

36 SOS

Bible: Luke 15:1–7

THE AIM: To understand that Jesus' rescue mission is for each individual

The aim unpacked

In this session, we see that the shepherd is motivated by his concern for the one lost sheep. Likewise, God is motivated by his love for those individuals who have turned from him and found themselves wandering without his guidance. This message may be personal or you may want to focus on how it applies to other people in the world.

WAY IN



theGRID MAGAZINE

WHAT: list-making and discussion
WHY: to introduce the theme of something going missing

- 1 Hand out pens and paper and invite the group to write a list of the three things they would miss the most if they lost them.
- 2 Spend some time thinking together about what they would do if they lost any of these items. How might they manage without these things? Ask, 'Has your opinion of these objects changed, having realised how much they mean to you?'
- 3 Explain that today they're going to be looking at a story about something going missing.



SCENE SETTER

WHAT: questionnaire
WHY: to think about being an individual
WITH: copy of page 231 for each person

- 1 Give out the copies of page 231 and ask the young people to complete the 'Me, myself and I' questionnaire on their own.
- 2 Bring the group back together and collect in the answers. Pick one questionnaire at random and read out the answer to question 10. Challenge the young people to guess who that answer belongs to. If they get it wrong, read out the answer to question 9 and continue until the group has figured out whose questionnaire it is. If you have time, pick another one and do the same.
- 3 Read out the paragraph at the bottom of the questionnaire. Ask the young people if they think God, who sees everybody, cares about people as individuals.



THEMED GAME

WHAT: decision-making game
WHY: to think about a rescue mission

- 1 Ask the young people to get into groups of four or five. (If you have a small group, do this activity all together.)
- 2 Read out this scenario: 'The earth is doomed! Global warming has heated up the world so much that people won't be able to survive for much longer. Spaceships have been built that can take up to 1,000 people to search for another planet where the human race can carry on living. You are the selection committee. How will you choose 1,000 people to go on these spaceships? What criteria will you use? Who are the most worthy members of society who deserve to go on this mission?'
- 3 Remind the young people that this is just a fictional scenario. Ask them to discuss this in their groups and decide who will be saved on the spaceships.
- 4 Bring the young people back together. Encourage the groups to share their conclusions and explain how they made their decisions. If appropriate, talk about how Jesus' rescue mission is real and that he doesn't want anyone to be left behind!



LEVEL 1: CONNECT

WHAT: real-life story
WHY: to understand that Jesus' rescue mission is for each individual
WITH: magazine pages 229 and 230, Bible

1 Read or ask a confident volunteer to read Luke 15:1–7 to the group. Talk about who the shepherd and sheep represent in Jesus' parable. Ask, 'Do you think God cares about each person individually? Do you think there is anything that would stop God from reaching out to rescue lost people?'

2 Read the article about Peter Wynn on pages 229 and 230. Try to gauge the group's reactions to his story. Ask:

- Was he the kind of person you thought might be a lost sheep? Why?
- Have you changed your mind about the things that might stop God saving people?

3 Talk about the way God reaches out to the lost – through the death of his Son, Jesus Christ. Talk about how God used the Christian lady to tell Tony about Jesus and what he had done. Emphasise that Jesus died for everyone, not just the ones who are good!



LEVEL 2: INTERFACE

WHAT: writing a parable
WHY: to understand that Jesus' rescue mission is for each individual
WITH: copies of Luke 15:1–7

1 Distribute copies of Luke 15:1–7 to the group. Read it together and discuss what the parable means. Give some guidance if the young people are struggling, but try to allow them to tease out the message themselves.

2 Explain that Jesus used sheep in the story because of the culture and the audience he was talking to. Lost sheep would have been very relevant to a crowd of shepherds! Encourage the young people to get into pairs and have a go at writing a parable of their own, drawing on examples from today's culture.

3 Once they've had time to do this, invite each pair to read their parable out, followed by their explanation of its meaning.

4 Explain that the parable in Luke 15 means that Jesus' mission is for each individual, and that God is concerned about each individual who has turned from him and found themselves wandering without his guidance. Ask them to check whether their parable also has that message. Give them the opportunity to edit it if they want to.



LEVEL 3: SWITCH ON

WHAT: Bible study and discussion
WHY: to understand that Jesus' rescue mission is for each individual
WITH: Bibles

1 Ask a confident volunteer to read Luke 15:1–7 to the group.

2 Discuss together the following questions. If necessary, draw out the points listed, but try to let the young people come up with answers for themselves.

- Who is Jesus referring to as the 'lost sheep'? The Pharisees referred to the people Jesus spent time with as 'sinners', so this implies that the 'lost sheep' are non-Christians rather than Christians who have fallen away. However, God's heart is to have all his children safe and in his presence.

3 Why did Jesus use the example of sheep? His audience would have been familiar with sheep and shepherds and what it meant to lose a sheep (a valuable object).

- What similarities are there between sheep and humans? Sheep all look the same from a distance; they can be stupid; they follow each other blindly; they are helpless without the shepherd.

4 Does this parable mean that God doesn't care about the 99 sheep? God wants everyone to love him. He cares for each of us as if we were the one lost sheep.

- What does this parable tell us about Jesus' mission? Jesus came to save those who are lost.

5 In what ways are we sometimes like the Pharisees in the story (v 2)? We can look down on those who aren't Christians or who have fallen away. We can sometimes take our salvation for granted and forget that we were once 'lost', or we can think that we are OK and don't need saving.

