

The Story of the **Good Shepherd**

The Point: Trust Jesus.

Scripture Connect: John 10:11–15

Supplies for all Session 1 activities options: pencils, prepared poster, identical spoons (metal or plastic, at least 1 per child), Bible, 1 penny or nickel for each child (to keep), paper

The Basics for Leaders

Quick! When's the last time you saw a shepherd leading a flock of sheep around the countryside? Ever?

In Jesus's day, it was a common sight—so common that when Jesus painted a word picture of his relationship with his followers, he chose the image of a shepherd and sheep.

And not just any shepherd—Jesus claimed the role of a shepherd who owns the flock, who'll risk anything to protect his sheep ... including his life.

That kind of commitment is rare. Think about who in your life is literally willing to die for you. For most of us, it's a short list.

As you share this story with your kids, you'll help them discover just how deep Jesus's love is for his followers—for us—and that we can trust Jesus too!

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

HOWZITGOIN’

Time: about 5 minutes, depending on attendance

Supplies: pencils, prepared poster

Before kids arrive, draw a line on a poster. Write a 1 on the left end of the line, a 10 on the right, and a 5 in the middle. As kids arrive, ask them to pencil in their initials on the line.



Say: If this past week was so awful you wish you’d slept through it, place your initials by the 1. If it was a great week you wish you could repeat, put your initials by the 10. Place your initials anywhere on the line that shows how you feel about this past week—except exactly on the 5. Because there’s no such thing as a week that’s exactly half good and half bad!

After kids have signed in, give them 30 seconds each to explain why they placed their initials where they did. Be sure to include your own initials and explain your placement on the line. Kids will begin to express themselves more over time, and hearing their stories will help you adapt this lesson to make it relevant to your kids’ lives.

OPENING ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

A SPOON BY ANY OTHER NAME

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: identical spoons (metal or plastic, at least 1 per child)

Raid the kitchen! You’ll want as many spoons as possible—but the spoons must be identical, all made in the same style. No metal spoons? A fistful of plastic spoons (or forks) will work.

Place the spoons in a pile on the floor. Say: **If I were a shepherd, I’d have one very big challenge: I can’t tell the sheep apart. They all look the same, like these spoons look the same. But if you look closely, you’ll find differences.**

Ask each child to take a spoon and study it. Challenge everyone to carefully examine his or her spoon for scratches, bumps, dents, or anything that makes the spoon distinctive. You can do the same with your spoon.

Next, ask children to name their spoons. Name yours Fluffy. Gather the spoons and mix them up. Toss them back on the floor with a rattle.

Say: **Our goal is to find our own spoons again. Let's start by calling them to see if they come to us.**

When that doesn't work say: **Guess these spoons are sort of like real sheep because they don't come when you call them. Oh well, go find your spoon!**

When children are certain they've located their unique spoons, have them circle up and discuss:

- **You found your spoon among a bunch that looked pretty much the same. What helped you do that?**
- **Jesus knows each of us—even though people all look pretty much the same. How do you think he does that?**
- **How does it feel knowing that Jesus knows your name and can pick you out of a crowd?**

Say: **Today we'll explore a story Jesus told about being a shepherd ... a good shepherd!**

Note: If kids can't find their own spoons, use this as an opportunity to point out that Jesus is a far better shepherd than we are. His love causes him to know each one of us perfectly.

Cool Stories Game

QUICK CHANGE

Time: 5 minutes or more, as desired

Supplies: none

Ask children to each find a partner. If you have an odd number of children, jump in and be a partner.

Say: **Stand facing your partner and discuss this: If you could go anywhere on a vacation, where would you go, and why? What would you do there?**

Allow up to one minute for children to talk. Then say: **You've had a minute to get a good look at your partner. Now turn around or sit back-to-back so you can't see your partner.**

Silently change one thing about how you look. Something small, such as unbuttoning a button, changing your hair, or untying your shoe—anything to slightly change your appearance. Take 30 seconds.

After they make the changes, ask partners to turn around and look at each other. See how many pairs can identify what changed about their partners. Play several rounds. Then ask children to sit and discuss:

- **What made this game easy or difficult?**
- **What if I'd asked you to say what your partner was thinking about? How well would you have done with that?**

Say: **Someone knows us well enough to tell when we change something about ourselves and to even know what we're thinking. Today we'll dig into a story that has an important meaning: Jesus knows us!**

Cool Bible Story

WOLF!

Time: 15 minutes

Supplies: Bible

Form your children into four groups: shepherds, hired hands, wolves, and sheep. Do you have just a few kids? You can play the role of wolf and, if necessary, drop the sheep role.

