

# God Is Love

## Lesson Focus

God expresses everywhere in our lives as love.

## Affirmation

God is love and love is who I am.

## Bible Scripture

“God is love. Those who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.”—1 John 4:16b

## Story

David and the Sheep (23rd Psalm)

## Music Possibilities

“A Big Enough God,” *Unite With Me in Song* CD #11

“The Gospel in One Word,” *Unite With Me in Song* CD #14,

“God Is!,” *God Is! Songs of Celebration and Reflection* CD #2, Richard Mekdeci

“God Is Loving Me Right Now,” *What a Wonderful World!* CD #4

“God Takes Care of Me,” *What a Wonderful World!* CD #18

“Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star,” *What a Wonderful World!* CD #1

## For the Teacher

The 23rd Psalm is found in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and is a song attributed to David expressing *actions* that shepherds take for their sheep that show the love they have for those in their care. In drawing a parallel with God’s care through us, we can see specific *actions* in our world that help us to know that God as love is not abstract but very discernible in our lives.

## Supplies and Preparations Chart

<u>Lesson Part</u>	<u>Supplies</u>	<u>Preparation</u>
<b>Pre-Session</b>	Nametags, markers, Helper Cards (see Appendix), art supplies, puzzles, or simple activities related to lesson	Set out supplies.
<b>Opening Activity: God Is Like ... game</b>	Deep opaque cloth bag or paper bag Various common objects such as mirror, ball, crayon, gift box, eraser, tissue, little book, toy car, etc.	Place objects in bag.
<b>Story: David and the Sheep</b>	Beach ball	
<b>Exploration Activity #1: Detective Corner: I Spy God ... mural</b> (Ongoing throughout unit.)	Mural paper or poster board, approx. 4' x 6' Optional: tri-fold foam or corrugated display board Crayons or markers	Write “I Spy God ...” at top of mural. Attach mural to wall or bulletin board. Have mural up for entire unit.

<u>Lesson Part</u>	<u>Supplies</u>	<u>Preparation</u>
<b>Exploration Activity #3: 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm diorama</b>	Play-Doh™ or playdough recipe in Appendix, assorted colors Heavy cardboard or wood base, approx. 2' x 2' Twigs and other natural objects for landscape Tools for shaping and marking Play-Doh™, such as plastic knives and forks, combs, craft sticks, twigs, etc. Aluminum foil or other shiny surface	Set out supplies.

## Pre-Session

### Supplies

Nametags, markers, Helper Cards (see Appendix), art supplies, puzzles, or simple activities related to lesson

### Prepare Ahead

Set out supplies.

Use the time before the opening circle begins to create a sense of community and spiritual family:

- Welcome children.
- Make nametags.
- Invite children to choose Helper Cards for the day. (See Appendix.)
- Encourage children to connect and converse by using simple art supplies, puzzle activities, building blocks, etc., to establish an easy environment for conversation and connection.

## Opening Circle

### Welcome/Introductions/Announcements

- Gather the children into a group circle.
- Invite them to take a slow, deep breath and then release it. Ask them to look around the circle to see who is there. If there is a guest, welcome them to the circle.
- Invite them to take another slow, deep breath, release and then gently close their eyes.
- Say a simple prayer, such as, “We are grateful for this opportunity to be together today. Amen;” or one of your choice. (Invite the children to join hands if you wish.)
- Going around the circle, invite children to say their name and share with the group someone or something they love. Example: *I am Sally and I love my dog.* Encourage everyone to use an example that has not been used yet. After everyone has had a time to share, invite them to say together: “I am grateful for God’s love in my life.”
- Lead the children in singing any of the songs in Music Possibilities, if desired. You might choose to add movements to the words to focus and release energy.
- Optional: Invite children to repeat affirmation and/or Bible scripture.

## Offering

Invite the children to hold their offering (or a thought of love) in their hands, and repeat an offering blessing together, such as, “Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive. Amen;” or “We have plenty to spare and plenty to share and we are grateful. Amen;” or one of your choice. Collect the offering in the offering basket or box.

