

WEEK 42 | SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2026

Teacher Background & Preparation Sheet

For Teacher Study Only. Not Read Aloud.

LESSON IDENTIFICATION

Week: 42

Date: Sunday, October 18, 2026

Lesson Title: Jesus the Good Shepherd

Primary Scripture Passage: John 10:1 through 18

Supporting Scripture: John 9:1 through 41; John 10:27 through 30; Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34:1 through 16

Bible Timeline Placement: During the public ministry of Jesus, after Jesus healed a man who had been blind from birth and during growing conflict between Jesus and some of Israel's religious leaders.

PURPOSE OF THIS LESSON

The children should understand that when Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd, He is telling us something deeply personal about who He is and how He cares for His people. Jesus knows His people, calls them to follow Him, protects them from what would destroy them, leads them to life, and willingly gives His life to save them.

The heart of the passage is found in Jesus' words:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11

This lesson should not become primarily about sheep, shepherding customs, or children trying harder to behave like obedient sheep. Those details can help children picture what Jesus is saying, but they serve a greater truth.

Jesus is telling us who He is.

He is not like a thief who takes, a stranger who misleads, or a hired worker who runs away when caring becomes dangerous. Jesus belongs with His sheep, knows them, loves them, and gives Himself for them.

The cross is already present in His words.

Jesus does not merely say that a good shepherd might risk his life. He says that He Himself will lay down His life for the sheep, and later in this same passage He explains that He will lay it down willingly and take it up again.

The Good Shepherd is therefore not simply a comforting picture of Jesus caring for frightened people. It is a picture that leads directly to His death and resurrection.

BOOK AND PASSAGE BACKGROUND

Book Name

The Gospel According to John

Traditional Author

Christian tradition identifies the author as John, the son of Zebedee, one of the twelve apostles and the brother of James.

The Gospel itself does not place the name John on its opening page, so teachers should understand the difference between what the text explicitly says and what early Christian testimony tells us. Near the end of the Gospel, John 21:24 connects the written testimony with “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Early Christian writers, especially Irenaeus in the second century, identified this disciple with John and associated the Gospel with John’s later ministry in Ephesus.

There continues to be scholarly discussion about the Gospel’s authorship and the exact process by which it reached its final written form. We do not need to hide that discussion from teachers, nor do we need to treat uncertainty as if it destroys the Gospel’s historical value.

The traditional attribution to the apostle John is ancient and significant.

Approximate Date Written

A commonly accepted range places the Gospel of John late in the first century, often somewhere around AD 85 to 95, although proposals vary.

The Gospel itself does not give us a date.

Teachers should therefore say “probably” or “approximately” rather than presenting one year as certain.

Original Audience

John appears to have written for Christians who already knew important truths about Jesus and needed a deeper understanding of who He is.

His purpose is stated clearly near the end of the Gospel:

“But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” John 20:31

That verse helps us understand the whole book.

John does not simply collect interesting memories about Jesus. He chooses signs, conversations, teachings, and events that help readers see who Jesus truly is and respond to Him in faith.

Purpose of the Book

John wants his readers to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, God’s promised Savior and King, and that He is the Son of God.

Throughout the Gospel, Jesus makes statements that reveal His identity in memorable ways. He says that He is the bread of life, the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, the way and the truth and the life, and the true vine.

Here in John 10 He says:

“I am the good shepherd.” John 10:11

That statement carries the weight of the Old Testament behind it.

God had already described Himself as the Shepherd of His people, and Israel’s kings and leaders were sometimes described as shepherds who were responsible to care faithfully for the people entrusted to them.

When Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd, He is not choosing a random country picture. He is stepping into a rich biblical picture of God's own care and the promised King who would shepherd His people faithfully.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

Shepherding Was Familiar, But Not Romantic

For many modern children, the word shepherd may bring to mind a peaceful picture of someone standing in a green field beside clean, fluffy sheep.

Real shepherding was harder than that.

Shepherds led animals to food and water, watched for danger, kept the flock together, searched for wandering animals, and guarded vulnerable sheep from predators and thieves.

The work required attention and endurance.

This matters because Jesus is not presenting Himself as a decoration standing beside the sheep. He is describing someone who takes responsibility for their life and safety.

The Sheepfold

Jesus begins John 10 by describing sheep gathered inside a sheepfold.

A sheepfold was an enclosure used to keep sheep together and provide protection, especially when they were not out grazing. Such enclosures could be surrounded by stone walls or other barriers, with an opening used for entrance and exit.

Jesus speaks of the shepherd entering properly through the gate while a thief or robber tries to enter another way.

