

# Restored

How can we describe God, who is so far beyond human understanding? The psalmist uses the metaphor of a shepherd, one who guards and cares for the flock. Even when we are uncertain and afraid, we trust that God is with us to nurture and restore. God's restorative love is shown in Jesus, who brings sight to one born blind and calls all to new ways of living and seeing.

## Focus Scripture: Psalm 23

During this Season of Lent, we have been tracing the story of God's saving love through the events that shaped God's people. Now, in **1 Samuel 16:1-13**, we turn to the story of Israel's kings. God calls the prophet Samuel to anoint as king one of the sons of Jesse of Bethlehem. Samuel acts in faith to do as God commands. Though Jesse's seven sons come before Samuel, God has chosen David – the youngest son who is out tending the sheep.

In Israel, high priests and kings were anointed as a sign that God had chosen them for their office. When David was anointed by Samuel, it is said that God's spirit "came mightily" upon him. The word *anoint* is linked with the word *messiah*, a word used in later writings to speak of the "son of David" whom God would raise up to be king of a restored Davidic kingdom. Israel's king is often described as shepherd to the people.

**Psalm 23** describes God as the shepherd who leads the people out in a new exodus. Sheep and goats were the most important domestic animals in the biblical period. Many of the early leaders in Israel's history spent some time caring for flocks and herds – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and David. Sheep need constant care. The shepherd must find food and water, guard against predators, and search for any lost sheep. Sheep depend entirely on the shepherd.

This psalm pictures God as caring for the people in just the same way. God leads them, defends them from danger, provides food and water to sustain them, and heals by anointing with oil. The relationship of shepherd to sheep is an intimate one. Even in "the valley of the shadow of death," God the shepherd restores the people to renewed life.

The image of preparing the table is multi-layered. Near Eastern shepherds used the

term to describe preparing the fields for grazing by removing harmful objects. The image connects also with God's providing of food in the wilderness (Psalm 78:18-20), and reminds readers that God is a generous host who welcomes all to the banquet table. In obedience to God's guidance, Israel will be blessed and will be the community of God's people forever. God's steadfast love (*hesed*) or "goodness" restores and sustains.

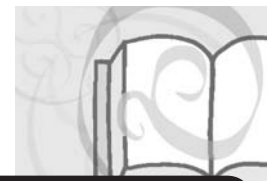
The psalm concludes with "royal" imagery. God anoints the king's head. Just as David was anointed by Samuel, so throughout Israel's history, rulers and governors were anointed to act as shepherds on God's behalf, to care for the people committed to their charge.

God's restorative love was expressed in Jesus' life and ministry. **John 9:1-41** tells the story of one born blind. When Jesus heals on the Sabbath, this causes trouble for the man and his parents. Yet the man trusts that what has happened is from God, though he cannot explain it – Jesus opens a new way of seeing.

As we live in the light of Christ, we are restored to wholeness. **Ephesians 5:8-14** tells us to "live as children of the light." In our baptism we have passed into the light of Christ. We are called to follow Christ and to live a life that is open and transparent, trusting that God cares for us.

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The life of sheep in biblical times was precarious, surrounded by many perils. Much depended on the wise and loving care of the shepherd. Likewise, when we are uncertain and fearful, what does it mean to rest securely in the restorative love of God, our trustworthy shepherd? Who are the "shepherds" today in our community?



April 3, 2011

**Focus Scripture**  
**Psalm 23**

**Additional Scriptures**  
**1 Samuel 16:1-13**  
**Ephesians 5:8-14**  
**John 9:1-41**

**Shepherd of All, bring us safely through the dangers that threaten us and restore us to wholeness of life. Prepare a table and call us to your banquet. Strengthen us by your grace to care for your flock, that all may share in your promises. Amen.**

If you have Internet access, visit [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com) to access Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage.

## The Focus for Ages 5–12

Psalm 23 is the beloved shepherd's psalm, but what do children today know about shepherds and sheepfolds? They will learn about the work of shepherds in the setting for the story and a talk show interview. While the life of shepherds in Bible times may be unfamiliar, children can connect with the care of animals as they think about how they care for their pets. Some children may care for younger siblings. Still others may connect with the care as they tend plants or help their families care for gardens.

The older children in your group may be feeling more independent of their parents. However, they are still grateful for adult support, whether they express this readily or not. The younger children in the group will readily acknowledge the importance of adults who care for and help them every day.

Pray that the children in your group will come to know the loving care of God expressed in Psalm 23 more deeply and be able to describe it in ways meaningful to them.