## Opening Activity

### God Is Like ... game

#### Supplies

Deep opaque cloth bag or paper bag  
Various common objects such as mirror,  
ball, crayon, gift box, eraser, tissue,  
little book, toy car, etc.

#### Prepare Ahead

Place objects in bag.

#### Say:

Who can tell us what God is like? *(Allow time for responses.)*

We can say God is like so many things, because God is everywhere in our world, as our world. Today we will take turns going around our circle and reaching into this bag to pull out a mystery object. Then we will think of interesting ways the object is like God. For instance, if I were to pull out a yellow crayon, I might say, “God is like a yellow crayon because God is the yellow in the sun,” or “God is like the yellow crayon because God is always drawing things to create.” You can be as imaginative as you like!

I will begin, and then we will take turns as I pass the bag to my left. *(Proceed as indicated. After the activity is complete, continue speaking as below.)*

We see that God is in everything. One of the easiest ways to recognize God’s presence is to look and see how and where love appears.

Today we are going to read a story about how God is like a shepherd who loves and cares for sheep.

#### Tip

The script in “Say:” throughout the lesson is suggested only. Feel free to use your own words while maintaining Unity theology.

# Bible Story:

## Psalm 23—A Song by David

(adapted from New Living Translation)

Read the following story aloud, or invite experienced readers to take turns reading it. To find pictures of shepherds and sheep to use in illustrating the story, visit [Google Images](#). Before printing any illustrations, please check for copyright information.

### Say:

David is a young boy who lives in the city but every summer he spends one whole month on his grandfather's ranch. Living on the ranch is much different than living in the city. In the city, David walks to school and his best friend lives on the same street three houses away. At his grandfather's ranch, the closest neighbor lives two miles away and kids ride the bus to go to school in town.

David loves being with his grandfather. He loves riding with his grandpa in the old blue pickup, helping with the horses, and at bedtime, seeing hundreds of stars in the really dark night sky. Most of all, though, David loves taking care of the sheep. His grandfather has lots of sheep.

When he was very small, David met the shepherds who live with the sheep. He learned that when sheep live in wide open spaces with no fences, they need people to take care of them. A shepherd is someone who looks after the sheep and cares for the dogs that help the shepherds guide and protect the lambs, ewes and rams.

When David was seven, his grandfather took him to live with the shepherds for a whole week. He learned how to lead the sheep to green meadows where there was lots of green grass. He learned how to identify the poisonous plants that were not to be eaten. He made sure that the sheep didn't swallow anything that could get stuck in their throats.

David was taught how to lead the sheep to calm water because if the water was too deep or was flowing too fast, the sheep could fall in and their woolly bodies would get so wet that they wouldn't be able to get back out.

Now that David is older, he listens for the guard dogs that warn the shepherds if there are any coyotes, wolves or mountain lions close by. He knows about the narrow places where sheep can get stuck and left behind, or the high places where a lamb might stumble and fall off.

### Tip

If time allows, provide experienced readers the opportunity to read the story to themselves ahead of time.

*continued*

David is able to talk to the border collies so they will guide the sheep in the direction he wants them to go. He knows how to look for any sheep that might be limping so he can clean the stones from their hooves. He helps lead the sheep to quiet, protected places where they can sleep safely.

David loves the sheep. In his care, they are safe and healthy.

**For older children continue:**

A long time ago, there was a shepherd in the Bible named David. He wrote a song telling how God is like a shepherd and people like sheep. See if you can hear what David says about the shepherd.

God, you are my shepherd, giving me everything I need. You let me rest in green meadows; you lead me beside peaceful streams. You renew my strength.

You guide me along right paths, bringing honor to your name. Even when I walk through the dark valley of death, I will not be afraid, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies. You welcome me as a guest, anointing my head with oil. My cup overflows with blessings. Surely your goodness and unfailing love will be with me all the days of my life, and I will live in your house forever.

