



TEACH IT MIDDLE SCHOOL SESSION 7

1. Materials

For this session each student will need—

- the Session 7 Scripture sheet
- the student journal page for Session 7
- his or her own Bible, a pen, and a notebook

You'll also need—

- a whiteboard and markers
- a pack of colored pencils (at least two colors per student)
- sheep trivia

2. Session Intro

GOALS OF SESSION 7

As students experience this session, they will—

- discover that no one has more interest in their well-being than Jesus.
- see how they can experience abundant life when they pay attention to Jesus' voice.
- rearrange their lives to be in a better position to listen when Jesus speaks.

PRAYER

Once the group has gathered, ask the Lord to help them block out all the voices competing for their attention. Pray they'll be attentive to God as he speaks through his Word.

OPEN

Sheep Facts

Listed below are some basic facts about sheep. Reproduce these on small slips of paper, one for each student if possible. Divide the group into two teams. Have a student read his or her question for the other team. In Balderdash style, the student can either read the correct fact about sheep—or he or she can read the false option you've also supplied. The other team has to guess whether the information is true or false. (Optional: Make this a data-projection trivia game.)

1. An adult male sheep is called a: ram (false options: wether, studly, stallion).
2. The gestation (length of pregnancy) of a sheep is: 147 days (false options: four weeks, 184 days, nine months).
3. The difference between a sheep and a goat is that sheep: have oil glands between their toes (false options: say "baa," have udders, give wool, have horns).
4. Sheep have: rectangular pupils (false options: no pupils, round pupils, oval pupils).
5. The meat from sheep over two years old is called: mutton (false options: veal, carne, lamb).
6. The fine waviness in wool is called: crimp (false options: staple, curls, luster).
7. The pieces of lamb meat containing a rib bone are called: chops (false options: steak, roast, stew).
8. How many teeth do sheep have on the top front of the mouth? None: Sheep have a dental pad, as they are grass eaters. They have eight teeth on the bottom. (false options: eight, 32, 16).
9. The name of the first cloned sheep was: Dolly (false options: Molly, Polly, Holly).
10. The average life expectancy of a sheep is: eight years (false options: two years, 25 years, 50 years).

Transition into the study by sharing in your own words—

You may know that sheep are considered among the dumbest of all animals. They're also helpless, having no means of self-defense. And they're prone to wander—they'll wander right off a cliff if they're looking for something to eat. This is why they're totally dependent on a "good shepherd" who will defend, feed, and care for them.

Explain that Jesus talks about sheep and shepherding in the chapter they're about to study. To help them grasp Jesus' words, share the following facts about shepherds in Jesus' day.


- 1. Sometimes two journeying shepherds would bring their flocks together for the night. It was impossible for the shepherds to keep their sheep apart, so in the morning when it was time to depart, one of the shepherds would stand some distance from the herd and call out. His sheep, familiar with his voice, would run toward him, and soon his entire flock would be accounted for.**
- 2. Sheepfolds in the sheep farmer's fields were usually crude corrals made of stacked stones. To protect the sheep and keep them in the fold at night, the shepherd would often lie across the entrance to the sheepfold.**

3. Digging In

What's a Metaphor? (To Keep the Sheep In)

First off, you may want to answer that very question: What's a metaphor? Here's a simple explanation you can share with your group: A metaphor is a comparison between two things that are seemingly unrelated, e.g., "The world is a stage," or "I am the gate." A metaphor doesn't use the words *like* or *as*. (Comparisons that do use either of those words are called *similes*.)

Before you begin, ask your students what symbol they could use to mark the word *sheep*. (You might want to have a quick drawing contest on the whiteboard.) Once they've agreed on a symbol, ask them to read John 10:1-18 using their Scripture sheets. As they read, have students—

- 1. Use one color to mark every mention of sheep with the symbol we've agreed on.**
- 2. Use the same color to mark every mention of Jesus with a cross . Jesus does appear in the illustration about shepherds and sheep, though he isn't mentioned by name. Mark these descriptions of Jesus, too.**
- 3. Use a different color to mark every mention of thieves and robbers.**

When most have finished, have them look at what they've marked and tell you the various "characters" in the scene, including people and animals. Then ask how Jesus is described in the illustration. Record their observations in two columns on the whiteboard. There is space for your students to write this info on their journal pages.

