



Shaped to Serve

Sunday, February 19, 2017

Sheep: The Innocent Wanderers

Some Background

Sheep and shepherd imagery appears throughout the scriptures. Shepherding was a common occupation in both Old and New Testament times. Young boys, including the not-yet-king David, were often tasked with the job of caring for a family's animals as they grazed. That meant more than finding the flock fresh grass and cool water, however. Shepherds had to be strong enough to fight off dangerous predators. Think fire fighter!

Sheep in biblical parables represented both people and sacrifice. In the Old Testament, lambs were offered as sacrifices to God, as were other animals. Altars that center the worship space in most contemporary churches are throwbacks to this Jewish worship practice of killing an animal and not using it as food. In John's Gospel, Revelation, and some of Paul's letters, Jesus is depicted as the sacrificial lamb. In the gospels, Jesus uses sheep metaphors to teach that he is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, and that every lost sheep is worth seeking.

But when Jesus calls us sheep, is he calling us stupid? Sheep are not dumb, though they can display a dangerous herd mentality. Sheep are able to distinguish their shepherd's voice and follow. Whether in the background or the foreground, sheep remind us who we're most like in these stories. But more importantly, their presence reminds us of our need for a shepherd.

Bible Fact: Wonder why sheep are included among Bible characters? They are mentioned more than 400 times in the Bible!

Youth Mindset: Young people loathe being classified as followers. Remind them that Jesus' sheep parables are not about group mentality—although following is something completely different when the one you follow is Jesus/God. Rather, they teach that just one of us gone astray is worth going after.

Teacher Homework: Read some key passages about sheep and shepherding: Genesis 4:1-4, 22:1-14 / Exodus 12:1-13 / Psalm 23 / Luke 2:8-20, 15:3-7 / John 10:1-18.

Opening Activity

Draw a picture of a sheep on one side of the white board, and a picture of a human on the other. Have students come up with words used to describe either animal and words that can be used to describe both. Write these down on the board.

Watch the Video

Show the video: “Sheep: The Innocent Wanderers.”

- Jesus talked about what people knew, and people in Jesus’ day knew sheep. What metaphor might he use today?
- The idea of a sacrificial lamb can be confusing. Why did anything have to be sacrificed?

In the Bible

Divide the group into six and give each group one of the key Bible texts at the top of this page. Each group should then come up with a Tweet (140 characters or less) to restate what they just read. Share these as a large group or write them on the whiteboard.

- What is the difference between Old Testament and New Testament sheep?
- What is the point of a sacrifice to God? What is the modern day equivalent?
- If Jesus is your shepherd, how tough will it be to keep you out off trouble?

They Know My Voice

Find a simple maze printout and break into groups of two. One person must keep their eyes closed as they go through the maze with a pencil or marker. The other must guide them using only their voice. How difficult was this to accomplish? For some it may be easier, and for others a very difficult task. Is it not the same when it comes to listening to God’s voice? Read again John 10:14.

Closing Ritual

Share in “highs and lows” from the week. Prayer together, and close with a blessing. Draw a cross on each student’s forehead or hand, say to them “Jesus said, “ I am the good shepherd. I know [name] and [name] knows me.”