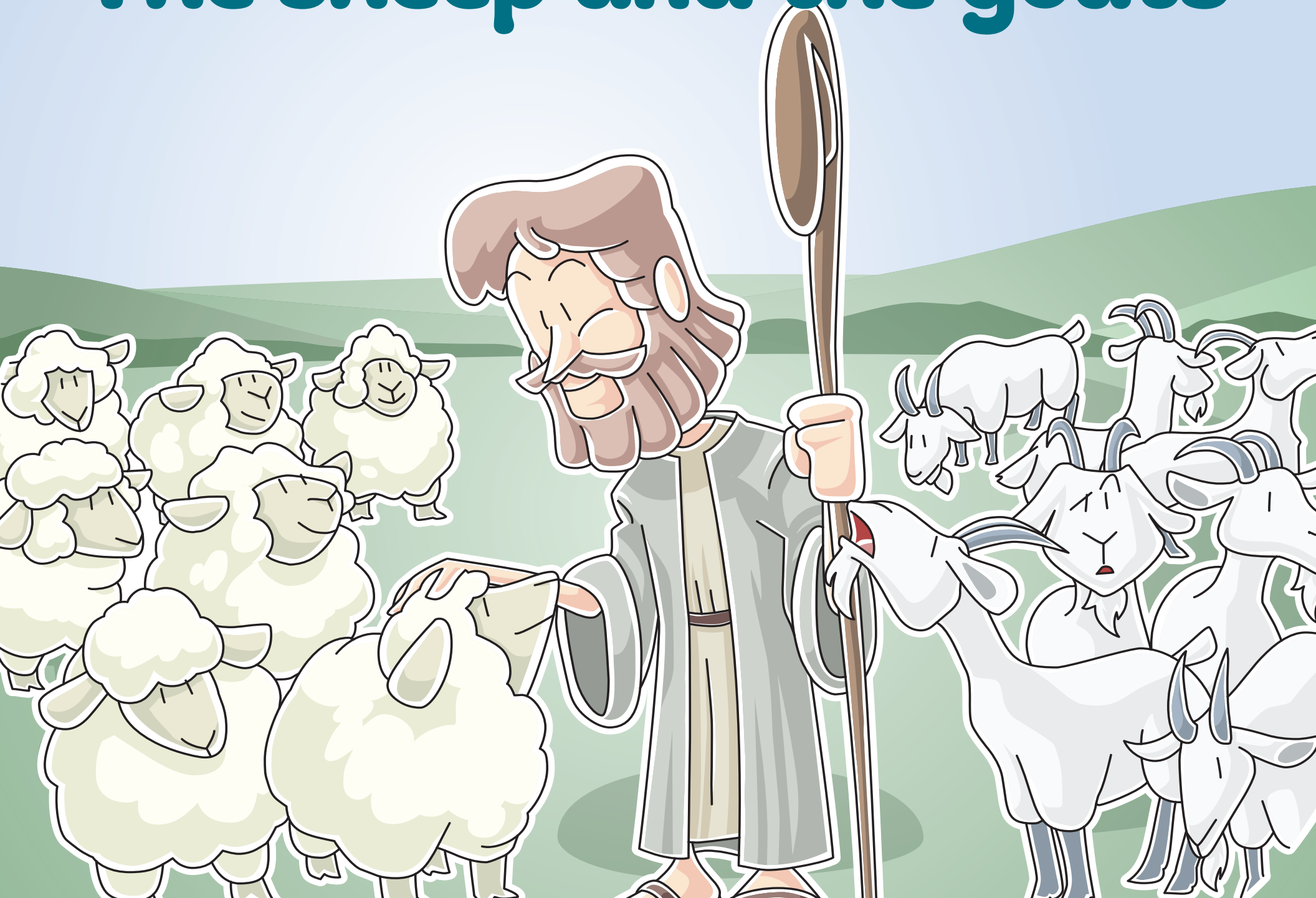


The sheep and the goats



Colour me!



Matthew 25:31-46

Jesus said:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory with all his angels, he will sit on his royal throne. The people of all nations will be brought before him, and he will separate them, as shepherds separate their sheep from their goats.

He will place the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. Then the king will say to those on his right, "My father has blessed you! Come and receive the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world was created. When I was hungry, you gave me something to eat, and when I was thirsty, you gave me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you welcomed me, and when I was naked, you gave me clothes to wear. When I was sick, you took care of me, and when I was in jail, you visited me." Then the ones who pleased the Lord will ask, "When did we give you something to eat or drink? When did we welcome you as a stranger or give you clothes to wear or visit you while you were sick or in jail?"

The king will answer, "Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me." Then the king will say to those on his left, "Get away from me! You are under God's curse. Go into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels! I was hungry, but you did not give me anything to eat, and I was thirsty, but you did not give me anything to drink. I was a stranger, but you did not welcome me, and I was naked, but you did not give me any clothes to wear. I was sick and in jail, but you did not take care of me." Then the people will ask, "Lord, when did we fail to help you when you were hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in jail?" The king will say to them, "Whenever you failed to help any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you failed to do it for me." Then Jesus said, "Those people will be punished for ever. But the ones who pleased God will have eternal life."

Commentary

This is possibly the last story Jesus told the crowds before his final meal, arrest and death on the cross. He wanted his listeners to know that soon it would be time to separate out those who had lived their lives generously and those who had closed their hearts to other people's needs. When God looks on our lives, it isn't how clever, rich or famous we are that matters in the end, but whether we have shown love to others.

Jesus uses the image of a shepherd sorting out the goats and sheep in his flock—a familiar sight in those times. The striking part of this parable is that those who showed kindness and love did so without realizing it. Each little act of compassion had been noticed by God; every time they cared for others, it had also been a way of loving God himself. The second group is condemned for not noticing people's needs. How can anyone see the massive needs there are in this world and not want to do something to help? This is a challenging story, but also full of hope, as it is clear that God sees every little good thing done to others as a way of serving him. And because God is always more ready to forgive than condemn, this is good news for everyone.

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Questions

- ▶ What good things have the ones on the king's right hand done?
- ▶ What didn't they realize about the good deeds that they were doing?
- ▶ Why do you think those on his left didn't see the needs of others around them?
- ▶ What do you think causes God most pain?
- ▶ How can we do things that please God today?



Visual aid

To represent the story, set out something to eat, a glass of water, a cup of tea, an item of clothing, a bandage and a business card.



Activity idea

Look online or in magazines and find pictures of people who are hungry, thirsty, in need of clothes or hospitality, sick or in prison. Talk about what would be the best ways of helping each of these people if we came across them in everyday life. Pin up the pictures and add the words of the key verse below to create a poster for your home.



Prayer idea

Use the poster you have made with the pictures, not only as a focus for prayer for those in need but also to ask God what he wants you to do about each situation. Leave some space in between your prayers to tune into what God may be saying to you.

Key verse

Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me (Matthew 25:40).

Old Testament story link

Ezekiel 34:11-31: Ezekiel compares God to a good shepherd and describes how he will care for his flocks and will sometimes need to divide them up.



Colour me!

