

Session 36

Lost sheep

Children from all backgrounds need to know that they are loved and valued. The story of the lost sheep shows the children that God cares for them as individuals. Our *Splash!* groups are a good place for that care to be demonstrated.

To plan your session... Choose a selection of *Opening*, *Into the Bible* and *Living the life* activities to make your session fun and memorable.

Aim

To remember that each individual is valuable to God

Bible passage

Luke 15:1-7

Options to open your session...

Find me game

Activity time: 15 minutes

Aim: to appreciate the importance of being found

- 1 Encourage everyone to play a game of hide and seek. Allow half the group to hide while the others search for them. Make sure that you make clear the boundaries for the seekers and hiders.
- 2 Repeat the game with the groups swapping roles. Ask the children who were found how they would have felt if they had not been found.
- 3 Say that, in today's story, Jesus tells us about an animal that wasn't hiding, but was actually lost and couldn't find its way home.

Thanks

Activity time: 10 minutes

Aim: to thank God that he knows each one of us

You will need: music (optional)

- 1 Invite everyone to sit in a circle. Ask each child to describe something that makes them different from other people, for example, their favourite colour, teacher or birthday.
- 2 Repeat this if the children are enjoying it, and then see if they think there is someone exactly the same as them anywhere else in the world. Say that God made every person different, and that he loves each one very much.
- 3 Thank God, in song, for loving us. Choose some suitable songs to sing.

Ready to use activity

Chat

Activity time: 5-10 minutes

Aim: to think about what it means to lose something precious or valuable

- 1 Ask the children what they think the words 'precious' and 'valuable' mean. You can prompt them by giving them examples of precious or valuable items.
- 2 Ask them to think of their most treasured possession, and then to imagine losing it. How would they feel? What would they do? Perhaps one or two children could share an experience of their own.
- 3 Talk about how God feels when some of his most treasured possessions – his children – are lost.

Tip for Leaders: Sitting in a circle so that everyone can see each other is ideal because it helps everyone to feel included. If possible, the leader should be on the same level as everyone else.

Into the Bible – options based on the Bible passage...

Ready to use activity

The lost sheep

Activity time: 20 minutes

Aim: to remember that each individual is valuable to God

You will need: copies of the *Splash!* sheet from page 251, cotton wool (optional)

1 Prepare

If you have time, make the simple sheep model from the *Splash!* sheet on page 251 to show the children how it should look. Depending on the ability of your group, you could cut out the sheep outlines in advance to make sure this part of the activity only takes five to ten minutes in total.

2 Make

Help each child make a simple sheep model using the *Splash!* sheet. Glue the page onto thin card. Ask the children to cut along the thick lines of the sheep outline. Invite them to draw a face on their sheep and to personalise it by, for example, adding spots, drawing a pattern on it or sticking thin pieces of cotton wool to the sheep outline. Show the children how to fold their sheep, and to glue or staple 'A' to 'A' to make the sheep's tummy. Encourage them to hold it tightly until it has stuck together (you could fasten with a paper clip until the glue has dried).

3 Listen

Read Luke 15:1–3 from a child-friendly Bible version, such as the CEV or the GNB. Ask the children who they think 'tax collectors' and 'sinners' are. Explain that, in Jesus' time, the leaders of the Jewish religion – the Pharisees and teachers of the Law – did not want to mix with such people, because they wanted to keep themselves pure and special. Ask the children what the Pharisees and teachers of the Law did when they saw Jesus spending time with these people. (*They grumbled.*) What did Jesus do about it? (*He told them a story.*) Say that you will be using all the sheep to act out the story in a few minutes, so they need to listen carefully. Then read Luke 15:4–7.

4 Respond

Ask the children why they think Jesus told this story (*to tell the Jewish leaders something important about God*). Prompt the children by asking questions like: 'Who are the sheep? Who is the shepherd? What does it mean if you are "lost"?'. Explain any significant words or jargon such as: 'repent', 'rejoicing' and 'righteous'. If you use a child-friendly Bible, there should be fewer words that need explaining! Invite the children to close their eyes and imagine God as our shepherd. Spend a few moments in silence thanking God for being our shepherd and for looking after us.

5 Act out the story

Suggest that the children act out the story with their sheep. They may want to make a few more sheep, as the story says there were one hundred. Encourage the children to act out the story, for example, by picking up one of the sheep and letting it wander off to another part of the room. As they finish their version, reinforce why Jesus told the story and what we can learn from it today (*that God loves us and that we are all important and valuable to him*).

6 Other shepherds

Challenge the children to think about some other shepherds in the Bible. Say that there were some shepherds who became so famous that we sing about them each year in churches and schools all over the world! See if the children know any shepherd songs that you could sing together!

