

LESSON 7

PARABLE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

LESSON NOTES

**FOCUS: THE SHEPHERD AND HIS SHEEP (MATTHEW 18:12-14;
LUKE 15:1-7)**

- **PARABLE**
- **CORE PRESENTATION**

THE MATERIAL

- **LOCATION: PARABLE SHELVES**
- **PIECES: PARABLE BOX WITH GREEN DOT, 12 BROWN FELT STRIPS, 3 BLACK FELT SHAPES, 1 BLUE FELT SHAPE, 5 SHEEP, 1 GOOD SHEPHERD, 1 ORDINARY SHEPHERD, 1 WOLF**
- **UNDERLAY: GREEN**

BACKGROUND

The primary sheep and shepherd parable of Jesus, recognized as authentic by many scholars, is the shepherd who searches for the one sheep that is lost and leaves the ninety-nine to do so. In this presentation, the gate is left open as the shepherd searches for the sheep, but you will also find that many of life's conflicts find meaning and resolution in the themes from Psalm 23 and John 10, also present in the lesson.

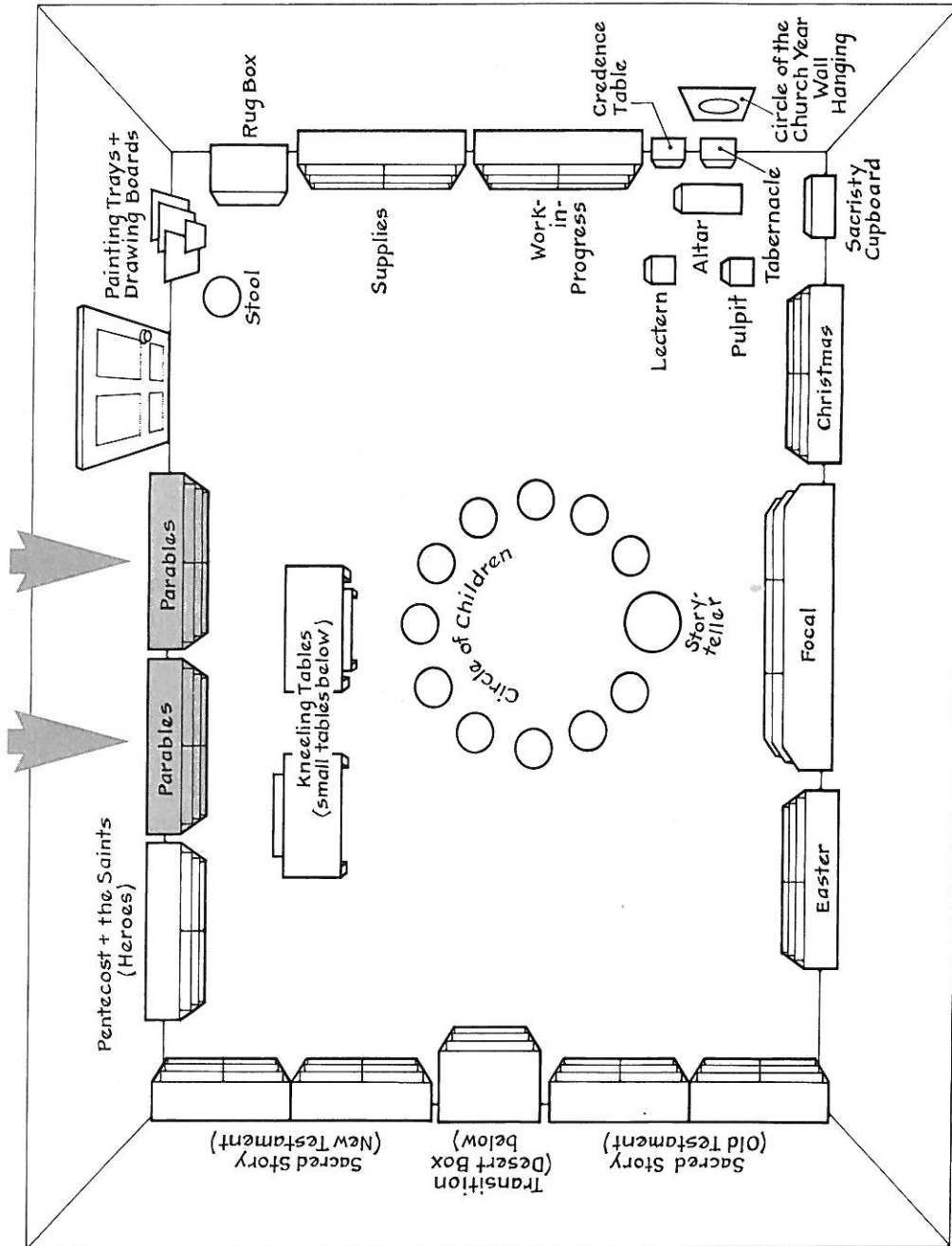
The term *parable* can have a wide meaning. This lesson is more of an identity statement of Jesus than a parable. It is especially connected to and an introduction for the later lessons on the "I am" statements in John's gospel.