April 3, 2011



### Materials needed

#### Before the session

- ❑ Prayerfully reflect on this week's focus scripture, Psalm 23, and biblical background material (p. 27). Who has shepherded you?
- ❑ Bring *basic supply kit* (see "This Season, So..." on p. 2) and, if possible, *Seasons Music CD, vol. 9* and *CD player*. *Seasons .mp3 Downloads* are available for purchase from [www.spiritseasons.com](http://www.spiritseasons.com).
- ❑ Bring songs "Hold Us in Your Grace" and "The Anointing" and (pp. 5 and 6–7 in *Music Section*, also #11 and #5 on *Seasons Music CD*).

#### Gather

- ❑ Prepare worship table with *purple cloth, wide purple ribbon, votive candles, matches, offering basket, and Bible*. Place *bookmark* at Psalms.
- ❑ Display group response from Lenten gathering litany (p. 116).

#### Engage

- ❑ Prepare to tell the story on *today's resource sheet "God's Loving Care"* or invite a guest to be the shepherd storyteller. Dress in rough outdoor clothes and carry tall walking stick or shepherd's crook.

- ❑ For shepherds group, provide *copy of today's resource sheet "Nazareth Late Night Talk Show"* to shepherd storyteller.
- ❑ For interview group, provide *copies of today's resource sheet "Nazareth Late Night Talk Show"* and *directions* (p. 29).

#### Respond

- ❑ **Lent zone:** *heavy paper* (cut into business-size cards), *copies of today's resource sheet "God's Loving Care,"* and *Bible in contemporary language*
- ❑ **Outreach zone:** *copies of today's resource sheet "Pop-up Cards"* *Make sample card.*
- ❑ **Quiet zone:** *comfortable pillows or chairs, small table, purple cloth, shepherd's crook, and directions* (p. 30)
- ❑ **Art zone:** *rock, bread, candle, glass of water, soft blanket, and newsprint with questions*
- ❑ **Music zone:** *song "Strength for the Journey"* (pp. 2–4 in *Music Section*, also #9 on *Seasons Music CD*)

#### Bless

- ❑ Bring *song "Strength for the Journey"* (pp. 2–4 in *Music Section*, also #9 on *Seasons Music CD*).

# Restored



**Scripture**  
Psalm 23

**FOCUS** To give thanks, with the psalmist, for God’s special care.

## GATHER 1

**Welcome** Greet the children as they arrive. Welcome children who have been absent or who are new. Introduce yourself to new children and them to the group.

**Song** On this fourth Sunday of Lent, invite the children to sing “Hold Us in Your Grace” (p. 5 in *Music Section*, also #11 on *Seasons Music CD*) together. Repeat it at least twice. During the song, have a child receive the offering.

**Litany** Lead the group in the Lenten gathering litany (p. 116).

**Extinguish** the candles as a sign that the opening ritual is over.

## Connecting with the focus

**Pets** Caring for pets is a natural connection for the children to make with the focus scripture, Psalm 23. Invite the children to tell you about caring for animals. Ask:

■ **When you are responsible for a pet, what do you have to do?**

The same thinking can be applied to caring for a house plant or a garden, if some children do not care for a pet. After the responsibilities of an owner have been discussed, explain that the Bible passage for today is about someone who cares for many animals.

## 2 ENGAGE

### Preparing for the story

**Psalms** The first Sunday of Lent took the children to the book of Psalms, Psalm 32. Have a child get the Bible from the worship table and open it to the bookmark. Remind the children that they read from this book a few weeks ago. Invite them to name the book. When it is identified, have a child turn to **Psalm 23**.

### The Bible story

**Like a shepherd** Invite the person portraying the shepherd to come forward and tell the story on today’s resource sheet “God’s Loving Care,” which includes a paraphrase of **Psalm 23**. Following the story, ask:

■ **What do you think it would be like to stay in the fields with the sheep day and night?**

Both activities that follow will provide more information about shepherding.

### Exploring the story further

To enable the children to explore the story further, according to interests and abilities, explain the two options and have each child select one.

**Shepherds group** This group will spend time with the shepherd storyteller. Provide the shep-

herd with today’s resource sheet “Nazareth Late Night Talk Show,” which provides more information about the shepherding life. Ask the shepherd to describe what a day is like. Then invite the children to ask their questions.

**Interview group** Both women and men worked as shepherds. The children in this group will prepare an interview with a shepherd, Miriam, to present at the end of Engage. Provide copies of today’s resource sheet “Nazareth Late Night Talk Show” and these directions:

- 1 Take a copy of “Nazareth Late Night Talk Show.”
- 2 Take turns reading the parts of the talk show host and Miriam as you read the script through once.
- 3 Decide who will take the parts. You may wish to divide up the parts and have two or more hosts and more than one shepherd at the interview.
- 4 Prepare to present this drama to the others.





**The Bible story and us**

Play the song “The Anointing” (pp. 6–7 in *Music Section*, also #5 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather together. Have the inter-view group present their drama. After it, ask:

- **If we understand that God cares for us as a shepherd cares for the sheep, what do we know about God?**

**3**  
**RESPOND**

Invite the children to select a zone and work with the materials there.

