

A NOTE TO PARENTS

Children respond very readily to the image of the Good Shepherd. It speaks directly to their needs. The Good Shepherd cares for his sheep. The Good Shepherd knows them all by name. (How important it is for children to feel that someone knows their name and will not forget it!) The Good Shepherd keeps them safe, scaring the wild animals away. The Good Shepherd will never run away. The Good Shepherd brings the sheep safely home, at nightfall, to sleep peacefully in the sheepfold.

The Good Shepherd is like a wonderful, perfect mother or father. Because our children today are unlikely to know any real shepherds, the way is open for them to build an image of the Good Shepherd out of their own fantasy lives, and what they have learned from stories. When we call God "Father," we may be raising problems for the child whose own father is absent, uninvolved, or even abusive. But when we use the image of the Good Shepherd, no child need feel left out, and no child is likely to be led into inappropriate fantasies.

Sofia Cavalletti, a pioneering Italian educator with a Montessori background, found that thinking of the Good Shepherd opens children wonderfully to the experience of prayer. With very young children, she found that if she simply told the story, and did not even spell out for the child that the Good Shepherd is Jesus and the sheep are you and me, children would make the connection themselves, with a sense of joyful discovery. Soon, parents would tell her of their children singing little songs they have made up themselves about the Good Shepherd, or speaking to him when they were alone in bed at night, or drawing pictures with deep absorption. All of these are ways for young children to pray.

The Twenty-Third Psalm has comforted Jews and Christians for thousands of years, with the assurance that even in "the valley of the shadow of death," the Shepherd's love does not leave us. This is a part of the Scriptures that every family should read together and learn by heart. Why not start this week?

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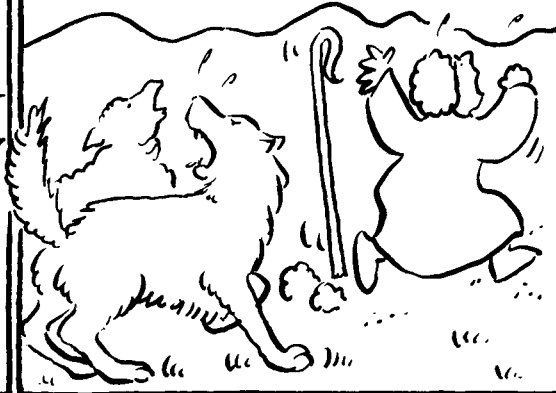


JESUS TOLD THIS STORY:

The Good Shepherd will give up his life to save the sheep.



Some shepherds do not care about the sheep. When the wolf comes, they run away.



But the Good Shepherd knows all his sheep, and they know him.



The Good Shepherd brings all his sheep safely home.



The Bible often says that God is our Shepherd. One of the most famous PSALMS, or poems, in the Bible says, "The Lord is my shepherd."

PSALM 23:1-4

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not be in want.
He makes me lie down
in green pastures;
he leads me by still waters.
He revives my soul;
and guides me along
right pathways
for his name's sake.
Though I walk through the valley
of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
for you are with me.

Decorate the Psalm, to show God's loving care for you!