

Love Is a Verb

Power, name, love. These words weave through this week's texts, and their interrelationship presents a rich depiction of the saving work of the divine amongst us. The name of Jesus Christ holds power. The power of Jesus resides in love. The love of God through Jesus exerts influence in us and over us. Our call is to love, to exercise our power in acts of love towards one another. The web continues to interweave and strengthen.

Focus scripture: John 10:11–18

John 10:11–18 is a passage whose familiar, comforting message exists in some tension with its context. Echoing Peter's experience in Acts 3 — 4, John 9 — 10 recounts Jesus' healing of a blind man followed by a contentious discussion with religious leaders in which Jesus employs metaphors of sheep and sheep-tending to attempt to reveal himself to the entrenched leaders.

A good shepherd's love for the sheep bears the same qualities as those described in the 1 John 3: it is sacrificial, bold, power-filled. Furthermore, this shepherd is not the shepherd only of these sheep. One flock, one shepherd (v. 16): other sheep, ultimately all sheep, belong to this shepherd.

The opening four verses of the chapter set the scene for **Acts 4:5–12** in which "the prisoners," Peter and John, have been arrested and held in custody by temple officials as a result of their teaching and preaching about the Resurrection while in the temple. This much-annoying sermon (v. 2) was recounted, in part, in last week's Acts 3 lectionary text.

In the face of questioning, Peter responds at first with an implicit censure of his interrogators: how is it that a good deed has become bad? In their fixation on a perceived challenge to the established authority and doctrine, these religious leaders are unable to see the miracle that has taken place in their midst.

Continuing his response, Peter reasserts the claim that has landed him in this interrogation — that the source of his power is the name of the resurrected Jesus Christ of Nazareth (see last week Acts 3:16). To know, to call upon, to believe "the name" is a recurring theme in this week's texts: here in Acts 4, in Psalm 23:3, and in 1 John 3:23. Power to speak, power to act, power to be bold, power to follow, power to love: all

are connected to a belief in the saving power of the name of God and the name of Jesus Christ.

The "rejected cornerstone" quotation in verse 11 is from Psalm 118:22. Jesus also quotes the verse self-referentially in each of the synoptic gospels (Matthew 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17); an ancient metaphor, with a new interpretation in a new context.

Psalm 23 is much-loved and undoubtedly one of the most well-known passages in the Bible. On this Good Shepherd Sunday, the image of God as shepherd inspires trust and confidence but does not deny the multiple, sustained threats to that security. Thus, we should take care that our familiarity with this psalm does not give way to sentimentality in reading it.

In the psalm's culminating verse, the writer is daily pursued ("follow" in the New Revised Standard Version), no longer by enemies, but by God's goodness and steadfast, faithful love (mercy in the NRSV).

The command of **1 John 3:16–24** is clear: love one another. Love sacrifices. Love attends to the economic realities of our siblings. Love moves boldly. Love shows obedience to God's way. This multi-layered love for one another has God's love as its source and its model. Its essence, however, is to be expressed outwardly in word, in deed, in action. Love is a verb.

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Contrary to the power exerted by human structures, the power of the resurrected Jesus Christ resides in his saving love for humanity. The power of this love emboldens our acts of love in a world full of people who have been disempowered and ill-loved. How can we, individually and communally, enact our love in service to those who have been systematically excluded and oppressed?



Focus Scripture

John 10:11–18

Additional scriptures

Acts 4:5–2

Psalm 23

1 John 3:16–24

God of Love, we turn ourselves this day to the Good Shepherd as our inspiration and model for the sacrificial love for one another to which you have called us. Fill us with the power of your name and embolden us in our acts of love. Amen.

Lection Connection

links current events with this week's scriptures. Go to www.seasonsonline.ca and click on the link.

