

"I am the Good Shepherd; I know my sheep, and my sheep know me."

John 10:14

*Jesus calls himself "**the Good Shepherd**". Do you know what a shepherd is?*

If God is our shepherd, what does that make us? Sheep! We are a lot like sheep. Sheep need a shepherd to guide them, protect them and help them. **We need God to guide us, protect us and help us too.**

Sheep are kind of clumsy animals. Sometimes they get themselves tangled up in fences or thorny bushes because they aren't looking where they are going. Their fleece is thick, so the more they try to free themselves, the more stuck they become! The shepherd has to come and cut the sheep free. Other times sheep fall over and can't get up by themselves, so the shepherd has to come and help them up. Sheep also don't always pay attention to where they are going, and sometimes they wander off and get lost, and the shepherd has to go out and look for them. We are a lot like sheep. There are so many things going on around us that we sometimes forget about God and what he wants us to do. Instead of reading our Bibles and praying, we wander off to do other things. **We need God to help us get out of sticky situations, pick us up when we fall, and help us stay out of trouble, just like sheep need a shepherd to guide and help them.**

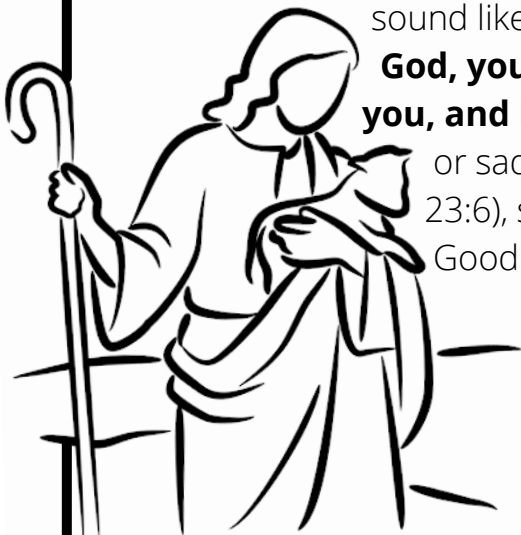
Sheep also aren't able to protect themselves very well. They don't have sharp claws or sharp teeth and they don't run very fast. The shepherd has to protect his sheep from dangerous animals. He carries a rod or stick that he uses to fight off any wild animals and to gather the sheep and keep them close to him. Just like the sheep need protection, we need God's protection. We can go to him when we are in trouble or scared, and he will comfort us and keep us safe. Just like sheep need the shepherd to save them when they are in trouble, we need Jesus to save us from our sins. **He died for us so we can be forgiven of our sins and live forever with Him in heaven.**

God isn't just *a shepherd*; He is *the Good Shepherd*. A good shepherd knows his sheep by name. Not only does he know their names, he knows *everything* about them! He knows what they sound like. He can tell by the way they cry if they are lost, in trouble, or sick.

God, your Good Shepherd, knows your name and everything about you, and loves you just the way you are! He knows when you feel happy or sad or lonely. A good shepherd never leaves his sheep alone (Psalm 23:6), so you can trust that God won't ever leave you, because He is *your* Good Shepherd (Matthew 28:20).

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for being our Good Shepherd. Please guide us, protect us, and keep us close to you. Amen.

Things to Ponder: Do you think it would be easy or hard to take care of a whole flock of sheep? How does it make you feel to know that God is your Good Shepherd? Consider that He knows your name and cares for you!



"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

John 1:29

Jesus is the "*Lamb of God*." Have you heard that name given to Jesus? In the Bible, a man named John the Baptist saw Jesus walking towards him and he shouted, "Look! Here comes the Lamb of God." The people of that time knew he wasn't saying Jesus was *really* a lamb: they knew that Jesus was just *like* a lamb, because lambs were often used as a **sacrifice**. A sacrifice is something that the people of God used to do many years ago when they felt bad about their sins and needed to apologize to God. We know that sin is wrong, because it makes God unhappy & can hurt other people. In fact, sins deserve to be punished. To save them from punishment, God's people in the Old Testament were told to take all the bad things that they had thought, said, and done, and kill an innocent lamb as a sacrifice to show how sorry they were for their sins instead of having to take on the punishment themselves. **The sacrifice of the lamb took the place of the punishment that the sinful people deserved.**

Sacrifice: to give up one thing in exchange for something else; for example, parents often have to sacrifice a good night's sleep to take care of a newborn baby.

It is a sad thing to watch a lamb be killed. But when the people sacrificed a lamb, they were reminded that sin is a very sad thing as well. They knew that God was saving their own lives when the lamb was killed in their place. They knew that this lamb was specially chosen as the most perfect lamb from the flock for the sacrifice. An innocent lamb hasn't done anything wrong, but the lamb was dying in place of the people who had sinned.

When John the Baptist called Jesus the *Lamb of God*, the people around him knew what John meant. Jesus was perfect, without sin. He was sent from God as an innocent sacrifice. And after Jesus was put to death on the cross, they would understand that Jesus died in our place. **We were the sinners, not Jesus; but Jesus took the punishment himself because of love.** Jesus was the last sacrifice that ever had to be made, because He was the sacrifice sent by God Himself; the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

After Jesus died on the cross and then rose again to life, no more sacrifices were needed! No more lambs needed to die, and no more people needed to die either. **God loved the world so much, that He sent his only Son, Jesus, the Lamb of God, to die for our sins,** and anyone who believes in Jesus will not die, but will live with God in heaven forever. Let's thank God together for sending his Lamb, Jesus, for each of us.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus, the perfect sacrifice, to take away all of our sins. Please help us to remember Your great love for us. Amen.

Things to ponder: Can you think of some other examples of "sacrifices" you or your family have to make sometimes? Is it easy or hard to give up something important to you? Consider how amazing it is that Jesus was willing to give up his life for His loved ones, including **you!**

