

The Lost Sheep

Sunday School Lesson for Preteens (Ages 11–12), 45–60 minutes

Main point: God goes after the lost and rejoices when one sinner repents, so we should welcome people the way Jesus did, not grumble like the Pharisees.

Bible passage: Luke 15:1–7. Students read it out loud themselves.

Memory verse: "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." *Luke 19:10 (KJV)* and "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." *Luke 15:7 (KJV)*

You need: a Bible for each student, paper or a notebook and a pen for each student, a whiteboard and a marker, and one take-home sheet for each student.

Before class: read Luke 15:1–7 and Luke 19:1–10. Write both memory verses on the board. Decide who reads which verses, or go around the room one verse each.

1. Opening game: Would You Go Back? (5–10 minutes)

Name one side of the room "I'd go back" and the other side "I'd let it go." Read each situation, and students walk to the side that shows what they would do. 1) You drop a penny in a parking lot. 2) You lose one of your hundred trading cards at the park. 3) You left your house key at school, and it is getting dark. 4) Your little brother wanders off at a crowded fair. Ask: *What made you go back for some things and not others?* Say: "It depends on how much the thing matters to you. Jesus told a story about how much one person matters to God."

2. Bible story: Students Read It (15 minutes)

Set the scene first. Read out loud: Luke 15:1–3. Old words in this passage:

- **drew near** (15:1): came close; **publicans**: tax collectors who took money for the government, and many people looked down on them
- **sinners** (15:1): people known for living in sin
- **Pharisees** (15:2): religious leaders who were very strict about rules; **scribes**: men who copied and taught God's law
- **murmured** (15:2): grumbled and complained among themselves
- **receiveth sinners, and eateth with them** (15:2): welcomes sinners and eats meals with them
- **spake this parable** (15:3): told this story that teaches a lesson

Ask: *Who is listening to this story? Who is it really aimed at?* (Jesus spoke it "unto them," the grumblers, 15:3, while the publicans and sinners were listening too, 15:1.)

Read out loud: Luke 15:4–7. Old words in this passage:

- **an hundred** (15:4): one hundred; **the ninety and nine**: the 99 sheep that were not lost
- **wilderness** (15:4): wild, open country with no towns
- **until he find it** (15:4): he does not stop until the sheep is found
- **layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing** (15:5): lifts it onto his shoulders, full of joy
- **calleth together** (15:6): calls together; **neighbours**: the old spelling of neighbors
- **likewise** (15:7): in the same way; **repenteth**: turns from sin back to God
- **just persons, which need no repentance** (15:7): people who are right with God and don't need to turn back

Talk it through: Jesus asked, "What man of you..." (15:4). He made the grumblers picture themselves as the shepherd. Any of them would go after a lost sheep and be glad to find it. So why were they upset that Jesus went after lost people? The man didn't wait for the sheep to find its own way back; he went after it. And he didn't drag it home angry; he carried it rejoicing. Jesus said heaven feels the same way about one sinner who repents (15:7). Luke 15 goes on with two more stories about the same thing: a lost coin (15:8–10) and a lost son (15:11–32).

3. Questions to ask (15 minutes)

1. The publicans and sinners "drew near... for to hear him" (15:1). Why do you think people who were looked down on wanted to be near Jesus?
2. The Pharisees and scribes murmured (15:2). Have you ever grumbled when someone you didn't like got attention or kindness? What does Jesus' answer say about that?
3. The man kept looking "until he find it" (15:4). What does that tell you about how God feels about people who are far from Him?
4. Jesus mentions "ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (15:7). Romans 3:23 says "all have sinned." Who do you think Jesus was talking about here? Can anyone truly say they need no repentance?
5. The man called his friends and neighbors to rejoice with him (15:6). When someone repents and comes to God, how can our church rejoice with heaven?
6. Who in your life might feel like a lost sheep: left out, looked down on, or far from God? What would it look like to go after them the way Jesus did?

4. Memory verse (5 minutes)

Luke 19:10 comes from the end of the story of Zacchaeus, a chief publican Jesus went to visit (Luke 19:1–10). Old words: **Son of man** is a name Jesus called Himself; **is come** means has come; **seek** means look for. In Luke 15:7, **likewise** means in the same way and **repenteth** means turns from sin back to God. Read both verses together. Then students cover one phrase at a time and quiz a partner. Say Luke 19:10 this week; keep working on Luke 15:7 next week too.



5. What this means for us (5–10 minutes)

Say: "Jesus said there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents (Luke 15:7). So what does it mean to repent and come home to God? God loves you, and 'all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23, KJV). Jesus is God manifest in the flesh, God who came as a man (1 Timothy 3:16). 'Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:3–4, KJV). We obey the gospel the way Peter preached it: 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.' (Acts 2:38, KJV) We **repent**, turning from sin, and our old self dies (Romans 6:6). We are buried with Jesus by baptism in His name, all the way under the water. **Remission** means our sins are washed away, and we rise to walk in newness of life, a brand-new life (Romans 6:4; Acts 22:16). And God fills us with the Holy Ghost, and we speak with other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, which means as He gives the words (Acts 2:4). Jesus called this being born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5)."

Pray with the students, and encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor about being baptized in Jesus' name and filled with the Holy Ghost. Never pressure a child.

6. Activity: Journal (10 minutes)

Each student writes privately. No one has to share. Write these three prompts on the board:

1. Am I more like the publicans and sinners who came close to Jesus, or the Pharisees who grumbled? Why?
2. Who is one person I could go after this week, someone left out or far from God? What is one thing I could do?
3. Write a short prayer thanking God for seeking the lost, and asking Him for a heart that rejoices when people come to Him.
If there is time, invite a few volunteers to share one sentence.

This week: do one thing to welcome someone others leave out: sit with them, text them, or invite them to church.

7. Prayer

"Dear God, thank You that You came to seek and to save the lost, and that heaven rejoices over one sinner that repents. Keep us from grumbling like the Pharisees. Give us hearts that go after people and rejoice when they come to You. In Jesus' name, amen."

If a student asks, "Am I a lost sheep?": answer honestly and gently. The Bible says all have sinned (Romans 3:23), so everyone needs Jesus. The good news is that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10), and heaven rejoices when anyone repents (Luke 15:7). Encourage them to talk with their parents and pastor.

