

# Earth care shepherds — Christian ed @ home

Adapted from an article by JOELLE BRUMMIT-YALE in the Presbyterian Outlook



**Scripture:** Psalm 23

**Optional Materials:** Children's Bible, Psalm 23 by Richard Jesse Watson (book)

Earth care theology is an important aspect of many Presbyterian congregations. Even if we're not worshipping together in person or aren't able to engage in many of the group earth care activities we've done in the past, it's important that we continue to talk about God's love for all of creation, especially with our youngest disciples. Using Psalm 23 as a springboard, your family will have the opportunity to explore your relationship with nature as a means for honoring and connecting with God.

## Introduce

- Begin the time with your children by asking them to imagine that your family is preparing to go on a hike in a new location. What would you need to take with you? How would you prepare to make this hike an enjoyable experience for everyone? You may want to make sure you have proper attire so that you're comfortable. You may want to carry snacks and water for refreshment and "fuel." You may want to take along a map or field guides to remain on the right path and to understand all of the plants and animals around you. And you may even want to take along some supplies to keep you safe, like sunscreen and bug spray.
- Share with your children that it's important to not only make sure that the humans have a great experience but also to ensure that the natural space we move through is unharmed. Every plant, animal and body of water is part of God's creation. As such, God loves it and wants it to be well.

**Prepare**

Prepare to read aloud Psalm 23. Because the language in this psalm is fairly child-friendly, your children will likely be able to understand the original text. There are wonderful retellings of it in many children's Bibles. There is also a beautiful picture book of the text named Psalm 23 by Richard Jesse Watson that includes vivid illustrations of the psalm's main images.

- Share with your children that today's Bible story is actually a poem/song. It is an ancient piece reminding the people of God to trust in God. It would have been recited or sung during worship services.
- Encourage your children to listen for what God does to guide and care for the people. Note that God is presented as a shepherd in the text.
- Younger children may not easily be able to recognize the connection, so you may want to ask them to pay attention to what the shepherd does in the story. Later you can connect the idea of the shepherd to God.

**Read**

Read aloud Psalm 23.

**Wonder**

After reading, ask your children to share what they noticed God/the shepherd doing in the psalm. God guides the people like a shepherd guides his sheep. God leads them to comfortable pastures to lay down in and to graze. God make sure they have food and water. God keeps them safe even in the "darkest valley."

- Ask your children how it makes them feel to know that God does all these things for the "sheep." You may even want to share your own reflections on the subject.
- Next, talk about how humans can respond to the gift of God's love and care. Note that when someone gives us something that is meaningful to us, we often say "thank you," or we do something to show that person we are grateful. We respond with our gratitude. Explain that we can do the same for God. We can show that we are grateful for God shepherding us through our lives by caring for the very setting of the psalm we read — the natural environment.



## Do

Because each family has a different approach to earth care, you can tailor the final part of the lesson to your household. Here are a few approaches you might choose from:

- Create a list of all of the ways your family works to care for and preserve God's natural creation. You may even want to consider adding a new action or two to the list. Have each family member sign their name at the bottom of the list. Display it somewhere in your home as a reminder of your commitment. Revisit it from time to time to evaluate and refine the list.
- Plan and go on a "noticing" expedition in nature. Take a walk or a hike somewhere where your children will be able to see a diverse ecosystem functioning. As you walk, encourage your children to notice what's around them. Have them look up and down as well as left and right. Pause from time to time to appreciate what they see and to wonder about it.
- Learn something new about solutions to climate change. This is a great activity for families already highly engaged in earth care. One resource I've found especially helpful is Project Drawdown ([www.drawdown.org](http://www.drawdown.org)). It's a nonprofit organization that focuses on actions we can take that will eventually cause greenhouse gas emissions to decline. You can explore actions your family, congregation and/or community is already taking to see their impact, as well as learning about solutions you may not have heard of before.



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