

# **Good Shepherd Sunday 2024**

## **Sunday School Lesson**

*by Rev. Kelly Nieman Anderson*

### **Scripture Lesson for the day:** John 10:11-18

[Jesus said:] <sup>11</sup>“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. <sup>12</sup>The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away—and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. <sup>13</sup>The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. <sup>14</sup>I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup>just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup>I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. <sup>17</sup>For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. <sup>18</sup>No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.”

**NOTE:** Not all Sunday School curriculum packages include “Jesus the Good Shepherd” as the lesson for April 21, even if you are using lectionary-based materials.

- If your church has a Sparkhouse digital subscription, then online resources for other lessons are available. Search for “Good Shepherd”. Options are available with Spark Lectionary Spring Year B and Whirl Year Gold.
- This lesson, written specifically for use on Good Shepherd Sunday 2024, includes material previously published from a variety of sources, all available free online.<sup>1</sup>

**Before the lesson:** *Gather all supplies, and set out some items for children to use as they enter the space. \*Supplies will vary based on activities chosen below.\**

**Welcome:** *Welcome all participants to the space.*

- Celebrate any birthdays.
- Collect offering and light candle(s) as appropriate.
- Dip your fingers into a bowl or water (optional), and then mark each other’s forehead with a cross, saying, “Jesus loves you!”
- Sing, “Jesus Loves Me” or another appropriate opening song.

**Introduce the lesson** *Say something like:*

Today’s Bible story is about Jesus’ love and care for us. Jesus tells a story comparing us to sheep, and him to a “good shepherd.” We’ll read the whole Bible story together soon. But first, we’re going to practice what it’s like to be a “good” shepherd and some well-loved sheep.

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<sup>1</sup><https://kids-bible-lessons.org/lesson-plans/i-am-the-good-shepherd-bible-lesson-for-kids/> and <https://ministry-to-children.com/the-good-shepherd-crafts/>

**Opening Activities:** *Choose one or more of the following:*



- **Good Shepherd Relay:** Each child is a “shepherd”, and balloons are “sheep”; children are in teams, and each team is trying to get their balloon “sheep” into their own “pastures/pens”, using paper wrapping tubes or wiffle ball bats as “shepherd staffs”. After everyone has had one turn, discuss the differences in how they treated the sheep. Point out how the balloon “sheep” responded better with gentle handling and remind them that this is how Jesus guides us: with a gentle nudge. Give the teams another round to see how they do.

- **Good Shepherd Marshmallows**<sup>2</sup> [Minute-to-Win-It style]. Use the fences in the printout at the end of this lesson guide. Fold the fences into a square with a little opening. Place 10 marshmallows outside of the fence. Each team has to use a straw to blow the marshmallows inside the fence during a one-minute time limit. The team with the most marshmallows inside the fence wins. [This is really hard because the fence moves when you blow on the marshmallow, but it is fun. If it's too hard, then tape the fence to a plate].



- **Find the scattered sheep:** Hide cotton balls throughout the room for children to find and gather in a “sheep pen” area.
- **Guard the sheep gate:** In this game, designate several students to be “sheep”, two or three to act as shepherds, and a few more to be “wolves.” The shepherds are to keep the sheep from getting tagged by the wolves and can block their flock from the predators who seek to tag the sheep. The goal is for the shepherds to guide the flock across a playing area without them getting tagged. If they are tagged, they must sit on the side as “sleeping sheep.”

**Transition:** *When the activity is done, gather everyone together in a circle, standing.*

*Tell the students:* The word in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) for “spirit” and the word for “breath” are the same word. Let’s take some deep breaths and invite God’s Holy Spirit to join us this morning.

**Deep Breath Moment:** Take a deep breath in, filling your lungs and stomach, and stretching arms up tall, and then breathe out deeply, emptying your lungs and stomach, folding your arms and head forward toward your feet. Repeat 3 times. Then, sit on the floor in a circle.

