

Develop the Essentials for the Christian Life

Grace is the invitation. Habit is the integration.

Love is the manifestation. Life is the destination.



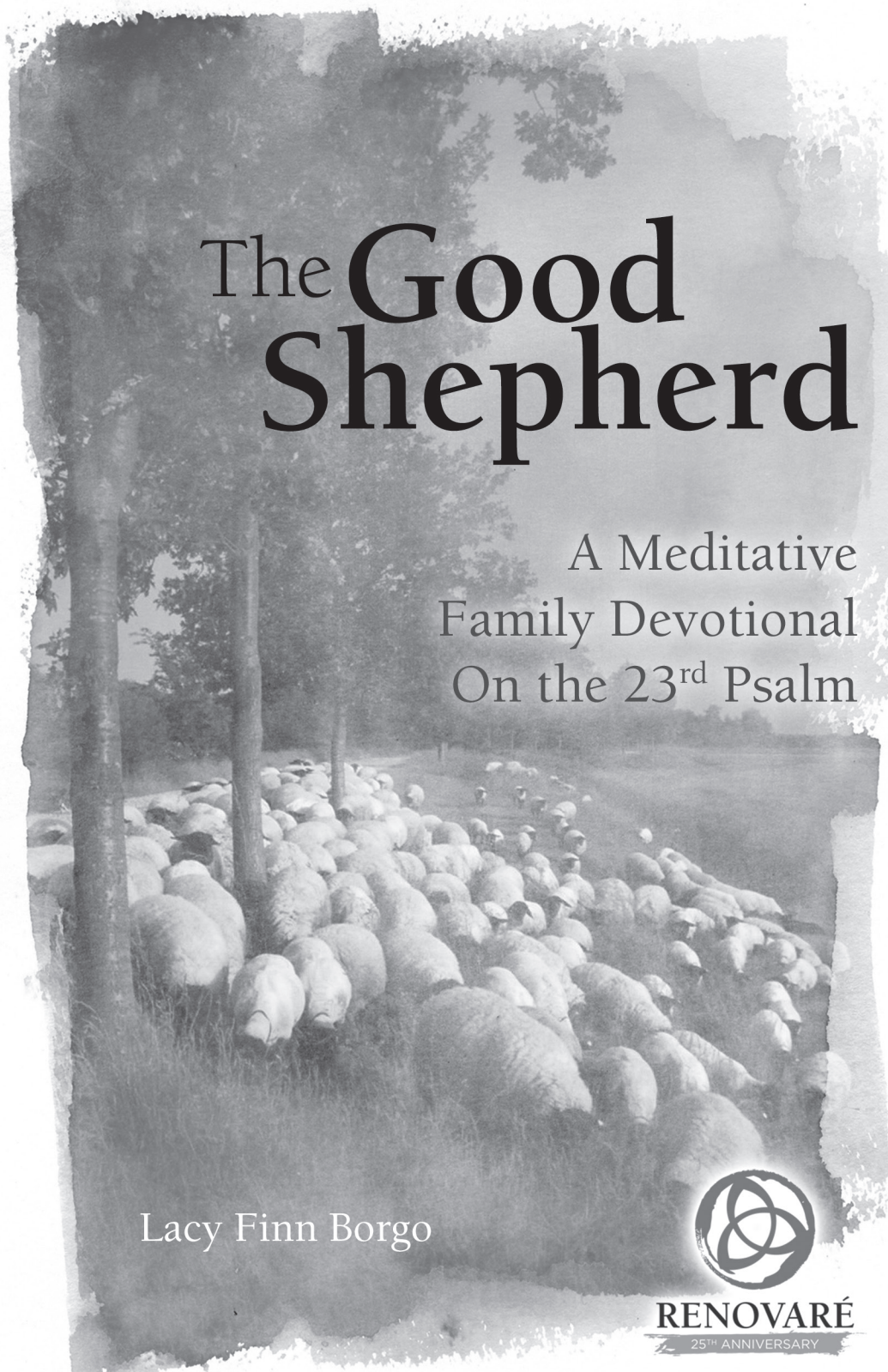
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THE GOOD SHEPHERD

A MEDITATIVE FAMILY DEVOTIONAL
ON PSALM 23

LACY FINN BORGIO



The Good Shepherd

A Meditative
Family Devotional
On the 23rd Psalm

Lacy Finn Borgo



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8 Inverness Drive East, Suite 102, Englewood, CO 80112 USA
303-792-0152, contact@renovare.org, www.renovare.org

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Author, Lacy Finn Borgo, knows little to nothing about sheep. However she's an expert goat milker, pretty good mother, and follows the Good Shepherd wherever he leads. She writes for the Spiritual Formation of Children.