The Focus for Ages 3–5

Most young children know the security of being cared for by those who love them. They are looked after every day, with food to eat, a place to sleep, and protection from danger. This week's Bible story uses the metaphor of Jesus as a shepherd, caring for all people as a shepherd would care for the sheep. The reality is that although children may have seen lambs and sheep at a petting zoo or perhaps at a farm, most in this age group will probably not know what a shepherd does. You can help children understand that many people in Jesus' time were shepherds and that it was their job to look after sheep all day, finding grassy areas for eating, streams for drinking, and shelters for safety at night. You can share with them

that not only do sheep follow one another, but they also learn the sound of their shepherd's voice and follow it trustingly.

The listening game in the Gathering time will help children to begin to get a sense of the metaphor of Jesus as shepherd: "When Jesus calls us, he knows each of us by name." You may want to take the children one step beyond this metaphor of Jesus as a good shepherd and help them to see that church people today can also show a shepherd's love and caring for others. In this way the powerful metaphors of our tradition can become known to children in new ways. Pray that children will grow in their understanding of Jesus as a caring and loving friend and that their church family loves and cares for them also.

Prepare

Before the session

- ❑ Read and prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, John 10:11–18, and [biblical background](#) material (p. 57).
- ❑ Set a worship space with yellow or gold cloth, white pillar candle, matches, offering basket, Bible with a bookmark placed in this week's focus passage from the gospel of John.
- ❑ Bring [basic supply kit](#) (p. 2), and, if possible, *Seasons Songbook* (Volume 7), *Seasons Music CD* (Volume 7), *Seasons Growing Faith (SGF) Songbook*, *SGF Music CD*, CD or MP3 player; downloadable sheet music and MP3 recordings are available at www.seasonsonline.ca.

Gather

- ❑ Cut out many [sheep shapes](#) (see pattern on p. 90) and mount each one on a craft stick. Scatter them around the room and make a simple sheep fold from blocks.
- ❑ Bring "Gather Round" (on resource sheet "[Additional Songs](#)," p. 89) or song, "Sing Alleluia!" (p. 23, *SGF Songbook*; #17, *SGF Music CD*).
- ❑ Option: bring a puppet (see information on p. 2).

Engage

- ❑ Bring this week's resource sheet "[A Good Shepherd](#)" and the Jesus figure from the poster [Storytelling Resources](#).
- ❑ Learn the [hand signs](#) for "Jesus" and "love" (on p. 89) and practice the poem (see below).
- ❑ Bring, if possible, the song "Somlandela/We Will Follow" (p. 34, *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #22, *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Respond

Choose from the options provided. Prepare and bring the materials.

- ❑ **Sheep:** round circles of brown construction paper (2 per child), cotton balls
- ❑ **Shepherd picture:** copies of Jesus figure on this week's resource sheet "[A Good Shepherd](#)," cotton balls, green and blue tissue paper, construction paper; print on each piece of construction paper: "Jesus is like a good shepherd."
- ❑ **Stained-glass:** copies of this week's resource sheet "[Stained Glass Window](#)," small amount of cooking oil in a flat dish, cotton balls; cut out a window for each child.

Bless

- ❑ Bring song "Follow Me" (on resource sheet "[Additional Songs](#)," p. 89).



Love Is a Verb

Scripture

John 10:11–18

FOCUS To come to know Jesus as a loving, protective, and caring friend

Gather

Welcome each child by name and encourage them to greet one another. Invite children to look around the room to find all the sheep. Each time they find one, they shout “Alleluia” and take the sheep to the “fold.”

Opening ritual

Gather around the worship space and remind children that we are in the Season of Easter. Light the candle, saying, “This candle reminds us that Jesus is always with us.”

Sing “[Gather Round](#)” (p. 89) or “Sing Alleluia!” (p. 23 in *Seasons Growing Faith Songbook*; #17 on *Seasons Growing Faith Music CD*).

Pray Dear God,
help us to listen to stories of Jesus
and learn about your love. Amen.

Extinguish the candle to signal that the opening ritual has ended.

Moving into the theme

Choose one of the following:

☐ Puppet conversation

Priscilla: Hello, (*names each child*). Happy Easter, everyone. That’s right, isn’t it? We are still celebrating Easter?

