

A Good Shepherd  
**Parable**

The Good Shepherd

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## **THE GOOD SHEPHERD .... MATERIALS**

- parable box containing:

- green felt circle underlay
- blue felt water
- 3 black felt pieces
- 12 brown felt strips
- 4 laminated sheep figures
- laminated wolf figure
- laminated ordinary shepherd figure
- laminated Good Shepherd figure



Shepherd



Good Shepherd

THE GOOD SHEPHERD .... based on JOHN 10:1-16 and PSALM 23

ACTIONS

After speaking, walk slowly to the shelf and pick up the parable box with two hands. Return to your place in the circle.

After speaking, gently trace the outline of the box. Sit in silence as you concentrate on the box and gather your words for the story.

Rest your hands lightly on the box, touching it reverently.

Slowly shake your head and smile.

Nod your head confidently.

Raise your eyebrows and shake your head.

Lift the lid just slightly.

Remove the lid so you can reach inside.

Remove, and slowly unfold, the green underlay. Smooth it slowly as you speak.

Remove the blue piece from the box and place it in the upper left corner of the underlay.

WORDS

Watch carefully where I go to get this story. Then, if you choose to make this your work today or another day, you will always know where to find it.

All of the words to this story are inside of me because I have made this story my own. Will you make silence with me, please, so I can find all of the words to this story?

This is a parable box. I wonder if there is really a parable inside this box?

Parables are very precious.

This box looks a bit like a gift.

Parables are like gifts. We can't go buy one, or even rent one, like we do a movie. Parables already belong to us.

And like gifts, we don't always know what's inside by looking at the box.

We have to take the lid off. If we take the lid off our box, maybe we will discover a parable.

Oh my! Look at this! It's so very, very green. I wonder what it is?

Maybe it's a tree, or yes, it could be .....  
(acknowledge the children's responses but don't discuss them.)

I wonder what else is in our box. This is not green. It's very blue. I wonder if this makes the parable?

Pause a moment and then shake your head.

Remove the three black pieces. Lay them in the upper right corner of the green underlay.

Remove two brown strips from the box.

Smooth one brown strip horizontally in the bottom left corner of the underlay. Place the second strip horizontally about five inches above the first.

Remove two more brown strips from the box. Lay them vertically overlapping the ends of the two horizontal strips to form a square sheepfold. Continue placing two horizontal and two vertical strips on top of each other until all the strips are part of the sheepfold.

Touch the outside and then the inside of the sheepfold.

Carefully push the strips outward at the upper right corner of the sheepfold to open the "gate". Push them back to touch other strips to close gate.

Remove the four sheep from the box and place them in the sheepfold.

Pause and then begin to speak softly.

Remove the Good Shepherd from the box and place him near the gate of the sheepfold.

I don't think so.

Let's see, there are these. I don't see very much light in these, do you?

There are these, too. I wonder what this could be?

If I put these here they look like sticks. I wonder what else it could be?

If I put this here and this here, this becomes a place. I wonder what kind of place this is?

It has an outside. And the place has an inside.

I can even make a way to get inside from the outside. Like this, I can make a gate.

I wonder if anyone or anything lives in this place?

I can put these sheep in this place. Then it becomes a sheepfold. In this place the sheep are safe.

Once there was a man who said such amazing things and did such wonderful things that people began to follow him. Once they said to him, "Who are you?"

And the man said, "I am the Good Shepherd. All the sheep know the sound of my voice. And I know each of the sheep.

Move the Good Shepherd, with the sheep following to the right.

Move the Good Shepherd and the sheep to the blue water.

Move the sheep to the right, in between and through the black felt pieces with the help of the Good Shepherd.

Remove the wolf from the box and place it near the sheep. Then place the Good Shepherd between the sheep and the wolf.

Shake your head firmly. Remove the ordinary shepherd from the box, place him near the wolf, then make him run away from the wolf. Lay the Good Shepherd down horizontally near the sheep.

Have the Good Shepherd lead the sheep back to the fold.

One at a time, put the pieces back into the parable box, except for the green underlay.

Because they know my voice, the sheep follow me.

■ take them to rich, green pastures to eat.

■ am careful to bring them by cool water to drink.

And when the sheep come to the dark places, ■ stay with them and help them.

Even when the wolf tries to take the sheep and hurt them, ■ stay with the sheep. ■ will protect the sheep.

Because ■ am the Good Shepherd, ■ will not run away from the sheep. The ordinary shepherd runs away because he is afraid. But ■ will even die to keep the sheep safe."

The Good Shepherd will always bring the sheep back safely to the fold.

### **WONDERING QUESTIONS:**

■ wonder what names the sheep had?

■ wonder how the voice of the Good Shepherd sounds?

■ wonder how it feels to be in a sheepfold?

Watch carefully how ■ put the materials back into the box. Then if you choose to work with this story, today or another day, you will know how to do this.

Take one side of the circle underlay and fold it over against the opposite side. Smooth the straight line.

I think this circle will need to be folded so it will fit in the box. Just start anywhere and touch that piece to the other side. Then you have a straight line.