Meditation?

Contrary to popular belief meditation is not just used in monasteries and desert places. No, meditation can also be child's play. Children can engage in meditation more easily than adults. They do it on and off all day long. Have you ever witnessed a child so enthralled in play that they seemed to be in another world? It is my experience that all children go through a stage where they are dogs and want to eat under the table at every meal and insist on being called Fido. They are meditating on being dog, but meditating none the less. Play is meditative for children. Imaginative play is a way of catapulting them into the presence of our imaginative, creative, story-telling God.

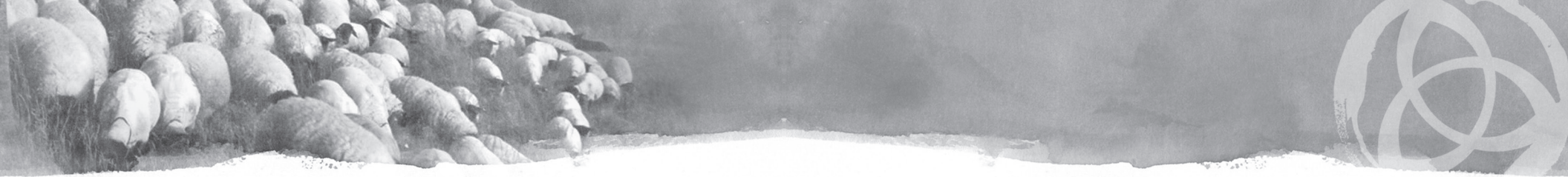
We will be using the medium of wooden toys and guided play to invite our children into the truths of the 23rd Psalm.

My Kid Doesn't Know Latin—*Lectio Divina*

Lectio Divina is the ancient process of chewing, savoring, and swallowing words. It's much like sucking, chewing, and savoring a piece of candy. When we pop that delectable bobble in our mouths we don't swallow it whole. No we suck it, and chew it, trying to make it last as long as possible. When we finally swallow the sugar and whatever else is in the candy, it becomes part of us.

The same is true with the scriptures. We suck and chew and savor the sweetness so that when we swallow all the life giving pieces become part of us.

Try this: On your first day of meditation pass out a piece of candy to each person. *If your family is trying to cut down on sugar intake, use a blueberry or strawberry or the season's first cherry tomato.* Have



a contest to see who can suck, and chew, and savor their treat the longest. Let each member tell about all the tastes and textures they experienced.

Play–Toys Required

Play is the learning space for children. And in this space you can both learn together. For Psalm 23 you will need the characters to play with. If you do some looking around on the internet you can find Psalm 23 toys.

But children are also highly creative like their Father in Heaven and would be thrilled to create their own. With a small set of rectangular blocks, (about the size of the blocks in the stacking game Jenga) and some washable markers, invite your children to transform each block into the following characters:

- Shepherd (a simple man, looking shepherd-like)
- 2 blocks of grass
- 2 blocks of water (streams of water)
- Lion (scary lion)
- Wolf (scary wolf)
- A bucket (round bottom, straight sides, regular bucket)
- Two toothpicks (one a rod, one a staff.)
- A plastic baggie to store them in.

Why Psalm 23?

Children are born with the ability to have a vibrant relationship with God. They haven't the language to express it yet, but from their very birth they have been in this relationship.

Psalm 23 affirms what they already know about God. God is good, beautiful, and true. It affirms that a life with him is safe and protected. It affirms that he has our very best good in mind at all times.

Daily adult life tends to dampen or even erase these truths altogether. Psalm 23 is the reminder that God is our Good Shepherd. It sets our lives in context of a life with God and gives us the eyes to see reality.

So jump right in, play with your children, learn with them, love with them, and find that the Good Shepherd is indeed good.



