Week 7: Jesus, Our Good Shepherd

Sheep of the Good Shepherd Identity: I am a sheep of the Good Shepherd. (Baa.) My Shepherd feeds me, guides me, and protects me with his name. I remain in his sheepfold, encircled by the faithful love and compassion of the Great I AM. I listen to the voice of my Shepherd who calls me by name and anoints me with his Spirit. I follow him to rescue his lost sheep and care for the needs of his flock.

Supplies:

- Popcorn (or homemade kettle corn from family lesson on the last page) for opening activity
- Music player
- Tissues for when the tears flow, music player, and family lesson

Optional Opening Activity as People Arrive: Serve popcorn or try making the kettle corn recipe from the family lesson below. What has ears but cannot hear? (Wait for it…) Corn! The Bible tells us that some people are like corn. They have ears yet do not hear the voice of the Lord because they don't want to follow him. But Jesus said, "*My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27, ESV).* Our popcorn kernels represent seeds of faith. When the fire of the Spirit ignites the seed of faith in those who have ears to hear, it explodes like popcorn. Just like our popcorn is coated in oil, the Spirit anoints us with oil so we can follow Jesus, our Good Shepherd, and do what he does. The love God pours into our hearts like sugar helps us love others as Jesus loves us. Like our kettle corn is seasoned with salt, the Holy Spirit gives us words that are *"seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6).*

Prayer: Holy Spirit, we invite you to come and lead us into a deeper revelation of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Worship: Play the song "Shepherd of My Soul" by Christy Nockels. (A link can be found on the worship playlist at the bottom of the Puzzle Piece 6 page at TillingMinistries.com.) As you listen, close your eyes and picture Jesus leading you through your present circumstances as your Shepherd. What is he saying and doing?

Remaining in the Word: Encourage people to have their Bible open as you read.

1. **Read Matthew 25:32-46 to discover how we love others as Jesus has loved us, his sheep.** *"But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. 32 All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. 36 I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.' 37 Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? 39 When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?' 40 And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!'*
   41 "Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. 42 For I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was

*thirsty, and you didn't give me a drink. **43** I was a stranger, and you didn't invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn't give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit me.'*
***44** Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?' **45** And he will answer, 'I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.' **46** And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life."*

Discuss: Isaiah 40:9-11 describes the return of the Good Shepherd as *"coming in power. He will rule with a powerful arm. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes" (v. 10).* How do Jesus' words in Matthew 25 about his return as the Shepherd of Israel and the church reveal how Jesus will rule with a powerful arm, bring reward, and take care of his sheep? How is God's judgment in this passage a reflection of his love for his sheep?

2. **Read James 2:1-4, 13-17 to understand why the way we treat the poor demonstrates our faith.**
*"My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others? **2** For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. **3** If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, 'You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor'—well, **4** doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?*
***13** There will be no mercy for those who have not shown mercy to others. But if you have been merciful, God will be merciful when he judges you. **14** What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? **15** Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, **16** and you say, 'Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well'—but then you don't give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? **17** So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.*

Discuss: Jesus said, *My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27, ESV).* How does showing kindness to the poor demonstrate we are Jesus' sheep? How does God's requirement of his sheep to show mercy in order to receive mercy reveal both God's love and his justice? How can we personally love the poor and needy in our church as Jesus, our Good Shepherd, has loved us?

Closing Prayer: Break into prayer partner pairs. Read through Psalm 23 and share with each other how you need Jesus to shepherd you through this season (rest for your soul, guidance, protection, greater anointing, peace over your past, etc.). Then invite the Shepherd to speak as you pray for each other.

Optional Handout for Families: Print off copies of the next page to hand out to parents in your group who would like to teach their children about having ears to hear the Good Shepherd.

Family Lesson – Sheep of the Good Shepherd

Learn about how Jesus' sheep hear his voice.

Bible Verse: John 10:27. Jesus said, *"My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27, ESV).*

Supplies: Large 4-quart soup pot/Dutch oven, popcorn bowl, oven mitts, ½ c. light olive oil (NOT extra virgin olive oil) or canola oil, ½ c. popcorn kernels, 3 T. sugar premeasured in a bowl, salt, M&Ms.
Set Up: Measure and set out all the supplies nearby before you begin – popcorn pops quickly! Have one person read aloud the explanations while another person makes the popcorn, if possible. (If you let the oil get too hot before adding the corn, you may end up demonstrating manna from heaven.)

Activity: What has ears but cannot hear? (Wait for it…) Corn! The Bible tells us that some people are like corn. They have ears yet do not hear the voice of the Lord because they don't want to follow him. But Jesus said, "*My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27, ESV).* Today, we're going to practice being sheep who follow Jesus by following directions to make sweet kettle corn.

1. **Set out popcorn kernels and all other supplies near the stove**. The Bible describes faith as a seed, just like popcorn kernels are seeds. Those who have faith in God desire to hear his voice.
2. **Pour the olive oil into the pot.** When God wanted to pour out his Spirit on someone in the Old Testament, they were often anointed with olive oil like we poured into our pan. Acts 2:33 says that God the Father gave Jesus *"the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us."*
3. **Put the pan on a burner. Turn the stove to just above medium heat and heat the oil for 1 minute.** The Bible describes the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a baptism of fire, so let's see what happens when we add our "seeds of faith" to hot oil.
4. **Pour in corn kernels and shake pan to distribute evenly. Sprinkle sugar evenly over top and cover. Set your popcorn bowl next to you.** Just like we added sweet sugar to our corn kernels, Romans 5:5 says that *"God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."*
5. **Put on oven mitts. When you hear the first kernel pop, turn the stove down to medium and hold the lid down while you gently move the pan back and forth across the burner. When the popping slows down to a few seconds between pops, remove from burner.** (Sometimes I let it continue popping for a few seconds off the burner before removing the lid.) IMPORTANT – make sure your kids are not close by when you take off the lid, in case a few hot kernels decide to pop out.
6. **Immediately pour popcorn into your popcorn bowl** (use a spoon to pull out any popcorn that's stuck to the side of the pan). **Sprinkle a layer of salt over popcorn, then carefully shake or stir to distribute. Repeat 4 or 5 times, depending on how salty you like it.** Jesus calls his followers the salt of the earth in Matthew 5:13 because we bring the flavor of God's goodness and holiness to others.
7. **Distribute the kettle corn to bowls and top with M&Ms.** When the fire of the Spirit ignites the seed of faith in those who have ears to hear, it explodes like popcorn. Just like our popcorn is coated in oil, the Spirit anoints us with oil so we can follow Jesus, our Good Shepherd, and do what he does. The love God pours into our hearts like sugar helps us love others as Jesus loves us. Like our kettle corn is seasoned with salt, the Holy Spirit gives us words that are *"seasoned with salt" (Colossians 4:6).* He gives the church a variety of gifts, like the colorful M&Ms, so we can point people to God.
8. **Give thanks to God for giving you ears to hear his voice and enjoy your kettle corn!**