The Characters	Jesus
-thief/robber (v. 1) -shepherd (v. 2) -sheep (v. 2) -watchman (v. 3) -stranger (v. 5) -hired hand (v. 12) -wolf (v. 12)	-He's the gate (v. 7). -He's the good shepherd (v. 11).

Now ask—

Who do you think the “thief” in John 10:10 represents?

If they have any guess, it will probably be “Satan,” since that’s the popular thinking. But if you look closely at the passage, there is nothing to indicate that the thief is actually Satan, even though the traits—steal, kill, destroy—describe things he does. Jesus is most likely further describing the thieves and robbers he has already spoken of in this passage.

What else can we learn about the thief/robber from what Jesus said?

Give them a few minutes to look at the passage and record some facts in the space provided on their journal pages. Then list their observations on the whiteboard.

- There’s more than one (v. 8).
- They don’t enter through the gate (v. 1).
- They climb in some other way (v. 1).
- Some of them came before Jesus (v. 8).
- They come only to steal, kill, and destroy (v. 10).

Based on these descriptions, who might the thieves be?

These descriptions don’t appear to refer to Satan, though he is a thief. You may want to keep the group guessing until after the next exercise.

4. Cross-Checking



More on Sheep and Shepherds

Explain that the Scripture passages they’ll look at next will shed more light on this sheep/shepherd business. They may even help them identify who the “thieves” are. Explain to your students that they’ll do this exercise as a personal retreat. Share—

- 1. Find places where you can get alone with God and read the Ezekiel passage noted on your journal pages. You’ll be doing the Cross-Checking exercise.**
- 2. You’ll need your Bibles, journal pages, and pens.**
- 3. After you read the Scripture, respond to the questions that follow.**

We’ve printed the exercise (with possible answers) below for your reference.

EZEKIEL 34:1-10, 15-16

What were these shepherds doing—or not doing?

- They were only taking care of themselves (v. 2).
- They were not taking care of the flock (v. 2).
- They were clothing themselves, not the flock (v. 3).
- They were not strengthening the weak (v. 4).
- They were not healing the sick (v. 4).
- They were not binding up the injured (v. 4).
- They were not bringing back the strays (v. 4).
- They were not searching for the lost (v. 4).
- They were treating the flock harshly (v. 4).
- In essence, they were not being shepherds at all! (v. 5).

How did God feel about the shepherds? What was he planning to do?

- He was against them (v. 10).
- He was holding them accountable for the scattered flock (v. 10).

- He was removing them from tending the flock (v. 10).
- He was going to rescue the flock from the shepherds' mouths (v. 10).
- He was planning to tend the sheep himself (v. 15).
- He was going to search for the lost, bind up the injured, and strengthen the weak himself (v. 16).

5. Taking It Inward

Perfect Gate, Perfect Shepherd

When most have finished, get the group back together. Discuss the Cross-Checking passage, asking—

How would you describe the spiritual leaders in Ezekiel's day?

They were corrupt, self-centered, selfish, lazy, and negligent.

Do you think these religious leaders had anything in common with the "thieves" in John 10? If so, what?

Neither had the best interests of the sheep in mind. The thieves in John 10 "steal and kill and destroy." The spiritual leaders in Ezekiel had the same effect on the sheep they were supposed to nurture. It should now be apparent that Jesus and Ezekiel are referring to corrupt, selfish spiritual leaders—including the false prophets who came for their own gain prior to Jesus' coming. Point out that many in Jesus' audience (the Pharisees) fit this description as well.

