

Psalms - sculpting the shepherd psalm

On your marks:

Surely the most famous and most often quoted of the Psalms is Psalm 23, and yet how often, if ever, have we spent time working with this in our children's groups? They won't necessarily come across it today unless we make time to teach it. For many older people who did absorb it regularly in the worship they have experienced throughout their lives and who maybe learned to say it by heart when younger, it is now a tremendous comfort to them as they face failing health or other challenges. Jesus picked up the shepherd image in this psalm and from other Old Testament passages and so we know he thought it was an important way in which we can understand God's love for us and by which we can come close to God.

Get set:

Make a large and easy to read copy of Psalm 23, which the whole group can see. Read it through with the group and ask them what they like best about it and which parts they think are the most important. Talk through what images David uses to describe what God is like for him. Some props of a shepherd's crook, pictures of sheep in the countryside and of dark valleys might be helpful in this first stage.

Go!

1. Now explain that the group is going to turn this psalm into a worship sculpture (click «page: here =1560» for more on this technique).
2. Divide the group up so that one, two, three or maybe more children take a verse each. The aim is to create a statue – a piece of sculpture that is a picture of that verse. For example, here are some ideas.

The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need
Someone posed as a shepherd with a stick (and other props?) and some sheep

He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters
Someone lying peacefully on the grass, sipping handfuls of water from a stream

He restores my soul
Someone indicating that they feel good inside

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his namesake
Someone showing someone else the way with a map/Bible and pointing

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death
Someone looking afraid and terrorised on every side

I fear no evil; Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff comfort me
Someone walking with someone else holding a stick and a book

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies
Someone mimes laying a table, while looking over their shoulder

You anoint my head with oil and my cup overflows
Someone anointing another with oil and pouring a cup of drink

Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life
Three people arm-in-arm, walking together

And I shall live in the House of the Lord forever
A group of people creating a safe shelter for another, perhaps including the shape of the cross in the design

3. Once each piece of the sculpture is in place and rehearsed a couple of times, each section should sit and wait for the whole psalm to be ready.

4. Now each group or individual needs to work out one simple movement that goes with their particular verse and then one or two words. Rehearse this.

5. Finally put the whole Psalm sculpture together, beginning with the first verse people who should say out loud their agreed line and perform their agreed movement three times but then continue in mime only while the next verse is added. Again the group with this verse should make its chosen movement and says its words out loud three times and then continue in mime and so on, until the whole Psalm has become a living and breathing piece of sculpture.

Linking it to actions and the creation of a group sculpture like this should help children learn this psalm of psalms.

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