- **Lent zone: Reminder cards**  Psalm 23 is probably the best-known psalm in the Bible. Place copies of today’s resource sheet “God’s Loving Care” and a Bible in contemporary language, such as the Contemporary English Bible, in this zone. Provide business-size cards of heavy paper and colourful markers for the children to select phrases from Psalm 23 to write on the cards. Talk together about where they might keep them so they can be reminders of God’s loving care.
- **Outreach zone: Pop-up cards**  Children know God’s love as it is shown in those who care for them. Invite them to think about the loving people in their lives. Provide paper for them to make thank you cards to give to them. See today’s resource sheet “Pop-up Cards” for directions. Make a card as a sample.
- **Quiet zone: Quiet corner** Place the shepherd’s crook in this corner as a symbol of the shepherd’s care. Display these directions:

Sit in a comfortable place.  
Hold the shepherd’s crook for a few moments.  
Think about all the people who take care of you.  
Then think about how you show others that you care for them.  
Pray to God. Give thanks for the people who care for you. Ask God’s continuing help to care for others.



- **Art zone: God is like...** Place the rock, bread, candle, soft blanket, and glass of water where the children can observe them closely. On newsprint, write: For the psalmist, God is like a shepherd. Look at one of the items on the table. Ask yourself these questions:

- **What do you see when you look at the item closely?**
- **If you can touch it, how does it feel?**
- **How does it smell?**
- **In what ways might God be like this item?**

After the children have examined their item, provide drawing paper and markers. Have the children draw their item in the middle of the paper. Then help them complete this sentence and write it around the edges of the paper: “God is like (a rock) because...”

- **Music zone: Shepherd song** The children have already learned the chorus for “Strength for the Journey” (pp. 2-4 in *Music Section*, also #9 on *Seasons Music CD*). Review it with them. Then read the first stanza aloud. Ask:

- **If we follow the shepherd, who will give us strength?**

Sing the first stanza and the chorus together.

# 4

**BLESS**

**Gather** Play “The Anointing” (pp. 6–7 in *Music Section*, also #5 on *Seasons Music CD*) as the signal to gather in a circle around the worship table.

**Sing** the chorus of “Strength for the Journey” (pp. 2-4 in *Music Section*, also #9 on *Seasons Music CD*).

**Prayer** Before the prayer, remove a strip of paper from the outer side of the poster *Lo the Green Blade Rises*. Invite the children to comment on what they see in the poster. Ask them to wonder about what the middle strip is covering.

Then pray the following prayer, or one of your own:

Shepherd God, we welcome your caring love. We want to show that love to others too.  
Amen.

**Blessing** To a child next to you, say, “(Child’s name), God is like a shepherd to you.” Pass the blessing around the circle until each child and leader has received it.



**REFLECT**

What do the children know about shepherds that they didn’t know at the beginning of this session? Which children were able to think about

God in a variety of ways? Which children found it easier to think about the people who care for them as a way to know God’s love?



# God's Loving Care

including a paraphrase of Psalm 23

Print Psalm 23 below on a long sheet of paper and roll it into a scroll.

When you are out in the field with the sheep, you have a lot of time to think. You have work to do, of course. Sheep need a lot of care. You have to find a quiet stream of water for them to drink because they won't go into water that is rushing along. They like to eat green grass, which isn't so easy to find in the fields.

But that isn't all that shepherds do. You walk ahead of the sheep, checking to see that it is a safe path for the sheep. Fortunately, sheep are really good about following. If a sheep falls into a ditch, you have to get it out.

When I am out in the field with the sheep, I have time to think about many things. But perhaps because I am outdoors, I often think about God. I think about how God is my shepherd, just like I am the shepherd of these sheep.

I think of God as my shepherd  
who gives me all that I need  
who lets me lie down,  
on soft green grass,  
beside a quiet stream.

I think of God as my shepherd,  
who helps me do what is right.  
God helps me feel strong  
when I'm weak and afraid,  
when I'm crying  
for someone who's sad.

My shepherd is glad when I'm happy,  
and gives me good things to eat.  
I know I'm invited  
to live in God's house  
for all the days of my life.

How do you think about God?

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# Nazareth *Late Night* Talk Show

**Cast:** Talk show host, Miriam

**Prop:** microphone

**Talk show host:** Good evening, Miriam. Thank you for joining us as our special guest on the “Nazareth Late Night Talk Show.”

**Miriam:** My pleasure. You know, shepherds don’t get much air time. We spend most of our time in the fields caring for our sheep. I’ve been looking forward to being in the big village of Nazareth.

**Talk show host:** Well, we are glad you are here. *(pause)* You bring an interesting odour with you, Miriam.

**Miriam:** You’ll have to excuse the smell, but I didn’t have time to shower. I was cleaning the sheep pens before I came.

