



# STORIES **AND** RITUALS

## LESSON 25

### Stories & Rituals: The Bible in Broad Strokes

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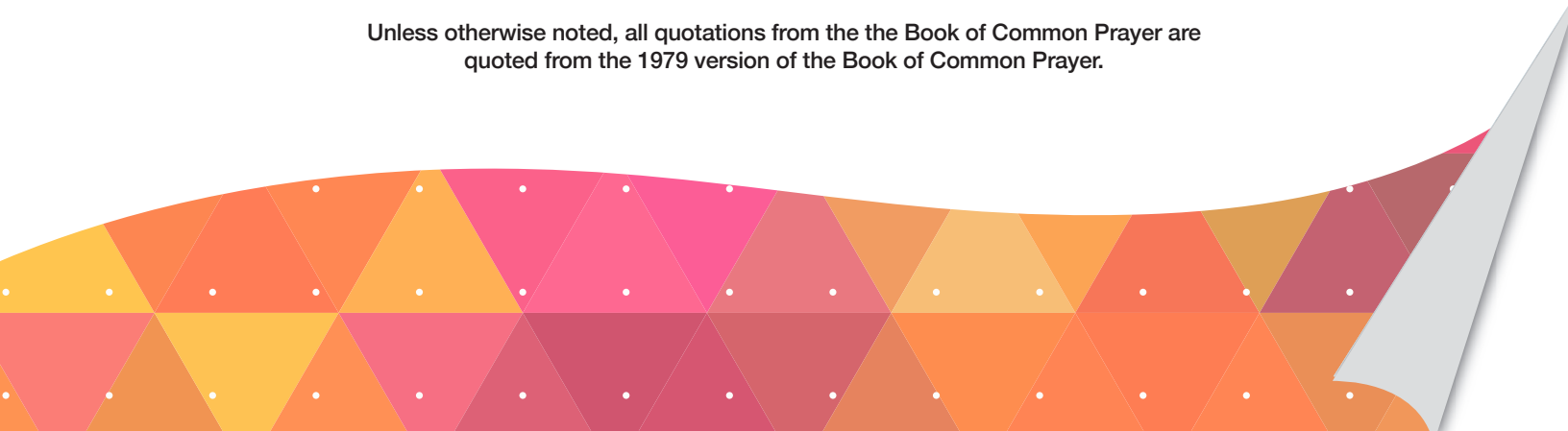
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# Parables: A Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Prodigal Son

**Texts:** Luke 15:1-32

**Big Idea:** We are found when we are lost.

**Symbol:** Compass

## Lesson Objectives

### Participants will:

1. Recognize a theme of the lesson by playing a game.
2. Identify that being lost is okay because God never stops looking for us by engaging in a re-telling of several parables.
3. Recall times when they have been lost and found by engaging in a creative activity.

### ACTIVITY (TIME)

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Dive In (10 minutes)  
**Group Check-In**

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Community Builder (15 minutes)  
**Find the Lost Coin**

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The Story (15 minutes)  
**Parables: A Lost Sheep, Lost Coin,  
Prodigal Son**

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The Ritual (15 minutes)  
**Feeling Lost and Being Found**

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Dig Deeper (10 minutes)  
**Making Service Relational**

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Wrap it Up (5 minutes)  
**Closing Prayer**

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### MATERIALS NEEDED

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- Nothing

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- Coin

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Copy of Lesson Sheet 25.1

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- Paper
- Pens
- Markers

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- Labyrinth or copies of Lesson Sheet 25.2

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- Nothing

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# LESSON OVERVIEW



## What's the Story?

Today's stories are found in Luke 15: 1-32 and are probably familiar to most of your group. Luke is one of the three Synoptic Gospels (along with Matthew and Mark), who share similar content and likely worked from at least one common source material. The Parable of the Lost Sheep is found in Luke and Matthew, while the Parables of the Lost Coin and Prodigal Son are only found in Luke. Remember from previous lessons that Luke's Gospel is especially concerned with social justice and the universal message of Christ to the world.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is spoken to a group of Pharisees and scribes who would have prided themselves on being experts of the law. These men prided themselves on knowing exactly who was considered a sinner in the eyes of the law. They were some of Jesus' most difficult critics throughout his ministry as they disapproved of him keeping company with tax collectors and others they did not think a holy person should associate with. The Parable of the Lost Coin echoes Jesus' underlying message that God rejoices when even one person returns to the community.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is an interesting allegory for our relationship with God. God can be interpreted as the graceful and loving father who gives abundantly and forgives his wayward, younger son. Humanity can be interpreted as the foolish younger son who squanders God's blessings, but is always welcomed back with an open and loving embrace.



## What's the "Big Idea?"

Today's lesson reminds participants that *we are found when we are lost*. Sometimes in church communities we feel self conscious or ashamed in moments of doubt or questioning. Some members of your group may have experienced times when God felt very far away or they found themselves behaving in ways that do not seem true to their identities. This lesson reassures us that God finds us in our moments of doubt and never abandons us, even when we feel alone and helpless.