<sup>2</sup> <https://hollyshome-hollyshome-hollyshome.blogspot.com/2016/11/minute-to-win-it-new-testament-bible.html?m=1>

**Activity Debrief:** *Before moving on to the next activity, give students a chance to talk about what they just learned. Ask questions like:*

- What happened during our activity?
- How did you feel during the activity?
- What have you learned through this activity?
- What can you do with your new learning? (*accept any reasonable answer*)
- I told you that today's Bible story is about Jesus' love and care for us. What do you think our activity had to do with Jesus' love and care for us? (*accept any reasonable answers*)

**Transition Teaching:** *Connect the fun activity to the Bible Story. Say something like:*

Playing with marshmallows, balloons, and blindfolds is fun and silly! In real life, taking care of ourselves and others can be very challenging. It's extra tough to follow Jesus, sometimes, and even tougher to share Jesus' love and care with others.

In today's Bible story, Jesus is talking to people who are wondering how to know that Jesus is really God (and not just pretending to be important).

### **Bible Story:**

Read today's Bible Story from John 10:11-18 (like Spark NRSV Bible page 1185) or read "The Good Shepherd" from a Story Bible (like Spark Story Bible page 436).

### **Bible Story Debrief:**

*Ask students questions like these, to see what they remembered or learned from the Bible story:*

- What was Jesus doing or saying in today's Bible story?
- Who was talking to Jesus or listening to Jesus?
- Do you know what a "shepherd" does?
- Why did Jesus call himself a shepherd?
- Who are the "sheep" in this story?
- What are some things we know about sheep? [They need a lot of help]
- What can we learn about Jesus and us from this story?
- How do we know that Jesus takes care of us?
- Who makes you feel safe? Who watches out for you and guides you? (Explain that Jesus does this for us, even more than any human could!)
- What does it mean to you that we are God's "sheep"?
- How / when can we say "thank you" to Jesus for taking care of us and guiding us?
- How / when can we care for and guide other people and animals?

*Note: Lots of background on sheep and shepherds can be found here: <https://ministry-to-children.com/the-seven-i-am-statements-of-jesus-lesson-5/>*

## [Optional] Marshmallow Sheep (Craft/Snack)<sup>3</sup>

Have these items available at the table

- Hand sanitizer
- 1 small plate for each participant
- 1 bag of large marshmallows
- 1 bag of miniature marshmallows
- 1 box of pretzel sticks

Have the children create sheep using only the items on the table. They can tear apart the marshmallows and break the pretzel sticks if desired. Have the children decide which sheep are the funniest and the most realistic.

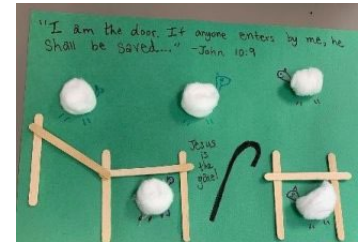
## Video Option

- Video retelling of the story [https://youtu.be/uKtW\\_3yQXBw](https://youtu.be/uKtW_3yQXBw)
- Video footage of a modern shepherd, at a real farm, with sheep! [https://youtu.be/zvi5N\\_y-910](https://youtu.be/zvi5N_y-910)
- Song option, great during snack time: <https://youtu.be/IDvb1tXuRrU>

*(Note: LSSI did not create these videos, so we cannot be responsible for ads that might appear before or during the video. For best results, preview the videos, and download prior to Sunday School to show with as few ads as possible.)*

## Craft Choose one of the following:

- Special names... Just like Jesus called himself the “Good Shepherd”, our names are also important. Have students write or draw their names with decorative color and design.
- Sheep pens. Build “sheep pens” or “fences” on construction paper with craft sticks, yarn, or toothpicks. Glue cotton ball “sheep” onto the paper (ideally, inside of the pen or in a green pasture!). Use markers or crayons to add sheep feet and heads. Write one of the day’s verses or take home points on the paper, too.



## Prayer Invite children to repeat after you, if that is your tradition.

Dear God, thank you for taking care of us. Thank you for protecting us and providing for us and being our Good Shepherd. Help us to listen to your voice so we can follow you. Thank you for sending us people to help and guide us. Show us how to care for others just like you care for us. We love you, God! In Jesus name, Amen!

<sup>3</sup> A video example is available here: <https://youtu.be/W0JVJnR-WGI>