Take the top of the circle and lay it against the part nearest you. Smooth the straight line.

Next take the top and put it by the bottom. There, now we have another straight line.

Repeat the top to bottom fold and the side to side fold and place it in the box.

We need to touch the top to the bottom and the side to the side. Now it will fit in our box.

After speaking, pick up the parable box with two hands and slowly carry it back to the shelf. Return to the circle.

Watch very carefully where I return this story so you will know where to find it if you choose to make this your work today or another day.

Dismiss the children to their work ONLY after everyone has had a chance to choose what they will do.

It's time to choose your work. Will you draw or paint something from this story? Or will you make a story your own today? Let's begin.

## **THE GOOD SHEPHERD .... TEACHER HELPS**

This parable is unlike any of the others used in our program because it is a combination of both the parable of the Good Shepherd in John 10: 1-15 and Psalm 23, commonly known by its first line, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." The emphasis on good green grass, cool water and the dark places are from the psalm while the rest of the parable is from the Gospel of John.

The primary learning in this parable experience is the special relationship the Good Shepherd has to the sheep. The Good Shepherd is well known to the sheep and the sheep to the shepherd. They recognize his voice and he can tell the difference between sheep to the point that he can call them by name.

For the people of Jesus' day, the shepherd was one of the best known figures. He would be seen by everyone at one time or another as he went on his way moving the sheep from pasture to pasture. Note that in our parable, as in Psalm 23, the shepherd does not drive his sheep to the place they need to go. Rather, the Good Shepherd leads the sheep. The relationship is so secure and certain that the animals will follow him without him needing to walk behind them to be sure there are no stragglers. They understand their source of security.

Mention is made of the ordinary shepherd who is not familiar with the sheep and who will not care for them. This is a piece of the parable, however, I've chosen not to emphasize. Instead, I have emphasized the characteristics of the Good Shepherd. This is in keeping with a continual assurance for the children that the Good Shepherd is the one who cares for them, even to the point of laying down his life for the sheep.

Some scholars do not consider the teaching of the Good Shepherd to be a parable. It does not follow the form of most parables where a question is asked of Jesus and he responds with a parable rather than a direct answer. It is used in this class as a parable because it teaches the relationship of Jesus and the people of God most effectively. In fact, this is the only parable that speaks to the "I Am ..." phrase that is found so often as Jesus tried to define just who he was to the people that followed him.

This parable is found in the Gospel of John. John is a very different book from the other gospels. Scholars believe that the writer was one of the twelve who basically assumed that persons knew the events of Jesus' life. This gospel then concentrates on interpreting what happened in key events and explaining them to early believers. The Gospel of John is dated approximately AD 90. It is a book full of familiar images and favorite stories. It is also the gospel in which Jesus is portrayed as being the most honest with his followers about who he is and what his task is in this world. Reading the Gospel of John leaves no doubt that God, the creator is revealed through Jesus, the Christ.

In the text of John the discourse on the Good Shepherd follows the incident where Jesus had healed a blind man on the Sabbath. According to Jewish tradition that was against the law. Healing was considered work and work was forbidden on the Sabbath. The text continues with the responses of Jewish authorities to Jesus' act of healing. The blind man was questioned by the authorities who eventually cast him out. Jesus goes back to the newly sighted man and asks him if he believes in the Son of Man. The man is not sure who Jesus refers to until Jesus points to himself. The man responds simply, "Lord, I believe." For the author of John to follow the story of the healing with Jesus' statements about himself being the true shepherd is significant. In placing the discourse where he did, the author acknowledges that Jesus held the needs of persons higher than the law.

The wondering questions of the Good Shepherd parable lend themselves to imaginative responses. Don't be surprised though, if the children name themselves as a sheep. There may be the older child who questions outright, "Is Jesus the Good Shepherd?" A good response would be "What do you think? Why would Jesus be like the good shepherd?" Remember that it's OK to wonder. The Good Shepherd class should be a place where the children feel free to ask any question without fear of being put down or told they are wrong. If a statement is completely incorrect, you may respond with something like, "Maybe an easier way to understand it would be .....". Never be afraid to admit to a child, or an adult for that matter, that you don't know an answer. But be sure to tell them that you will find out by next week. Your church library and clergy are resources for questions and observations that stump you.

## **SUGGESTED DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR OLDER CHILDREN:**

In this story it was the shepherd who was responsible for the sheep. He took his responsibility very seriously. Who is responsible for you? Do they take their responsibility seriously? For whom or what are you responsible? Are you faithful to that responsibility?

The Good Shepherd was known to the sheep by the sound of his voice. Think of the voices of people you know. Who do you know by their voice? How do you feel when you hear the voice of certain people: your mom or dad, your brother or cousin, your best friend the school principal, your coach or teacher? Which of these people is most like the Good Shepherd for you?

The Good Shepherd is even willing to lay down his life for his sheep. He will die to protect them. Is there anyone you know who would die to protect you? Is there anyone you know for whom you would be willing to die?