Session 1
Psalm 23: God is with us

This session will introduce the children to God as the Good Shepherd. They will learn how shepherds care for their flocks and relate that to how God cares for us. A shepherd stays with the flock and is a comforting presence. Children can rely on God to always be with them, in good times and in times of trouble.

BIBLE TEXT
Psalm 23

FAITH CHALLENGE
We can trust God to always be with us.

ADVANCE PREPARATION
• Read through the entire session and decide what you will do.
• Set up the room/space for the various activities.
• Gather rhythm instruments for use with the theme song.
• Copy and cut apart the shepherd notes from page 25.
• Gather supplies for the activities you choose to do.
• Prepare a snack (p. 11).

Kids Cluster
1. **Plan an activity for the early arrivals.** See page 6 for ideas.
2. **Welcome the children and gather for a time of singing** (p. 8). Be sure to include action songs, familiar songs, favorite songs, and new songs.
Kids Explore

1. **Sing the theme song**, “Cantai ao Senhor” (“O Sing to the Lord”) (p. 9). Distribute rhythm instruments for the children to play as you sing.

2. **Introduce the theme of the day**: We can trust God to always be with us.

3. **Read Psalm 23 aloud**, inviting the children to close their eyes and imagine the pictures the words create.

4. **Learn about shepherds and sheep**. Explain that because David was a shepherd, it was natural for him to think of God as a good shepherd. Learning how shepherds took care of sheep in ancient times can help us understand more about the psalm. Distribute the shepherd notes from page 25 to different children and ask them to read the notes aloud.

5. **Talk about the psalm**. Ask the children:
   - Can you imagine yourself as a sheep, following God?
   - How is God like the shepherds we just read about?
   - What are some ways we hear our Shepherd’s (God’s) voice?
SHEEP SNACK
(INDIVIDUAL)
The children can think about the Good Shepherd as they decorate cupcakes or muffins to look like sheep.

Materials: cupcakes or muffins (already baked), white frosting or cream cheese, mini marshmallows, large raisins, chocolate chips

Have the children:
• Frost a cupcake or muffin with frosting or cream cheese.
• Cover the entire surface with mini marshmallows.
• Add a raisin for the nose and two chocolate chips (or pieces of raisin) for the eyes.

SHEPHERD'S STAFF REMINDERS
(INDIVIDUAL)
The children can create their own reminders of Psalm 23 to hang up at home.

Materials: shepherd’s staff template from page 26, pencils, craft foam in sheets, fabric markers, scissors, glue, cookie cutters (optional)

Have the children:
• Trace around the shepherd’s staff template on a sheet of craft foam. Cut out the shape.
• Cut out five different shapes from craft foam, as shown in the illustration. Trace around cookie cutters if desired.
• Write the following phrases on the shapes with fabric markers: (1) “The Lord is my shepherd,” (2) “I shall not want,” (3) “He makes me lie down in green pastures,” (4) “He leads me beside still waters,” (5) “He restores my soul.”
• Glue the shapes to the staff and add craft foam embellishments if desired.

Option: Instead of craft foam, use cardboard for the staff and construction paper for the shapes. Use regular markers for writing the verses.

COMFORT GIFTS
(INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP)
A good shepherd comforts the sheep. God, our Good Shepherd, comforts us through others. The children can make these simple gifts for people who need comfort.

Materials: mugs from a thrift store, tissue paper in various colors/designs, small plastic bags, narrow ribbon, card stock cut into small squares, hole punch, crackers or small cookies, drink packets (coffee, cocoa, or tea bags)

Have the children:
• Put crackers or small cookies in a small plastic bag and tie it shut with narrow ribbon.
• Set the bag, along with some drink packets, in the center of several squares of tissue paper.
• Gather the tissue paper around the items and insert it into the mug.
• To make a gift tag, write the person’s name on a small square of card stock.
• Write the words “God cares for you” on the back of the tag.
• Punch a hole in the tag and tie it to one end of the ribbon on the bag.
GUIDE THE SHEEP
(GROUP)
The children become shepherds, guiding balloon sheep.

Materials: Balloons, newspapers, masking tape, two chairs, electric fan
  • Set up two chairs at one end of the room to make a sheepfold and create a masking-tape starting line at the other end.
  • Give each child a balloon and explain that this is the child’s sheep.
  • Give each child a newspaper to roll up into a rod. Tape the rods with masking tape so they don’t come apart.
  • The object of the game is guide the sheep into the fold (between the chairs).
  • Have the children stand at the starting line with their balloons in front of them. They will use the rod to hit or guide the balloons to the fold.
  • After playing the game once, repeat it and make it harder by turning on a fan.

TIPS
Be aware of latex allergies in your group.
For younger children, make the rods ahead of time.

BAAING SHEEP
(GROUP)
The shepherd tries to identify the sheep by their voices.

  • Ask for a volunteer to be the shepherd and blindfold that person.
  • The other children are sheep and roam around the room.
  • Point to one sheep at a time to call out to the shepherd, saying, “Baa, baa.”
  • The shepherd must answer, “Yes, I hear you, ____,” guessing the name of the player making the sound.
  • If the shepherd is wrong, the sheep continue to blear, one at a time, with the shepherd guessing. If the shepherd guesses correctly, the sheep becomes the next shepherd and play continues.

Closing
For closing ideas, see page 7.
Shepherds cared for their sheep night and day. They led them to grassy areas to graze and took them to clean, calm water to drink.

In the hot summer, shepherds moved their flocks to cooler pastures on higher ground. For days on end, shepherds worked and slept outdoors.

Sheep had complete trust in their shepherd and followed the shepherd’s voice even when walking through dangerous places.

Shepherds anointed their sheep with oil (especially on their heads) to protect them from flies, gnats, mosquitoes, and other insects.

At night, shepherds guarded the sheepfold or sheltered the flock in a cave. If the howl of a hyena scared the sheep in the darkness, the shepherd’s voice would calm them.

Each evening, shepherds counted the sheep and checked their health. The shepherd would call and the flock would follow him to the pasture.

Shepherds used a heavy wooden rod as a weapon against wild animals that would harm the sheep. The rod was also used to discipline the sheep.

The shepherd’s staff was a long stick, often with a crook or hook on one end. Shepherds leaned on the staff when climbing and also used it to guide the sheep and to rescue them when they got stuck.