

# GIMME GOD!

Church Service Packet

Protector

John 10:1-18

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Welcome to the Gimme God! Worship Service. We have tried to make these resources as easy to use as possible. The sermons and prayers have been formatted with plenty of space to write in between the lines. Please feel free to make changes that will be most appropriate for your church.

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# Sermon

The early American Indians had a unique practice of training young braves. Young boys were very sheltered as they grew up, never being allowed to stray far from home. As the young boys approached their teenage years, they learned hunting, scouting, and fishing skills. Then, on the night of his thirteenth birthday, each was put to one final test. He was placed in a dense forest to spend the entire night alone.

Until then, he had never been away from the security of the family and the tribe. But on the night of the test, he was blindfolded and taken several miles away. When he took off the blindfold, he found himself in the middle of thick woods, with trees so dense that the moonlight couldn't penetrate. It was so dark he couldn't see his own hand in front of his face.

Those night hours were like torture. Every time a twig snapped, he imagined a wild animal ready to pounce. In the total darkness, every sound became a fright. Sleep was impossible. After what seemed like an eternity, dawn broke and the first rays of sunlight pierced the interior of the forest. And as he looked around, the boy saw flowers, trees, and the outline of the path. Then, to his utter astonishment, he saw the figure of a man standing just a few feet away, armed with a bow and arrow. It was his father, and then the boy would realize that he had been there all night long.

## **Fierce Protector**

Reading the Scripture from John 10 this week, one of the first things that comes to mind is that

God is a fierce protector. Like the father in the forest who protects his son all night, God is out to make sure that no harm comes to us. In John 10, Jesus talks about being the one who protects the sheep when the wolf comes in to destroy. Contrasting Himself with the hired hand—who does not own the sheep nor care for the sheep—Jesus says that He has not come to kill and destroy, but to give, preserve, and protect life. He is the Good shepherd. He is the protector.

It's easy for us to lose sight of this sometimes, because we have certain preconceived ideas of what God should be protecting us from. And often, in this life, we may feel like we're not protected from very much. When we get laid off or fired, when we lose a loved one to an illness, when our finances spiral down into bankruptcy, when a child is in distress, we often wonder . . . where is God? Where is my protector? David, the psalmist, wondered this *a lot*. The opening verse of Psalm 10 says, "Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"

So, if the Lord is such a Good Shepherd, if He is such a fierce protector, why do we wonder where He's at? What, exactly, is He protecting us from?

Let me suggest today that everything God is doing is in an effort to protect what is *most* important—our eternal life. This doesn't mean that God wants us to have a rough time while we're on this Earth, but it *does* mean that, if necessary, He will always choose to preserve and protect our ultimate life.

Jesus talked about this very contrast several times. Once, He said, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? What can a man give in exchange for his soul?"<sup>1</sup> Else-

where, when He was talking about the effect of sin in our lives, He said that—if it came down to a choice—it would be better for us to have a hand cut off or an eye gouged out than it would be to lose our eternal life.<sup>2</sup>

### **Ultimate—Not Necessarily Temporary—Protection**

You see, God loves to fill up our lives with good gifts, but He is not going to give us *anything* that would jeopardize our future with Him. This is one of the ironies of God's protection . . . that sometimes He provides ultimate and permanent protection by *not* providing the temporary protection we want.

Do you remember the story of Jessica McClure?

On October 14, 1987, 18-month old Jessica McClure fell down a water well in Midland, Texas. For the next 55 hours, nearly the entire world watched and waited to see what would happen to the little girl. After digging a parallel shaft down next to the mine and digging a tunnel over to where she was, rescuers were dismayed to find that—though they were pulling with all their might—she wouldn't budge. Jessica was wedged so tightly in the well that they couldn't move her.

The first rescue attempt failed. When the paramedic came back to the surface to talk to the doctor, it was obvious that he was a little squeamish about hurting her. But the doctor was adamant that Jessica was out of time. The doctor told him to do whatever it took to get her out of the well. She said, "You may have to break her legs, her hips, her feet. But as long as her head, neck, and

back are intact, we can fix the rest. This is it. Do whatever it takes. Break her bones if you have to, but *get her out.*” And perhaps you remember the rest of the story. The second rescue attempt was successful and Jessica made it out of the well alive.

