

Three Parables

BIBLE PASSAGE: Luke 15

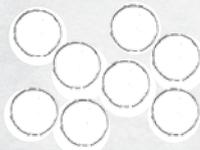
MAIN POINT: Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

SMALL GROUP OPENING
(10–15 MINUTES)

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LARGE GROUP BIBLE STUDY
(25–30 MINUTES)

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SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES
(25–30 MINUTES)

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Leader BIBLE STUDY

In Luke 19, Jesus went after Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector. Zacchaeus was not well liked, but his interaction with Jesus led him to repent of his wrongdoing. Jesus said to him, “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

Who is “the lost”? What does it mean to be lost? In Luke 15, Jesus told three parables to the crowd of tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and scribes. Jesus’ teaching brought gospel truth to the tax collectors and sinners—those whose unrighteousness separated them from God—and to the Pharisees and scribes—those whose relied on their own righteous efforts for salvation.

The first two parables are similar. In one, a man loses a sheep. He leaves his flock to find the missing sheep, and he rejoices when it is found. In the second, a woman loses a silver coin. The woman carefully searches her home until she finds it. Then, she calls her neighbors and friends to celebrate with her. Heaven rejoices when even one sinner repents. Finally, Jesus told a parable about two sons. The younger son asked for his inheritance, wasted his money on immoral living, and decided to return to his father. Rather than rejecting his wayward son, the father embraced him. The older son, who had always been obedient to his father, reacted with anger.

As you read Luke 15, think about the crowd Jesus was speaking to. The focus is often placed on the younger son—the one with whom the tax collectors and sinners could identify—but Jesus also made a point about the older son. He was like the Pharisees and scribes, focused on his own morality and feeling entitled to his father's favor.

Jesus taught what God is like. He seeks sinners who have wandered far from Him, and He seeks sinners who try to earn salvation by their good works. As you teach, help kids understand that being lost means not knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior. God loves us, and He actively seeks to bring sinners to Himself.



Additional resources for each session are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

The BIBLE STORY

Bible Storytelling Tips

Three Parables

Luke 15

• Use sound effects:

Find different sound effects to use during the story: a sheep bleating for the first parable, a cash register ring for the parable of the coins, pigs snorting for the lost son, and a party horn blowing for when he arrives home. You could even use a “sad trombone” sound for the older brother.

• Dramatic dialogue:

When the son returns home, lower your voice to pull kids in; speak the father’s and son’s lines from different spots facing each other.

Tax collectors and sinners came to listen to Jesus teach. The religious leaders complained because Jesus welcomed sinners, so Jesus told them three parables to teach them about God.

Jesus said, “If a man has 100 sheep and loses one, what does he do? He leaves the 99 sheep in the open field and searches for the lost sheep until he finds it. Then he tells his friends, ‘Let’s celebrate! I found my lost sheep!’”

Then Jesus said, “This is what heaven is like; there is more joy in heaven when one sinner repents and turns back to God than for 99 people who did not wander off.”

Jesus said, “If a woman has 10 silver coins and loses one of them, what does she do? She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches carefully until she finds it! Then she tells her friends, ‘Let’s celebrate! I found my lost coin!’”

Then Jesus said, “This is what heaven is like. There is joy in heaven when one sinner repents and turns back to God.”

Finally, Jesus said, “A man had two sons. The younger son said, ‘Father, give me my inheritance today.’ So the father gave his son his share. The younger son left home. He wasted his money and lived foolishly. There was a famine, and the people there did not have enough food. The son got a job feeding pigs. He was so hungry, even the pigs’ food looked tasty.

“The younger son made a plan. He would go back to his father and admit he was wrong. He would ask to work for his father like the servants.

“So the younger son headed home. He was still a long way away when his father saw him coming. **His father ran to him, threw his arms around him, and kissed him.** The son began to apologize. ‘I have sinned against God and against you,’ he said.

