Parable of a Lost Sheep



Scripture Reference: Matthew 18:10-14 and Luke 15:1-7

Suggested Theme: God has made everyone on the earth, and each person is important to Him. He does not abandon anyone.

Memory Verse: “You made my whole being. You formed me in my mother’s body. I praise you because you made me in an amazing and wonderful way. What you have done is wonderful. I know this very well.” Psalm 139:13-14, ICB

Story Overview:

Jesus told a parable about a shepherd who had one hundred sheep. When one of the sheep got lost, the shepherd searched until he found it. Every sheep was important to the shepherd.

Background Study:

Information about teaching the Parables

Jesus seems to have told this parable more than once. In Matthew’s account, Jesus speaks to the audience while a little child stands before them. He answers one of the disciples’ questions concerning “who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matthew 18:1-4). The parable of the lost sheep is used to help the audience understand that God is not just concerned with the “greatest” in the Kingdom. He does not want even one little child lost (Matthew 18:14).

In Luke’s account (Luke 15:1-7), Jesus told the parable to help the Pharisees understand that God loves each and every sinner. The Pharisees did not understand why Jesus spent so much time with the sinners. They thought they were more important than the “sinners” and that they should spend time with Him. In the parable, Jesus showed that He did not spend all His time with faithful Jews (the 99 sheep) because He wanted to search for those lost in sin (the one sheep).

In both cases, the people Jesus spoke to would have been very familiar with sheep. Shepherds were common in the first century. A shepherd led his flock in and among the hills of Palestine, searching for the best grass and water. Bears, leopards, jackals and even hyenas were known to roam the hills of Palestine. The shepherd often risked his life to protect the sheep from these dangers.

Sometimes a sheep would fall down a crevice and the shepherd had to climb down and pull it to safety. It would have been common for a shepherd to carry a sheep on his shoulders (Luke 15: 5).

A shepherd spent much time with his sheep and most likely knew each one by name. Every sheep was important, and his goal was to keep every one of them safe.

This is the kind of care that God has for mankind. He knows each of us by name. He does not want even one of us to go astray. Mankind had gone astray, and God sent His Son, Jesus, to find us.

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Satan is the predator of mankind (1 Peter 5:8), and he prowls around like a roaring lion, trying to find someone to devour in the spiritual sense.

Other Scriptures about sheep and shepherds to help in your study:

- Isaiah 53:6
- Psalm 23
- Ezekiel 34
- Matthew 10:6-11
- John 10:1-18
- Psalm 100:3
- 1 Peter 5:1-4
- 1 Peter 2:24-25

Way to Introduce the Story:

Collect a number of keys. Before the session begins, hide one of them. When the children are ready to begin the story, tell them you will pretend you lost your house key. Show the children your other keys and explain what they are used for. Then explain that even though you have all of the other keys – – – the house key is very important to you. You need to get into your house when you go home today; only that key works. Let the children help you hunt for the key. After they have found the key, settle them all down for the lesson. “In today’s lesson, we are going to learn about a shepherd who had a lot of sheep. One of those sheep got lost . . .”

The Story:

One day, some of Jesus’ followers began discussing who might be the most important people in the Kingdom of God. “Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Were kings and queens the most important? Were religious leaders the most important? Maybe it would be the strongest or most beautiful. Maybe only good people who were important to God.

So they asked Jesus, “Who is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?”

Jesus did not answer in the way they expected. To Jesus, each and every person is important in the Kingdom of God. Even the littlest child is important in the Kingdom of God. Even someone who is not doing the right things is important. He wants everyone to follow Him.

To help everyone understand this, Jesus told them a story. A story that helps people understand something better is called a parable. Jesus told a parable about a shepherd and a lost sheep.

This is the parable: Once, a shepherd had a flock of 100 sheep. Shepherds love their sheep. Sometimes, they even have names for the sheep. A shepherd leads his sheep to nutritious green grass to eat. He looked for nice, clean water so his sheep could have a drink when they were thirsty.

A shepherd watches after every sheep and takes care of them. Sometimes, dangerous animals like bears and lions would try to hurt the sheep. The shepherd protects the sheep and chases the dangerous animals away from them.

At other times, the sheep would wander away from the rest of the sheep, and the shepherd had to call out the sheep’s name. When the sheep heard the shepherd’s voice, he would run back to the shepherd.

The shepherd loved every one of his sheep. He even had names for his sheep. Every night, he would count his sheep to make sure that all 100 were there.

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Jesus continued telling about the shepherd in the parable. One day, the shepherd counted his sheep and found only 99 sheep instead of 100. The shepherd was so worried. One of the sheep must be lost.

Even though 99 of the sheep were safe, the shepherd was very concerned about the one sheep that was lost. Immediately, he left the other sheep in a safe place and looked for the lost sheep.

The shepherd searched everywhere. What if the sheep were hurt? What if some wild animals had attacked it?