Now, we wouldn’t normally go around telling people it’s okay to intentionally break children’s bones. Certainly, we wouldn’t say it’s a *loving* thing to do. But in such a situation as this, it was *definitely* the loving thing to do, because a broken leg or a hip out of its socket is highly preferable to a dead baby!

So, what is God to do, since the world has fallen down a well? When Adam and Eve decided to bring sin, suffering, and death into this world . . . that certainly wasn’t God’s plan. That’s not what God wanted. And that’s *still* not what God wants. He doesn’t want us to suffer, but He is *most* interested in making sure we don’t miss out on what’s to come. In all His dealings in this world, He is working to get us out of the well. So, when it seems like God’s not protecting us, it may be that God is actually working for our *ultimate* protection.

## **God Is Into Freedom**

The wonderful thing is that God knows us intimately. He not only knows our names, He knows our hearts, and He knows just what we need. He knows just what to do to work in and through the suffering that sin has caused in order to preserve our freedom. This is the second component we

see in the reading from John 10. When Jesus says, “I am the gate,” He goes on to say, “Whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture.”

God is into freedom. And we are never more free than when we are in His fold. We usually think it’s the opposite, don’t we? When we are living life as we want, doing what we want without giving a thought to God, that’s when we think we are “free.” And somehow, we have this idea that coming to God is going to “restrict” our freedom. Now, maybe we’re willing to do that because heaven and eternal life sound pretty good, but there’s this misconception that the further we are from God, the freer we are, and the closer we are to Him, the more freedom we must give up.

It’s just the opposite! When Christ is our gate, we will find that we are free to come in and go out. The closer we come to God, the freer we are. What we don’t realize is that we spend most of our lives in bondage. Sin is slavery, and God is in the freedom business. He is always working to break the chains of sin that bind us and bring us out into a true, free life.

The image of the door is used again in Revelation 3:8. Jesus says, “See, I have placed before you an *open* door that no one can shut.” When God says He is a gate, when He pictures Himself as a door, it is an *open* door. God doesn’t hem us in and enslave us. We have freedom to come and freedom to go.

## **The Shepherd Is the Gate**

This leads us into the third important part of the passage in John 10, because the gate area in the

sheepfolds of Israel was also open. There was no wooden gate. The shepherd *was* the gate. At night, instead of closing the sheep in with a gate that locked, the shepherd laid down across the entrance to the sheepfold. The shepherd *became* the gate, and that meant that he was aware of everything. Nothing could come into the fold to hurt the sheep without first having to go through him.

As the shepherd literally laid down to protect the sheep, so Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd; I lay down my life for the sheep.” And in His ultimate act of protection, Jesus laid down His own life for us. This is how we know—in those times when we feel like we’re *not* being protected—that God hasn’t abandoned us out of selfish neglect. How do we know? Because we have seen Him sacrifice Himself, lay down His own life, for us. He didn’t have to do this. He had a choice. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus could have decided that He wasn’t going to go through with it, that He was going to protect Himself instead . . . but He didn’t do that. Instead, He went to the cross and sacrificed Himself for our protection.

One of the most powerful messages of the cross is, “I would rather die than have to live forever without you.” That’s powerful, isn’t it? There, we see God stretching out His arms and saying, “I am going to give up *My* temporary protection for *your* ultimate protection. If I must choose between losing you forever or sacrificing Myself, I choose you.”

And, for us, the death of Jesus *is* the gate. It’s the gate to a new understanding of God, because in the death of Jesus, we see that we have nothing to fear from God. There isn’t anything we can



do to make Him act in a vengeful or unforgiving way. On the contrary, even when He is being most abused, God says, “I forgive you.” God’s love is *always* greater than our hate.

And the death of Jesus is also the gate to a new understanding of sin. Because at the cross, we see that *sin*—not God—causes death and destruction. And we see that *sin*—not God—brings hurt and suffering. And we see that God is always working to relieve suffering, even to the very point of laying down His own life.

