

MIDDLE SCHOOL
SHORT STORIES, BIG IDEAS | PART 1

SERIES OVERVIEW

Jesus often used short stories, or parables, to teach big ideas. In this series, we'll look at three parables Jesus used so students can discover that everyone has value, everyone is invited into God's story, and God never stops searching for those he loves.

BOTTOM LINE

In God's eyes, we all have value.

SCRIPTURE

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' // Luke 15:1–7

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Small group leaders, use the questions below to guide your conversation.

CONVERSATION STARTERS *(Start with fun, low-pressure questions.)*

- If you had to organize people into silly categories, what would they be? (Examples: early birds vs. night owls, sweet snacks vs. salty snacks, dog people vs. cat people.)
- Why do you think people are so quick to make assumptions about others?
- Have you ever been completely wrong about someone after you got to know them?

Leader Tip: Keep this section light, making sure any silly conversations stay honorable. The goal is simply to get students talking.

WHAT GOD SAYS

- **Read Luke 15:1–7 together.** Jesus told this parable after religious leaders criticized him for spending time with people they believed didn't belong. In response, Jesus told a story of a shepherd leaving ninety-nine sheep to search for one that was lost. He wanted everyone listening to understand something important: In God's eyes, we all have value.
- Why do you think the Pharisees had such a hard time accepting the people Jesus spent time with?
- What do you think the lost sheep represents in this story? Why do you think the shepherd was willing to leave the ninety-nine to search for one?
- What does this parable teach us about God's heart?

WHAT WE CAN DO

- Sometimes we let friends, social media, grades, sports, or other people decide what we're worth. God says our value comes from him.
 - What are some things people often use to measure their worth? (See examples above.)
 - How would believing that God determines your value change the way you see yourself?
- Everyone has categories they naturally put people into. Is there someone you've accidentally put into a category that is hurtful?
- Why is it easy to judge someone before you really know them?
- What's one practical way you could include someone who often gets overlooked?
- How can our small group become a place where everyone feels welcomed?

PRAY TOGETHER

Example: God, thank you for loving every one of us enough to come looking for us. Help us believe that our value comes from you alone. Please give us eyes to see people the way you see them and give us the courage to reach out to someone who may feel overlooked this week. Amen.

LEADERS – *Encourage students to take a step this week: 1) Believe you are valuable because God says you are. 2) Take one intentional step toward someone you normally wouldn't talk to.*