

The Shepherd -Matthew 25:31-32; Ezekiel 34:17

INTRODUCTION

There is a great Shepherd and He longs to lead us home and offer us purpose even when we cannot hear it or see it. He loves us more than we know. His name is Jesus, He lived, died, and rose from the dead so we can have relationship with the Father again.

DISCUSSION

What has been your greatest time of doubt (in regards to God or His goodness) in your life?

EXPLANATION

Have you ever heard any good arguments against God?

What are they?

Have you ever been in a debate with someone who thought you were an idiot for your belief?

What happened?

Have you ever been able to share the hope you have with someone who had none?

What happened?

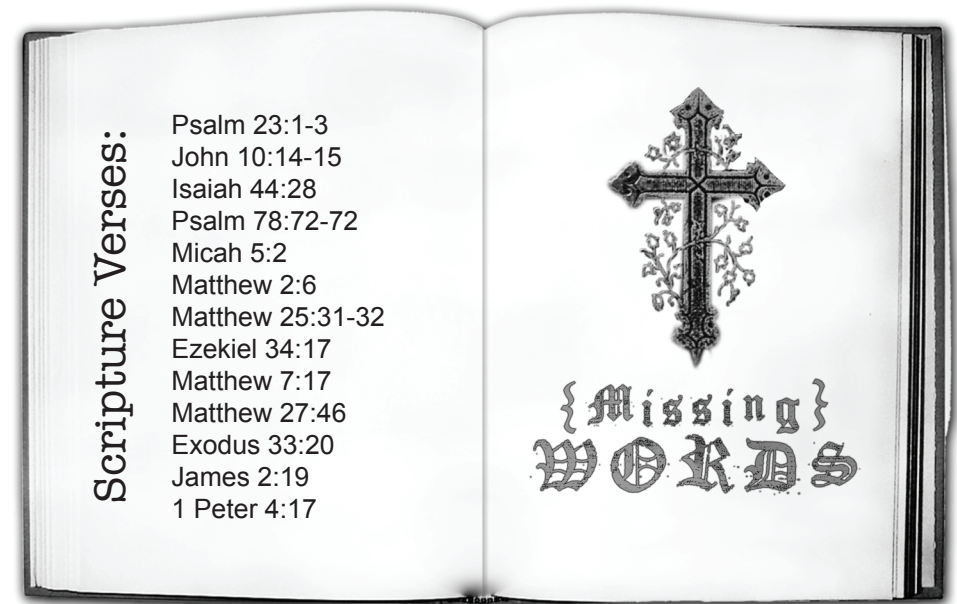
APPLICATION

For you, what is the greatest evidence for our Great Shepherd?

How do you think God's people could better live lives that proved not only God's existence, but His care?

When has someone helped you with doubts (what were they and what happened)?

What images does the term “Good Shepherd” evoke in your mind/heart?



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WEEK 6 Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins or other markings on the paper.

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Psalm 23:1-3 "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul."

One of the most fascinating ways Jesus used the Scriptures was to point toward His own identity as the One who would fulfill them. Some of His most powerful claims to be the Messiah were delivered in this way, and one of the most popular images of Jesus is the "good shepherd."

John 10:14-15 "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--and I lay down my life for the sheep."

Jesus was doing more than evoking a comforting image of Himself. He was also evoking an image of power, because shepherd imagery is often used to describe kings.

Matthew 25:31-32: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."

Ezekiel 34:17: "As for you, my flock, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will judge between one sheep and another, and between rams and goats."

Jesus, by using the metaphor of a shepherd sorting his sheep, is linking himself to God, who is called the "Shepherd of Israel."

Major struggles with faith fall into 3 categories.

1. Lack of evidence - more Proof

If God is there, why doesn't He make more noise? We must understand and trust that God, our Shepherd, has His reasons for the silence. God's goal for the human race is more than just getting people to admit that He exists.

Blaise Pascal said that *"there is enough light for those who want to see and enough darkness for those of a different persuasion."*

2) **God's products** - believers themselves. Why aren't we better people?
1 Pet 4:17 *For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God.* Frederick Buechner *"There is perhaps no better proof for the existence of God than the way year after year he survives the way his professional friends promote him."*

3) **Problem of pain** - Why is there awful suffering? Why doesn't God put an end to it?

Jesus introduced us to a suffering God of suffers with us...because He loves us, a shepherd who weeps over His sheep, not because He is powerless to act but allows much freedom to man.

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