

# LEADER'S GUIDE

## Discussion Questions: Parable of the Lost Sheep

### Matthew's perspective for the Parable of the Lost Sheep: Matthew 18:10-14

To understand Matthew's perspective on the Parable of the Lost Sheep, it's essential to look at the context of Matthew chapter 18. The chapter begins with the disciples discussing who will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus responds by explaining how to enter the kingdom of heaven and who would be considered the greatest. He emphasizes the need to be converted and humble oneself like a child. This perspective is reflected in Matthew's version of the Lost Sheep, where Jesus refers to "these little ones" twice. Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven, their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven.

### Luke's perspective for the Parable of the Lost Sheep: Luke 15:1-7

When trying to understand the meaning of this parable, it is crucial to examine the dialogues presented in both Matthew and Luke's accounts. While the conversations are similar, each author provides a unique lesson perspective. By arranging the verses in a seamless and fluid manner, we can gain a comprehensive understanding of the parable. It's also worth noting that in Ezekiel 34:16, God mentions that he will destroy the sleek and strong sheep. This raises the question of why God would want to do this. Some verses refer to them as fat and strong, but the reference here is to those who are proud, arrogant, and full of themselves - the wicked, sinful, immoral, corrupt, and unrighteous.

On the other hand, God is trying to find and save those who are lost - the broken-hearted, those who had the Holy Spirit within themselves and are now lost, and those who are enlightened by God's Spirit. By keeping these points in mind, we can better understand the parable and its message. To set the stage for understanding, someone should read Ezekiel 34:11-16, in which God mentions that he will destroy the sleek and strong. When examining the Parable of the Lost Sheep in Luke's Gospel, we can see that Jesus interacted with tax collectors and sinners, which caused disapproval from the Pharisees and scribes. They started murmuring about him. But when we look through the lens of a tax collector or sinner, we can witness the search for the lost sheep and the excitement of finding it. The story comes to a head with great rejoicing in heaven when the sinner repents, showing the power of redemption and God's love for all people.

**Set the stage:** Have someone read Ezekiel 34:11-16. In Ezekiel 34:16 God mentions he will destroy the sleek and strong. Two questions:

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**1. Why would God want to destroy the sleek and strong sheep?** The reference here is to those who are proud, pompous, arrogant, full of themselves, the powerful and rich, the wicked, sinful, immoral, corrupt, and the unrighteous.

**2. Who is God trying find and save?** God is always searching for those who are lost. He seeks out the broken-hearted, those who once had the Holy Spirit within themselves but have become lost. He also looks for those who are enlightened by His Spirit. Rest assured, if you feel lost, God is searching for you. He wants to bring you back into His loving embrace and guide you towards a brighter future.

**3. The tax collectors and sinners (Read in black Luke 15:1): Who were the tax collectors? And why would they be grouped with the sinners?** There were two levels of tax collectors: the ordinary and the chief. Matthew, one of Jesus' disciples, was an ordinary tax collector, while Zacchaeus was the chief tax collector in Judean. The Pharisees and scribes looked down on both levels of tax collectors, seeing them as untrustworthy and low-valued members of society.

1. The tax collectors were viewed as dishonest and corrupt individuals and were not highly respected in society.

2. They enriched themselves at the expense of their own people.

3. The tax collector would sometimes offer them an advance to help cover the cost of their taxes. However, in exchange for this advance, the tax collector would require the individual to use their assets as collateral for a private debt. This debt would then accrue interest over time, making it even more difficult for the individual to pay off their tax debt.

4. Tax collectors lived quite a luxurious lifestyle. They could afford better clothing and even sandals, which allowed them to maintain a higher level of cleanliness.

**4. Eating with sinners (Read in red Luke 15:2): Why is eating with sinners looked upon as an unacceptable or intolerable act by the Pharisees and scribes?** Read Mark 2:15. It is mentioned that after Matthew joined Jesus' group of disciples, many tax collectors and sinners ate with them in Matthew's house. It is important to note that sinners were often known as those who deliberately refused to follow the Mosaic law. This act of Jesus eating with them was seen as an insult by the Pharisees and scribes. However, it was a sign of acceptance and friendship, a beautiful demonstration of Jesus' unconditional love for all people.

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Let's look at the beginning part of Matthew's version of the Lost Sheep.

