Small Group Bible Study Lesson: “The Shepherd-King Who Seeks, Rules, and Calls Us to Mercy”

Theme

Jesus Christ is the promised Shepherd-King. He seeks and gathers His scattered people, rules over all things as Head of the Church, judges with justice, and calls His flock to worship Him and to love “the least of these.”

Scripture Focus

- Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24
- Psalm 100
- Ephesians 1:15-23
- Matthew 25:31-46

Summary

In Ezekiel, God promises to intervene personally when Israel’s leaders fail: He will seek, rescue, gather, feed, and heal His sheep, and He will judge between the strong and the weak. Psalm 100 responds to this Shepherd with joyful worship: we belong to God, we are the sheep of His pasture, and His steadfast love endures forever. Ephesians lifts our eyes to Jesus, raised and seated above every power, given as Head over all things for the Church. Matthew 25 shows the Shepherd-King coming in glory to judge the nations, identifying Himself with the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned. Together these readings call us to trust the Shepherd, worship the King, and embody His mercy in concrete ways.

Leader Preparation Notes

- Read all four passages aloud slowly before the group meets.
- Ezekiel 34 comes in the context of failed Israelite leaders—“shepherds” who fed themselves rather than the flock. God promises to take over as Shepherd and to raise up “my servant David,” a messianic hope fulfilled in Jesus.

- Psalm 100 is a short psalm of thanksgiving and belonging. Let it shape the group's mood of gratitude.

- Ephesians 1:15-23 is a prayer, not a lecture. Notice what Paul prays that believers would know: hope, riches, and power.

- Matthew 25:31-46 should be handled carefully. It is not a parable teaching salvation by good works. It is a picture of the King's judgment, where mercy toward the vulnerable is the visible fruit of belonging to Him. Avoid guilt-driven application; aim for grateful, concrete obedience.

Suggested Flow (60–75 minutes)

1. Welcome and opening prayer (5 min)

2. Read passages aloud; brief summary (10 min)

3. Key points and discussion questions (40–45 min)

4. Application and prayer (10–15 min)

Key Points

1. God Himself Seeks and Shepherds His Flock — Ezekiel 34:11-16

God does not abandon His people to failed leaders. He says, "I myself will search for my sheep" (v. 11). He rescues them from scattered places, gathers them, feeds them on good pasture, gives them rest, seeks the lost, brings back the strayed, binds up the injured, and strengthens the weak. This is grace: the Shepherd moves toward the vulnerable and the wandering.

2. The Shepherd-King Judges Between the Strong and the Weak — Ezekiel 34:20-24

God also judges "between sheep and sheep." The fat and strong sheep who push with shoulder and horn and scatter the weak are called to account. God promises one Shepherd, "my servant David," who will care for the flock rightly. This points to Jesus, the Son of David, who rules not by crushing but by shepherding.

3. Worship Is the Right Response to Belonging to God — Psalm 100

We are not our own. “It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture” (v. 3). Worship is joyful, grateful, and glad service. We enter His gates with thanksgiving because the Lord is good and His steadfast love endures forever. Worship is not merely a song; it is a life of grateful belonging.

4. Christ Is Exalted Above All and Given to the Church — Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul prays that we would know the hope of our calling, the riches of God’s inheritance, and the immeasurable greatness of His power. That power is already at work in Christ, who is raised from the dead, seated at God’s right hand, above every rule and authority. All things are under His feet, and He is Head over all things for the Church. The Shepherd-King is not distant or weak; He reigns.

5. The Shepherd-King Identifies with “the Least of These” — Matthew 25:31-46

The Son of Man comes in glory and separates the nations as a shepherd separates sheep and goats. The King welcomes those who fed the hungry, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, and visited the prisoner—and He identifies Himself with them: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these… you did it to me.” This is not earning salvation; it is the fruit of a life that recognizes the King in the vulnerable. Worship and mercy belong together.

Discussion Questions

Ezekiel 34:11-16, 20-24

1. Which image of God as Shepherd stands out most to you—seeking, gathering, feeding, resting, healing, or strengthening? Why?

2. Ezekiel’s original hearers had experienced failed leaders and scattering. Where do you see people today feeling scattered, neglected, or preyed upon?

3. God judges between the “fat sheep” and the “lean sheep.” What might it look like for a church or small group to take seriously the way strong members can crowd out weak ones?

4. How does the promise of “one shepherd, my servant David” point us to Jesus?

Psalm 100

5. What makes thanksgiving central to worship in this psalm?

6. How does knowing “we are his people, the sheep of his pasture” shape both humility and security?

7. What would it look like this week to “enter his gates with thanksgiving” in ordinary life—not just at church?

Ephesians 1:15-23

8. Paul prays for believers to know hope, riches, and power. Which of these do you most need to know right now?

9. How does Christ’s exaltation above “every rule and authority” encourage you in a fear-filled or confused season?

10. What does it mean that Christ is Head over all things for the Church? How can we pray this passage for one another?

Matthew 25:31-46

11. Why do both the sheep and the goats seem surprised by the King’s verdict?

12. How do we avoid two errors: reducing this passage to mere social work, or reducing it to private piety with no concrete mercy?

13. Who are “the least of these” in our community—people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick, or imprisoned? What is one specific way our group could respond?

14. How does seeing Jesus as both Shepherd and Judge change the way we treat the vulnerable?

Bringing It Together

15. How do worship, assurance, and mercy connect in these readings?

16. If Jesus is the Shepherd-King who seeks us and reigns over all, what might He be calling our group to do or change?

Application

Personal Application

- Receive the Shepherd's care: Identify one area where you feel scattered, weary, or wounded. Bring it to Jesus this week in prayer, trusting Him to seek, gather, feed, and strengthen you.

- Practice thanksgiving: Write down three specific reasons to thank God, using Psalm 100 as a guide. Thank Him not only for gifts but for belonging to Him.

- Pray Ephesians 1 for someone: Choose one person in the group and pray that they would know hope, riches, and power in Christ.

- Do one concrete act of mercy: Choose one "least of these" action this week—give food, welcome a stranger, check on someone sick, visit or write to someone isolated, or support a ministry that does this.

Group Application

- Adopt a mercy focus: As a group, choose one tangible service project for the next month: a food pantry donation, a meal for someone in crisis, visits to a shut-in, welcome for newcomers, or support for prisoners' families.

- Guard against favoritism: Discuss how your group can make space for the "lean sheep"—those who are quieter, needier, or on the margins—rather than only listening to the strong.

- Close with worship: Read Psalm 100 together responsively and end with thanksgiving.

This Week's Challenge

Worship the Shepherd-King with your life: each day, thank God that you belong to Him, and each day look for one person to treat with the mercy the King has shown you.

Closing Prayer

Shepherd-King, thank You for seeking us when we were scattered, gathering us when we were alone, and feeding us with Your good pasture. Thank You that Jesus is raised and exalted above every power, and that He is Head over all things for Your Church. Open the eyes of our hearts to know our hope, Your riches, and Your power. Make us a grateful people who worship You with joy and who recognize You in the least of these. Give us courage to serve concretely this week, and keep us humble enough to receive Your care. In Jesus' name, Amen.