



# Parables

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# Lesson 01



Lesson 1: The Lost Sheep



Bible Verses: Luke 15:1-7,  
Psalm 23



Bottom Line: Jesus finds us  
when we're lost

# SUPPLIES

01

## GAME SUPPLIES:

- 2 blindfolds

02

## SMALL GROUP SUPPLIES:

- One nice \$1 bill per small group (or Monopoly money)
- One rough looking \$1 bill per small group (or Monopoly money)
- A Bible per small group

# NOTES

All Scripture references are NLT unless otherwise indicated.

Allowing youth to help by doing the readings for the lesson is a great way to make sure they get the chance to be involved and that they get the chance to feel comfortable reading the Bible. Pick out readers ahead of time if you know that a few could really use the responsibility, or do it during the lesson as needed.

# OPENING GAME

## The Struggling Shepherd

### GAME SETUP:

Start by figuring out where you plan to play the game, based on how many students you plan on participating. Make sure you have enough room for them all to make a big circle where their fingertips can just barely touch the person next to them. Have two blindfolds ready to go.

### HOW TO PLAY THE GAME:

The game starts by having the students form a big circle, so that they can just barely touch fingertips. Take two volunteers into the middle and have everyone else fill in the circle as needed.

Say:

- Now that we have two volunteers, I need one of you to be a sheep and one of you to be a shepherd.
- The shepherd's job is to find their lost sheep, and the sheep's job is to avoid being caught by the shepherd.
- Both the shepherd and the sheep will be blindfolded to make it harder to find each other, which means that it is the job of all of you who make up the circle to make sure that they stay inside of the circle.
- When I say "sheep," our sheep has to make their best sheep noise to give the shepherd a clue where they are. *[If you give an example it will help out a lot!]*

- When the shepherd catches the sheep we start a new round. The shepherd becomes the sheep, the sheep joins the circle, and we take a new shepherd from the circle.

Keep playing until everyone has gotten a turn. If you want to change things up for further rounds or to challenge you can have the other youth make non-sheep animal sounds, limit how many times you'll say sheep, or add in a timer.

# TEACH

That was a lot of fun!

It was fun to hear all the great sheep sounds, to watch you all cheer each other on, and to finally see the shepherds catch their lost sheep.

If you were wondering, yes there was a reason I had you all acting like a bunch of lost sheep and their shepherds.

We played The Struggling Shepherd because it helps you better understand the Bible story we will be talking about today, and helping people understand things is what our parables series for these next four weeks is all about.

Does anyone know what a parable is?

*[Allow time for the students to answer.]*

Going off of those guesses, a parable is an imaginary story that is used to help the people listening understand a point or a lesson they probably wouldn't understand without it.

Jesus used parables a lot in His ministry to help people understand spiritual lessons that would be way over their heads if He didn't find a way to relate to them.

There are quite a few parables that start off with something close to "The kingdom of God is like..."

I don't know about all of you, but understanding who God is, what He is all about, and what God expects from us can be tough topics to get.

Jesus chose to talk to people back then and also to us now in a way that we can understand and learn from.

To help us fully dive into our series about parables, we are going to start by looking at the parable of the lost sheep.

*[Allow for student readers to open up to Luke 15, or all students if you prefer.]*

Luke 15:1-2 says:

1 Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach.

2 This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!

We have here in this story two main groups of people – the tax collectors and other known “sinners,” as well as the Pharisees and other religious teachers.

Who knows what sin is?

*[Allow students time to answer.]*

Sin is all of the things that we do wrong on purpose or not on purpose every single day. Sin goes against how God wants us to live our lives.

The Pharisees were a group of religious people who were known for very strictly following all of God’s laws, and tax collectors had a bad reputation for lying and overcharging people, which made them known sinners.

The Pharisees and the others with them could not believe Jesus would eat and hang out with people that they considered to be sinful and even dirty.

Jesus wanted to explain that God values all people, even those we don’t think are worth that value.

To get this point across, Jesus goes on to tell them the parable of the lost sheep.

Luke 15:3-7 reads:

3 So Jesus told them this story:

4 “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?”

5 And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders.

6 When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.'

7 In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!"

Back in Bible times people were very familiar with shepherds and sheep, which makes this parable very relatable to them and even us today.

This man has 100 sheep, which is a lot of sheep!

Sheep are very valuable because each one produces wool that can then be used to make clothes and they also produce milk that provides food for the owners of the sheep.

Even people who didn't own or work with sheep were aware of their value to their owner.

In the parable, Jesus shares one of the sheep wanders away, leaving the man with 99.