Leader: Yes, Priscilla, we are. I’m glad you are here. Now you can play a game with us.

Priscilla: I like games!

Leader: Good. I’m going to say a sound and you have to guess what it is. “I hear something with my little ear and it sounds like baa.” (*Invite responses; then repeat the statement using other sounds, such as a clock, train, kitten, and invite children to guess what makes each sound.*) Now it’s your turn. (*Invite children to make sounds to guess.*)

Priscilla: That was fun!

Leader: Sometimes we hear someone calling our names. Who might be calling us? (*Invite responses.*)

Priscilla: I always know the sound of my mother’s voice. Even when I’m playing with friends and there are lots of sounds around me, I still know her voice.

Leader: In our story today, Jesus’ friends remember Jesus’ voice. Let’s find out more. (*Say goodbye to Priscilla.*)

- ☐ **Listening game** Introduce the game (above) and invite children to take turns saying the statement and making a sound for others to guess. Talk about which voices the children recognize (for example, parents, teachers, coaches, grandparents, friends). Explain that in today’s story Jesus’ friends are remembering Jesus’ voice and what he said to them.

Engage

Before the story

Invite a child to bring the Bible from the worship table and use the bookmark to open it to the gospel of John. Invite children to each take a sheep figure from the “fold” to use during the story. Explain that a shepherd is someone who looks after sheep, making sure they have enough food to eat, water to drink, and a safe place to sleep at night. Use resource sheet “[A Good Shepherd](#)” to tell the story based on **John 10:11–18**, instructing children to say the repeated response as they hold up their sheep figures. Have the figures of Jesus and of the two disciples (from the poster [Storytelling Resources](#)) nearby. At the end of the story place all the figures in the worship space.

After the story

Action poem Teach the children the [hand sign](#) for “Jesus” and the sign for “love” (p. 89). Invite them to use these signs and other actions as they repeat each line of the following poem after you.

Jesus said, “I’m the shepherd.” (*Repeat, and make hand sign for Jesus.*)

Listen to my voice. (*Repeat, and cup ear.*)

Follow me. (*Repeat, and march in place.*)

Care for others. (*Repeat, and give another a hug.*)

Share my love. (*Repeat, and make hand sign for love.*)

Repeat poem if desired.

Sing, if possible, the song “[Somlandela/We Will Follow](#)” (p. 34 in *Seasons Songbook*, Vol. 7; #22 on *Seasons Music CD*, Vol. 7).

Respond

Choose from the following activities:

- ❑ **Sheep** Invite children to decorate the sheep used earlier in the session to take home as reminders of this week’s story. Distribute two round circles to each child and have them draw on facial features and glue these onto both sides of their sheep’s head. Have them spread glue over the rest of their sheep figures and add cotton balls (to both sides). Invite children to make their sheep “walk” around the room as they say together, “Jesus is like a good shepherd!”
- ❑ **Shepherd picture** Jesus cared for people just as a shepherd cares for sheep. Give each child a



Jesus shepherd figure and invite them to glue it onto a sheet of construction paper and glue on green tissue paper grass, blue tissue paper sky, and cotton balls to represent sheep.

- ❑ **Stained-glass** Many churches have stained glass windows depicting Jesus as a shepherd. Give each child a picture of Jesus from resource sheet “[Stained Glass Window](#).” Have them colour the picture with crayons and help them brush the whole picture lightly with a cotton ball soaked in cooking oil. Encourage them to hang these pictures in a window at home and see the light shining through.

Bless

Gather in the worship space and light the candle again. Hold up the Jesus figure from the story and remind children that Jesus cares for everyone, like a shepherd.

Pray Dear God, thank you for Jesus
Who loves and cares for us
as a shepherd cares for sheep. Amen.

Sing “[Follow Me](#)” (on p. 89), inviting children to repeat each line after you.

Send each child off with this blessing, “(Child’s name), love others the way that Jesus loves us.”

Reflect

Like a shepherd with sheep, consider how well you know the children in your care and how well they know you. What are the qualities of the shepherd Jesus that can be a model for you?



