Faith Adventures for Children Together

Committed to URC Children Together: enabling everyone to grow more like Jesus together in the home, church and beyond.

For guidance on the purpose of the resource and how to use it as a launch pad for your engagement with children and families, please use this link: https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf

Psalm 23: The Lord's my shepherd.

Theme: A bedtime story about God being with you.

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Introduction: What would be helpful to know in my planning?

Psalms

Over the next two sessions, in our theme of 'stories', we will be looking at sheep and shepherds – starting this week with the most well-known psalm of all, Psalm 23: "The Lord Is My Shepherd."

This can be read as a 'bedtime story' – that gives us comfort before going to sleep at night and makes us feel safe.

It is generally accepted that King David wrote this psalm. David was originally a shepherd so was able to write it with some experience of the role of the shepherd and, interestingly, wrote the psalm from the perspective of the sheep – with God as the shepherd. The next session's material will be exploring what it might have meant to the people who were listening, and to us today, when Jesus tells the story of The Good Shepherd. The two stories are linked – and you can see how they are connected in this Godly Play video: **https://youtu.be/4l9GiHqlshU?si=f10PZ-GDtyzZDQdz**

There are positive and negative images in the psalm, emphasising that God is with us in both the good times and the bad times. Some of the imagery may be difficult for members of your group who are scared of the dark, or are themselves experiencing 'dark times'. Similarly, the idea that God will prepare a banquet or provide everything we want might be difficult to understand for those who are experiencing food poverty and the cost of living crisis at home.

The psalm is written in a very personal way: look at how often a personal pronoun is used (The Lord is MY shepherd). This psalm assures us all, individually, of God's presence and support in our own life.

Further ideas on how to explore this reading can be found at **Families_on_Faith_Adventures_-_week_67_-_Forever_Love_.pdf (urc.org.uk)**

Together

How do I help my group to come together and get started with the theme?

Gathering prayer

Jesus, our friend
(use alternate index fingers to point and tap the middle of opposite palms)

Be with us today
(two hands, palms up in front of you, move up and down twice)

As we share together,
(two hands, palms up in front of you, move one forward and one back and alternate twice)

Pray together,
(hands together, palm against palm, as though praying)

Play together,
(hands to each side, palms up, make two small circles outwards)

And get to know you better,
(point up with one hand)

As children together in your family
(one hand out, palm down in front of you, move it sideways and up in three 'steps' as though to indicate children of three different heights)

AMEN
(Two thumbs up, and bring fists slowly together to meet in front of you)

OR

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today.
Help us to grow closer to you in all we do.
Help us to speak and to listen, to learn and to grow together,
Adventuring together with you wherever we may go.
Amen

In-person game – Obstacle Course

Thinking about how things can be difficult and challenging but God is with us as our guide.

Create an obstacle course thinking about how different obstacles might represent different parts of the psalm, for example for the dark place use a tunnel or create a section where the person is blindfolded. When thinking about a cup overflowing have a section of the course where a full cup of water needs to be carried along a balance section. Make this a team challenge allowing each child to ask for help from a leader for one part of the obstacle

course or each child saying which part of the obstacle course they want other team members to help with.

This would be ideal as an outside game weather permitting!

Alternative game

Thinking about how God is preparing wonderful things ready for us.

Get the children to sit in a circle. Go around the circle using the letters of the alphabet starting the phrase with God gives me…

For example: God gives me apples…God gives me beans… God gives me cheese…etc

Try going all the way to Z.

Experience

For this story we recommend using the Good News Bible
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=psalm+23&version=GNT

Where can I find the story online?

Under fives: Jesus storybook Bible
https://youtu.be/JPCDlKQazAc?si=oLdvOH4G94U9k4Y9
Over fives: Nicola reading The good shepherd
https://youtu.be/egU-gBWctDs?list=PLkmvtYy-o_QvQzSJRvAfPLTTbcx-aeqRk

Songs to support the story
Under fives: Psalm 23 (Surely goodness, surely mercy) by Kingdom Kids
https://youtu.be/MKzTilLfMyc?si=-EBamKvx3LFHPbDu
Five to elevens: The Lord's my shepherd by Stuart Townend **https://youtu.be/-elQQayhpak?si=HeamFHPxmSwpqmhz**

Explore

Ideas and activities to explore this week's Bible passage together

A new way to explore the passage

Psalm 23 meditation

Find a quiet space, indoors or outside, have comfy pillows and sheets.

Gentle music playing in background. Once children have found a comfortable space, you can begin, take your time, don't rush the reading and remain calm.

Script
Lie down or sit comfortably and close your eyes. You can use pillows or blankets to make yourself as comfortable as possible.

Listen to my voice and relax. Sometimes we get a giggle during relaxation, this is ok but try not to disturb the people around you as we are all concentrating.