Say: **One day Jesus told a story that involved sheep and a shepherd. Jesus was trying to make a point to his listeners. These were Jewish leaders who said they were leading people closer to God, but they really weren't. Let's experience the story and see if we can discover a lesson for us.**

Place the sheep in the center of the room on all fours. Ask them to get in character by delivering a few *baas*. Place your shepherds and hired hands near the sheep. Keep the wolf off to the side of the room.

AGE-ALERT TIPS

Younger children

will especially enjoy impersonating sheep, so allow time for them to get in character and move around a bit before proceeding.

Say: I'm going to read aloud the story Jesus told his listeners. As I read, do what's described and what you think a wolf and sheep would do. Ready?

Read John 10:11–15, pausing when there's action called for. Applaud your actors and ask kids to sit in a circle. Discuss the following questions:

- **Two kinds of people were guarding the sheep: hired hands and shepherds. Why did they behave differently?**
- **Jesus described himself as one of those two kinds of guards. Which one? And why?**
- **In what ways is Jesus a shepherd to us all? To you?**
- **How do you feel knowing that Jesus is watching out for you?**
- **In what ways has Jesus earned your trust?**

AGE-ALERT TIPS

If you have mostly **older children** (4th, 5th, and 6th graders), modify the lesson in these ways:

Alert #1: Ask for a volunteer to read the passage aloud.

Alert #2: Add this as a last debriefing question:

*In what ways have you trusted Jesus and found him worthy of your trust?
In what ways have you felt disappointed?*

Say: We don't have many people in our lives who'd die for us. But that's exactly what Jesus did. And he's alive again and watching out for us. That makes it easy to love him and trust him!

CLOSING PRAYER

KNOW ME PRAYER

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: 1 penny or nickel for each child (to keep)

Give each child a penny or nickel. (If you're doing this activity in another country, adjust the activity to reflect a local coin.)

Say: **On the front of your coin you'll find a face. On the back of the coin is a building. And on the edge there's ... well, nothing.**

We'll use our coins as prayer prompts to help us tell Jesus what's going on in our lives. I'll lead and then pause, giving you time to silently tell Jesus what you want him to know.

Yes, he already knows what's going on in our lives. But it's also true he wants a friendship with us, and friends tell each other what's happening!

First, please hold your coin so the face is up. Close your eyes and, for the next minute or two, tell Jesus about people in your life. Tell him about your friends (pause) and about your family. (pause) Tell Jesus about people who aren't treating you well. (pause)

Now turn your coin so the building is up. Tell Jesus what's happening in buildings in your life. Tell him about what's happening at the building where you go to school. (pause) Tell Jesus about happenings in your home (pause) and your church. (pause)

Now turn your coin so the edge is up. Tell Jesus what's keeping you on edge—worried—in your life. Maybe it's a test coming up or a friendship that's not going well. What is making you uncomfortable? (pause)

Close the prayer time by thanking Jesus for listening, for his friendship, and for being a good shepherd. Tell children to keep the coins as reminders to pray each time they see their coins during the coming week.

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 1

FAST FACTS

Time: about 10 minutes

Supplies: 1 sheet of paper and 1 pencil per child

Give each child a sheet of paper and a pencil. Ask children to write or draw their answers to the following questions. Instruct them not to show anyone their answers.

- What's your favorite pizza topping?
- What's your favorite ice cream flavor?
- What's your favorite sports team?
- What's your favorite movie?
- What's your favorite kind of dog?
- Where were you born?
- If you could paint your room any color, what would that color be?

Collect and shuffle the papers. Then read several answers at a time from each paper. See how quickly kids can match up answers with names.

After playing, have kids circle up and discuss:

- How well do you think we know one another?
- How well do you think Jesus knows us?
- Is having Jesus know you a good thing or a bad thing? Why?

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 2

WOLF ATTACK!

Time: about 5 minutes

Supplies: 1 sheet of paper per child

On each sheet of paper (except one) write the word *sheep*. On the last, write *wolf* (or draw sheep and a wolf, depending on the ages of kids). Fold the papers. Ask children to sit in a circle with a lot of space between them. Tell them these rules:

- After I hand out the folded papers, wait to open them.
- When I give the signal, open your papers to see who you are. The “wolf” will try to touch as many “sheep” as possible in ten seconds. You sheep will scoot on your behinds to get away from the wolf.

Hand out the papers at random and play several rounds. You should play too! After playing, have children discuss:

- How would it feel to be a helpless sheep if a real wolf attacked?
- What would a good shepherd do to help his sheep?
- How does Jesus help you?
- What makes it easy—or hard—to trust Jesus as your shepherd?

EXTRA-TIME ACTIVITY—OPTION 3**INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW**

Time: 5 minutes

Supplies: none

Gather kids in a circle. Ask: **Imagine that you're all grown up and thinking back to this time. Who do you remember trusting? (Maybe your grandma because she always told you the truth). What did you trust? (Maybe the lock on the front door because it kept out bad guys). Was Jesus on your trust list? Why or why not?**