## What's the Symbol?

Today's ritual invites participants to think about times when they have been lost or found. First, participants will write or draw times when they felt far away from someone they loved. Then, they will then write or draw times when they were reunited with someone they loved.



## What's the Ritual?

Today's ritual invites participants to think about times when they have been lost or found. First, participants will write or draw times when they felt far away from someone they loved. Then, they will then write or draw times when they were reunited with someone they loved.



## Setting Up Your Space

Set up your "altar" area. Set up a table and cover it with fabric or linen. On the table, place a few candles and a large cross. Place a compass next to the cross. Have supplies for the ritual and Dig Deeper activity nearby. If you are using the Community Builder activity, gather necessary materials.

## DIVE IN (10 MINUTES)

### Group Check-In

#### Materials:

- Nothing

#### During the session:

- Open your session with a quick prayer. Use this one or a prayer of your own:  
**Holy Lord, open our eyes, ears, and hearts to see your love and faithfulness in the world around us. Help us to see your love for us in your Word. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.**
- Let's start our time together by sharing some of the great and not-so-great things that have happened to us this week. What were the high and low points of your week? Go around the group and invite everyone to share.

## COMMUNITY BUILDER (15 MINUTES)

### Find the Lost Coin

#### Materials:

- Coin

**Special Note:** This activity may involve some physical expression and requires some space. It is best to play this game in a large, open space where your group has room to move. You should also hide the coin in a challenging place for them to find. If your group is large, you may wish to use more than one coin.

#### During the session:

- Today we are going to talk about some lost things in the Bible: sheep, coins, and people. In one of our stories, a woman loses a coin and searches throughout her house to find it. I have hidden a coin somewhere in this room and as a group we are going to find it.
- Invite the group to look for the lost coin. If you have time, hide the coin again and invite the group to search for the coin in its new hiding spot.
- Continue playing the game until you run out of time. After you are finished playing the game, ask the following questions:
  - Tell us about a time you lost something that took you a long time to find. Did you just “give up”? Why or why not? *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*
  - What was it like to look for the coin together? Do you think you worked well together as a team? *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*



# THE STORY

## (15 MINUTES)

# Parables: A Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Prodigal Son

### Materials:

- Copy of Lesson Sheet 25.1
- Hymnal or copies of the song “Amazing Grace” (optional)

### Before the session:

- Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 25.1
- Practice reading through the story several times so you are familiar with it.

### During the session:

- Tell the story on Lesson Sheet 25.1
- After the story, ask: **What is this story telling us about God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God doesn't give up on us, no matter what; God is so happy when we are found; etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about humanity?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: sometimes we find ourselves lost; sometimes we think that grace is unfair, but we should be happy for others instead of holding onto grudges; sometimes it is hard for us to forgive; etc.]*
- **What is this story telling us about the world?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: the world might not value a sheep or coin very much, but God loves each of these things; there are many ways in which we can become lost in the world; etc.]*
- **In all three of today's stories, people lose something and then rejoice when it is found again. Do you know the hymn “Amazing Grace”? Let's try to sing it together.**
- Invite participants to join you in singing the hymn “Amazing Grace.” You may wish to use hymnals, or have lyrics to the song printed for participants. If the group is uncomfortable singing, you could also play a recording of the song.
- **When we talk about grace, we mean a gift from God that is completely free and we did not, in any way, earn. Sometimes we screw up and instead of punishing us or holding it against us; God forgives us and still loves us just as much. How does that make you feel?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: happy, loved, grateful, unworthy, etc.]*



# THE RITUAL

## (15 MINUTES)

## Feeling Lost and Being Found

### Materials:

- Soft, instrumental music (*optional*) • Method for playing music (*optional*)
- Paper • Pens • Markers

### During the session:

- If you are playing music, begin playing it softly.
- **All of today's stories talk about things or people being lost. Take a minute and think about a time you felt far away from someone you loved. Maybe a family member was away on a trip or you went to summer camp. After you pick a time, draw or write about what that was like.**
- Give participants time to think, reflect, and create.
- Ask participants to share their reflections with the group, if they feel comfortable doing so.
- **Thank you all for sharing those experiences, it sounds like they were pretty tough. Now take some time to think about when you were reunited with someone you loved. Draw or write about what this time was like.**
- Give participants time to think, reflect, and draw.
- Ask participants to share their reflections with the group, if they feel comfortable doing so.
- **Thank you for sharing those experiences. It seems like we have all experienced both feelings- of losing someone and finding them again. Thinking about your own stories, try to imagine how God feels when someone is lost and then found. Maybe they made some choices that hurt themselves or someone they loved, but decided to stop and apologize to the people they hurt.**
- **It seems like we all experience both feelings. Sometimes it is reassuring to know that God is always with us and happy when we decide to return.**
- Close by praying with the group. Use the following, or pray your own prayer: **Holy God, sometimes we become lost, and it's difficult to find you. Help us remember that you love us. Help us remember that we are always found, and that you will never let us go. Amen.**

# DIG DEEPER

## (10 MINUTES)

### Labyrinth

#### Materials:

- Labyrinth or copies of Lesson Sheet 25.2.