The Good Shepherd

A Meditative Family Devotional On the 23rd Psalm

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Suggestions for Use: These devotions do not have to be used fourteen days in a row. It could be every other day or every Sunday.

They can be used Saturday night after dinner to begin the Sabbath. Use these to fit your family and schedule.

The Lord is my Shepherd

I have everything I need

He gives me rest in green pastures

He leads me to calm water

He gives me new strength

For the good of his name

He leads me on paths that are right

Even if I walk

Through a very dark valley

I will not be afraid

Because you are with me

Your rod and your shepherd's staff comfort me

You prepare a meal for me

In front of my enemies

You pour oil of blessing on my head

You give me more than I can hold

Surely goodness and love will be with me all my life

And I will live in the house of the Lord forever

Psalm 23 ICB



Praying and Playing and Pondering

The format that we follow is Pray, Play, Ponder, and then Pray again. This becomes a mini ritual. Many people think of rituals as the stuff of ancient people and human sacrifice. Not so. Here we use Christian ritual as a perimeter or guide for meditation and discussion. Imagine the ritual of Pray, Play, Ponder, Pray being a fence, a fence that guides. Within that fence the children and adults are encouraged to play, ponder, listen and follow the Holy Spirit.

Pray: Feel free to pray the prayer exactly as it is written, but don't feel bound to it. Pray what is in your heart. Pray for what you know your children need. Let the children pray. This could be the most delightful part of your day.

Play: The essential part of this devotional is Psalm 23. It should be read aloud each meeting time. However when you have finished reading take the time to play with your children. Leave adult agendas and schedules outside and jump in the story and play.

Ponder: Again feel free to ask the questions exactly as they are written, but don't feel bound to them. Ask what is in your heart. Listen to the Holy Spirit guide you and give you insight into the heart of your child. During play is most often when the Holy Spirit will whisper into your heart the whys and hows of guiding your children.

Jesus Our Good Shepherd

Pray: Thank you, God, for our time to listen to you. Thank you for King David and this wonderful story about the shepherd and his sheep. Please speak. We want to hear. Amen

Read Aloud: Meditation is a time to think about God and about some of the stories in the Bible. Here is a great story, written by a King named David. Do you remember the story of David and Goliath? This is that David. He wrote this story. It's about the shepherd and sheep. To go along with our story we have these wonderful wooden toys to help us think about the story. Take a quiet look at them while I read this story to you. You may look and play, but while your fingers are moving let your ears be listening, and your mouth be quiet. *Invite the children to take out each piece and examine them, move them around, arrange them, and play with them. Stop only inappropriate use of the toys. Everything else is good.*

Play: Read all of Psalm 23 out loud. Slowly practice *Lectio Divina*. Read two lines and pause, two lines and pause. Let the words feed you as you read them. Listen for the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Invite the children to play. If you want to, go ahead and play with the toys with the children. Be sure not to lead them though. You are the follower here. Let the children follow the Holy Spirit through their imagination into this story with God. He is a good guide and knows just how to speak to our children.

Ponder: Point to the shepherd piece and ask: Who is that? What does he do? *Give the children plenty of time to speak. What they say may not sound like anything of relevance to us, but the genuine act of listening gives honor both to God and children.* Do we know any shepherds? Can we think of anyone who acts like a shepherd? Did anyone hear God speak? *If the children are not eager to share— allow a minute or two*



of silence for everyone to think about what God might have said. Then feel free to share how the Holy Spirit spoke to you through Psalm 23. Be vulnerable and honest. We cannot expect our children to share honestly if we will not.

Pray: Thank you, God, for talking with us. Thank you for King David and his story about the shepherd.

Encourage the children to linger as long as they would like with the toys. When they are finished they should put the pieces away. Keeping the toys in a safe place, but accessible (with permission) can be where ordinary wood transports children to the throne room of God. Long after this devotion on Psalm 23 is over, the children will return to their toys and the Good Shepherd to revisit the good and life giving truths they found through play.