“But **the father told his servants, ‘Let’s celebrate** with a feast! Bring the best robe and put it on my son! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **This son of mine was lost, and now he is found!’**

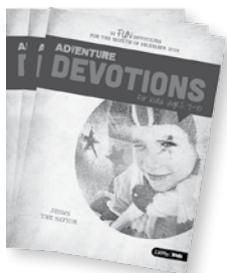
“At this time, the older son came from the fields and heard music at the house. “What’s going on?” he asked one of the servants.

“Your brother is here,’ the servant said. ‘Your father is celebrating.’

“The older brother was angry! He refused to go to the feast. **The father asked him to come inside. ‘Look!’ the older brother said. ‘I never disobeyed you! But you never threw a party for me.’**

“‘Son,’ the father said, ‘everything I have is yours. We have to celebrate and be happy. Your brother was lost and is found.’”

Christ Connection: The religious leaders complained that Jesus welcomed sinners. Jesus told these parables to teach about God’s forgiveness. God sent Jesus so sinners can be forgiven. As Savior, Jesus seeks sinners. He paid the ultimate price—His own life—to save people from sin.



**WANT TO
DISCOVER
GOD’S WORD?
GET
ADVENTURE!**

Invite kids to check out this week’s devotionals to discover the father never gave up on his son. When people hurt us, God tells believers to trust in Him and keep going. God works everything out at the right time.

(Gal. 6:9) Order in bulk, subscribe quarterly, or purchase individually. For more information, check out www.lifeway.com/devotionals.

Small Group OPENING

SESSION TITLE: Three Parables

BIBLE PASSAGE: Luke 15

MAIN POINT: Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost.

KEY PASSAGE: Mark 6:34

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.

Welcome time

Greet each kid as he or she arrives. Use this time to collect the offering, fill out attendance sheets, and help new kids connect to your group. As kids arrive, ask them about a time they lost something very special to them. How long did they look for it? Did they find it again?

SAY • When we lose something special, we often spend time looking for it, even if it means we put off other tasks. Sometimes it will even feel impossible to move on until we find what we are looking for. In our Bible story today, we will learn how Jesus looks for lost things. What do you think Jesus might look for?

Activity page (5 minutes)

Invite kids to complete the “Lost and Found” activity page. Kids will search the picture to find 10 coins, a sheep, and a son hidden in the picture.

SAY • Our story today is actually three stories! Jesus told parables about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. Why do you think Jesus talked so much about lost things? We’ll learn more soon.

- “Lost and Found” activity page, 1 per kid
- pencils or markers

Session starter (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Lost coin

Instruct the kids to sit in a circle on the floor. Choose one kid to sit on a chair in the middle of the circle. Place a single coin under the chair. Tell the child in the middle to close his eyes. Then silently select another kid to sneak to the chair and take the coin. She should hide the coin and return to her spot in the circle. Ask the kid in the middle to open his eyes and try to guess who has the coin. If he is right, that person he guessed moves to the middle to become the next guesser. If he is wrong, he must remain in the middle. Play additional rounds as time allows.

SAY • Today our story includes a parable about a woman who lost a coin and spent lots of time and energy to find it. What do you think Jesus could teach about God using a story about a lost coin?

OPTION 2: Pig “slop”

Invite the kids to stand around a table covered with a plastic tablecloth or another water-resistant surface. Help the kids roll up their sleeves. Spray a small pile of non-menthol shaving cream in front of each kid. Invite the kids to spread their shaving cream around. They can draw or write in the foam or just smear it around to feel it between their fingers. You may also provide chopsticks or craft sticks for kids who do not wish to use their hands. After a few minutes, use water and paper towels to clean up the mess.

SAY • Today we will hear is about a boy who lived with pigs! Can you imagine how messy that was? We made a mess playing with foam! He lived with pigs in mud!



