,
Give me joy in my heart,
I pray—hallelujah!
Give me joy in my heart,
keep me singing,
Keep me singing till the
break of day.

Sing hosanna, sing
hosanna, sing hosanna
to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna, sing
hosanna, sing hosanna
to the king.

Repeat three times

Shepherds

The Bible has many stories and poems that tell about sheep and shepherds. People in Bible times were familiar with the job of being a shepherd. There are still shepherds today, but many people do not know much about the job.

A shepherd is responsible for a flock of sheep. A flock can be as few as three sheep or as many as thousands of sheep. Read about what a shepherd must do to take care of the flock:



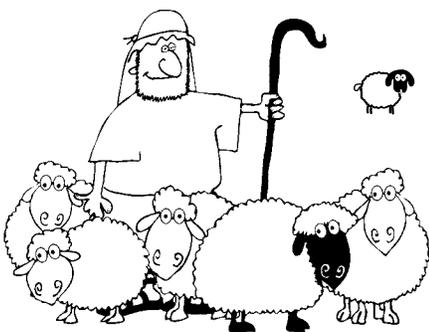
Guide and Call Sheep need to be guided or led to where they are supposed to go. Sheep don't always pay attention to where they are going. Sometimes a sheep wanders off and gets lost from the rest of the flock. The shepherd must find the sheep and lead it back to the flock. In Bible times, shepherds would lead their sheep into a sheepfold or pen where they were safer. Sheep recognize the voice of their own shepherd. They typically will not respond when they are called by someone else.



Guard and Protect Sheep can't do much to protect themselves. The shepherd must be ready to protect the sheep from predators like mountains lions, coyotes, or wolves. Sometimes shepherds are hurt when they do this. Shepherds in Bible times had long sticks and slingshots to use to protect sheep. At night, shepherds kept watch to guard the sheep, especially if they were out in an open pasture.



Help and Care Sheep have long, woolly fleece (hair). It can get caught in thorns or brambles. The shepherd has to untangle the sheep when this happens. Also, sheep can have a hard time getting up if they fall into a tight spot between rocks or trees. If this happens, the shepherd has to help them stand up again. Sometimes shepherds have to lift and carry a hurt or sick sheep to safety.



Feed and Water It is the shepherd's job to know where to find good pasture grass and safe water for the sheep. In Bible times, shepherds led their flocks away from the towns to find grass and water. This was not easy when the terrain was rocky or the weather was dry.

The Good Shepherd

John 10:11-18, CEB

¹¹"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹²When the hired hand sees the wolf coming, he leaves the sheep and runs away. That's because he isn't the shepherd; the sheep aren't really his. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them.

¹³He's only a hired hand and the sheep don't matter to him.

¹⁴"I am the good shepherd. I know my own sheep and they know me, ¹⁵just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. I give up my life for the sheep. ¹⁶I have other sheep that don't belong to this sheep pen. I must lead them too. They will listen to my voice and there will be one flock, with one shepherd.

¹⁷"This is why the Father loves me: I give up my life so that I can take it up again. ¹⁸No one takes it from me, but I give it up because I want to. I have the right to give it up, and I have the right to take it up again. I received this commandment from my Father."

Good Shepherd/Hired Hand

Read the verses above and find how the good shepherd cares for the sheep and how the hired hand cares for the sheep. Summarize your comparison between the good shepherd and the hired hand in one sentence.

My Summary: _____