Story Tip

Have the children practice saying the phrase, "Yes! Jesus is like a good shepherd" several times before telling the story.

A Good Shepherd

(based on John 10:11-18)

(Distribute sheep figures and invite children to hold these up when they echo the bolded statements.)

One day, some of Jesus' friends were walking down the road when they noticed lots of sheep in a meadow. They could hear the little lambs calling, "Baa! Baa!" Sheep were everywhere. Some were nibbling on the grass. Some were sleeping in the shade of the bushes. Some were running and playing together. *(Invite children to pretend that their sheep are eating, or sleeping, or playing.)*

Jesus' friends noticed that the shepherd was hard at work looking after all the sheep. And then Jesus' friends remembered something important that Jesus said. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep and my sheep know me." *(Invite one child to hold the figure of Jesus.)*

Jesus' friends started to think about this. "What does that mean?" They thought and they thought.

"I know," said one friend. "Jesus always loves us. That's just like shepherds who love their sheep."

Yes! Jesus is like a good shepherd.

"I know," said another friend. "Jesus always cares about us. That's just like shepherds who care about their sheep."

Yes! Jesus is like a good shepherd.

"I know," said a third friend. "Jesus will always be with us. That's just like shepherds who stay with their sheep."

Yes! Jesus is like a good shepherd.



"I know," said another friend. "Jesus knows our names. That's just like shepherds who know all their sheep by name."

Yes! Jesus is like a good shepherd.

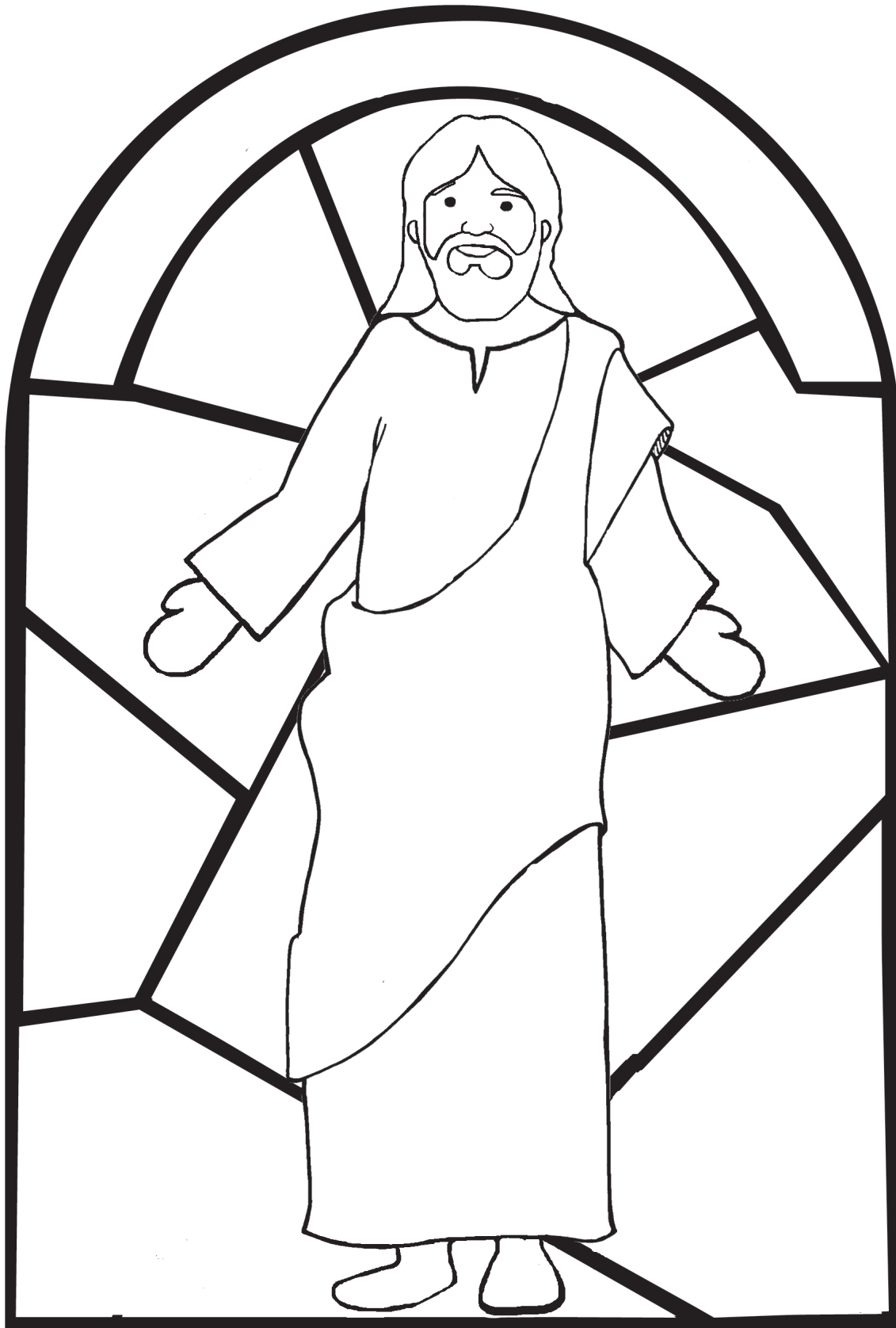
Jesus' friends thought about all this. They said together, "Jesus is such a caring and loving friend."