The exact design of every sheepfold would have varied, so teachers should resist adding details Scripture does not give.

A popular Christian teaching sometimes claims that shepherds routinely slept across the opening and literally became the door of the sheepfold. That picture is often used to explain Jesus saying, "I am the gate."

It may sound memorable, but the lesson does not need that claim, and we should not present it as a certain historical custom without adequate evidence.

Jesus Himself gives us enough explanation.

He is the One through whom His sheep enter safety and find life.

Sheep Recognizing a Shepherd's Voice

Jesus says that the shepherd calls his own sheep by name and that the sheep recognize his voice.

The main point is relationship and recognition.

The sheep know who their shepherd is and follow the shepherd rather than a stranger.

For children, this can be explained without pretending sheep understand language the same way human beings do. Animals can learn familiar voices, sounds, routines, and the person who regularly cares for them.

Jesus uses that familiar relationship to explain something much greater.

His people know Him and learn to follow Him.

Wolves, Thieves, and Hired Workers

A flock could face danger from predators or human thieves.

Jesus contrasts Himself with people who care for the sheep only when it benefits them. A hired worker may leave when danger becomes too costly because the sheep do not belong to him.

Jesus says He is different.

The sheep matter to Him.

He does not abandon them when loving them becomes costly.

That statement becomes especially powerful when we remember where the Gospel is heading.

Jesus will soon allow Himself to be arrested and crucified.

IMMEDIATE BIBLICAL CONTEXT

What Happens Before John 10?

John 10 flows directly out of John 9.

This connection is important enough that teachers should understand John 9 before teaching John 10.

In John 9, Jesus meets a man who had been blind from birth and heals him.

Instead of simply celebrating what happened, some Pharisees begin questioning the man because Jesus performed the healing on the Sabbath. The questioning grows increasingly hostile.

The healed man refuses to deny what Jesus did.

Eventually, he is thrown out.

Then John tells us:

"Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?'" John 9:35

That sentence gives John 10 an especially beautiful setting.

Religious leaders have pushed the man away.

Jesus finds him.

Then Jesus begins speaking about shepherds.

That is not accidental.

Some leaders had failed to care faithfully for someone placed in front of them, while Jesus sought him, received him, and led him toward faith.

The Good Shepherd teaching therefore grows out of a real example of what good and bad spiritual leadership look like.

What Happens in John 10:1 through 18?

Jesus begins with a picture involving sheep, a sheepfold, a shepherd, thieves, strangers, and a gatekeeper.

The sheep recognize the shepherd's voice and follow him.

John 10:6 tells us that Jesus' listeners did not understand what He meant, so Jesus continues explaining with another picture.

He says:

"I am the gate for the sheep." John 10:7

Then He says:

"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." John 10:10

Immediately afterward comes the central declaration:

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11

Jesus contrasts Himself with a hired hand who runs when a wolf comes.

Then He returns to the closeness between shepherd and sheep:

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me." John 10:14

Jesus goes on to say that He will lay down His life willingly.

He also says:

"I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." John 10:18

Those words point clearly toward the cross and resurrection.

What Happens Later in the Chapter?

Later in John 10, Jesus returns to the picture of sheep and says:

"My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me." John 10:27

He promises eternal life and says that no one can snatch His sheep out of His hand.

Then Jesus says:

"I and the Father are one." John 10:30

The people listening understand this as an extraordinary claim, and opposition grows.

John wants us to understand that the Good Shepherd is not merely a wise human leader.

Jesus' words lead us toward His divine identity.

WHY THIS MOMENT MATTERS IN GOD'S PLAN

The picture of God as Shepherd did not begin in John 10.

David wrote in Psalm 23:

"The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing." Psalm 23:1

Later, through the prophet Ezekiel, God condemned Israel's unfaithful leaders because they had cared more about themselves than the people they were supposed to protect.

God then promised:

"I myself will search for my sheep and look after them." Ezekiel 34:11

A little later in the same chapter, God promised a shepherd from David's line who would care for His people.

Then Jesus comes and says:

"I am the good shepherd." John 10:11

We should allow that connection to carry its full weight.

The Lord is the Shepherd.

God promises to shepherd His people.

God promises a faithful Shepherd King from David's line.

Jesus says He is the Good Shepherd.

John is showing us that God's promises are finding their fulfillment in Jesus.

KEY THEOLOGICAL TRUTHS APPLIED TO THIS WEEK'S LESSON

CORE TRUTH 1: JESUS KNOWS HIS PEOPLE PERSONALLY

"I know my sheep and my sheep know me." John 10:14

Christian faith is more than knowing facts about Jesus.

