

John 10:1-18

Aim of Lesson

To show that Jesus loves and cares for everyone who trusts him.

Background study

Ezekiel 34; Psalm 23; 1 Peter 2:25.

Recall the great shepherds of the Old Testament such as Abraham, Jacob and David. Look into sheep farming methods in Bible times, so that the significance of the terms in the scripture are clearly understood and can be accurately described. Be clear in your own mind of the importance of the good shepherd in Old Testament teaching, especially in regard to God as the shepherd of the people, and the religious leaders who encouraged the people to accept false beliefs and practices, thereby leading them astray. Note the link, at the end of John 9, with the religious leaders at the time of Jesus who were blind and whose sin remained.

Suggested outline of lesson

Produce a selection of articles or clothes made of wool and/or a sample of sheep's wool or a fleece. Ask the children where wool comes from, and whether they have seen flocks of sheep. Try to draw from the class as much information as possible about sheep farming in this country. A picture should emerge of the farmer skilfully using his sheep dogs to round up the sheep by driving them before him. Discuss other features of sheep farming.

Then talk about the methods used by a shepherd on the hills of Judaea. Emphasize the fact that the sheep learned to trust him so much that they followed wherever he led. The shepherd truly cared for every one of his sheep. Refer to the shepherd's search for new pasture, safe from the threat of poisonous plants or dangerous animals. Describe how each sheep has a character of its own and is distinctive in appearance and temperament. Aware of these distinctions, the shepherd would give to each an appropriate name. When he called them by name the sheep would come to him. The children might enjoy suggesting possible names. The important principle to be learned from this story is that individuals matter. Paint the scene of the flock filing through "the door" under the rod, of each sheep being counted, and of one of them perhaps being stopped by the lowered rod so that the shepherd might clean a wound and soothe it with oil.

Discuss the character of the shepherd. What sort of person is required in order to make a good shepherd? Where appropriate make a list of the children's suggestions. Having ensured that all the features referred to in John 10 have been covered, draw the analogy of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who gave his life to save the sheep. Jesus, in the way he acted towards his followers, showed all the best facets of a shepherd. He, too, knows those who are his and loves them, as they grow to love him. He called them, tended the sick, fed them, healed them, sought the lost and, in a last great sacrifice for his sheep, he gave his life, so that they might be saved.

At night, the sheep were put into folds for safety. The way in was through a narrow entrance that could be easily guarded. Jesus said that he was also the door of the sheepfold and showed men that if they wished to belong to God's fold they must come to God through him.

Impress upon the children that, although we cannot see Jesus, he is still acting as the Good Shepherd to those who try to follow his way. He still loves men and women, and boys and girls, who trust him to lead them, and he is always ready to help whenever they need him. It is only by following Jesus that we can hope to please God.

Relevance to the children's lives

How are we like sheep? (Easily led astray, sometimes rather silly, accident-prone, needing protection and guidance). How is Jesus like a shepherd to us?

Worksheets

These should be self-explanatory.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, we thank you for Jesus who loved people so much that he gave his life to save them. How happy we are to know that Jesus loves us and takes care of us. Amen.

Memory verse

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). Consider also Psalm 23.