

Growing in God's Love

A Story Bible Curriculum

More Parables Jesus Told



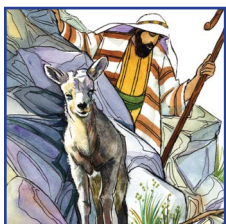
Growing in God's Love

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Unit Overview and Connecting page written by Elizabeth F. Caldwell
Sessions written by Edye Bender

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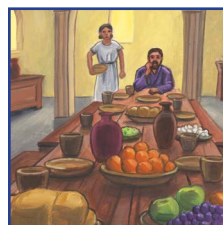
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Luke 15:3-7



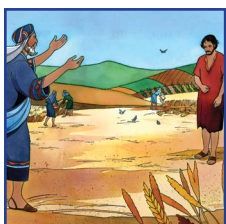
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The free At-Home Kit Guide provides instructions and suggestions for at-home faith formation. Download it at www.pcusastore.com/StoryBibleCurriculum or www.thethoughtfulchristian.com/StoryBibleCurriculum. Click on the unit title, and then click on the download button found at the bottom of the product page for this unit.

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🌱 **Goal:** To explore what it means to be lost, found, and celebrated.

Connecting with the Biblical Text

Ninety-eight, ninety-nine, oops! This parable of Jesus is so rich in imagery and imagination. Can't you just see the man counting and then stopping when he realizes one is missing? Quickly he knows what he must do. He has to go and find the one that is missing. And leaving the ninety-nine, he goes off. He finds the lost sheep, returns home with it, and throws a party for his friends to celebrate. That's the parable, as Jesus would have told it. Some scholars believe that Luke added verse 7, turning the parable into an allegory about repentance. Let the parable stand as Jesus would have told it and think about why he told it and what he wanted people to remember. The man counted. One of the sheep was missing. The man's flock was not complete with one missing. It mattered that one sheep was missing. In God's economy, everyone counts. Everyone, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one hundred. Yes, let's celebrate!

For additional commentary on this text, explore:

- 🌱 Amy-Jill Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi* (Harper One, 2014)
- 🌱 Amy-Jill Levine and Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Luke*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge University Press, 2018)
- 🌱 See notes for this text in Amy-Jill Levine, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament* (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Connecting with the World

- 🌱 Who in your community is missing—not visible or overlooked? Children who live with their families in homeless shelters, children and families who lose everything in a fire, children who lose a parent? Project Linus is an organization that invites people to make simple no-sew blankets to give to those in need.

- 🌱 Explore this parable further in Sandy Eisenberg Sasso's and Amy-Jill Levine's *Who Counts? 100 Sheep, 10 Coins, and 2 Sons* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2017)

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

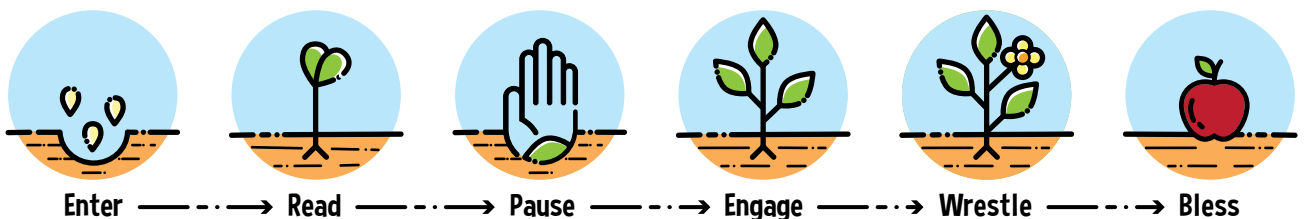
Children grow up in families and in families of faith at church. Together everyone works to support a child's important initial formation in the Christian faith. As children grow and move out into larger worlds of daycare, preschool, elementary school, scouts, sports, or music and the arts, they make friends. Some know what it's like to have many friends. Some struggle to make friends. Children quickly learn what it's like to be included or to be left out. Helping children learn to make a wide circle of friends and to notice when someone is left out is important to their spiritual growth. It's the way they learn how to live in response to this parable.

Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

The man's flock was not complete because one sheep was missing. This week think about your life. Is there someone missing, perhaps a friend you haven't seen recently? Or when was the last time you checked in with a family member who lives far away from you? And what about a neighbor or someone at church whom you notice has been absent? Think about the people who surround you at home, at work, and in your neighborhood. How do they make your life complete?

Our lives of faith grow as we connect with others, as we take the time to notice someone else and to care. Counting each beloved child of God is truly a spiritual practice.

Loving God, we are thankful that you call us each by name. We are grateful that no one is lost from your loving care and mercy. Amen.



Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✓ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✓ Sheep cut from copies of Resource Page 1 (See note in “Enter” section for number of sheep.)
- ✓ Basket or box
- ✓ Drawing supplies
- ✓ Internet-connected device
- ✓ Resource Page 2
- ✓ Stuffed or toy sheep
- ✓ Blindfold

Preparing to Lead

Read the parable from the Bible, Luke 15:3–7. As you read, make note of the parts of the story that stand out to you or raise questions. Then read “One Hundred Sheep” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 214). Think about the ways you engage with this story.

- ✓ What other names have you used for this parable?
- ✓ How does the title “One Hundred Sheep” change the way you read it now?
- ✓ Which character(s) in the parable do you identify with most? Why?

Parables can have multiple meanings, depending on where we place ourselves in the story.

- ✓ What are some of the reasons Jesus might have told this parable?
- ✓ What can this parable teach the children in your group?

Recall the faces and names of the children in your group. What do you know about them? Pray for them and for your time together.

Before the session, cut out and hide sheep pictures from copies of Resource Page 1 in your learning space for the “Enter” activity. Set out the drawing supplies for the children to access after you read the story. Cut apart the cards on Resource Page 2.



Enter into sacred space together.

As the children arrive, invite them to search the room for the sheep pictures. As they find sheep, have them collect them in a “pen,” such as a basket or box. From time to time, count the sheep who have

been found and send the children out to look until all sheep have been found. When all are located, celebrate with a happy dance or cheer! Pray together, inviting the children to respond with “Yay, God!” after each phrase.

Dear God, we thank you that all our sheep have been found!

Yay, God!

Help us to learn and grow together this morning.

Yay, God!

We love you, God!

Yay, God!

Amen.

If your group is large, you might be able to find one hundred sheep! For smaller groups, reduce the number to twenty-five or thirty. Just be sure to tell the children how many are hidden.

Ask the children to think about a time when they lost something they loved *or* when they felt lost (maybe a pet or a favorite toy was lost, maybe a child got separated from a parent, or their family was lost trying to get somewhere). Discuss your experiences:

- ✓ What did it feel like to lose something or to be lost?
- ✓ How did the situation get resolved?

Tell the children that today they are going to hear a story about a shepherd who had lost something very important—one of his sheep.



Read a story of God's people.

Explain to the children that in today's session (and the next several) they will be exploring Jesus' parables. Parables are stories that Jesus told, usually about objects that would have been familiar to his friends (such as seeds, sheep, and family). Jesus used these stories to teach important lessons and to invite his friends (and us) to think about how those stories relate to life every day. Parables are not always neat and tidy—there might be more than one way to look at them.

More information about parables can be found on page 209 of the *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*.

Leading

Today's parable tells us about a shepherd. Shepherds were much more common back in Jesus' day.

- ✦ What does a shepherd do?
- ✦ Why would sheep need a shepherd? (*for protection, finding food and water*)
- ✦ What kinds of jobs today do you think might be like shepherding? In what ways?

Read the first five paragraphs of "One Hundred Sheep" in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 214). Ask the children what they think will happen next. Read the rest of the story and talk about the first question at the end of the story.



Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Invite the children to reflect quietly about the parable. Where do you think the shepherd found the sheep? Imagine what the sheep looked like when the shepherd found it. Encourage them to respond by drawing a picture of the lost-and-found sheep using the art supplies provided.



Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

Invite any children who would like to share their drawings to do so. Remind them that Jesus used parables to talk about important things, using familiar objects. Talk about the following:

- ✦ Where do you imagine yourself in this story? Are you more like the lost sheep? The sheep that were not lost? The shepherd? A neighbor?
- ✦ Why do you think the shepherd was so happy when the one sheep was found?
- ✦ What do you think are some of the important things Jesus wanted to tell us with this story? List responses on newsprint or a whiteboard to look at later in the session.

Choose one or both options.

- Parable Remix
 - ✦ Wonder together what familiar things Jesus might have used to tell the story today.
 - ✦ Have the children form pairs or groups of three. Invite each group to make up a modern-day version of the parable. Encourage them to think of a situation where someone would be sad to lose something.

- ✦ Once the groups are prepared, invite them to act out their modern parable for the rest of the group.

You may want to mix older and younger children in groups for this activity. If you don't have many children, you may want to do this activity with the whole group together.

○ Shepherd Song

- ✦ Show the YouTube video "The Baa Baa Song (He's the Good Shepherd)—Sibling Harmony" (bit.ly/GLBaaBaaSong, 2:05).
- ✦ Invite the children to join in singing the chorus as it becomes familiar.



Wrestle with our place in God's story.

○ Finding the Lost

- ✦ Form groups of two to four children, or work together as one group. Give each group a card cut from Resource Page 2 and invite them to imagine what is going on in the photo.
 - Who might be feeling lost?
 - Do you think it would be easy or hard to notice a person in this situation? What might be some clues?
 - What do you think the person might need most?
- ✦ Encourage each group to brainstorm ways they could help the lost person in the situation depicted. Gather the small groups back together to talk about their ideas. Wonder together about people now who might feel lost in one of these ways. How might we be like the shepherd in Jesus' parable and help them?



Bless one another with God's grace.

Gather the group in a circle. Hold a stuffed or toy sheep, or one of the sheep from the "Enter" activity, in your hand. Ask the children to pass the sheep around the circle to their right. As they pass it to their neighbor, invite them to say, "When you feel lost, I will help Jesus find you." Then pass the sheep around the circle to the left, saying "When you are found, I will celebrate!" Close with "Amen," and invite everyone to cheer together.



