

## THE SHEPHERD'S GUIDE TO PARENTING



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**S**HEPHERDS! They're everywhere this time of year — shepherds watching over their flocks by night (Luke 2), shepherds standing near baby Jesus in family manger scenes, shepherds donning homemade robes and staves in the annual Christmas pageant. But did you ever stop to think how much parents and the New Testament shepherds have in common? Let's take a moment to look at the lives of each.

### A Day in the Life of a Shepherd

At the crack of dawn he rises to open the gate of the sheepfold. He leads his flock out to fresh pastures and water. Through the day, he watches his sheep constantly with concern. *Are they healthy?* he wonders. *Do they have what they need? Are they comfortable? Are they safe?*

The shepherd stays alert to defend his little lambs from dangerous predators, like bears or lions. He also keeps his sheep from endangering themselves: he prods them gently along the path, redirects them when they stray, pulls them out of thickets and looks for them when they wander off.

At the end of the day, the shepherd leads his flock back to the fold. If a sheep is tired or sick, he carries her home on his shoulders or close to his chest. Finally, the shepherd does all he can to ensure a safe night's rest for his flock — which often means lack of sleep for himself!

### A Day in the Life of — YOU!

Consider your daily life as a parent. You rise up early with the kids to make them breakfast. Through the day, you think about your child's well-being: *Is he eating enough? Should I take him to the doctor? Is he happy? Is he developing properly? Does he know Jesus Christ?*

You stay alert to your child's safety. "Don't talk to strangers," you warn. "Don't watch that questionable TV show." "Ask permission before you leave the yard." You also know what's best for your youngster. You prod her to brush her teeth, even when she protests. You teach her right from wrong and correct her when necessary. Sometimes you rescue her from her own bad choices.

At bedtime, you might carry a weary child in your arms or give out spoonfuls of cough medicine to sniffling kids. As you tuck your little lambs in, you know there's always a chance they might wake you up later!

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### Lives of Self-Sacrifice

Just like shepherds, parents daily give up their lives for those in their care. They sacrifice the best of their time, thoughts, skills, resources and energy for their children. (And in this busy gift-giving season, you know that full well!)

Shepherds and parents have something else in common too. Both shepherds and parents are valued by God. Have you ever wondered why the shepherds were the first to hear of Jesus' birth? Could it be that God wanted to honor them for their humble servants' hearts? Could it be that these selfless shepherds were the best pictures of God's own selfless Son?

In Matthew 20:26, Jesus says that true greatness belongs to those who serve.

This season, as you serve your family and others, remember the shepherds! Just like them, you are great in God's eyes. And just like them, you display a beautiful picture of our servant Savior to those you serve.



## TEACHING CHILDREN TO RESPECT GOD

The preschool years are prime years to instill a reverence and respect for God. One way to do this is by answering their questions about God in a way that helps them to ponder His uniqueness and greatness. For example, young children often ask thoughtful questions, such as "How big is God?" or "How did He make the sky?" or "How does God know where we are?" or "Where does God sleep?"

Use these questions to point out how different God is from us. He knows everything and He is everywhere. He's so big and powerful that we can't always understand Him. But He loves us. Isn't that amazing?

## 'TIS THE SEASON

This holiday, give presents that honor — not distract from — the true meaning of Christmas. The Awana Store offers books, CDs, toys and much more for everyone on your shopping list. Simply go to [awana.org/store](http://awana.org/store) for great gift-giving ideas.



# For unto you is born ... a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11



**Parents,** does your child constantly ask, "How many days until Christmas?" Start a fun tradition this year (recommended by families with young children). Make a paper chain, with a link for each day until Christmas. After dinner each evening, ask one child to remove a link, and then tell part of the Christmas story from Luke 2:1-21. Watch your child's excitement grow as the length of the chain shrinks.

## Birthday Cake for Jesus

Remind your Puggle that Christmas is the time we celebrate Jesus' birthday. Bake a cake and sing to Jesus on this special day. Add symbolism to the cake to make it extra special. For example, decorate the cake with a star to remind your family of the star in Bethlehem or place an angel ornament on it as a reminder of the good news the angels shared with the shepherds. Use red candles to remember Jesus' blood shed for our sins.

## Puggles Precept

An appropriate Puggles Precept for the month of December is "God is love." Read Luke 2:1-21 from a picture Bible and **thank God for His love, which He showed most fully when He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be our Savior.** Although your child may not fully comprehend what it meant for Jesus to die on the cross for our sins, you are planting little seeds in his heart. Keep praying that these seeds of truth will grow and that someday soon he will trust Jesus as Savior.