Today, Jesus says to us: I AM the gate, I AM the open door, I AM the Good Shepherd, and I AM freedom. We have a God who will stop at nothing to protect us. And, just like those young American Indian braves, when we feel like we’ve been left all alone in a place so dark, it is my prayer that it won’t be long before the Light of the World begins to pierce that darkness, and we will see that our heavenly Father, fierce protector, has been right beside us all the time.

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1. Mark 8:36-37, NIV

2. See Matthew 5:29-30

# Prayers, Etc.

## **INVOCATION**

Gracious God, You are the Shepherd and we are the sheep. You lay down Your life for Your sheep. You protect us from ultimate danger. Come now and fill this place with Your presence, our Guardian, Guide, and Stay. Amen.

## **CALL TO WORSHIP**

We serve a God who lays down His life for us. We serve a God who protects us from the sin that wants to destroy us. We serve a God who will lead us out into fresh, green pastures. Come and let us worship Him, our Fierce Protector!

## **PARTICIPATORY PRAYER** *(may be spoken together with the congregation)*

God, You are the Good Shepherd. You lay down Your life for Your creatures. But often, we have thought of You as getting revenge on those who reject You. You are the open door. In You, we find true freedom. But often, we have run away from You in order to remain in the slavery of our sin. You are our Protector. Everything You do is for our benefit. But often, we have not recognized Your presence, and we have felt neglected and abandoned. Help us to see You as You really are, and help us to know that You love us just as we are. Amen.

### **ASSURANCE OF GOD'S GRACE** *(may be spoken by pastor after the Participatory Prayer)*

God see us, knows us, and tenderly cares for us. He is not angry with us, but He is moved by our condition. You are precious and valuable to Him, and You can know that He has forgiven you.

Amen.

### **CALL FOR THE OFFERING**

As the Good Shepherd, God gives everything He has for His sheep. He even lays down His own life for our protection. As He has given His all, may we be inspired to give freely this morning. Today's offering is for . . . *(omit if your offering is not specially designated)*

### **OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Lord, Your sacrificial giving humbles and amazes us. Teach us how to give as You do. Thank You for the opportunities You provide for us to practice giving to others. Amen.

## CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

Great Shepherd, You provide for everything we need. You lead us to peace and rest. Your presence is refreshing. You restore our spirits. You know us intimately and call us by name. You're a good and loving God.

Lord, You are the Gate. You are the way, the truth, and the life. You have provided the means of our salvation. You have given us a way out of our fear, shame, and guilt. You are merciful and patient, tenderly leading us on Your paths of righteousness.

Thank You, Father, for being an open door. Thank You for giving us the freedom to come in and go out. Your love respects our freedom, even when we make choices You don't like, choices that cause You pain.

You have a tender and compassionate heart that hears all our cries—the audible ones and the inaudible ones. Hear us this morning as we bring our concerns to You. **[insert the specific needs of your congregation here]**

Thank You for carrying us gently and treating us with kindness. Help us to become ever more like You in the way we treat others. Amen.

## BENEDICTION

And now, may the Good Shepherd guide you to green pastures, lead you beside still waters, and restore your soul for His name's sake. Amen.

# Children's Story

*Method: Story/Conversation*

*Purpose: To help children understand how God protects us.*

Good morning, boys and girls. Today, we're going to talk about how God protects us. The Bible says that God protects us, right? He is our great defender and protector, so we can always feel safe because we know that Jesus is taking care of us.

But sometimes, God's protection doesn't come in the way we think it should. Let's think about the story of Joseph. Do you remember the story of Joseph?

He was out with his brothers one day, and do you remember what his brothers did to him? *[Allow children time to answer.]* Yeah, they threw him down in a big pit. Some of his brothers wanted to kill him, but in the end, they sold him as a slave, and he was taken to Egypt.

That wasn't very nice, was it? But Joseph believed that God was with him, even if he was going to be a slave in Egypt. Do you remember what happened to Joseph next? He was working in the house of Potiphar, who was like the Vice President of the country.

What happened to Joseph there? *[Allow children time to answer.]* Potiphar's wife said Joseph had tried to do something awful to her, but she was lying. And Joseph ended up in prison.