God Gives Us All We Need

Pray: Hello, Jesus, thank you for my children. *Ask the children to say aloud anything they are thankful for because Jesus is in the room. Encourage the children to not just say one thing, but as many as they can think of.*

Thank you, God, for giving us everything we need. Holy Spirit, please speak to our hearts. Amen

Play: Read Psalm 23 aloud. Invite the children to listen and play. Remember to savor each image. The children may need a gentle reminder to listen and play, but not to speak.

Ponder: Point to the sheep, what do these need? Cars, toys, food, water? Who makes sure the sheep get what they need? How does the Shepherd give the sheep what they need? What do you need? *Share what you need and how God provides for you. Indeed how God provides for your whole family.*

Pray: Thank you, God, for giving us what we need. Thank you for being a Shepherd to us. Thank you for speaking to us. Amen.

Rest, Food, Water

Pray: Thank you, God, for giving us all we need like food and water and rest. Help us to follow you as our Shepherd and lead us. Holy Spirit, please talk to us. Amen.

Play: Read Psalm 23 aloud. Tell the children to imagine that they are the sheep. Invite the children to play. Gently remind the children that they are listening and playing, but not speaking.

Ponder: Who do the sheep follow? Where is he leading them? Why does he lead them there? Does he know where the grass and water are? Where does Jesus lead you? *Share where Jesus is leading you. Talk about where you think Jesus is leading you as a family. Discuss the difference between want and need. God knows our wants and our needs.*

Pray: Thank you, Holy Spirit, for talking to us. Thank you, Jesus, for being our Shepherd and leading us and giving us what we need. Amen.

He Makes Us Strong

Pray: You are so strong. King David knew you were strong, because you helped him kill Goliath. David knew that he was just a boy. He was weak, but you are strong. Please talk to us, Holy Spirit, we are listening. Amen.

Play: Read Psalm 23 aloud. Read, thinking about how strong our Shepherd really is. Think about how strong a shepherd must be to protect his sheep.

Ponder: Look at the toys. What are the dangers for sheep? Do you think the Shepherd can protect his sheep? What does the shepherd use to protect his sheep? How does the shepherd make his sheep strong?

Pray: Thank you, God, for making David strong. Thank you for making me strong. *Lead the children in thanking God for all the ways that they are strong. Maybe they are strong in reading, or math, or they are strong in soccer or art. Thank God aloud for the ways he has made you strong.* Thank you, Shepherd Jesus, for protecting us. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for talking with us. Amen.

Right Paths

Pray: Shepherd Jesus, you lead us in right paths. If we listen we can hear you tell us what path to take. We want to know your right path. Help us to listen to you right now. Amen.

Play: *Invite children who can read to lead the meditation of Psalm 23. Remind the reader to read slowly, tasting and savoring the words. Gently remind those who are playing to listen with their ears and hearts, but keep their mouths silent. Read Psalm 23 aloud. Invite the children to play.*

Ponder: If you were a sheep, what would a wrong path look like? How would you know you were on the wrong path? Can people be on the wrong path? How can sheep get back on the right path? How can humans get back on the right path? *There should be no safer place than a family. Here is a time to be vulnerable and confesses (what is appropriate for children to know) a time when you have been on the wrong path and how the Good Shepherd Jesus came and found you and walked with you on the right path. Seeing your example will encourage the children to be honest.*

The Holy Spirit seems to always be working and perhaps this section has brought to light a current wrong path. Don't put off the confession that is needed right now. Let the children play and in your heart speak to our Shepherd Jesus and let him lead you to the right path.

Pray: Thank you, Shepherd Jesus, for showing us the right path. Thank you for coming and finding us when we've been lost on the wrong path. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for talking with us. Amen.

Very Dark Valleys

Pray: Thank you, Jesus, for being our Shepherd. Thank you for never leaving us. Thank you for keeping us safe. Thank you for protecting us. Holy Spirit, please talk to us, we are listening. Amen.

Play: Read Psalm 23 aloud. *Encourage any child who can read to lead the Lectio Divina. While playing invite the children to think about the things that might scare the sheep.*

Ponder: What do you think make the sheep afraid? Do dark valleys seem like places where we might be afraid? What's in a dark valley? Have you ever been afraid? *Tell about a time when you have been afraid and God protected you.*

Pray: Jesus, you are our Good Shepherd and you never leave us. Even when we are afraid you are with us, protecting us. Thank you. Amen.



