GROUP GUIDE

Jeff's Org

What is the Church?

God's Flock

John 10:11-15; Psalm 23:1-6

No Date

MAIN POINT

As the flock of God, the church can trust in the care of the shepherd.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

When someone is called a sheep in our culture, whatâ€™s the meaning behind the term?

Is that term meant to be positive or negative? Why?

Why, then, do you think God chose to picture the church as a flock of sheep?

Sheep donâ€™t have the best of reputations in the animal kingdom. They arenâ€™t particularly smart, largely defenseless, and fairly incapable of fending for themselves. Thatâ€™s why a shepherd is so essential for the sheep to live and thrive. This picture of the church reminds us, as the flock, of how desperately we need a shepherd.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Ask a volunteer to read John 10:11-15.

Why is important that we know Jesus is the Good Shepherd as opposed to just the shepherd?

In these passages, what separates the good shepherd from the hired man?

How can we be sure that Jesus is a good shepherd?

How do the sheep respond to the good shepherd?

What are the ways Jesus speaks to His sheep today?

The good shepherd is the one who loves the sheep enough to lay down his life for them. Thatâ€™s how we know that Jesus is the good shepherd. And because we are certain He is good, we can, as His flock, trust Him to lead us in the right way. The flock hears the voice of Jesus through the Word of God as well as through the spiritual leadership of their pastors as they represent Jesus.

Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 23:1-6.

In one word, describe what the Good Shepherd gives in verses 1-3. Name some ways youâ€™ve experienced this in your own life.

What would you consider a dark valley in your life? How did you sense Godâ€™s presence in that valley?

Describe a time when your cup was overflowing. What were the circumstances?

When a shepherd took care of his sheep by feeding and watering them, he strengthened them for the journey to the next pasture. God often refreshes us by providing for our needs not only as individuals, but also as the entire flock. But following Godâ€™s leading is not always easy or comfortable. It is comforting to know Godâ€™s hand and presence never leave us, so the flock of God can be free of fear.

David mentioned Godâ€™s goodness. What comes to your mind when you think of Godâ€™s goodness?

If youâ€™re being honest, do you trust that God will provide for your needs? How have you seen Him faithfully do so in your past?

David did not always understand Godâ€™s perfect ways, just as we do not. Yet through all life brings, God is goodâ€”all the time. Romans 5:8 tells us that even though we were sinners, God demonstrated His great love for us by sending His own Son to die for our sins. Because of the cross, we know Godâ€™s love, care, and goodness are true.

What qualities of God as Shepherd are most dear to you?

What causes you not to sense Godâ€™s presence or not to trust Him to give you comfort?

What specific challenges are you facing today? Which truth from Psalm 23 do you need to cling to in the midst of that challenge?

In which ways do you see the Good Shepherd leading, guiding, and protecting our church as His flock?

When the family of God functions as a healthy family, people of all sorts find hope, encouragement, and support in our midst. Regardless of what kind of family someone came from, they should find in the church an example of the love and support they get from their Heavenly Father. When this happens, people not only connect with and love each other more deeply; they experience in tangible ways the love and support God Himself has for them.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

What are some of the implications for our church if we are the flock of God?

As the flock of God, we must be unified as we follow the Good Shepherd. Is there anyone who you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from in order that unity might continue?

What is one specific way you can support the vision of the church as we follow the Good Shepherd?

PRAYER

Thank God for the gift of the church. Pray that our church would continue to be a flock that follows the Good Shepherd. Pray for our pastors today, that they might continue to lead us in a way that lifts Jesus high in our church and the community.

COMMENTARY

Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is a psalm of confidence and trust. Most scholars believe David, a shepherd himself, wrote this psalm. A shepherd was a familiar figure in the geographical region and historical time frame when the psalm was written. Ancient Near Eastern texts and the Old Testament use the metaphor of God as the Shepherd of His people and the king as the shepherd of Israel.

The first interest of a good shepherd was to supply the sheep with everything the sheep needed for their well- being. Applied to â€œhumanâ€ sheep, the metaphor covers both physical and spiritual needs, as the details in the psalm make clear. â€œHumanâ€ sheep need rest, refreshment, restoration, guidance into right paths, protection, comfort in sorrow, a sense of Godâ€™s presence, the covenant faithfulness of God throughout life, and assurance about the future relationship with God.

David declared in verse 1 his confidence in Godâ€™s provision so that he experienced no lack. Two primary provisions the shepherd made for the sheep were green pastures and quiet waters. His care was revealed by the wisdom he exercised in leading the sheep to the green pastures and quiet waters, so the sheep could satisfy their hunger and thirst. The Shepherd of the human flock guides His sheep into right paths, or paths that lead to salvation. God regularly guides His people into paths that result in their deliverance from their enemies and from sin.

Use of second person in this psalm provides a more intimate communication between David and his God. Godâ€™s presence enabled him to face dark and difficult situations without fear. The implements used to discipline and protect him brought him comfort.

The phrase the shadow of death is one word in the Hebrew text. This term may be translated â€œdarkness,â€ or â€œdeep darkness,â€ and refers to all those difficult experiences in life leading up to death. Or the word may refer to the ultimate darkness of death itself. In either case the fear normally associated with such experiences was eliminated for David by the presence of God. He was trusting Godâ€™s presence to protect him from calamity that might befall a person going through such a valley.

My enemies refers to enemies David had encountered in the past and had, at their hands, suffered affliction. They may have been present at the feast as captives and no longer a threat because God the Host protected him from their attack. Anointing the head with oil was a gesture of the host toward the guest indicating the hostâ€™s acceptance of the guest at the hostâ€™s table. Oil was symbolic of rejoicing and, thus, appropriate for a festive occasion. The occasion here was likely the sacrificial meal related to the ceremony of thanksgiving. The meal would take place in the temple. The host provided the cup for the guest. The cup overflowing suggests abundance. Godâ€™s generous provision overwhelmed David.

Part of Davidâ€™s confidence in God and his feeling of security about the future was based on Godâ€™s faithfulness to provide the needs of His covenant people in the past. What God had done for Israel, David expected God to do for him for the rest of his life. The word translated lovingkindness is often identified as a covenant term, describing Godâ€™s loyal love and faithfulness in His relationship to His covenant people, Israel. Here in Psalm 23 the word likely describes Godâ€™s lovingkindness attending David day by day.