Those facts matter deeply, because we cannot trust someone while believing things about Him that are untrue. Yet Jesus describes salvation as a relationship in which He knows His people and His people know Him.

For a child who sometimes feels overlooked, this truth can carry tremendous comfort.

Jesus does not care for humanity as an unnamed crowd.

He knows His people.

That does not mean every child who hears a Sunday school lesson automatically belongs to Jesus because Jesus knows they exist. Scripture calls each person to repent and believe the gospel.

But no child who comes to Jesus should imagine that they disappear inside a crowd too large for Him to notice.

The Good Shepherd knows His sheep.

CORE TRUTH 2: JESUS LEADS HIS PEOPLE RATHER THAN USING THEM

Jesus says His sheep hear His voice and follow Him.

This is not a picture of Jesus forcing frightened animals forward from behind. It is a picture of leadership built upon trust.

Jesus goes before His sheep.

They follow because they know Him.

That distinction matters when we teach obedience to children.

Christian obedience is not about earning Jesus' love by behaving well enough. We follow Jesus because He first loves us, saves us, and proves Himself worthy of our trust.

Our obedience is a response to grace.

CORE TRUTH 3: JESUS GIVES HIS LIFE FOR HIS SHEEP

This is the center of the lesson.

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11

Jesus is explaining His death before it happens.

The cross is not an accident that catches Jesus by surprise. It is not merely the tragic ending of a good man's life.

Jesus says several times in this passage that He lays down His life.

Then He makes the voluntary nature of His sacrifice unmistakable:

"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." John 10:18

Human beings really will arrest Jesus, condemn Him, and crucify Him, and they remain responsible for what they do.

Yet behind those human actions stands the willing obedience of the Son.

Jesus gives Himself for sinners.

The Shepherd dies for the sheep.

CORE TRUTH 4: JESUS ROSE AGAIN

John 10 does more than point toward Jesus' death.

Jesus says:

"I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again." John 10:18

The Shepherd will die, but death will not keep Him.

This gives teachers an especially natural way to connect the Good Shepherd with the complete gospel.

Jesus lived without sin.

Jesus willingly died for our sins.

Jesus was truly buried.

Jesus rose bodily from the dead.

Our hope rests in a living Shepherd.

Christian children should never picture Jesus only as someone who died a long time ago.

The Shepherd who laid down His life is alive.

CORE TRUTH 5: JESUS GIVES ETERNAL LIFE

Later in John 10, Jesus says:

"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish." John 10:28

Eternal life is not something we earn by following Jesus perfectly.

Jesus says He gives it.

That language matters.

Salvation is grace.

We have sinned and cannot repair our own relationship with God. Jesus gives His life for sinners, rises again, and gives eternal life to those who trust Him.

The sheep are not the heroes because they are unusually clever sheep.

The Shepherd is the Hero because He saves them.

GOD REVEALED AS TRINITY

John 10 gives us especially clear teaching about the Father and the Son.

Jesus says:

"Just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep."
John 10:15

The Father and the Son are distinct Persons who know and love one another.

Later Jesus says:

"I and the Father are one." John 10:30

We should neither flatten those verses into saying the Father and Jesus are the same Person nor divide them into two gods.

The fuller teaching of Scripture is that God is one God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The Father is God.

The Son is God.

The Holy Spirit is God.

There is one God.

John 10 focuses especially on the relationship of the Father and Son, so we should teach what the passage clearly reveals rather than forcing the Holy Spirit into every paragraph.

The Holy Spirit is fully God and belongs to our complete doctrine of the Trinity, but this particular passage gives us a beautiful opportunity to help children see that the Father and Son are distinct while sharing divine unity.

CHRISTIAN AND MISSIONARY ALLIANCE ALIGNMENT

The current Christian and Missionary Alliance describes its Christ centered identity through the Fourfold Gospel: Jesus our Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, and Coming King.

This lesson connects most naturally with Jesus our Savior and Jesus our Coming King, while the other truths remain part of the larger picture of who He is.

Jesus Our Savior

John 10:11 could hardly make this connection clearer:

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep."

Jesus saves by giving Himself.

His death is not merely an example of courage or love. His death is the sacrifice through which sinners can be forgiven and reconciled to God.

Jesus Our Sanctifier

The Good Shepherd does not save His sheep and then abandon them.

He continues leading them.

For a child, sanctification can be explained simply: Jesus continues working in those who belong to Him through the Holy Spirit and teaches us to become more like Him.

We follow because He leads.

Jesus Our Healer

Physical healing is not the main subject of John 10, so it should not be forced into the lesson.