7

No Fear

Pray: Sheep can be very afraid. So can humans. Sometimes we are so afraid. We are afraid of getting hurt, we are afraid of being by ourselves. Help us, Shepherd Jesus, to remember that you are with us. You will never leave us and so there is no reason to be afraid. Talk to us, Holy Spirit, we are listening. Amen.

Play: Read Psalm 23 aloud. Invite the children to play with the toys. *Encourage a child who can read to lead the Lectio Divina.*

Ponder: *Not only are adults super anxious and living in fear, but in this day and age, children are becoming more and more fearful. Our wonderful Christian faith provides the only antidote to fear—trust in a God who is with us no matter what happens and loves us no matter what happens. He really does have the whole world in his hands. The whole point of Psalm 23 is to assure us of this.*

Spend as much time as needed to talk about your child's fears. Use the wolf and lion pieces to act out a sheep's fear and show the shepherd protecting the sheep, "so that none of these little ones will be lost." With older children it could be time to talk about how God's protection doesn't mean that hurtful things won't happen, but that God is still in control and he still loves us and he is still working out the best for us even when life is difficult. If you were a sheep would you be afraid when the shepherd was with you? Why or why not? How does the shepherd protect the sheep? Which pieces could hurt the sheep? Do you think they frighten the shepherd? Why or why not?

Pray: Good Shepherd Jesus, thank you for never leaving us. Thank you for always being with us. Help us to trust you and know that you love us so much. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for talking with us. Amen.



8

Rod and Staff

Pray: Help us, Good Shepherd Jesus, to understand how you use the rod and the staff. Help us to know your comfort and love. Holy Spirit, talk to us, we are listening. Amen.

Play: Look at the shepherd's staff and the rod. Tell the children, "A shepherd uses the rod to protect the sheep. As a boy, he learns to use it like a weapon and can fight off a coyote or lion with this rod. He also can move the sheep away from poisonous plants with the rod. This is a staff. A shepherd will use the staff in much the same way. But the crook at the end can also be used to pull a sheep out of a briar patch. The staff is used to keep the sheep on the right path." Read Psalm 23 aloud. Invite the children to play. *Today encourage all the children to play, thinking of the ways that the shepherd uses the staff and the rod.*

Ponder: How does the rod protect the sheep? How does the staff protect the sheep? What do you think the sheep think about the rod? How about the staff? What does the Good Shepherd Jesus use to keep humans on the right path? What does Jesus use to help us out of briar patches? *Some have interpreted this section as a reason for beating children into submission. This is wrong. The scripture plainly says that the sheep find comfort in the staff and the rod. The rod is a metaphor for guidance and correction, but not a beating, for that would bring fear.*

Pray: Thank you, Jesus, for using your rod and staff to guide and protect and help us. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for speaking to us. Help us to find comfort in your rod and in your staff. Amen.

Enemies

Pray: God, thank you for serving us, even though you are the King and we are the servants. Thank you for feeding us and protecting us. Holy Spirit, please talk to us, we are listening. Amen.

Play: Read Psalm 23 aloud. *Encourage a child who can read to lead Lectio Divina of Psalm 23.* Invite the children to play.

Ponder: Who makes dinner for a king? Does a king ever make dinner and serve it to others? What is your favorite meal? How do you feel when someone makes it for you? Who is the enemy of sheep? Why? What can an enemy take from a sheep? Enemies can kill sheep or take their life. What does food do? *Life with God is a life opposite of how the world works. Kings give life to their servants right in front of those who want to take life away. Talk about how living with Jesus as our Shepherd is often just the opposite from the way everything else works.*

Pray: Thank you, Good Shepherd Jesus, for giving life to us. Thank you for feeding us. Thank you for giving when others want to take. Help us to be more like you and give instead of take. Help us to serve each other like you serve us. Amen.

Blessings

Pray: Thank you, God, for the blessing of my children and friends and grandmas and grandpas and dinner and toys and clothes. *Ask the children to join you in "counting their blessings" aloud in this prayer.* Amen.

Play: Read Psalm 23 aloud. Bring out a bucket or container of some sort, along with the wood figures. Invite the children to play.

