**Week 4 – I Am the Good Shepherd/Knowing God’s Care**

**Points of Focus**

**Description:** The objective of this session is to bring God’s love into action in our lives, emphasizing that God love for us calls us to love one another, caring for and praying with our brothers and sisters as God care for all of us and to show that Jesus cares for us in our comings and goings like a good shepherd.

**Opening Prayer:**

Lord Jesus, loving shepherd, we thank you for watching over us, for laying down your life for us. We thank you for caring about us and about all the concerns and situations we have named here. During this time together, help us see and to appreciate the way your care comes to us and move us to follow you by showing that same care to those around us. Amen.

**Video: I am the Good Shepherd**

**Background and Historical Context**

**Mishnah** – Which means to study by repetition or review is the first major written collection of the Jewish [oral traditions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_tradition) that are known as the [Oral Torah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_Torah). Oral tradition is information, memories, and knowledge held in common by a group of people, over many generations; Jesus was Jewish and so was not only familiar with the Torah, but with the Mishnah, as well. The Mishnah was divided into 6 sections, one of which dealt with “Sacred Things’, including sacrifices.

“Command the Israelites, and say to them: My offering, the food for my offerings by fire, my pleasing odor, you shall take care to offer to me at its appointed time. And you shall say to them, This is the offering by fire that you shall offer to the Lord: two male lambs a year old without blemish, daily, as a regular offering. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight”

**“I AM THE GATE”**

* Neh 3:1 *Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brethren the priests and built the Sheep Gate; they consecrated it and hung its doors.*
* The Sheep Gate was the first gate to be restored, and it was rebuilt by the High Priest and his fellow priests. Note: This was the only gate that was consecrated (set apart as holy), as it was used for bringing in sacrifices for the temple.
* It was called the Sheep Gate because it was the entrance for sheep entering into the Temple compound from the sheep markets (where lambs were sold for
* sacrifice in the Temple) and the sheep pool, where lambs were washed before sacrifice.
* 

Many years later, when Jesus was on earth, He always entered Jerusalem via the Sheep Gate (except for the Triumphal Entry). The Sheep Gate also led to Golgotha, the path Jesus took to the crucifixion.

* **What is the significance of the Sheep Gate?**
* **Jesus’s Sacrifice — Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29)**
	+ The Sheep Gate = Salvation through Jesus’ death on the cross
	+ This gate had no bolts or bars — salvation freely available to everyone who enters through it.
	+ Built by the High Priest — Jesus is our High Priest
	+ His death opens the way for us and restores free access to the Father
* The Sheep Gate is mentioned at the start and end of the chapter — everything starts and ends with Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross. It’s all about Jesus and His finished work on the cross!

**John 10:1-10**

***“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep***

***hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.” Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So again, Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.*** ***All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly***.

**Questions or comments?**

**“I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD”**

Abel, Abraham, Jacob, Rachel, Moses, Job and David were all connected to shepherding, as were many other men and women in Biblical times. Shepherds were often highly regarded, and the size of their flocks was an attribute of their wealth. Job alone had 7,000 sheep! A common metaphor in the Near Eastern world of Ezekial was that a king was a shepherd, and his subjects were the flock, and this shepherd/flock imagery continues to resonate. Indeed, the word for shepherd in Latin is ***pastor,*** a term very much in use to the present day. The word pastoral originally had the meaning of a rural way of life, and for much of human history, most of mankind has maintained a rural, agrarian existence. Sheep are mentioned more than 500 times in the Bible, beginning in Genesis 4:2, “…Now Abel was a keeper of sheep…” They were a source of nourishment (meat and milk) and of clothing, shelter and trade. Shepherds were responsible for providing food and water, as well as protection from predators.

**Personal Story**

# "Mary had a little lamb,"

BY [SARAH JOSEPHA HALE](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/sarah-josepha-hale)

Mary had a little lamb,

Its fleece was white as snow;

And everywhere that Mary went

The lamb was sure to go.

It followed her to school one day,

Which was against the rule;

It made the children laugh and play

To see a lamb at school.

And so the teacher turned it out,

But still it lingered near,

And waited patiently about

Till Mary did appear.

Why does the lamb love Mary so?

The eager children cry;

Why, Mary loves the lamb, you know,

The teacher did reply.

God is also depicted as a shepherd in the Old Testament, particularly in Ezekiel 34, but also in the beloved Psalm of David – 23.