What are some things that can cause spiritual leaders to get off track—in Jesus' day and in ours?

- There's always pressure to grow in numbers; some people will use any method to grow.
- It's easy to seek people's praise rather than God's.
- Busyness: A busy spiritual leader doesn't take time to listen to God through his Word and prayer.
- Selfishness: A selfish person desires to exalt or elevate self at the expense of others.

What did God do to fix the problem?

The people (even the leaders) needed a shepherd who would do it right, so God sent a shepherd. Draw your students' attention to Ezekiel's prophecy that God was going to tend to the sheep himself. God's remedy was Jesus, who was and is the perfect shepherd.

Jesus described himself as the "gate" and the "good shepherd." Looking at John 10, what do you learn about Jesus as the gate?

Record the responses to this and the next question on the whiteboard.

What do you learn about Jesus as the good shepherd?

Jesus as the Gate	Jesus as the Good Shepherd
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Anyone who enters through him will be saved (v. 9). -Those who enter will go in/out and find pasture (v. 9). -He came to bring life to the full (v. 10). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -He lays down his life for his sheep (v. 11). -He knows his sheep, and his sheep know him (v. 14). -He has other sheep not of that pen (v. 16). -His sheep listen to his voice (v. 16).

How does Jesus' protection compare with that of all the other folks (such as the hired hand or the stranger)?

Jesus' protection is sacrificial. He laid down his life for the sheep. He protects them by becoming the gate into and out of the fold. He keeps the sheep in and the wolves out. Point out that the hired hand ("hired hands" today could be pastors, youth pastors, youth workers, and so on) is not the shepherd. Even the care of the best "hired hand" can't compare to that of the shepherd.

6. Digging Deeper

Be a Sheep!

Share that so far the group has focused on the shepherd. Now it's time for a quick look at the sheep. Remind your students that if they've put their faith in Jesus, they're sheep! Have them read John 10:19-30, marking every mention of sheep.

When most have finished, ask what they learned about Jesus' sheep. Record the main facts the students discussed on the whiteboard. Your board will look something like this:

Jesus' Sheep

- The Jews Jesus was talking to didn't believe and were not his sheep (v. 26).
- His sheep listen to his voice (v. 27).
- Jesus knows them, and they follow him (v. 27).
- Jesus gives them eternal life (v. 28).
- They will never perish (v. 28).
- No one (thief, robber, stranger, hired hand, or wolf) will snatch them from his hand or the Father's hand (v. 28-29).
- The Father gave them to him (v. 29).

7. Taking It Inward

Sheepyness Has Its Privileges

Once you have a fairly complete list on the whiteboard, share that the Greek word for *listen* in John 10:27 is *akouo*. This word means more than just hearing; it means "to pay attention to." Anyone can hear Jesus' voice, but only his sheep pay attention.

Have your students answer the questions below privately on their journal pages. Then discuss them as a group, but be sure students know they don't have to share if they're not comfortable doing so.

Think about everything you've learned about sheep today. What benefits do Jesus' sheep receive?

They receive eternal life, protection, an intimate relationship with Jesus.

Who or what is the shepherd of your life? In other words, where do you put your trust?

Your youth pastor or leader?

Other youth workers?

Friends?

Activities such as sports, music, computers?

Jesus?

Jesus has sacrificed the most to be your shepherd, but what are some ways you're not allowing him to be your shepherd?

What needs to change in your life so that you can pay more attention to Jesus' voice?

8. Wrapping It Up

Sheep Ears

Make sure to offer an opportunity for students to respond to Jesus' voice before wrapping up the session. Perhaps there's someone who has never become a sheep. You could close the session by reading Hebrews 3:7-8: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...." The time is now to hear Jesus' voice and respond. Give students a chance to respond by completing this sentence under Wrapping It Up on their journal pages:

Jesus, you laid down your life for me; you promised me a full life; you are calling me with your voice. Here's what I'd like to do to be your sheep: