

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>



FACILITATOR NOTE: We're giving you a lot of teaching material. Don't feel like you should cover everything here. You know your group better than anyone. Choose the material that will best fit your students and skip over the rest.

OPENING

PRAYER

Start your small group by asking the Lord to bless your discussion and time together.
OPTIONAL: Give students an opportunity to lead the prayer.

1-2 minutes

OPENING QUESTIONS

- How was the week? What's the best thing that's happened? Anything major going on?
- Describe a time when you felt lost and needed help finding where you were going.

3-5 minutes



EXPLORE

EXPLORE GOD'S WORD

As Jesus's ministry continued to grow, he showed his love to all kinds of people, including those who were considered worthless by the religious authorities. When they confronted Jesus about his love toward sinners, he responded with a story. He told the story of a shepherd who left 99 percent of his flock to rescue one lost sheep. Jesus talked about how much joy any shepherd would have in rescuing his sheep. He said that heaven rejoices when one sinner comes to repentance.

3-5 minutes

Read Luke 15:1–3 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- **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.
- **Why would Jesus respond with a story?**
Answers will vary, but one possible answer is that stories can give people more clarity about a spiritual truth. Jesus wanted to show his heart for the lost and expose the hearts of those who refused to socialize with “sinners.”
- **Why did the Pharisees and scribes care who Jesus was welcoming into his life?**
The scribes and Pharisees were deeply concerned with power and their own image. They believed that the way to salvation was through their own good works. Jesus’ message and ministry threatened this, so they criticized him whenever they could.



Say something like: Sometimes we may feel like we need to get our lives together for God to love us, but Jesus shows us that he loves us even when we feel completely lost in our sin and shame.

Read Luke 15:4–7 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- **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 they viewed as “sinners.”
- **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.



Say something like: We may be lost sheep, but we are valuable to Jesus, our Shepherd. He is ready and willing to rescue us!

FACILITATOR NOTE: If you have extra time, go through the next set of questions. If not, skip to the **Connection** section.

Read Luke 15:7 and discuss 1–2 of these questions:

7–10 minutes

- **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.



Say something like: Nowing that we are sinful can make us feel shame. Instead, Jesus calls us to repentance from our sins and then joyful participation in his Kingdom. Just like the shepherd celebrates the sheep’s return, so does Jesus celebrate when he rescues us.



CONNECT & APPLY

CONNECTION

5-7 minutes

Show your students how Scripture connects to their lives: Use the example below OR share a personal story of how dependent you are on Christ for salvation.

Example: In June of 2018, twelve boys and their football coach were lost in a dangerous cave system in Thailand. While exploring the cave, waters rose and filled the tunnels they had entered. They were totally trapped in the darkness. After nine days of searching, rescuers found the boys. Elite dive teams brought them food and water. The waters continued to rise, so elite divers from around the world worked together for an incredibly complicated rescue through tiny cave openings. Each boy had his own diver equipped with oxygen tanks and years of practice. Because the caves were so terrifying, each boy was sedated. He was completely reliant on his rescuer. All twelve boys and their coach were saved.²



- How was this amazing rescue mission like what Jesus did for us?

We are totally lost and unable to save ourselves. Just like it took elite divers to risk their lives, we can only be saved by one person who gave his life: Jesus.

MARK OF A DISCIPLE

2-3 minutes

Disciples of Christ are dependent on Christ for salvation.

Use the Mark of a Disciple to reinforce the lesson and challenge students to apply it to their lives.

APPLY IT

5-10 minutes

Just like the shepherd celebrates by joyfully telling others that he has found his sheep, spend some time this week celebrating what God has done for you. You could tell others something you are grateful for or spend some time singing worship songs.



Be specific:

- What are you going to do?
- When are you going to do it?
- Is there someone who can keep you accountable?



FACILITATOR NOTE: Allow students who are comfortable to share their plans for application. This may encourage or spark ideas for other students, plus add a level of accountability.



CLOSING

PRAYER

2–3 minutes

Take a moment to ask for prayer requests. Spend some time praying that each of us will experience the joy and freedom of Jesus doing the hard work to rescue us.

Write down any prayer requests mentioned and ask your students about them at your next meeting.

MEMORY VERSE

Send the memory verse graphic included in your download to your students later this week to keep the conversation going.

“All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.”

Isaiah 53:6 (ESV)

NOTES

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

² “Thai Cave Rescue: How the Boys Were Saved,” *BBC News*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-44695232>.