That's terrible, isn't it? To end up in prison for something you *didn't* do? Poor Joseph. He was in prison for a long time, but do you remember what happened next? *[Allow children time to answer.]*

A big famine was headed toward Egypt, and Joseph was in just the right place to be promoted by the king to be second-in-command. Joseph knew just what to do to prepare for the years where there was going to be no food. He had a lot of people working to store up food, and because of everything Joseph did, the Egyptians were saved, and Joseph's own people—the Israelites—were also saved.

Now, here's the important part, boys and girls.

Did God save Joseph from being sold as a slave? Did God protect Joseph from his brothers?

*No.*

And did God save Joseph from going to prison? Did God protect Joseph from Potiphar's wife? *No.*

But did God save the Egyptians and the Israelites? Did God protect them from the famine? *Yes.* Even *Joseph* was saved from the famine because he was in the right place at the right time. Because he had been sold into slavery and cast into prison, he was available at just the right moment to be put in charge over Egypt.

So, God provided *ultimate* protection for Joseph, the Egyptians, and the Israelites by *not* protecting Joseph from the bad things that happened to him before. Joseph could have complained that God didn't protect him from being sold into slavery and thrown into prison, but he didn't. He knew that God was looking out for him, even if things seemed bad.

So, boys and girls, I want you to remember that God will do whatever it takes to save us, and sometimes that means *not* saving us from something that looks bad. And just when it seems like God isn't protecting us at all, let's choose to trust Him and remember that He is really working things out for our *ultimate* protection.

# Responsive Reading

Lord, You are the Good Shepherd.  
**You tenderly care for Your sheep.**

You have claimed us as Your sheep.  
**You treat us with never-failing compassion.**

You call us by name,  
**and we are Yours.**

Lord, You are the Gate.  
**You laid down Your life to protect us.**

You invite us to enter through You,  
**and You give us freedom to come in and go out.**

You are an ever-open door.  
**Your heart is never closed to us. May our hearts be open to You!**

# Hymn

## You Call Us to Worship

sung to the tune of *We Gather Together* (Kremser)

You call us to worship to give us Your blessing.  
Your presence alone can refresh us again.  
Our worries are soothed by Your gentle caressing.  
Revive our weary souls; fill us from within.

Beside us, You guide us, our way is not lonely.  
You are the Provider in famine or feast.  
Whenever we falter, we look to You only,  
And You meet every need, from greatest to least.

You're worthy of glory, of praise You're deserving.  
Your beauty outshines all the stars that we see.  
Help us to be like You through loving and serving,  
And from the clutch of greed, O Lord, make us free!

*Words by Kelley Lorencin*

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# Song Suggestions

## Hymns

Loving Shepherd of Thy sheep (Orientis Partibus)

*Words and music by Jane E. Leeson and French Melody*

O Shepherd divine (My Shepherd)

*Words and music by Herbert Work*

The Lord's my Shepherd (Brother James' Air)

*Words and music by Scottish Psalter and J.L. Macbeth Bain*

## Praise Songs

I will enter in

*Words and music by Bill Batstone*

© 1997 Meadowgreen Music

I'm forever grateful

*Words and music by Mark Altrogge*

© 1986 People Of Destiny International

My refuge

*Words and music by Jeff Deyo, Jason Halbert, and Otto Price*

© 1999 Sonicflood Music

My tribute

*Words and music by Andrae Crouch*

© 1971 Bud John Songs, Inc.

Obsession

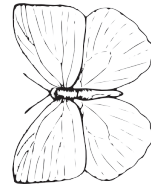
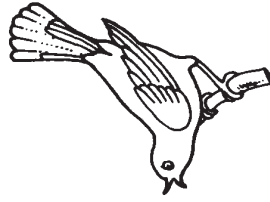
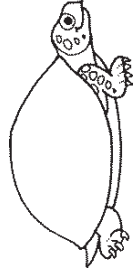
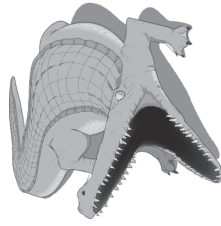
*Words and music by Martin Smith*

© 1995 Curious? Music

God knows how to keep us safe.

Look at the pictures below.