6 Give everyone a few minutes to reflect on their attitude towards 'lost-sheep'-type people or towards what God has done for us and ask him for forgiveness if necessary. Finish with a prayer.

RESPOND



MUSICAL

WHAT: writing song verses

WHY: to think about the point of view of the lost sheep

WITH: CD or MP3 of 'Amazing Grace' and playback equipment, or sheet music and musical instruments, copies of 'Amazing Grace' lyrics

1 Hand out copies of the lyrics of 'Amazing Grace'. Play a version of the song from a CD or MP3 or ask some musicians to play it to the group. If appropriate, encourage the young people to sing along.

2 Point out that the third line, 'I once was lost, but now I'm found', links with the lost sheep in the parable.

3 Challenge the young people to write some extra verses from the viewpoint of the 'lost sheep' or a person who has just been 'found'. They could do this on their own or in pairs.

4 If you have an instrumental version of the tune, or musicians, play this and invite the group to sing their own verses to God in their heads.



PRACTICAL

WHAT: providing practical help

WHY: to demonstrate Jesus' love and desire to save each individual

WITH: appropriate equipment

1 Ask the young people if they know anyone who is on the fringes of the church, or who doesn't go to church, who might appreciate some practical help.

2 Discuss the different kinds of things the young people could do for others – for example, gardening, cleaning, washing cars. Talk about the reasons why you might want to do this. Say that by showing Jesus' love to individual people, you open up opportunities to talk about Jesus and share with others what Jesus has done for you – how he rescued you.

3 Make sure the group understands that this does not mean they should preach to people for the whole time they are supposed to be helping them! If you prepare prayerfully, Jesus will give you the chance to share naturally his rescue mission with others.

4 Decide who you might approach and what you might be able to offer to do for them. Ensure that you keep to your church's child protection policy and bear in mind health and safety issues while you're helping people.

5 Plan and carry out this act of service.



CREATIVE

WHAT: collage

WHY: to pray for people who are saved and who are lost

WITH: large sheet of paper, black marker pen, cotton wool balls, glue sticks, felt-tip pens or paint

1 Before the session, ask someone to draw on a large sheet of paper the outline of 99 sheep in a field and one sheep separated from the flock.

2 Explain that you are going to use this as a time of thanksgiving for those who have already been saved by Jesus and to pray for those who still need to be rescued.

3 Work together to create a collage of the scene from the parable, using cotton wool balls for the sheep and filling in the background with paint or felt-tip pens. Young people of this age don't often have the chance to do something like this, so encourage them to enjoy it!

4 While you are working, chat together about people you all know who are 'saved' (including themselves). Encourage the young people to give thanks for those people and thank God that he has rescued them. Then suggest that everyone thinks about one or two people they know who are yet to be saved. Pray together for them, maybe mentioning them by name as you work on the picture.

5 When you have finished, hang the collage on the wall as a reminder of Jesus' rescue mission for everyone.

MORE ON THIS THEME:

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

35 *Admit one* *Luke 14:15–24*

37 *Whatever I've done?* *Luke 15:11–32*

FROM MURDERER TO MENTOR



Peter Wynn got involved with crime for the first time aged just 10, committing a robbery with a gang in Toxteth, Liverpool. It was to be the start of more than two decades of criminal behaviour and gang violence.

'Gangs became a way of life for me. With no dad on the scene, the gangsters were who I looked up to and who I wanted to be like. I ended up mixing with some of the most notorious criminals in Liverpool – most are now either doing life sentences or are dead.'

Peter was involved in the Toxteth riots in 1981, and made a living running protection rackets and working as a bouncer on the south coast. Drugs, including cocaine, soon followed. He ended up standing trial for murder.

'I'd been charged with murder and on remand as a "Category A" prisoner. I was looking to serve at least 14 years behind bars. But then this woman started writing letters to me. She had seen me in the dock. Her letters said things like, "I believe that you are not the person that they say you are, but that you're a man of God."

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'At first I thought she was off her head! I binned the letters as soon as I read them. But she kept writing, saying I should pray and that I should do the Alpha course. Well, I did start praying – and things started changing.'

Over the coming months and years not only did Peter's life change, so did the units he was placed in. After encountering God in a powerful way, he began sharing his testimony with fellow prisoners.

Peter became a new man, growing in his faith, and was finally released from prison in 2009. He now shares his testimony through powerlifting demonstrations in churches and prisons, and passes on the cookery skills he learnt in prison to young people at risk of exclusion from school.

'While I'm doing it, they get to hear my story and maybe get a bit of hope. I'm planting seeds – it's great to work with them and tell them what the Lord can do in their lives.'



Me, myself and I

What is it that makes you an individual? Here's a chance to take some time to focus on yourself and discover just how individual you are.

- 1** What three words describe what you look like? (Be positive!)
- 2** What are you good at that most people around you aren't good at?
- 3** What's the first food that comes to mind right now?
- 4** What was the last thing that made you laugh?
- 5** What three words best describe your personality?
- 6** What is your least favourite subject at school?
- 7** What winds you up (annoys you) that wouldn't necessarily annoy others?
- 8** If you were given £100 million to make the world a better place what would you spend it on?
- 9** What was your weirdest dream?
- 10** What was the first piece of homework you can remember getting?

Whether you consider your answers to any of these questions good or bad, stupid or sensible, popular or unpopular, it doesn't matter. These are the types of things that make you who you are. There will never be another person in existence with the same looks, likes, personality, annoyances, ideas, dreams and memories as you.

That makes you an individual... That makes you special.