Take a few deep breaths as you begin to relax. Breathe in long and deep to the count of 5, hold it for 3 then release it slowly to the count of 6.

Breathe a few times till we are all relaxed.

Bring all your attention to your feet, noticing how they feel. Feel them on the floor. Squeeze the feet, making a fist with your entire foot and all five toes; tense and squeeze it tightly. Hold this tension for two deep breaths.

Then release all tension in the feet suddenly. Relax them completely, stretch them out and notice the tension release. You may feel a tingling sensation in the foot.

Take a deep breath, and then move on…(We are going to move slowly up and around the body, squeezing one body part at a time to create tension, immediately followed by the contrasting sensation of release and ease. Follow each part with a deep, cleansing breath. Here's a sample progression you can follow)

- Knee and calf
- Thighs
- All feet and legs
- Hips and bottom
- Belly
- Entire lower body, from tummy down
- Chest, lungs and heart
- Arms
- Hands
- Shoulders and neck
- Face

Now we are relaxed, lie still for a while.

I want you to imagine a door in front of you.

The door has a handle, see your hand reaching out to touch the handle, turn it slowly and the door will open.

You see the door open and you can see a beautiful green scene.

Hills and fields spread out in front of you.

You can see the sun shining.

Step through the door, feel the grass under your feet.

You hear a voice, welcome he says. It is the shepherd.

Come with me he says, I shall show you around.

You follow the shepherd across the green fields, you can feel the longer grass tickling your legs.

The shepherd invites you to rest a while in the long grass amongst the flowers.

You lie down on your back, hidden in the grass.

The sun is warm on your face, you close your eyes to enjoy the warmth.

You can hear the shepherd is nearby, he hasn't left you, he is stood nearby, keeping watch.

Your mouth is feeling dry because of the sun, the shepherd invites you to come and drink.

He leads you to a clear rippling stream. The water glistens like diamonds.

You kneel beside the water and cup your hands. The water is cold on your fingertips.

You take handfuls of water and drink.

The water is cold and refreshing as it goes down your throat, it's the best water you have ever drunk.

Time for a walk.

The shepherd leads you on, over the fields, across the hills, along small paths.

Sometimes the shepherd is in front of you, sometimes he is behind you, and sometimes he walks beside you.

Now it seems to be getting darker, you are entering a dark valley, you look up but can't see the sky or the sun anymore.

You are not sure where to put your feet.

You are not sure which direction to walk in.

But the shepherd, begins to speak, you can't see him, but you follow his guiding voice,

Leading you on, and out of the valley, into the sun again.

You have walked far.

You are feeling hungry.

There in front of you is a large blanket on the ground.

All your favorite foods are there.

The shepherd sits down and invites you to join him.

You sit and you eat, and you chat to the shepherd.

I wonder what you say to him?

What does he say back to you?

Spend some time with him now. PAUSE

Now it's time to move on.

You look and see the door is back.

You reach out for the handle and turn it.

As you walk through the door, you know that it's a place you can always return to in your heart and your mind, whenever you would like to.

You are back in our room.

Slowly begin to move and be aware of your whole body again.

Finally lie perfectly still, repeat the deep breathing from the start for 3 breaths.

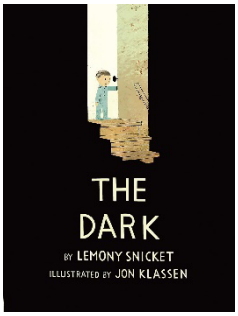
When you are ready open your eyes and begin to sit up slowly.

Drink and Discussion
How did you find the experience?
How did you feel during it?
I wonder what God showed you today?

Modern parables

Jesus used stories to help people understand the things of God, even though they weren't necessarily overtly Christian stories. Lots of children's books can be used in a similar way as a conversation starter on the week's theme. Examples are shared here but you may think of others too.

This picture book sees a small boy exploring the dark places in his house, it gives him a gift of a lightbulb and doesn't bother him again. A chance to talk about the dark places and what makes us feel brave (God is with us).



The Dark by Lemony Snicket
https://youtu.be/TfZbDsWeEEA?si=3vEMGCF-XBIdHQIL

Talking together: How might we talk about the story together?

- How does this psalm make you feel? What stands out for you?
- I wonder where you feel comfortable and quiet, where do you find God?

Wondering together: suggested questions to use during activities

- I wonder what a dark place means to you?
- If God prepared you a banquet, what would be in it?

What's in the box (for under fives)

Use the special box or bag and sing "what's in the box/bag? What's in the box/bag? Let's see, let's see, what's in the box/bag" (to the tune of The Farmer's in the Dell). You could tap the top of the box twice after the word 'box'. Pull out the things one by one and then let the children play with them, talking about the theme or the story in simple terms.