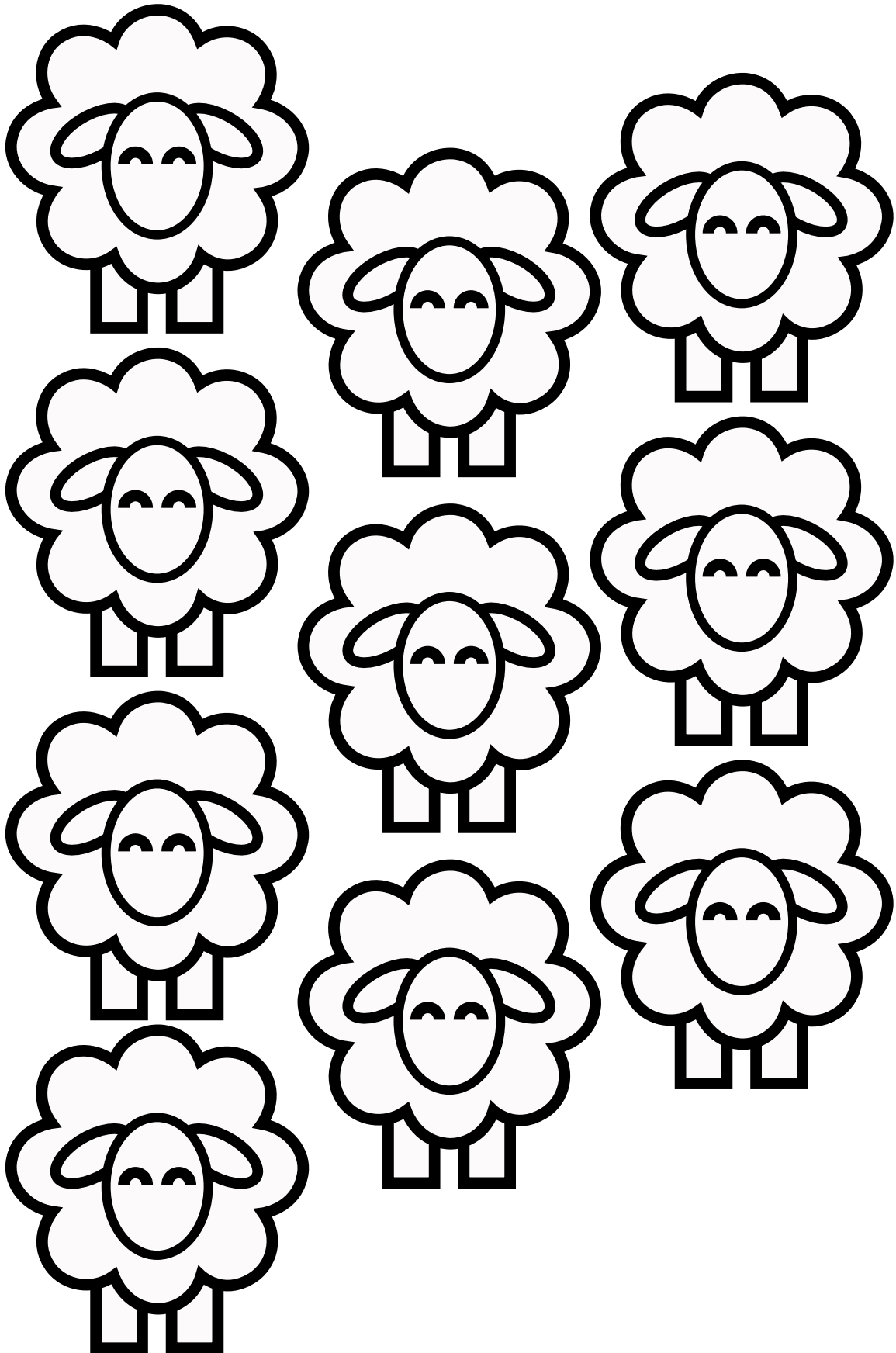
Grow with more.

○ Feeling Lost

- ✦ Have the children go back and look at the picture they drew of the lost sheep during the “Pause” time after the story, or show them a stuffed or toy sheep and have them think about the lost sheep. Invite them to think about what they would tell the lost and frightened sheep. Encourage them to say their message out loud or write down their thoughts.
- ✦ When they have finished, ask if they have ever felt like the lost sheep. Encourage them to think about a time when they were frightened, lonely, or unsure that anyone cared. Ask:
 - What did those times feel like?
 - Were there places that you could feel fear in your body?
 - What were you thinking about?
 - Did someone comfort you, like you did the lost sheep? What was that like?
 - Do you know that when you are feeling lost, Jesus is looking for you, just like the shepherd? How does it feel to know that?

○ Shepherd-Seeking Sheep

- ✦ Play a game to help children find the lost sheep. Ask for a volunteer to play the sheep, or use a stuffed or toy sheep. Ask for a second volunteer to play the shepherd, and give that child a blindfold. You can also spin them if they need an extra challenge.
- ✦ The rest of the group can help the shepherd find the sheep by calling out “warmer!” when the shepherd gets near the sheep, or “colder!” when they are getting farther away. Variations such as “really hot!” and “freezing cold!” are also welcome.
- ✦ Encourage jubilant celebration when the sheep is found. Play several rounds if time allows.



One Hundred Sheep
Resource Page 2