Ponder: What do you think that is? *Point to the bucket.* How is it used? Could it be sweet treats for the sheep? What would be a blessing for a sheep? What are your blessings? Do you have a bucket to hold them? Where do you keep your blessings?

Discuss treasures that moth or rust cannot destroy. Logically walk down the path of each blessing thinking about which ones will last (people, relationships) and which ones will not last (things).

Pray: Thank you God for pouring so many blessing on us. Remind us to value our people blessings more than our thing blessings. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for speaking to us. Amen.



11

Too Much To Hold

Pray: Thank you, God, for giving us two hands. Thank you, God, for filling us full of your goodness. Holy Spirit, please come and talk with us. Amen.

Play: Read Psalm 23 aloud. *Encourage children who can read to lead the Lectio Divina.* Invite the children to play.

Ponder: Last time we were together we counted our blessings. Are our hands big enough to hold all our blessings?

Our hands are small, we can't hold very much. Why do you think God gives us so much if we can't hold it all?

Have one child cup her hands together. Fill her hands full with the toys. Keep trying to give her more. When she can't hold any more, ask her to pass the toys on to someone else. Then fill her up again. Explain that this is how blessings work. We get them, but we can't have any more until we give away what we have.

Pray: Thank you, Jesus, for giving us so much. Remind us to give to others like you have given to us. Show us when and to whom we should give our blessings away to. *During the prayer ask the children if they can hear God asking them to give their blessings away. Help them to talk to God about the blessings and the receiver, right now during prayer.* Thank you for giving us two hands that don't hold very much, but big hearts that can hold so very much. Amen.



12

Goodness and Love

Pray: God, you are good. Anything that is good comes from you. God, you are love. You are patient and kind. Help us to remember that you are our good, kind, patient, and loving Shepherd. Please talk to us, we are listening. Amen

Play: Read Psalm 23 aloud. Invite the children to play while thinking about how a shepherd would be kind, good, patient, and loving to his sheep.

Ponder: How is a shepherd kind to his sheep? How does a shepherd show patience with his sheep? How is a shepherd good to his sheep? How is a shepherd loving to his sheep? What are the ways God is good, kind, patient, and loving to you?

Remember to share your own examples of ways God has been good, kind, patient, and loving.

Pray: Thank you, God, for all that is good. Thank you for loving us. Remind us to be kind, loving, good, and patient with others just as you have been with us. Thank you for talking with us. We really enjoy it. Amen.

Living With God

Pray: Wow! We are so excited to think about living with you. Right now we live with you. We don't have to wait for heaven to talk to you or know you or be with you. We are with you right now. Thanks for always talking with us. Keep talking, we're listening. Amen.

Play: Read Psalm 23 aloud. *Even though we are coming to the end of the devotional continue to practice Lectio Divina. These last verses are life giving.* Invite the children to play.

Ponder: With whom do the sheep live? Do you think they forget about the shepherd? Do you think they talk with him everyday? How do they hear the shepherd?

How do you think the sheep feel when the shepherd is around? Does the shepherd ever leave? How is Jesus like our shepherd? Does he live with us?

Pray: We get to live with you everyday, and forever. It is a wonderful blessing to live with you, God. Thank you for taking care of us like a shepherd takes care of his sheep. Thank you for listening and talking with us every day. Amen.

Knowing the Good Shepherd

Pray: Thank you, Good Shepherd, for taking care of us. Thank you for calling us all by our name. Thank you that we belong to you. Amen.

Play: Invite the children to play. *Today we are reading John 10:14-16. Again use Lectio Divina, reading and savoring the life giving words.*

I am the good shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me, just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. I give my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not in this flock here. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd. (ICB)

Ponder: Who is our Good Shepherd? Does he know us? How does he know us? Can we know him? How do we know him? What do you think the Good Shepherd's voice sounds like? Tell about a time when you have heard the voice of the Good Shepherd. *Share about a time when you have heard the voice, which is often the quiet nudging of God.*

Pray: Thank you, God, for the kindness and courage of your voice. Help us to listen to you all day long. Help us not to forget you. You never forget us and you always here. You are the Good, very best Shepherd. We love you. Amen.

Renovaré models, resources, and advocates intentional living through spiritual formation among Christians wanting a deeper connection with God.



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