This week the items in the box help to create the different parts of Psalm 23 and will enable the children to play with the psalm whilst it is being read.

- Toy sheep – have a variety of sheep that each child can hold and place in the story
- A shepherd toy (God is my shepherd and I am his little lamb)
- Green fabric to make a quiet meadow or green field for the sheep (as quiet as lying on soft green grass)
- Blue fabric or wool to make a stream (in a meadow by a little stream)
- Some small pebbles to make a rocky path
- Some dark cloud cut from felt or paper (even when I walk through dark scary lonely places)
- Some play food and cups and plates for a feast (he is getting wonderful things ready for me)
- Hearts to hold – Gods loves goes with us wherever we go and is always there
- A set of play people to act out the story or random shapes/bits you can move around to make pictures from the story as you tell it (eg stones, felt, twigs etc)

Express

Praying together: how can you involve the children actively in prayer?

Prayer walk

You will need:

- Green fabric
- Blue fabric or a tray of water
- Small pebbles in a tray
- Sandpaper or a green scouring pad
- Some snacks on a plate
- A heart cushion or soft toy

Lay out the items in a large circle or create different stations and encourage the children to quietly walk around the items. As an alternative you could create individual tabletop finger prayer walks, having smaller items for each child.

Stand or sit quietly before you begin and breathe in and out slowly. Breathe out all the things that might be worrying you and breathe in Gods peace. You are being guided by the good shepherd. As you walk, talk to him and listen to what God might be saying to you. Slowly walk around the items. When you reach the green material, stop and rest taking time to remember that God is with you in the stillness. When you are ready, walk to the blue fabric or water. Dip your toe into the water and breathe in Gods peace. Place your feet on the stones and pick up the sandpaper, feel its roughness. Talk to God about the things that you find difficult or scary. Move to the snack and know that God is preparing wonderful things for you. Sit quietly with the heart cushion or soft toy, remembering that God is with you in the challenges, the sadness, the worries and in the happiness. God guides us through all the different situations with never ending love.

When you have completed the walk take some time just to sit quietly with God.

Spoken prayer

Loving God, I am glad that You are with me always.

(Make a happy/excited face) When I am happy and excited: You are here (point to the ground near your feet)

(Make a sad/scared face) When I am sad or scared: You are here (point to the ground near your feet)
Thank You for all that You have done, and will do, for me. Amen

Responding together

Here are some suggested crafts and activities, and there is a colouring sheet at the end of this resource. You could also use small play toys and/or have a basket of resources available so children can choose their own way to respond. https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/FACT-how-to-sheet.pdf

With an online group, plan whether to deliver any resources in advance or how you will encourage them to use what they've got to hand in their response.

However you do it, it is good for the adults to engage in the response too, and all chat together.

Making activity – creative response

The Psalms are books that are personal. After the mediation the group might be ready to respond artistically.

Provide lots of different art materials such as paints, canvases, collage, pens. Encourage the group to reflect on Psalm 23 to create something as their own personal response, they might want to recreate the images they have imagined on their meditation.

My Cup Overflows

"you welcome me as an honoured guest and fill my cup to the brim."
Some Bible translations have this verse as "My Cup Overflows" – the aim of this activity is to not be the one that makes the cup overflow. Leaders can take part in this activity, too.

You will need:

- a paper napkin/paper towel/blotting paper (anything that will show up when it gets wet)
- an empty glass
- cups of water (one for each participant)

What you do:

Place the empty glass on the paper napkin in the centre of the table. Fill it half full with water (or leave it empty if you want the game to last longer).

Participants take it in turns to add a little water from their own cup to the glass – without making the glass so full that it spills onto the paper napkin.

The activity ends when someone fills the glass to 'overflowing'.
You can watch a video of the activity here: **https://youtu.be/_kn-LGRVcyE?si=ixhGiUD6xqOQrwbN**

Everyday with Jesus – Walking the Way

What could we do this week to carry on what we've learned? Maybe members of the group could come up with a suggestion. If not, get them to choose from these two challenges:

- There are many different versions of this psalm, perhaps you could write your own one. It doesn't need to be about the same thing but could focus on how God helps you.
- Talk to someone older or younger than you and ask them if they know the psalm and what they think about it.

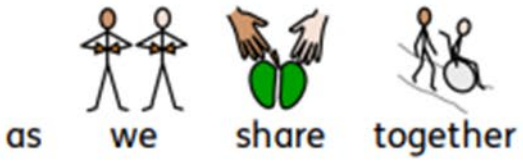
We hope you enjoyed exploring the story of **The good shepherd** with us.

