



**Faithful GOD**  
**COVENANT People**  
a Good Soil series for small group study

**#15: The Lord, Our Shepherd**

**Bible Readings: Psalm 23, John 10, Ezekiel 34**

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## **INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES: Faithful God, Covenant People**

This series is taking us on a journey through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, looking at God's purposes in calling human beings into a **covenant relationship**.

## **PREPARATION FOR GROUP LEADERS**

At this point in the series, it is useful to recall the journey we have been on. Look back over the previous issues in this Covenant series. *What have been the highlights for your group? Where have you seen moments of understanding, revelation, or light dawning?*

Be prepared to make any notes from some of the questions asked overleaf, and to feed them back if possible. This will be helpful in planning future sessions, and shaping our series for next year.

## **PREPARATION FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS (before the session)**

Take some time to rest in God's presence. Reflect on the 'Good Soil' journey we have been on, looking at God's covenants through the Bible. *What have you learned? Has anything been revealed to you afresh? Do you feel closer to God or more secure in your relationship with God? Where do you want to go next on the journey? Have you felt that God has been with us, leading and guiding?*

## **STARTING THE SESSION: A PRAYER**

Read together this adaptation of Psalm 23 as a declaration of faith and a prayer of adoration:

**Lord, you are our Shepherd;  
with you we shall want for nothing.  
You let us lie down in green pastures;  
you lead us beside still waters; you restore our souls.  
We praise you, for you lead us in right paths, for your name's sake.  
Even though we may walk through darkness and danger, we will fear no evil;  
for you are always with us;  
your covenant love will comfort us.  
You prepare a feast for us, even in the presence of our enemies;  
by your grace, you anoint our heads with oil; our cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives,  
and we shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever. Amen.**

## **FINDING OUR ROOTS – some questions to explore**

*What thoughts or images came to mind when reading that version of the psalm as a group?*

*In what ways are we like sheep? Is this a helpful illustration? Do you ever feel like a lost sheep, or are you secure in the fold? What difference does that make to your relationship with God?*

## READING THE SCRIPTURES – with background information

'Shepherd' was an important metaphor in the Old Testament. **Psalm 23** is believed to have been written by David, the shepherd-boy who became king. David expressed that the Lord God (Yahweh) was his shepherd – who led him, protected and blessed him, and would always be with him. For the people of Israel, 'shepherd' became a metaphor for 'king'. But unfortunately, many of the kings recorded in the Bible were not worthy of the title.

The prophet **Ezekiel (chapter 34)** expressed God's anger and dismay at the 'shepherds' of Israel, promising a better Shepherd to come, to rule with kindness, justice and compassion. God says in this passage that *he himself* will be like a shepherd: seeking out the lost, bringing them into the fold, feeding and healing them (**verses 11-16**). God will also judge those in the existing flock who should know better (**17-22**) – especially the greedy and violent ones. And a true Shepherd is promised; in the mould of David (**23-24**). Ultimately, it's about a **covenant relationship**: "*I will make with them a covenant of peace... They shall know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people... You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, and I am your God...*" (**verses 25-31**).

Centuries later, **enter Jesus** – who sometimes expressed his mission as 'seeking out the **lost sheep** of the house of Israel' (**Matthew 10:6, Matthew 15:24**).

**Read together the Gospel passage: John 10: 7-18**

## DIGGING DEEPER – some questions for you to consider in your group:

*Is it helpful for you to think of Jesus as 'Shepherd', or 'Gate'? How does he give 'abundant life' (v. 10)? What does it mean for you that Jesus 'lays down his life for the sheep'?*

Jesus faced much **opposition** after his words in John chapter 10 (see **John 10:19-39**). *Having read the prophecy of Ezekiel, can we understand why his claim to be 'the good shepherd' was so controversial? What do words like 'flock', 'pastor' and 'pastoral' suggest about the nature of **ministry and leadership** in the church? How does Jesus model this for us?*

Jesus linked being in his flock and following him with receiving **eternal life (verses 27-28)**. *How do you understand this? (And what do you make of the promise that no one can snatch us out of his hand?)*

**God's covenant people** are supposed to live in an obedient, trusting and dependent relationship with their loving Shepherd, reflecting God's loving-kindness to one another and the world: **He is our God and we are his people**. *Where have we seen this reflected in other 'covenant' passages?*