Circle the animals we need protection from.



# Wee Worship

ages 3 to 6

John 10:1-18



I Am the Gate

God protects us like parents protect their children.

Connect the dots.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7



Jesus lays down His life for the sheep.

Jesus saves the sheep from the wolves.

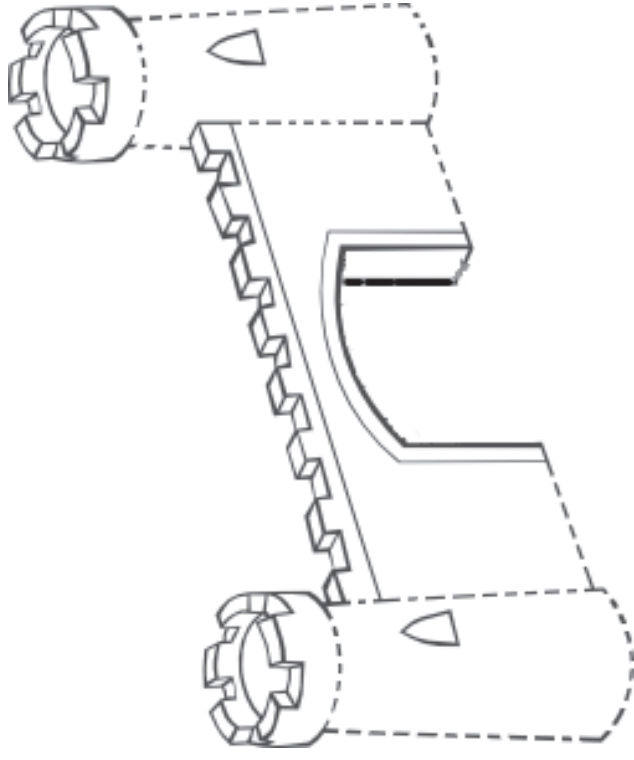
Circle the hidden wolves in the picture below.



Jesus said He was like a gate.

Is the gate to heaven open or closed?

Circle the correct answer, then trace the gate.




open

closed



Jesus protects His sheep.

Find the correct path through the maze below. Put the letters in order in the blanks to complete the Bible text.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | G | O | N | H | E | N | J | E |
| R   | A | O | W | V | L | D | K | L |
| H   |   | D | P | K | H | A | M | I |
| E   | D | V | S | E | V | N | Y | L |
| K   | R | H | E | R | N | E | A |   |
| V   | D | S | E | H | L | O | N |   |
| S   | L | W | P | H | E | R | D | L |
| R   | H | O |   | L | V | E | O | D |
| S   | A | E | W | N | R | E | S |   |

Jesus said, "I am the \_\_\_\_\_"

\_\_\_\_\_.

I \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ for the sheep."

# iWorship

ages 7 to 12

John 10:1-18

I Am the Gate

Jesus said, "I am the gate."

Find and circle five synonyms for "gate."

opening door gateway entry access

O P E N I N G C E N

F M B L K D B Y N X

K A D O O R D V T O

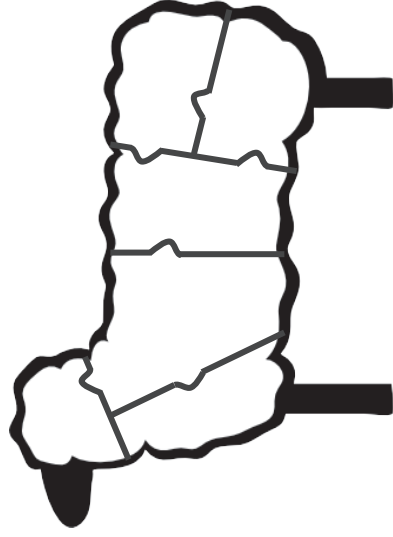
F Z P Q S X Y L R R

L P G A T E W A Y N

A C C E S S E C W M

The sheep need a good shepherd.

Fit the puzzle pieces together. Then, choose the correct word to complete the Bible verse.



sheep

gone...

All

like

we

have

astray

shopping

to school

Jesus is the shepherd of the sheep.

Find and circle six changes in the second picture below.