**Talk show host:** So that is what I smell... fresh sheep manure. I should have known. What else do shepherds do besides clean up manure?

**Miriam:** Shepherds do a lot of things. Being a shepherd is a very important job.

**Talk show host:** Ah, tell us more, Miriam.

**Miriam:** My day begins early in the morning. I take the sheep out to graze. Most of the rest of the day is spent leading them to fields of green grass. I also prepare the fields for grazing by removing harmful objects. A little like preparing a dinner table.

**Talk show host:** Green grass... not my preferred food, but I’m sure your sheep like it. Personally, I prefer pizza and juice.

**Miriam:** No juice, but plenty of fresh water for my sheep. The hot sun makes them thirsty. I find clean streams of peaceful water for them to drink at. It can be quite a challenge. Often there is no rain where we live in the Judean hills.

**Talk show host:** Mmh, I see. So being a shepherd is no “piece of cake!” You seem to know all about this challenging job.

**Miriam:** Sure do! My dad was a shepherd, and his dad was a shepherd, and his dad was a shepherd, and...

**Talk show host:** *(interrupts)* I get the picture! It’s a family-run business. What else can you tell us about your work as a shepherd?

**Miriam:** When a sheep gets hurt, I look after it. I clean its wounds, put on oil, and gently wrap the wound with a bandage.

**Talk show host:** Sounds like “First Aid 101” to me.

**Miriam:** I use a staff to keep the sheep safe and to rescue them. Sometimes sheep fall down a ravine or get caught in a bush. Sometimes the paths they walk on are very narrow and difficult. Sometimes they wander off where there are wild animals. Sheep have their own minds and can be stubborn.

**Talk show host:** Like some people I know... maybe people and sheep are quite similar.

**Miriam:** At the end of the day, I hold the staff across the entrance to the sheepfold. I count each sheep as it passes under and make sure each one is safely home. I also protect them with a rod, a short stump of wood.

**Talk show host:** Wow, it makes me tired just hearing you talk. Guess I better let you go so you can get back to your tent in the Judean hills and rest. And don’t forget to shower!

**Miriam:** Thanks for having me. You are welcome to join me in the fields with my sheep any time. Oh, and my grandmother makes a delicious pizza over the open fire.

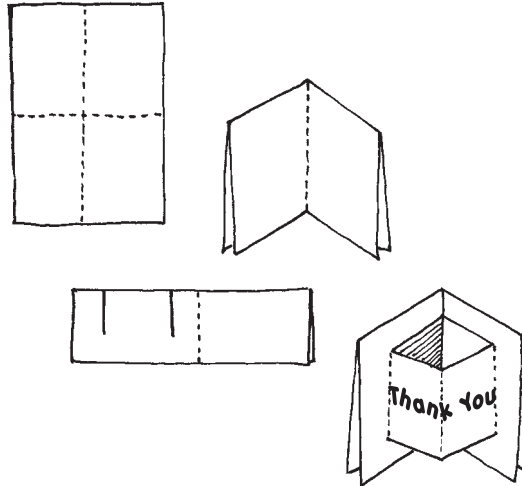


# POP-UP CARDS

We experience God's love and care through the love and care of others. Think about someone who loves and cares for you. Make a pop-up card for them by following the instructions below. Write a thank you note inside the card and give it to them.

## Instructions

1. Fold a sheet of paper into quarters. Open lengthwise and on the lower half make two cuts from the fold about 5 cm / 2 in apart and about 5 cm / 2 in long.
2. Open the paper, fold the card the other way, and pull out the cut section in the opposite direction from the card fold.
3. Close the card and press it.
4. Now open and close the card and you will find a pop-up section.
5. Print or colour a message in the pop-up section. Sign your name.
6. Decorate the front of the card or write a message to the person there.



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Thank you

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# Gather Rituals

## Lenten gathering litany

*(Place the purple cloth on the worship table.)*

**One:** During Lent we think deeply about God and how we are living in God's ways.

**All:** And God is with us.

*(Place the purple ribbon as a path across the cloth on the table.)*

**One:** As we move through Lent, we ask questions of God and of ourselves.

**All:** And God is with us.

*(Place six stones on the purple ribbon.)*

**One:** During Lent, we hear and explore stories of journey, close relationship with God, challenge and opportunities, needs met, and strength.

**All:** And God is with us.

*(Place six votive candles on the purple ribbon and light them.)*

**One:** With every question and every story, we learn more about God and God's ways.

**All:** And God is with us.

Easter  
gather  
words

**In the Easter season,  
we celebrate Jesus  
alive in a new way.**

*(Invite the children to repeat each  
line after you.)*

Together we show Jesus' love  
to each other  
And show Jesus' love  
to the world.  
We gather in love  
to be the church.