• coin

- non-menthol shaving cream
- chopsticks or craft sticks (optional)
- plastic tablecloth or other water-resistant surfaces
- water for cleanup
- paper towels for cleanup
- Allergy Alert download

Transition to large group

Large Group LEADER

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Countdown

• countdown video

Show the countdown video as your kids arrive, and set it to end as large group time begins.

Introduce the session (3 minutes)

• leader attire

[Large Group Leader enters wearing one hiking boot and a large backpack. He or she is hopping around. The second hiking boot should be placed somewhere where a kid will easily find it.]

LEADER • Hey, kids! I'm glad you are here. Maybe you can help me find my other hiking boot. I can't really do anything else until I get it back, and my leg is tired from all this hopping! Does anyone see my lost hiking boot? It looks just like the one I'm wearing. *[Wait for responses.]* Oh! That's it! You found it. Thanks so much! *[Retrieve boot and put it on.]* I can finally stand on both feet without getting my sock all dirty! Finding something that was lost is a great feeling, isn't it? It kind of makes me want to celebrate.

More than that though, it makes me want to tell you all a Bible story! Jesus actually told three parables

about things that were lost. One story was about a lost sheep, one was about a lost coin, and the third was about a lost son.

Big picture question (1 minute)

LEADER • Our big picture question and answer is, *Why did Jesus tell parables? Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom.* I can't wait to learn what Jesus taught with these three parables.

Giant timeline (1 minute)

LEADER • We have already talked about three different parables Jesus told. From the parable of the sower, we learned that not everyone who hears about Jesus will believe in Him. From the parable of the unmerciful servant, we learned that God wants us to show mercy because He has shown us mercy. In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus taught us who our neighbor is and what it looks like to love the way Jesus loves. This week our story is called “Three Parables.” Let's dive in to see what we can learn from a lost coin, sheep, and son.

• Giant Timeline

Tell the Bible story (10 minutes)

Open your Bible to Luke 15. Use the Bible storytelling tips on the Bible story page to help you tell the story, or show the Bible story video “Three Parables.”

LEADER • Three parables in one story is a pretty good deal, huh? Let's look at what each parable has in common to make sure we understand what Jesus taught about God and His kingdom from these parables.

• Bibles
• “Three Parables” video
• Big Picture Question Poster
• Bible Story Picture Poster

First of all, in all three parables, something was missing. In the case of the son in the third parable, he left home. The son purposefully went away from a place that was safe for him. The three parables show us that we all start out away from God and that we are not where we belong. The Bible explains that our sin separates us from God. We are like the sheep and the coin because we cannot do anything to be found, but we are also like the younger son because we choose to wander away from God.

All three parables also feature someone actively looking for the thing that is lost. The shepherd left the 99 safe sheep to find the one in danger. The woman searched though the whole house and lit lamps to keep searching after dark. Even the father didn't stay inside and wait until the son knocked; he saw the son a long way off and ran to him. This shows us that God searches for people who are away from Him. He loves us and wants us to be reunited with Him. **Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost.**

The third thing that all three parables have in common is a celebration when the missing item is back where it belongs. In these three cases, the shepherd, the woman, and the father all celebrated when they found what they were looking for. Jesus explained that this is a picture of the celebration that happens in heaven when people who are far from God repent and are brought near to God. It also shows us that God forgives our sins to welcome us back to Himself when we trust in Jesus.

Christ connection

LEADER • When we talk about “lost people” we mean people who do not know Jesus or believe in Him. Many of the religious leaders in Jesus’ time were angry to see Him talking to and teaching sinners. They believed that sinners were not worthy of God’s love. They thought that following God’s laws as closely as they could would save them. They did not want to believe that they were still sinners too. ***Jesus told parables to teach people about God and His kingdom,*** and in the three parables we learned today, Jesus taught that God loves sinners and sent Jesus to rescue them.

Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost.

Doing good works and trying to obey are not enough to rescue us from our sin. We can never be good enough. Jesus was perfect and sinless and died in our place. Jesus rose again on the third day. Only Jesus can save us.

