

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ are dependent on Christ for salvation (Ephesians 2:8).

SCRIPTURE

LUKE 15:1-7

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

The religious leaders often followed Jesus, criticizing the things he did and said. The parables in this chapter are a response to the scribes and Pharisees grumbling against Jesus' habit of receiving *sinners*. "These 'sinners' were Jews who were not obeying the Law or the traditions of the elders and were therefore "outcasts" in Israel...Jesus saw what these 'sinners' really were: lost sheep who needed a shepherd; lost coins that had value and needed to be put into circulation; lost sons who needed to be in fellowship with the Father."¹

Check out the *Teacher Prep Video* for this lesson: <https://vimeo.com/1065900057>



OPENING

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

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GAME or ICE BREAKER

Based on your group's size, choose a **Game** from **Deep Discipleship Games** OR use the **Ice Breaker** prompt.

- **Game**—We recommend **Missing Family** or choose another screen game from **Deep Discipleship Games**
- **Ice Breaker**— Describe a time when you felt lost and needed help finding where you were going.

WORSHIP

Craft a time of worship with a live band or sing along to a playlist.

- Check out our curated Spotify list. We understand that every church has a different theological view of worship. These songs are suggestions, please pick what works best for your church.
- <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2xmeIKGUjkEE7bJYSCbRwe?si=d254ec715a4749e5>

MEDIA AS STUDENTS ARRIVE

1. Play background music (optional)
2. Display **SERIES TITLE Slide** and announcement slides in a loop or customize the provided **PowerPoint**.
3. Play a 5-minute Countdown Timer 5:00 minutes before you start.

DEEP DISCIPLESHIP GAMES

Find free games in **Deep Discipleship Games**. It's already included with your Deep Discipleship subscription. View the game in advance in case you need supplies or slides.

SLIDES (optional)

Use **SERIES Background & Blank Slides** or **PowerPoint** to create lyric slides.

TRANSITION TO MESSAGE

Include a brief element that transitions students from worship to teaching time, like a prayer or video. This will keep students focused and prepared for the message while the band leaves the stage.

VIDEO (optional)

Show **SERIES Promo Video** or **LESSON Intro Video** after the last worship song.

MESSAGE

Use the following teaching points and suggested illustrations as a starting point to build your message.

POINT 1: Jesus meets us where we are, even in dark places

Read or have someone in your group read Luke 15:1–2

Jesus faced a lot of anger from religious leaders around him. One of the things that made them the most angry was that Jesus was willing to eat with “sinners.” In this passage, we see crowds of people flocking toward Jesus, including people who were lost in the darkness of their sin. While most religious leaders would tell people like this to leave in order to protect the leaders’ reputations, Jesus meets them where they are with love. Notice that he doesn’t say that their sin is okay. The following story about the sheep shows that they need saving, and he knows that their salvation can only be through him.

SLIDES (optional)

Use the **SERIES PowerPoint OR the Background & Blank Slides** to create these slides to support your message:

- Luke 15:1–2
- Point 1

POINT 2: We are helpless to save ourselves

Read or have someone in your group read Luke 15:3–4

While the scribes and Pharisees believed that they needed no help to be righteous before God, Jesus’ parable shows that we are no better than lost sheep. Jesus chooses to compare us to sheep because sheep are valuable to shepherds but are also incapable of protecting themselves. Just as a lost sheep can’t figure out how to make it home or defend itself from predators, we are completely lost in our sins; we are helpless without Christ.

SLIDES (optional)

- Luke 15:3–4
- Point 2

ILLUSTRATION: Tell a **personal story** about a time when you faced a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. It doesn’t need to be serious or even spiritual; just share something you could never do on your own.

We all know what it’s like to be unable to accomplish some things alone. It’s important to remember that we can never be made righteous on our own.