Yes! Jesus is like a good shepherd.





Stained Glass Window



Additional Songs

Gathering Song

(tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat")

Thank you, thank you, thank you God.
Thank you for this day.
God loves you and God loves me.
We're glad we're here today.

Gather Round

(tune: "Row, Row, Row Your Boat")

Gather round the table now,
we gather round today.
Time to listen, sing, and pray,
Let's worship God today.

God's Promise

(tune: "Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping")

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

Listen closely. **Listen closely.**
To God's promise. **To God's promise.**
God will always love us. **God will always**
love us.
We can love too. **We can love too.**

Leaving Song

(tune: "Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping")

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

God is with us. **God is with us.**
As we go. **As we go.**
It is time to leave now. **It is time to leave**
now.
Go with God. **Go with God.**

Follow Me

(tune: "Frère Jacques/Are You Sleeping")

(Children repeat the bolded lines.)

I'm the shepherd. **I'm the shepherd.**
Follow me. **Follow me.**
Listen to my voice. **Listen to my voice.**
Share my love. **Share my love.**

Friendship Song

(tune: "Jesus Loves Me")

Jesus loves me and you too.
That's the good news and it's true.
Share God's love and be a friend.
Love's the gift that has no end.
Friends, join together. Friends, join
together.
Friends, join together, and share the love
of God!

Hand signs

Jesus

Place the tip of the middle finger
of the right open hand into the
left palm. Repeat the
action in reverse.