Finally, he found the lost sheep! The shepherd was so relieved and happy.

The shepherd lifted the sheep onto his shoulders and carried him back to join the rest of the flock.

The parable that Jesus told helped the people understand. Every sheep is important to the shepherd. Even if only one is lost, he will search everywhere to find it.

In the same way, people are important to God. He does not want anyone to be lost, either. If someone is lost and no one tries to find them, that person has been abandoned. No matter what we do, God will never abandon us. God does not even abandon people who have done very wrong things or don't believe in Him. He will always want to find them. Every person is important to God.

Do you believe that people are important to God? If we know that someone is missing from our group, what do you think we should do?

top

Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using various methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible, but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection or other group participation.

Be selective. Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson.

Click here for visual aids and more storytelling methods.

View this slideshow and download it from the original source: http://www.freebibleimages.org/photos/lost-sheep/

top

Review and Reflection Questions:

Review questions help children remember and know the facts of a story. Reflection questions encourage them to internalise the meaning and implications for their lives. Asking at least one of each type of question can help strengthen a child's spiritual development and help them connect to God. Click here to learn more about review and reflection questions.

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Review:

- What is a shepherd? (Someone who takes care of many sheep)
- In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, how many sheep did the shepherd first have in his flock? (100)
- What did the shepherd do in the Parable of the Lost Sheep when one of his sheep got lost? (He looked for it until he found it)

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- What did the shepherd do when he found the lost sheep? (He rejoiced, put the sheep on his shoulders, took it home, and wanted everyone to rejoice with him)
- Who in the world is important to God? (Everyone)
- If every person in the world obeyed God and only one person did not believe in Him, would God care about that person? (Yes! Each and every person is important to God)
- Are you important to God? (Yes!)
- What does this parable show us about Jesus the good shepherd?
- What does this parable show us about people?

Reflection:

- How do you think the sheep felt when it was lost?
- How do you think the sheep felt when the shepherd found it?
- Does God love people who do sinful things?
- Why does Jesus care about the lost sheep, or the people who don't follow Him?
- What are some things that make Jesus happy?
- How are people like the sheep in the parable?
- How can we be more like Jesus and the shepherd?

Prayer:

It is important to guide children in learning how to pray. In prayer, children can connect with God and learn that He hears and answers them. God can become a lifelong friend who is with them every moment of their lives. Try using a variety of prayer methods from time to time so that the children can learn to connect with God in different ways. Note that you can pray at any time throughout your lesson. A variety of prayer methods are found here.

Song Suggestions:

- Hello Hello Song
- I Just Wanna Be a Sheep Song
- Ha-la-la-la Song
- L-O-V-E Song
- Refer to the Song Page on this website for more song options.

top

Activities and Crafts:

- How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation.
- Visit the activities and songs pages for additional activities and crafts.

Activities:

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- If you know anyone with a baby lamb, this is the day to bring it. Let the children pet it and have a look!
- Sheepskin factories often sell sheepskin scraps and off-cuts. Use a laundry marker to write Psalm 100:3 on the back of the scrap. Give each child one of these to take home.
- Provide the children with a large bag of cotton wool balls. Have children count out 100 of them. Use these to represent the 100 sheep and review the story. You can then play a game by letting the children take turns hiding and finding one of the "sheep."
- Have one child hide his eyes or face a corner of the room. Let the other children take turns "bleating" like sheep. If the "shepherd" can recognise his sheep, then that sheep becomes the shepherd and sits in the corner while the original shepherd becomes a sheep.
- Click here for printable instructions for a "Find the Sheep" game using recycled bottle caps.
- If you can play outside, let the children play a lost sheep version of "Marco Polo." Mark off an area that all children must stay inside of. One child stands in the middle of the area and is designated the shepherd. That child is blindfolded. The object of the game is for the blindfolded child to "find" one of his sheep by touching them. Then, that sheep becomes the shepherd. The shepherd can call out, "Where are my sheep?" Each time the shepherd says this, all the sheep must say "baa."
- Our elders are shepherds (1 Peter 5:1-4). Tell them what the children are learning about and arrange for them to talk to the children about each person, including each child, in the church being important.

Invite the children to respond to this story using the adaptable "God's Story" printable reflection page. Free printables for this story.

Crafts:

- For a craft idea, draw a simple lamb (or copy one from a child's colouring book) and then let the children glue cotton wool onto it.

Print and use these free bookmarks, trading cards or timelines. Free printables for this story.

top

Other Online Resources:

- Colouring page and worksheets about the parable of the lost sheep (Calvary Curriculum)
- Colouring page and worksheets about parables in general (Calvary Curriculum)
- Craft: Adapt this craft for Abel, the shepherd, made from an empty toilet paper roll and make a generic shepherd (dltk-bible.com)
- Snack: Cute lamb cupcakes (catholicinspired.com)
- Lost sheep and coins anagrams/word searches (dltk-bible.com)

top

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