**5. The little ones** (Read in dark red Matthew 18:10): **Who are the little ones?** Jesus is referring to any believer or follower of Christ at any age. Equally important is not to devalue or look down on those with the heart of a child.

**6. Guardian Angels.** The second part of this verse, Jesus talks about "in heaven, their angels always see the face of God." For many years, people have referred to this verse as evidence that every believer has their own guardian angel. **Does this mean every believer has their own guardian angel?** This interpretation may not be entirely accurate. While the verse does say that angels in heaven always see the face of God, it does not necessarily mean that every believer has their own personal guardian angel. So, while this verse may be a source of comfort for some, it does not necessarily provide evidence for the idea of individual guardian angels for every believer.

**7. The sheep goes missing** (Read verses in green Matthew 18:12 and Luke 15:4) **From Matthew's perspective, who is the lost sheep?** God knows each and every one of his believers or followers of Christ. God's love for us is boundless, and just like a parent, He will leave no stone unturned until He finds the lost one. Have someone read Psalm 139:1-4. God's love for us is immeasurable, and He will go to the ends of the earth to seek and save his lost children. Every single believer is precious to Him, and He will never give up on us.

**8. From Luke's perspective, who is the lost sheep?** Jesus had just overheard the Pharisees and scribes grumbling amongst themselves about his choice to associate and dine with tax collectors and sinners. The tax collectors and sinners could easily see themselves as the lost sheep. They had once been part of a larger community but now found themselves lost and alone. The tax collectors were fellow Jews, now collecting taxes on behalf of the Roman Empire, while the sinners had fallen from grace after once being righteous and faithful.

**9. The sheep is found, and the shepherd rejoices.** (Read in purple verses Matthew 18:13, Luke 15:5-6). **From Matthew's perspective what is gained by finding the lost sheep?** The feeling of finding a lost sheep must be indescribable. It's like witnessing a miracle that brings so much joy to the heart. It's an incredible reminder that even when a follower of Jesus strays from the path, there is always a way back to the flock.

**10. From Luke's perspective what is gained by finding the lost sheep?** The parable of the lost sheep is a poignant and heartwarming representation of the Lord's boundless

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love for sinners and his unwavering commitment to their redemption. The story depicts a shepherd who, upon realizing that one of his precious sheep has gone astray, sets out on a mission to find it. After much searching and effort, the shepherd finally locates the lost sheep and, overcome with joy and relief, hoists it onto his shoulders and carries it back to safety. The imagery of the shepherd carrying the sheep on his shoulders is a powerful and evocative symbol of the Lord's care and protection for his people. It is reminiscent of a triumphant parade, with the crowd lifting up a hero or celebrity after a victorious sporting event. Similarly, the shepherd's joy at finding the lost sheep is palpable and infectious, inspiring him to call upon his friends and neighbors to join him in celebrating the happy news.

**11. The Parable from Luke.** (Read in grey Luke 15:7): **What is the parable lesson in Luke?** The parable of the lost sheep teaches us that heaven rejoices when a sinner repents and turns to Jesus for salvation. In this parable, finding a lost soul is likened to finding a lost sheep. The joy and celebration in heaven are abundant when a sinner repents and accepts Jesus as their savior. When a sinner repents and turns to Jesus, it brings great joy to heaven. The welcoming of a born-again Christian who has turned away from their sinful ways is more joyful than the other ninety-nine who have already been saved.

**12. Parable from Matthew.** (Read in orange Matthew 18:14): **What is the parable lesson Matthew?** It's comforting to know that God will never give up on us, even if we wander off or fall away. The parable in Matthew emphasizes that if we are one of the "little ones" who have lost our way, God will continue to search for us and give us many opportunities to find our way back. It's a beautiful reminder that God's love and mercy are boundless.

**13. Jesus came to save the lost.** (Read in blue Matthew 18:11): **Why did Jesus come to save the lost and not the righteous?** Read Luke 5:31-32, the healthy do not need a physician, but rather the sick. It's interesting to see how Matthew and Luke both showcase the different ways people can be lost. Matthew emphasizes the importance of finding and bringing back the "little ones" who have strayed from Jesus, while Luke focuses on sinners who have yet to turn to God for salvation. Jesus, in both cases, provides a way for these lost individuals to find their way back to righteousness and salvation. It's a powerful reminder of the boundless love and mercy that God has for all of us.