However, John 10 comes immediately after Jesus heals the man born blind in John 9. That healing shows His compassion and power while the Good Shepherd teaching reveals the deeper relationship He gives to those who trust Him.

Jesus Our Coming King

The Shepherd image also has royal meaning in Scripture because kings were sometimes described as shepherds of their people.

Jesus is the faithful Shepherd King.

His people can follow Him now because He has already conquered death, and they can look forward with hope because He will return and His kingdom will finally be seen in its fullness.

RELIABILITY OF SCRIPTURE

John Presents His Work as Testimony

John does not describe his Gospel as a collection of spiritual legends.

Near the end of the book, he explains that he has selected particular signs of Jesus so readers may believe that Jesus is the Messiah and Son of God.

John 21:24 also connects the Gospel with the testimony of the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Whatever questions scholars continue to discuss about the final composition of the Gospel, the book presents itself as testimony rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus.

Early Christian Attribution

The Gospel itself is formally anonymous, but early Christian testimony strongly associates it with John.

Irenaeus, writing in the second century, identified John, the disciple of the Lord, with the Gospel and connected its composition with Ephesus.

Teachers should state that as early Christian testimony rather than pretending the author wrote his name across the manuscript.

That approach is both honest and confident.

Manuscript Evidence

The Gospel of John has strong early manuscript support.

Papyrus 66, often called P66, is an important manuscript of John usually dated to the late second or early third century and preserves a substantial portion of the Gospel.

This matters because it gives us physical evidence that John was being copied and circulated very early in Christian history.

A manuscript does not prove that every event in the Gospel happened merely because the manuscript exists. What it does show is that the text is ancient and deeply rooted in the early Christian movement.

APOLOGETICS FOUNDATION

A good teacher can use this lesson to continue teaching children three simple questions.

1. What Does the Bible Actually Say?

Jesus says that He is the Good Shepherd.

He says His sheep know His voice.

He says He knows His sheep.

He says He lays down His life for them.

He says He does this willingly.

He says He will take His life up again.

Those claims are in the text.

We do not need to decorate them until they become impressive.

They already are.

2. What Can History Help Us Understand?

Shepherding was a real and familiar occupation in the world of Jesus.

Sheep required food, water, guidance, and protection, and flocks could face danger from predators and thieves.

Knowing this helps us understand the picture Jesus chose.

Early Christian testimony also places the Gospel of John within the first generations of the Christian movement, and early manuscript evidence confirms that the book circulated long before the medieval period.

These facts support our understanding of the historical setting and transmission of the text.

They do not turn faith into an archaeological experiment.

3. What Are We Only Guessing About?

We do not know what the sheepfold Jesus pictured looked like in every detail.

We do not know whether Jesus was looking at an actual flock while He spoke.

We do not know the names of any shepherds who may have inspired parts of the picture.

We should not claim that every shepherd slept in the doorway of a sheepfold.

We should not tell children that shepherds regularly broke wandering sheep's legs to teach them obedience. That popular illustration is not found in Scripture and should not be taught as biblical or historical fact.

We have more than enough truth without adding invented details.

ANTICIPATED CHILD QUESTIONS

"Why does Jesus call people sheep?"

Jesus is using a picture to help us understand our relationship with Him.

Sheep need a shepherd to lead, protect, and care for them. In a much greater way, we need Jesus.

Jesus is not insulting people or saying humans are literally sheep.

He is teaching us through something His listeners understood.

“Does Jesus know my name?”

Jesus knows each person completely.

For those who belong to Him, John 10 gives the beautiful picture of a Shepherd who knows His own sheep personally.

A child never has to worry that Jesus has too many people to care about and might forget them.

“How do I know Jesus' voice?”

Children should not be taught to call every thought or feeling “Jesus talking to me.”

Jesus has given us His Word.

The safest and clearest place to learn the Shepherd's voice is Scripture, because Jesus will never lead us against what God has already revealed in the Bible.

The Holy Spirit helps believers understand and obey God's Word, but a personal feeling should never be allowed to overrule Scripture.

“If Jesus protects His sheep, why do Christians still get hurt?”

Jesus never promises that His followers will escape every painful thing during this life.

The Shepherd Himself went to the cross.

Christians can suffer sickness, loss, persecution, accidents, and other painful things, yet none of those things can defeat Jesus or undo His final promise of eternal life.

Our safety in Christ is deeper than having an easy life.

Jesus holds His people even when life is hard, and resurrection means suffering and death will not have the final word.

“Why would a shepherd die for sheep?”

Jesus uses the picture to show how far His love will go.

A good shepherd protects the flock even when there is danger.