## Discussion

All questions need not be asked. Several children may answer each question. When making “I wonder” statements, be sure to wait for responses. You may prompt with, “Do you have any ideas?” There are no right or wrong answers. Continue as long as children’s interest is maintained.

Invite the children, depending on their ages and abilities, to either roll, pass or lightly toss a beach ball around the circle as they share their answers to the following questions. Only the person holding the ball can speak. After sharing his or her answer, they will pass the ball to the next person who would like to share.

## Supplies

Beach ball

## Ask:

- Why do you suppose David calls God a shepherd?
- How does a shepherd show caring to his sheep?
- Have you ever had a pet?
- What kinds of things do you need to do to take care of an animal?
- Do you have a best friend? What is your best friend's name? How do you show your best friend you care for him or her?
- How do we take care of plants? Have you ever helped take care of a garden?
- Have you ever helped with chores at home?
- What helper cards did you choose today? How does the job you chose show you care for your friends here?
- When we care for friends, pets, brothers and sisters or help our parents at home, how are we being like the shepherd in the 23rd Psalm?

## For alternate story

If you have access to the Internet, show the class this short 3-minute video that tells the story of Bella and Tara, a dog and elephant who are inseparable friends.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=59v3PmKp-5Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=59v3PmKp-5Y)

**Say:** Let's look at a story about two good friends who cared for each other.

If using the video, after watching, follow up with these questions:

- What happened in the story?
- How do you know that Tara and Bella are friends?
- What did the elephant do that showed how much she cared for the dog?

# Creative Explorations

Choose one or more of the Exploration Activities that are appropriate for your group today.

## Exploration Activity #1 (Ongoing throughout unit.)

### Detective Corner: I Spy God ... mural

#### Supplies

Mural paper or posterboard (approx. 4' x 6')  
Crayons or markers

#### Prepare Ahead

Write "I Spy God ..." at top of mural. Attach mural to wall or bulletin board. If you don't have permanent space, use a tri-fold foam or corrugated display board used for science projects. It is easy to fold up, store and then set up for the entire unit.

- Invite the children to look around the room and notice everything that God is a part of.
- They may then write or draw pictures of those items on the mural.

## Exploration Activity #2

### Tag, You're Love! game

- Designate one person as "the shepherd." This person is the tagger.
- Everyone else will be sheep.
- When you say "go," "the shepherd" attempts to tag the sheep while they move safely around a designated area in the room, attempting to avoid being tagged.
- If the shepherd tags someone, that person freezes.
- The tagged person must think of something or someone where they can see God's love and say, "I see God's love in \_\_\_\_\_."
- The tagged person remains frozen until he or she can think of an example. After they say it, they unfreeze, and the game resumes.
- Once the shepherd has done this in 5 rounds with 5 people, another person becomes the shepherd.

## Exploration Activity #3

### 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm diorama

#### Supplies

Play-Doh™ or playdough recipe in Appendix, assorted colors  
Heavy cardboard or wood base, approx. 2' x 2'  
Twigs and other natural objects for landscape  
Tools for shaping and marking Play-Doh™, such as plastic knives and forks, combs, craft sticks, twigs, etc.  
Aluminum foil or other shiny surface

#### Prepare Ahead

Set out supplies.

Use the materials to create a group 3-dimensional scene that includes the objects described in the version of 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm they heard. Each person may add what they wish.

### **Alternative**

Create a group 3-dimensional scene with symbols representing their image of God. Each person may add what they wish.

## **Closing Circle**

Gather all the children together into a closing circle.

Invite the children to do any of the following:

- Share any creations from today.
- Share one thing they learned today.
- Say what they might do differently this week as a result of what they learned today.
- Repeat today's affirmation.
- Speak today's Bible scripture.
- Sing one of the songs from today.
- Say the Affirmative Prayer for Protection or the Prayer of Faith (see Appendix).

Close with a prayer of gratitude for something in the day or something in their lives: "I am grateful for \_\_\_\_\_." Amen.

### **Tip**

Consider selecting one song and using it for several Sundays so children may learn it.