*How would you describe **our covenant relationship** with God? And while there is always a need for an individual response, why can it never be purely 'my' covenant relationship...?*

*Which of the covenant readings have meant the most to you in this series (so far)? Or have any of our sessions opened your eyes to something in a new way?*

*Is there anything about the series (or the format or style) that has been particularly helpful or unhelpful for you? Are there any topics or parts of the Bible which you would find useful to explore in future issues of 'Good Soil'? Please share these and any other comments or suggestions with your group leader.*

## PRAYING TOGETHER

**Sing or read: 'The Lord's my shepherd'** (*Singing the Faith*, 481), **'In heavenly love abiding'** (*Singing the Faith*, 736), or **'Even though I walk...'** (*Singing the Faith*, 626) – all based on Psalm 23.

Pray for those who need help on their journey with God, and those who seem to be lost. Pray for the needs of your group, your church, and the wider world. And include **The Lord's Prayer**.

## COVENANT LIVING: PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE (to think about afterwards)

*Is there anything you are fearful of at the moment? What feels for you like a dark valley? How can you find God's presence and peace in the midst of this? We are called **together** to be part of God's covenant flock and fold. Try to find someone you trust to talk to about your fears or worries.*

## Junior Good Soil, issue #15

### Jesus our Shepherd

Written by Andy Murphy.

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Junior Good Soil is for children's and young people's groups in churches.

It can be easily adapted and you can add your own ideas!



#### PLANTING THE SEED – what are we thinking about today?

Today, we are thinking about Jesus being our Shepherd! He once said “**I am the Good Shepherd**”, and he also told a story about God’s love, talking about a shepherd leaving 99 sheep behind to go and search for the one that was lost! (**Luke 15:1-7**). *What do you think shepherds do? How can Jesus be our shepherd? Do you think God is like a shepherd? Or can you think of other descriptions of God you find more helpful?*

#### QUIET TIME – a prayer (for use at the start of the session)

Dear God,

Thank you that you love and care for us, like a shepherd looks after the sheep, and even better than that!

We thank you that you search for us when we are lost and never give up on us.

We thank you that you would even die for us, and show us the way to everlasting life.

Be with us today, as you are always with us. In Jesus’ name. **Amen.**

#### TELLING THE STORY – reading the Bible... John chapter 10

Read the story from a Bible of your choice, or from the **International Children’s Bible: John 10:7-18**.

Or, for younger children, read the parable of the lost sheep (‘The Good Shepherd’) from the **Usborne Children’s Bible**, pages **103-104**.

#### WATERING AND GERMINATING – what can we learn? / what does it tell us?

In the Old Testament, the **kings of Israel** were often called ‘shepherds’. This is possibly because King David used to be a shepherd-boy and he tried to look after the people in the same way as God taught him to look after the sheep. **David** wrote a very famous poem, **Psalms 23**, where he said “*The Lord is my shepherd...*”. It’s all about his faith that God would always look after him, keep him safe (even in dark or difficult times), provide for him, and lead him the best way. We are encouraged to trust in God in a similar way (even if life is hard for us), leading to eternal life with God.

Some of the kings in the Bible were bad shepherds, not ruling in the best interests of the people (and we might say the same thing about some of the rulers around the world today). But, through the prophet **Ezekiel (chapter 34)**, God promised that one day he would send a better shepherd, a true shepherd, following God’s own heart, who would rule with justice, kindness and peace. **Jesus** claimed to be this shepherd when he said: “I am the Good Shepherd”.

Jesus wants to welcome everyone into his flock, so that we can be safe forever in God’s love.

#### LETTING IT GROW – ideas for activities and discussion

There are various craft activities to do with making sheep out of cotton wool, and even marshmallows! Or you could do a decorative mural with a shepherd’s crook and other pictures, illustrating the words of Psalm 23. Or perhaps ask each child to draw a picture mapping their life’s journey – with streams, rocks, dark places and green pastures, illustrating different times in their life when God has been with them.

#### PRAISE AND WORSHIP – ideas for hymns and songs (can be used whenever you wish)

**Psalm 23** (by Allstars Kids Club) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEG5IL9uZoc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEG5IL9uZoc)

**You Never Let Go** (by Matt & Beth Redman / Capitol Kids) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjy3wzby2w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjy3wzby2w)  
(Singing the Faith – no.626)

**The Lord’s My Shepherd** (by Stuart Townend) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=upRoR7ej9Ns>  
(Singing the Faith – no.481)