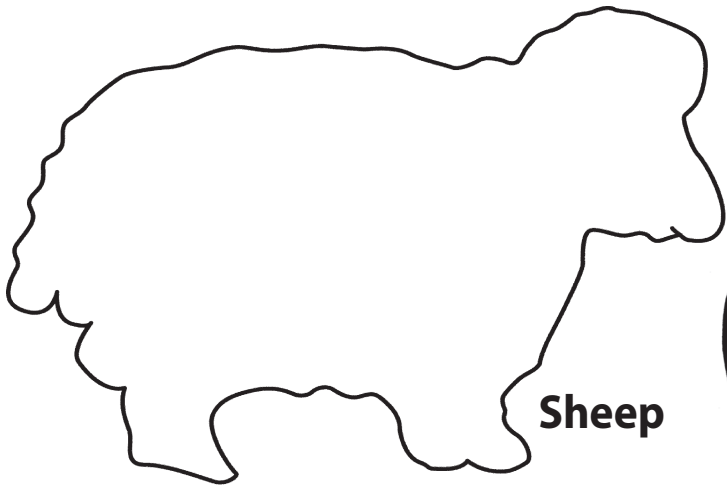


Love

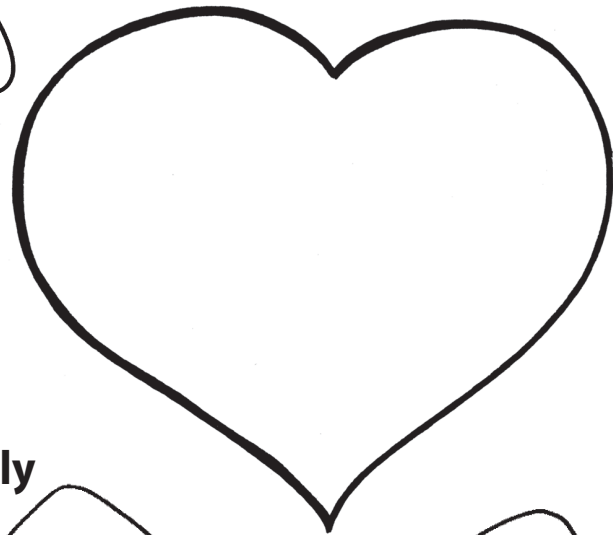
Open hands
are crossed
and pressed
to the left.



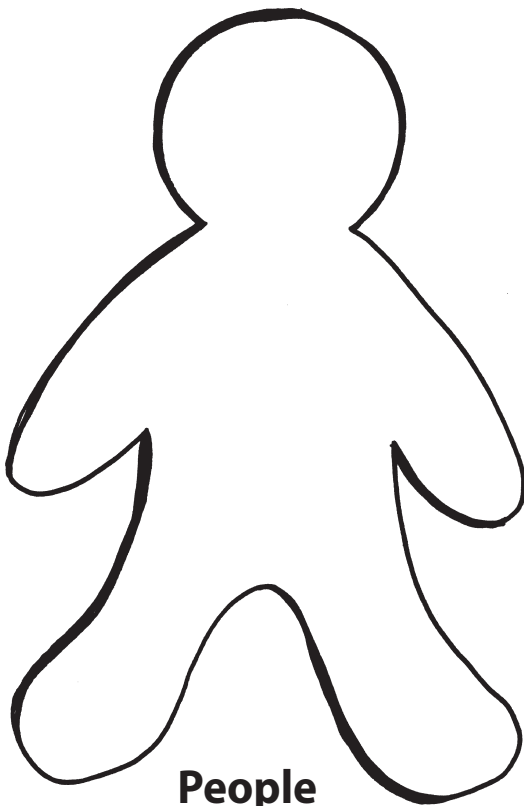
Patterns



Sheep

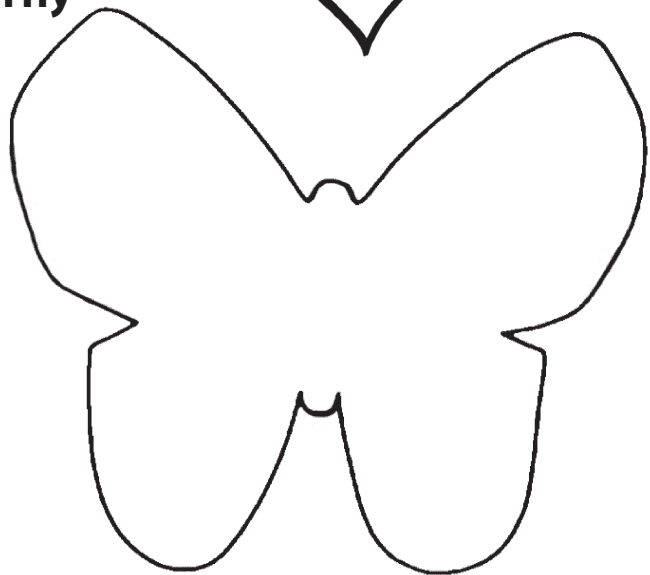


Heart



People

Butterfly



God knows me

Stars