POINT 3: Jesus does the joyful work of saving us

Read or have someone in your group read Luke 15:5–7

Being a lost sheep is a terribly dangerous situation. Just like the sinners and tax collectors in the passage were lost in their sins, so are we before we are rescued by Jesus. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who does the work of saving us. When Jesus rescues us, he doesn’t do it as an angry shepherd who only saves the sheep out of obligation, but he rescues us joyfully. The shepherd loves the sheep. When he finds it, “he lays it on his shoulders,

SLIDES (optional)

- Luke 15:5–7
- Point 3



rejoicing" (v. 5). He has worked hard to rescue this valuable and precious sheep. After doing so, he is so overjoyed to bring it back to the flock, that he celebrates.

ILLUSTRATION: Tell a **personal story** about a time when you received a gift you did absolutely nothing to earn.

We all know how great it is to receive a good gift. Just as the sheep received the gift of safety and a place in the flock, Jesus freely offers us a gift he paid for: the gift of salvation.

CLOSING

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

Disciples of Christ are dependent on Christ for salvation (Ephesians 2:8).

SLIDES (optional)

- Mark of a Disciple

FACILITATOR NOTE: DO YOU HAVE SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION RIGHT AWAY?

- If YES, then **STOP HERE**, divide into groups, and provide Small Group Leaders with the **Small Group Breakout Questions** on the next page.
- If NO, then end your gathering with the **Reflect & Respond** questions and **Prayer** prompt below.

REFLECT & RESPOND

Give the students time to silently think through what they have heard and contemplate these questions:

- What is an area of your life where you feel lost and need help?
- What keeps you from going to Jesus with that part of your life?

SLIDES (optional)

Use the **SERIES PowerPoint** OR the **Background & Blank Slides** to display the **Reflect & Respond** questions.

FACILITATOR NOTE: Don't rush this part. Give the students a few minutes to really consider how freeing it is to depend on Jesus for salvation. Sometimes stories that remind us how lost we are can cause shame. Remind students that this is a joyful passage.

PRAYER

Take time to pray that Jesus will find and rescue your students from the dark places in their lives.



SMALL GROUP BREAKOUT (OPTIONAL)

Pick a few questions from each section to discuss. Close with prayer.

BREAKOUT QUESTIONS

Build Meaningful Relationships

- How does it feel to be compared to a helpless sheep?
Answers will vary, but note that it's freeing to acknowledge that we need help.
- How have you seen Jesus rescue the lost in your life?
Answers will vary. Remind students that it doesn't need to be a dramatic rescue. Answers may include: Christ has rescued us from sin and death, sinful habits, painful circumstances, etc.

Share Personal Stories & Ask Intentional Questions

- Why do you think people who were looked down on, like the "tax collectors and sinners" (v.1), would want to be close to Jesus?
The love and forgiveness that Jesus showed throughout his ministry attracted those who were desperate to be forgiven and healed.
- What type of people need to repent? Are there righteous people who do not need Jesus to save them?
All of us are or were lost sheep who need to repent (Isaiah 53:6; Rom. 3:23). No one is righteous on their own!
- Why would one sheep be such a big deal to Jesus' audience?
Sheep were expensive, and even one sheep was a major investment. Jesus is saying that while we need help, we are also valuable to him.
- How do you think the crowd responded to this parable?
Answers will vary. Most people in the crowd probably responded like we do when hearing that Jesus' Kingdom seeks to save the lost. The Pharisees may have been angry that Jesus focused so much on loving people that they viewed as "sinners."

Make Life Application & Hold Students Accountable

- How should we respond to this parable of the lost sheep?
We should remember that Jesus is the one who does the work to save us and to help us whenever we are lost. We can also tell others this truth because no one is beyond God's salvation.
- How do you feel about being lost or going astray?
Answers will vary. While we should feel shame about our sin, we don't have to live in that shame. This parable shows that Jesus's rescue brings joy, not condemnation. He sets us free from sin and shame.

PRAYER

Take time to pray that Jesus will find and rescue your students from the dark places in their lives.
Use this space to keep track of any prayer requests.

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¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 183.