Jesus goes farther than any ordinary shepherd because He willingly gives His own life to save sinners.

The picture reaches its full meaning at the cross.

“Did Jesus have to die?”

Sin is real, and God is holy and just.

God does not simply pretend evil does not matter.

Jesus willingly took the judgment sinners deserve so that everyone who turns from sin and trusts Him can be forgiven.

He was not helpless at the cross.

He gave Himself.

“Is Jesus still our Shepherd now?”

Yes.

Jesus rose from the dead and is alive.

Christians do not follow a dead religious teacher whose work ended long ago. We belong to the living Son of God.

COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

Misunderstanding 1: The lesson is mainly about being a good little sheep.

That turns the lesson into moralism.

The main point is not, "Be a better follower."

The main point is, "Look at the Shepherd."

Our obedience grows from knowing and trusting Jesus.

Misunderstanding 2: Jesus protects Christians from everything bad.

John 10 does not promise a painless life.

Jesus protects His people in the deepest and final sense, and no enemy can overturn the eternal life He gives.

Misunderstanding 3: Following Jesus means obeying every religious leader.

No human pastor, teacher, parent, or church leader becomes Jesus.

Adults can be wrong, and some adults can be unsafe.

Children should never be told that following Jesus means keeping abuse, threats, frightening behavior, or unsafe touching secret.

A trustworthy adult will never ask a child to hide something dangerous.

Misunderstanding 4: "Abundant life" means Christians should become rich or successful.

John 10:10 should not be used as a promise of money, popularity, comfort, or an easy life.

Jesus is describing the life that comes through Him, life under the care of the Shepherd, life reconciled to God, and ultimately eternal life.

Misunderstanding 5: Jesus was forced to die because His enemies became too powerful.

John 10 directly corrects that idea.

Jesus says that He lays down His life willingly.

The cross was costly beyond anything we can fully understand, but it was not an accident outside God's plan.

GOSPEL CONNECTION

The gospel is not something we need to attach to John 10.

Jesus places it inside the Shepherd picture Himself.

We are like sheep who cannot rescue ourselves.

God is holy and good, while we have sinned and wandered from His ways.

We cannot erase our guilt, make ourselves spiritually alive, or earn our way back to God.

Then the Shepherd comes.

Jesus is God the Son who became truly human.

He lived without sin.

He knows His people and loves them.

Instead of abandoning the sheep when salvation becomes costly, Jesus says:

"The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11

Jesus died for our sins.

He was buried.

Then He rose again.

Everyone who turns from sin and trusts Jesus is forgiven and receives eternal life.

Our hope does not rest in being clever enough to find our own way home.

Our hope rests in the Shepherd who came to save us.

TEACHER HEART PREPARATION

There is something wonderfully gentle about the picture Jesus gives us here, especially for a child who feels forgotten.

Children know what it feels like to wonder whether someone notices them.

They know what it feels like to be left out of a group, frightened by something they cannot control, or uncertain whether an adult will keep a promise.

Some children are surrounded by loving people and still carry quiet fears.

Others may have learned much too early that adults sometimes leave, disappoint, or hurt people they were supposed to protect.

That is why we should handle the words "Good Shepherd" carefully.

Jesus is not simply the best version of every human authority figure a child has known.

He is unlike us in His complete goodness.

He never forgets one of His people because He became distracted.

He never uses His sheep for His own comfort.

He never runs because loving them became inconvenient.

He knows them, leads them, and gives Himself for them.

And when we fail Him, our hope is not that we can somehow become impressive enough sheep to deserve another chance.

Our hope is still the Shepherd.

Before teaching, it may help to sit quietly with Jesus' words:

"I know my sheep." John 10:14

Teachers carry their own fears, failures, questions, and weariness into the classroom too.

The Good Shepherd is not only the subject we explain to children.

He is our Shepherd.

We teach best when we remember that we are standing among the sheep, not above them.

A simple prayer might be:

"Father, thank You for sending Jesus, the Good Shepherd. Help me teach these children with the patience and care You have shown me. Keep me from adding things Your Word does not say, and help me make Jesus clear. Holy Spirit, use Your Word to help these children know that Jesus sees them, knows them, loves them, and gave His life to save sinners like us. Help us hear His truth and follow Him with trust. Amen."

TEACHER TAKEAWAY

John 10 is not mainly a lesson about sheep.

It is a revelation of the Shepherd.

Jesus knows His people personally, leads them faithfully, refuses to abandon them, and willingly gives His life to save them.

The Shepherd dies for the sheep.

Then He takes His life up again.

That is why children can trust Him.