Please let us know what you liked or what you would find useful by emailing **lorrainewebb@urc.org.uk**

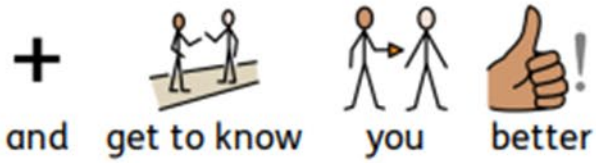
Why not have a look at next week's resource on **The lost sheep**

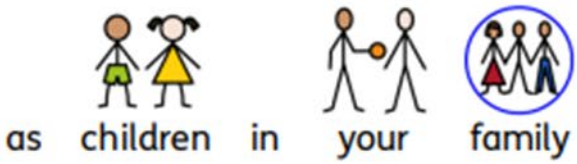
The United Reformed Church Children

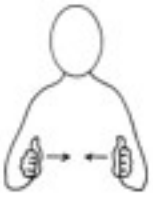
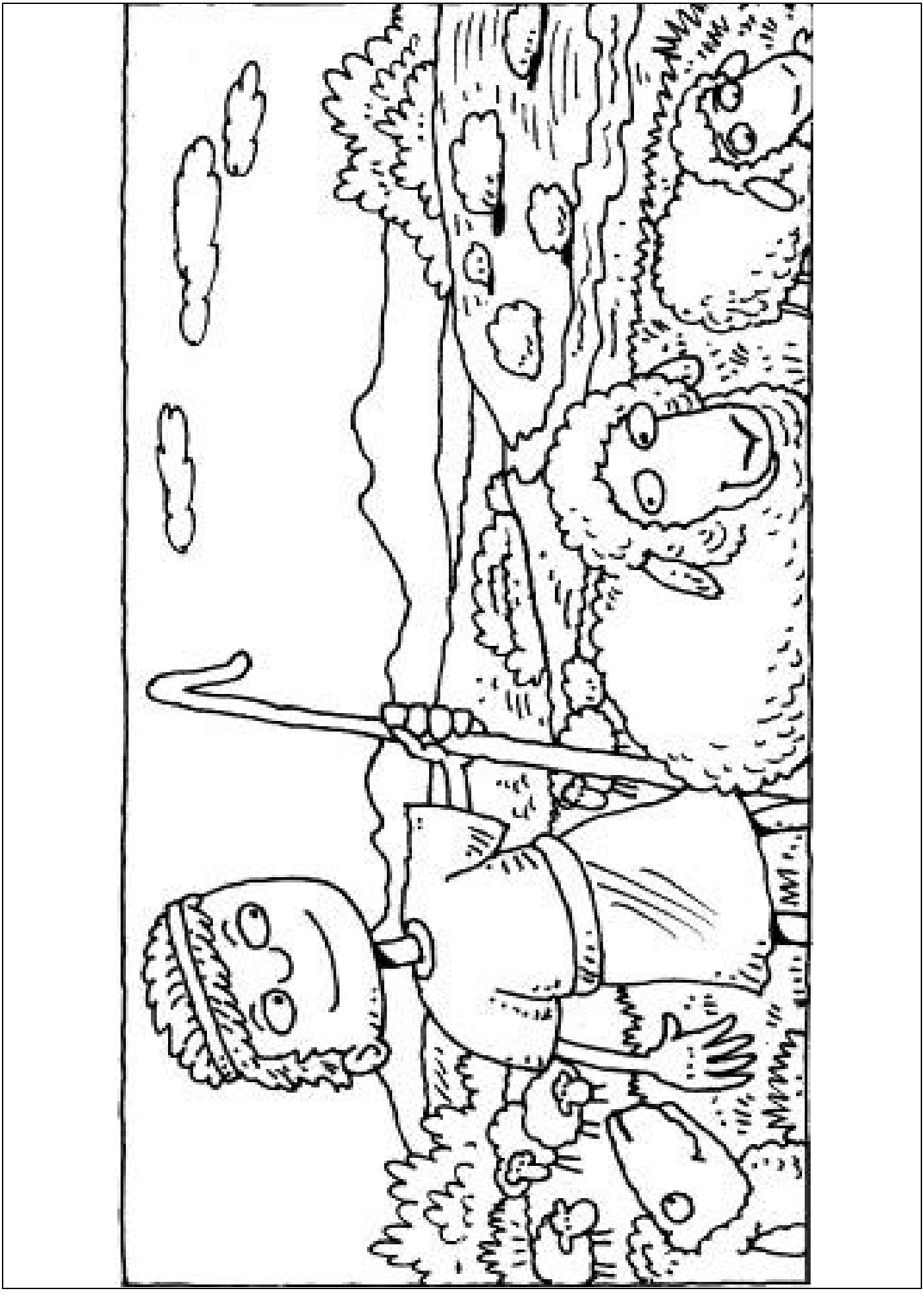
The United Reformed Church Youth



Alternate hands back and forth



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