

## Jesus, Our Good Shepherd: *Guide for the Journey*

*A shepherd is one of the best metaphors we could use for the loving, constant care of Jesus. It is one thing to be known and loved. It is another thing to be cared for and protected by a trusted friend.*

*David reflects on this very thing in the Psalm 23. Each stanza repeats another aspect of God's watchful care. As David considers his own protection of timid and vulnerable sheep, he poses the question, "Who is watching over me?" With beaming pride, Psalm 23 provides the answer: "The **Lord** is **my** shepherd." Because the Lord is our shepherd, we are getting the best of care. "I shall not be in want."*

### Journey Together:

1. Have you ever owned a pet? What are some things a pet depends on us for?

(Read Psalm 23 out loud together)

2. What are some of the elements of the good shepherd's care in Psalm 23? What specific things is he being praised for? How many of these elements have you experienced in your own life and when?

3. What aspect of God's shepherding care do you need most in your life? Where do you need direction, protection, or celebration most in your life right now?

**Roadmap:** John 10:1-18. This passage reminds us of Jesus' constant care for us.

**Note:** In John 10, Jesus claims to be both the sheepfold gate and the shepherd. This can seem confusing to us today. However, shepherds often protected their sheep during the night by walling them into a secluded guarded area and placing themselves at the only opening to protect their sheep. In this respect, the good shepherd leads his flock to safety and stands guard over it throughout the night.

1. What impresses you most about Jesus' shepherding care?
2. What makes Jesus the only "true" shepherd? What distinguishes Jesus from all others?
3. Jesus has a very intimate relationship with his sheep. How can we learn to hear and follow his voice?
4. What does Jesus say the Father loves about him? What makes him the Good Shepherd?
5. Jesus said he was prepared to lay down his life for his sheep. What do you appreciate most about all that Jesus has done for you?
6. Shepherds watch over and protect sheep, but they also lead sheep to greener pastures and sometimes through dark valleys. What are some ways God is leading in your life right now? How does the promise of God's leading bring peace to you?
7. What further questions do you have from this week's reading?
8. How can this group pray for you right now?

### My Journey:

1. How has God used this week's fellowship discussion on the Good Shepherd in your life this week?
2. How has Jesus been leading and watching over you in coming to college? What are some personal examples of his leading and watch-care in your life?
3. What further questions do you have from this week's reading?
4. How can this group pray for you right now?

**Backstory:** This week's journey is a reminder of God's care for us along the way. It can be a bit unnerving when we stop to consider God's absolute knowledge of all things and especially of us, but Psalm 23 and Jesus' reference to himself as the "Good Shepherd" clarifies that he not only knows us fully, but he also cares about us completely. It is important for us to realize how much God cares for us, and Psalm 23 goes through some specific ways that God demonstrates his shepherding care. In Psalm 23, David reflects upon his care for his own sheep. David was a good shepherd and in his care for his sheep he must have begun to wonder who was caring for him like he was caring for them. As David reflected, he began to realize that God was caring for him, just like he was caring and providing for his sheep – "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want...." Having students stop and consider God's care of them is very important. How are they experiencing God's care for them by helping them get into college, by directing them to ACF, by God's daily attentiveness to their needs and anxious thoughts?

John 10 is actually connected to or a continuation of Jesus' care and healing of the man born blind in John 9 (see John 10:19-21). Going back even further, the Old Testament background is the contrast Jesus is making between himself as the Good Shepherd and the bad shepherds of Ezekiel 34. The religious leaders and Pharisees in the story of the man born blind are perfect examples of the bad shepherds in Ezekiel 34. Just like these shepherds, they care nothing about this poor man, who was blind from birth. Jesus is the "Good Shepherd" who cares so much about the sheep that he will lay down his life for them. This is Jesus. He will speak up for us. He will do whatever it takes to deliver us. He will even lay down his life for us, which is the greatest sign that he is the Good Shepherd predicted in Ezekiel 34. He is both our shepherd who leads us and the gate that protects us and becomes our gateway to God.

The goal of this week's journey is to see exactly how far God will go to watch over and care for us. In what ways is God caring for us right now? How is God demonstrating his role as the good shepherd in our life today? What will it take for us to come to the same epiphany as David does in Psalm 23: that "the Lord is *our* shepherd"?