More on this theme

If you want to do a short series with your group, other sessions that work well with this one are:

Session 35 Invitations refused, Luke 14:15–24

Session 37 Invitation given, Luke 15:11–32

Bible story with pictures

Activity time: 15–20 minutes

Aim: to remember that each individual is valuable to God

You will need: pictures from page 252, props (optional)

1 Talking about what shepherds do

Ask the children what a shepherd is. See if they can spot any shepherds on the Bible Timeline (*for example, Jacob, Moses, David*). You could read 1 Samuel 17:34,35 and discuss what shepherds do.

2 Sheep in danger

Give each child a copy of page 252 and invite them to cut it up into individual pictures (you may wish to do this in advance of the session). Look at each picture in turn and ask the children what a shepherd might do for his sheep in each situation (try to ensure every child has the opportunity to think about each question before someone answers). If you have props, ask the children which item the shepherd would use to help the sheep:

Some thirsty sheep in a field with no grass and a dried-up puddle of water. (*The shepherd would provide food and water for the sheep.*)

A bear creeping up on the sheep. (*The shepherd would protect the sheep from bears and other wild animals.*)

A sheep wandering off towards the edge of a cliff. (*The shepherd would keep the sheep close to him.*)

A sheep with really long wool. (*The shepherd would care for the sheep by shearing their fleece when it gets too long.*)

A sheep 'panting' in the hot sun. (*The shepherd would provide shade and water when it is too hot.*)

A sheep that has wandered way off from the flock. (*The shepherd would go to find his sheep when they are lost.*)

3 Listen and chat

Read Luke 15:1–7 from a child-friendly Bible, such as the CEV. Tell the children that Jesus told stories to help us learn things about God. Ask them what they think Jesus is trying to tell us about God in this story. Steer them towards the idea that God is a bit like a shepherd. He cares for us just as a shepherd cares for each of his sheep. Even when we choose to do things our own way, God will come and 'find' us, his 'lost sheep'.

4 What God does for us

Ask the children to look at the pictures again, comparing what God does for us with what a shepherd does for his sheep. As the children come up with ideas of how God helps them, encourage them to draw or write their ideas on the back of their sheep pictures. For example, God gives us food to eat, clothes to wear, places to live; God keeps us safe. Talk about how Jesus is sometimes called the Good Shepherd and how he was sent to this earth to save us. When each child has come up with at least one idea, encourage them to turn their ideas into short prayers of thanks to God for the things he does for us. Say the prayers out loud, if they are willing to do so.



Living the life - options to help live God's way...

Film clip

Activity time: 10–30 minutes

Aim: to experience God's love for us

You will need: *Finding Nemo* DVD and means to show it

- 1 Ask the children if they have seen the film *Finding Nemo*. If they have, encourage one or more to explain the story. Talk about how Nemo gets lost, and what his father does and why (*he goes looking for him, because he loves him*). See if they can remember some of the dangers Nemo's dad, Marlin, faced while trying to find Nemo.
- 2 Chat about the similarities between this story and the story we read in the Bible. Say that the story about the lost sheep shows us that God loves each of us so much that he sent Jesus to 'find' us.
- 3 Show the scene where Nemo is found by his dad. (Make sure your church has the appropriate licence for the public showing of a DVD.)
- 4 Ask the children how this makes them feel about God.

Find me

Activity time: 5–10 minutes

Aim: to have fun finding sheep

You will need: copies of the *Splash!* sheet from page 251

- 1 If the children did not make their own model sheep earlier in 'The lost sheep', give out a copy of the *Splash!* sheet from page 251 to each child and help them to make them now. Make sure each child can identify their own sheep. Talk about how we are all different from each other, and that each one of us is precious to God.
- 2 Ask some of the children to hide their sheep. Then ask the others to pretend to be shepherds searching for the 'lost' sheep. The 'shepherds' must see how many sheep they can find.
- 3 Make sure each sheep is returned to its rightful owner, and then swap roles.

Ready to use
activity

Thanking God

Activity time: 5 minutes

Aim: to imagine being found by the good Shepherd

- 1 Ask the children to sit comfortably with their eyes closed.
- 2 Read: 'Imagine you are a sheep living with your family and friends. Every day you munch grass. Then at night your shepherd leads you back into the fold to sleep.
One day you see some lush green grass a little way off so you go over to eat it. Then you see some even better-looking grass further away. Suddenly you can't see your family any more. How do you feel? It's getting dark. Suddenly you see a light and hear footsteps. It's the shepherd! He puts you on his shoulders and carries you back to meet the others. How do you feel then?'
- 3 Encourage the children to talk silently to God about how it feels to be found by him. End by praying together.

Extra ideas for the session, and beyond...

Make a birthday calendar together to remind everyone of each other's birthday. Try to make each individual feel special on the week of their birthday.