#### Before the session:

- If your congregation has or owns a labyrinth, ask Clergy or other congregational leaders about using it. If your community does not have a labyrinth, make copies of Lesson Sheet 25.2 for participants. If you are using the Lesson Sheet, participants will trace the path of the labyrinth with a finger.

#### During the session:

- **The labyrinth has been used as a prayer practice throughout Christian history. For many people, a labyrinth helps them focus on a particular question or prayer they have for God.**
- **Take a moment think of a question you have for God.** Give participants a moment to think.
- **Once you are ready, begin walking the path of the labyrinth, understanding that our paths in life may take us in a variety of directions and sometimes we might feel a little bit lost. As you walk the labyrinth, pray to God about the question you asked. Listen for God's response.**
- Invite participants to begin either walking or tracing the labyrinth.
- After everyone is finished, ask the following questions:
  - **How was this experience similar or different to other types of prayer you have prayed before?** *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*
  - **What did you like about the labyrinth and what was challenging?** *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*
  - **How does this practice remind you of today's stories?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: sometimes we walk a path that gets us lost; sometimes it is hard for us to focus only on God; even if we get lost, God will help us find a way out; etc.]*

# WRAP IT UP

## (5 MINUTES)

### Closing Prayer

Invite the group to share any prayer concerns or requests they may have for the week. Close your time in prayer. Use the following or pray your own prayer:

**My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore will I trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face my perils alone.**

**- Thomas Merton**



# Lesson Sheet 25.1

## Parables: A Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Prodigal Son:

Tax collectors, sinners, and other people that society didn't like very much came and sat down next to Jesus. Pharisees and scribes, religious leaders, saw that they sat down next to Jesus and wrinkled up their noses in judgment. They said to each other, "Look at who he's hanging out with! He doesn't even care that they are bad, sinful people. We would never hang out with them."

Jesus heard them and decided to tell a story about how much God loves everyone, even the people they were making fun of at the time. He said, "Let's say you have a hundred sheep and one wandered off. Wouldn't you go find the lost one and leave the 99? And then, when you found the lost sheep, wouldn't you celebrate and call all of your friends and neighbors to tell them? Maybe you'd even throw a big party and invite everyone over to your house to celebrate with you. If you would be happy finding one sheep, imagine how happy God is when one person who was lost is found! That would make God much happier than being with 99 uptight people who thought they were better than everybody else."

Jesus wasn't sure if they got the point, so he told them another story. "What about if a woman had ten silver coins and lost one? Would she just give up and lose a hard earned silver coin? Wouldn't she look for it all night, all over the house? Imagine her joy when she finds the coin! She, just like the shepherd, will call together all of her friends and host a huge celebration. Again, God is so happy when anybody apologizes for hurting themselves or someone else. God is delighted when this happens!"

Jesus still wasn't sure if the religious leaders were hearing his message to stop judging people, so he told another story. Jesus said, "One time there was a man with two sons. The younger son asked for his inheritance early. The man agreed and divided his property between the two sons, even though he wasn't dead yet. Having his money, the younger son left and went travelling all over the world. He wasted his money on stupid things, thinking it would last forever. Pretty soon there was a famine where he was staying and no one had any food. Having wasted all of his money, he became hungry and found himself in need of help. He began working for someone as a pig feeder. He still didn't have anything to eat and became so desperate he would have even eaten the pig's food—had anyone offered it to him. After a while he began to think about all of the people who worked for his father and how well they were taken care of. They had bread to spare! He decided to go home and apologize to his father, asking to be treated like one of his father's servants. He left the pig farm and went home. Even before he reached the door, his father saw him and ran to embrace him. He was so happy! The son apologized to his father and the father cut him off, ordering the best robe to be brought for his son. He also wanted his son to have a ring, shoes, and huge celebration. He said, 'he was lost, and is found.' Everyone was so happy and began dancing and singing."

Jesus continued, "The older son came back from a hard day's work and heard all of the singing and dancing. He asked someone what was going on. They responded that his brother had come home and their father was hosting a huge feast to celebrate. Instead of being happy, the older brother was mad and pouted, refusing to go into the celebration. Eventually their father came out and asked what was wrong. The older brother responded that he served faithfully for years and never disobeyed him. What did he get in return? Nothing! Yet his younger brother, who wasted his inheritance and was rebellious, got to have a big feast with all of his friends. It just wasn't fair! Their father replied, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. I love you. We're doing the right thing. Your brother was lost and now is found.'

# Lesson Sheet 25.2

## Labyrinth