The man now has to decide between staying with all of the sheep still safely in the field, or going after the one that has wandered off.

What would you have done now if they were your sheep?

*[Give students time to answer.]*

Even though he still has 99 sheep still right there with him, he leaves those because he values this one sheep just like he values the other 99.

He knows those other sheep are safe in their field, so the shepherd goes out and seeks the one who is lost.

The shepherd goes and finds his lost sheep and brings them back home.

When this happens, both the man and his friends celebrate the safe return of the sheep.



In this story, sheep represent people.

God made all things, all animals, and all people.

That means He made you too!

We are all created by God to be His people, but as we learn from this story ... we don't always act like it.

The 99 people represent those who already know and follow God, and the one represents those who wander away from God to lead sinful lives.

I hate to say it, but we wander away from God every single day when we sin.

We all sin, whether we are the tax collectors or the Pharisees.

We are all that lost sheep far from home.

But despite the fact that we are the ones who wander away from God and who actively sin against Him, God had a plan to deal with our sin.

He sent Jesus into the world to live the perfect life that we could not.

Jesus' life, death, and resurrection show us that he has power over sin and death.

That makes Jesus the shepherd in this story.

He goes out when we wander away and brings us back home to Him where we belong.

So we are the sheep, Jesus is the shepherd, and in this parable the shepherd goes out and finds the lost sheep even though He still has plenty of other sheep.

What does that tell you about how Jesus feels about you?

*[Give students a moment to think, and then take some answers.]*

It means that Jesus cares about you very much!

Jesus loves me and He loves you too.

Sheep who wander away from the herd and their shepherd can't find their way back on their own, whether they forget the way back or because they get stuck in a pit.

We needed Jesus to lead us back to the love He has for us because we couldn't do that on our own.

The ability for all people to be brought back into the family of God was made possible when Jesus gave Himself up because of His great love for us.

This isn't just a one-time forgiveness when we walk away from God and sin.

Every time that we sin God continues to bring us back, because the blood of Jesus is enough to cover up all the sins we will ever commit.

Instead of being lost and alone, stuck in sin, we get returned to God's family.

Also, each and every time a sinner turns back to God we learn that all of Heaven celebrates and is so happy at the news!

Shepherds don't just go and find lost sheep either.

They lead their sheep to fresh pastures and clear waters, they protect their sheep when they are in danger, and they really get to know their sheep throughout all the time spent caring for them.

Jesus leads us as we live out our lives as Christians, and He is there with us through the good times and the bad times.

So what about you?

Do you think you are more like the sheep in the field or the one who wanders?

*[If your group is open to it, take a few responses from the youth. If your group is too large, this might be hard to do. In that case, ask the question but don't take answers.]*

Sometimes we do pretty good, maybe we take time to read our Bible or to help out a friend in need.

But even when you and I do our best, we still sin.

We wander away from God.

But Jesus always comes and finds you when you wander off.

Jesus always goes after you, no matter how many times you mess up and sin.

It doesn't matter how far you wander or what you do.

Jesus' love for you is so great that He can always save you from your sins.

Jesus always finds you when you are lost and brings you back to Himself.

As we continue this series the next few weeks, we will continue to see how God is present in our lives and just how much He loves each of us.

We will also see how Jesus used parables to help us grow in our knowledge and understanding of God and His will for our lives.

*[Pray and dismiss into small groups.]*

# SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Based on what we talked about earlier, in what ways do parables make it easier for us to understand a point or a lesson?
- How does Jesus use this parable to speak to both the Pharisees and the tax collectors?
- We are going to take a second to read through Psalm 23. *[Pause to read it as a group or individually.]* In what ways does this relate to our lesson earlier?
- What do you learn about shepherds from Psalm 23?
- Knowing all of this, what do you think it means that Jesus is our Good Shepherd?
- What parts of Psalm 23 do you find comforting?
- *[Get out the two bills you brought, one that is crinkled up and one that is crisp.]* Take a look at these two bills. Which one of them is worth more?
- Knowing that they are worth the same, let's pretend that one of these bills represents you ... whichever one you identify with more. What do these two bills show you about your worth to God?

*[Both bills are worth the same despite how "messed up" one might look and how "perfect" the other might look! Compare this to how God values us the same no matter if we see ourselves as messed up by sin or perfect, the way the two categories of audience for the parable would have seen themselves.]*

- How does this parable change the way you think about your relationship with God?
- What does it mean that Jesus rescues us when we wander away and that He continues to grant us forgiveness from our sins?

*[Close in prayer.]*