### *God, the True Shepherd*

 ***11For thus says the Lord God: I myself will search for my sheep and will sort them out. 12As shepherds sort out their flocks when they are among scattered sheep,[***[***a***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel%2034%3A11-31&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-21326a)***] so I will sort out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. 13I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them into their own land, and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. 14I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. 15I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. 16I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strays, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.17As for you, my flock, thus says the Lord God: I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats: 18Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the rest of your pasture? When you drink of clear water, must you foul the rest with your feet? 19And must my sheep eat what you have trodden with your feet and drink what you have fouled with your feet? 20Therefore, thus says the Lord God to them: I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep. 21Because you pushed with flank and shoulder and butted at all the weak animals with your horns until you scattered them far and wide, 22I will save my flock, and they shall***

***no longer be ravaged, and I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them; he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24And I the Lord will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them; I the Lord have spoken.***

***30They shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God. 31You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture,[***[***b***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel%2034%3A11-31&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-21345b)***] and I am your God, says the Lord God.***

### How does God care for His sheep, according to Ezekiel?

### Searches out the lost - Delivers the captive.

### Gathers the dispersed - Feeds the hungry

### Rest the weary - Binds up the hurt.

### Strengthens the weak - Protects the vulnerable

### Equips the needy - Directs all.

### *The Divine Shepherd*

***1 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;[***[***a***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+23&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-14238a)***]***

 ***3 he restores my soul.[***[***b***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+23&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-14239b)***]He leads me in right paths[***[***c***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+23&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-14239c)***]for his name’s sake.***

***4 Even though I walk through the darkest valley,[***[***d***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+23&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-14240d)***]I fear no evil, for you are with***

 ***me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.***

***5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my***

 ***head with oil; my cup overflows.
6 Surely[***[***e***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+23&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-14242e)***] goodness and mercy[***[***f***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+23&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-14242f)***] shall follow me all the days of my life, and I***

 ***shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.[***[***g***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+23&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-14242g)***]***

What does David say about “My Shepherd”?

- Provides - gives rest

- Confidently leads - renews and restores

- guides and directs - protects

- corrects and comforts - feeds and anoints

- loves unconditionally - furnishes permanent shelter

One writer has suggested that ‘follow’ is too tame a translation for the Hebrew “radaph”, which means to pursue or chase after. In their telling, we are pursued by mercy and chased by grace! Another writer has pointed out that the heart of the psalm is “…For you are with me…”. God is first spoken of in the third person “He”, but then the psalmist moves into the second person “You”, speaking to God directly.

**John 10: 11-18 - NRSV**

***11“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12The 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. 13The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, 15just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16I 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. 17For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. 18No one takes[***[***b***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=john+10%3A+1+-+18&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-26489b)***] 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.”***

According to Jesus, a “Good Shepherd” does what?

- Labors out of love - Has a heart for the sheep

- Gives his life for the sheep - Faithfully serves his master

- Feeds the sheep - Tenderly cares for the sheep

- Leads the sheep wisely

Clearly, the Shepherd in John’s gospel is tender, sincere, intimate, and loving, as he guides, corrects, protects, and feeds.

Words from a song that we usually hear during Advent and Christmas seasons, is appropriate during Lent, as well. “Mary Did You Know” concludes with;

“The blind will see, the deaf will hear
The dead will live again
The lame will leap, the dumb will speak
The praises of the Lamb

Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Is Lord of all creation?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy
Would one day rule the nations?
Did you know that your baby boy
Is heaven's perfect Lamb?
That sleeping child you're holding is the great, I Am

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Reader 1: I am is my shepherd, I shall not want,

Reader 2: I am makes me to lie down in green pastures,

Reader 1: I am leads me beside the still waters,

Reader 2: I am restores my soul,

Reader 1: I am leads me in right paths For I am’s name sake.

Reader 2: Even though I walk through the darkest valley.

Reader 1: I fear no evil, for I am is with me,

Reader 2: I am’s rod and I am’s staff - they comfort me.

Reader 1: I am prepares a table for me in the presence of my enemies.

Reader 2: I am anoints my head with oil, My cup runs over

Reader 1: Surely I am’s goodness and I am’s mercy shall follow

 me all the days of my life

Reader 2: And I shall dwell in the house of I am my whole life long.

**Closing Prayer:**

Savior Jesus, like a Shepherd lead us, thank you for your loving care. Teach us to hear your voice and follow your lead, to lean on you and not our own understanding. Help us to care for others as you care for us. Amen