Note: You may use this opportunity to use Scripture and the guide provided to explain how to become a Christian. Make sure kids know when and where they can ask questions.

Key passage (5 minutes)

Show the key passage poster. Lead the boys and girls to read together Mark 6:34.

LEADER • Jesus cares deeply for people. He wants to see lost people saved. That’s the reason He came to die for our sins! Our key passage reminds us that He has compassion on people and wants to lead us to God. Lead boys and girls in singing “He Saw a Huge Crowd.”

- Key Passage Poster
- “He Saw a Huge Crowd” song

Discussion starter video (4 minutes)

LEADER • Have you ever lost something you cared a lot about? What about something you cared very little

- “Unit 22, Session 4” discussion starter video

about? Think about that as you watch this video. Show the “Unit 22, Session 4” discussion starter video. Discuss the differences between the two kids’ reactions. Which kid does your group think loved their pet more? How do they know?

LEADER • You can tell a lot about how people feel about something by how they react to losing it. We can see that God loves people very much because He sent His own Son to die to rescue us. Jesus taught that heaven celebrates when lost people are found. We should celebrate that too!

Sing (4 minutes)

LEADER • God’s love for us is so magnificent. Let’s worship Him together. Sing with me!
Sing together “The Kingdom of Heaven.”

• “The Kingdom of Heaven” song

Pray (2 minutes)

Invite kids to pray before dismissing to small groups.

LEADER • Lord, You are good and You love us. Thank You for sending Jesus to teach parables that show us about You and Your kingdom. Help us to love lost people like You do and rejoice when You find them. Amen.

Dismiss to small groups

The Gospel: God's Plan for Me

Ask kids if they have ever heard the word *gospel*. Clarify that the word *gospel* means “good news.” It is the message about Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation. Use the following guide to share the gospel with kids.



God rules. Explain to kids that the Bible tells us God created everything, and He is in charge of everything. Invite a volunteer to read Genesis 1:1 from the Bible. Read Revelation 4:11 or Colossians 1:16-17 aloud and explain what these verses mean.



We sinned. Tell kids that since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (Romans 3:23) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God's punishment of death. (Romans 6:23)



God provided. Choose a child to read John 3:16 aloud. Say that God sent His Son, Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It's something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. Read and explain Ephesians 2:8-9.



Jesus gives. Share with kids that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God's family for eternity. This is the best gift ever! Read Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; or 1 Peter 3:18.



We respond. Tell kids that they can respond to Jesus. Read Romans 10:9-10,13. Review these aspects of our response: Believe in your heart that Jesus alone saves you through what He's already done on the cross. Repent, turning from self and sin to Jesus. Tell God and others that your faith is in Jesus.

Offer to talk with any child who is interested in responding to Jesus. Provide *I'm a Christian Now* for new Christians to take home and complete with their families.

Small Group LEADER

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- Key Passage Poster
- large sheet of paper
- pens
- magnifying glasses, 1 per kid

Key passage activity (5 minutes)

Before class write each word of the key passage out of order on the large sheet of paper in the smallest print you can manage. Hang the large sheet of paper on a focal wall. Distribute magnifying glasses to the kids and encourage them to find the words and say the key passage in the correct order.

SAY • Jesus has compassion on people. We are like lost sheep in need of a shepherd. Jesus is our Good Shepherd. **Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost.**

- Bibles, 1 per kid
- Main Point Poster
- index cards
- pen

Bible story review & Bible skills (10 minutes)

Before class, write out the answers to the review questions on separate index cards and hide them around the room. Distribute a Bible to each kid. Help kids look up Luke 15. Ask the questions one at a time and encourage the kids to find the index card with the correct answer.

Questions:

1. Jesus spent time teaching people whom the religious leaders did not like. Who were they? (*sinners and tax collectors, Luke 15:2*)

2. How many sheep did the man from the first parable have in total? (*100 sheep, Luke 15:4*)
3. What did that man do when he found his lost sheep? (*He invited his friends and neighbors to celebrate with him, Luke 15:6*)
4. What did the woman do when she lost one of her coins? (*lit a lamp and searched the house carefully until she found it, Luke 15:8*)
5. When did she celebrate with her friends? (*when she found her lost coin, Luke 15:9*)
6. What did the younger son in the third parable do with the money his father gave him? (*He wasted it all on foolish things, Luke 15:13-14*)
7. How did the father greet the younger son when he returned home? (*warmly, joyfully, lovingly, and with compassion; Luke 15:20*)
8. Why was the older brother upset? (*He did not think his brother deserved a party, Luke 15:28-30*)

SAY • The religious leaders thought that the tax collectors and sinners whom Jesus was teaching did not deserve God’s love. They wanted Jesus to ignore them. They were like the older brother in the third parable. **Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost**, and He taught that all of heaven celebrates when the lost are found by Him. We get to celebrate with all of heaven when lost people are saved because we know how great God is.

Option: Retell or review the Bible story using the bolded text of the Bible story script.

Activity choice (10 minutes)

OPTION 1: Hide-and-seek

Select one kid to be *It*. *It* will close her eyes and count to 30. While she counts, the other kids must run and find a



place to hide within the room. When *It* reaches 30, she will call out, “Ready or not, here I come,” and begin seeking the hiding kids. When she finds a kid, he must return to the place where *It* counted. The last kid to be found is *It* in the next round. Play as time allows.

SAY • In hide-and-seek, the people hiding don’t want to be found. In life, it’s similar. People who are lost cannot save themselves and often don’t think they need Jesus, or they think that Jesus cannot save them. They may not have even heard of Jesus! Although **Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost**, He has called us to tell people the gospel so that people can be saved by Him. People cannot believe in Jesus without hearing about Him. [See *Romans 10:14-15*.] When Jesus saves lost people, He opens their eyes to see Him and changes their hearts to follow Him.

OPTION 2: Fair or unfair?

Before class, make two signs: one labeled *fair* and one labeled *unfair*. Tape the signs on opposite sides of the room. Read the following scenarios and ask the kids to run to the wall that represents their feelings about the situation.

- One kid does his homework and another kid copies his answers. They get the same grade.
- The birthday girl at a party gets the biggest piece of cake.
- Two kids try out for a baseball team, but only one of them makes it.
- One man breaks a law, but someone else goes to jail instead of him.
- A kid in your class forgot to study for a spelling test. He gets a bad grade.

- paper
- markers or pens
- tape

- You did not clean your room before a fun trip to a theme park. Your parents decide to let you go anyway.

SAY • Life is not fair. Sometimes the unfairness hurts us, and other times it seems to help us. Often, our ideas of what is fair do not match with God's ideas about fairness. God provided a way for us to live with Him forever even though we deserve death. Jesus died on the cross to make the way for us to experience life. We celebrate when lost people are saved because we know that we didn't deserve salvation and God still provided it to us.

Journal and prayer (5 minutes)

Distribute each child's journal. Ask the kids to write about or draw a picture of what they think a heavenly celebration might look like. Remind them of the part we get to play in spreading the gospel to help more people meet Jesus.

SAY • **Jesus is the One who seeks and saves the lost.** One way Jesus seeks the lost is through us telling people about Him! When people hear the gospel, they can believe in Jesus and He will save them. We can celebrate with all of heaven when people are saved.

Make sure each child secures this week's sheet in the journal, and then collect them. Keep the journals in the classroom so they will be available every week or as often as you wish to use them.

If time remains, take prayer requests or allow kids to complete the Bible story coloring page provided with this session. Pray, thanking God for sending Jesus to rescue us from sin. Ask Him to use you all in His mission.

- markers or crayons
- Journal Page
- Bible story coloring page, 1 per kid

Tip: Give parents this week's *Big Picture Cards for Families* to allow families to interact with the biblical content at home.