NOTES ON THE MATERIAL

Find the material in a gold parable box with a green dot, located on the top shelf of one of the parable shelves. Inside the box is a green underlay with roughly rounded corners and an irregular, approximately square outline. Twelve brown felt strips (about 1" x 10") form the sheepfold. Three irregular black shapes made of felt give the rough appearance of a mouth and two eyes when put together to form the dangerous place. A blue piece of felt provides the water. There are five sheep of different shades of gray and brown, a Good Shepherd, an ordinary shepherd and a wolf.

SPECIAL NOTES

Classroom Management: The parable, as presented here, has served children well since about 1974. Much of its testing came from working with sick children in the hospitals of the Texas Medical Center in Houston from about 1974–1984. It has continued to comfort, challenge and give voice to existential issues. When the child is ready to discuss the open gate, this parable provides the occasion to do so.



WHERE TO FIND MATERIALS

MOVEMENTS

Go to the parable shelves and bring the gold box to the circle. As you pick up the box, point to the green dot on it. This hint of the underlay's color is the only outside indication of what parable is inside. This prevents giving one parable value over another one by color, size or shape. The children can approach the parables as equals and find the one that is right for them.

Place the box in the middle of the circle.

When you mention the box being closed, knock on the top of the box like a door. When you are talking about the parable being a present, you hold the box out toward the children like you were giving it to them. You might also mention that the parable is old and the box even looks old. You don't need to do all of these opening comments every time.

Sit back. Reflect on the need to be ready to open a parable and to keep from breaking it. When you and the children are ready, you begin.

Carefully move the box back to your side. Remove the lid and leave it tipped up against the box on the circle side. This helps keep the children from being distracted by what is inside.

As you take things out of the box, wonder with the children about what each thing might be. You are inviting the children to help you build the metaphor of the parable, helping create a common ownership in what is to come.

WORDS

▶ Watch carefully where I go so you will always know where to find this lesson.

▶ Look! It is the color gold. Something inside must be precious like gold. Perhaps there is a parable inside. Parables are even more valuable than gold, so maybe there is one inside.

▶ The box is also closed. There is a lid. Maybe there is a parable inside. Sometimes, even if we are ready, we can't enter a parable. Parables are like that. Sometimes they stay closed.

The box looks like a present. Parables were given to you long ago as presents. Even if you don't know what a parable is, the parable is already yours. You don't have to take them, or buy them, or get them in any way. They already belong to you.

▶ You need to be ready to find out if there is a parable inside. It is easy to break parables. What is hard to do is go inside.

▶ I have an idea. Let's look inside and see what's there!

MOVEMENTS

Take out the green underlay. First leave it crumpled. Then smooth it out in the middle of the circle of children.

The idea is to invite many serious and sometimes funny—but not disruptive—responses. This supports ownership in the imagined parable, but it also frustrates the idea that children already know what it is. Some will have already seen this parable many times.

Look up at the imaginary tree.

Turn it over. Smooth it out again. You might do this more than once.

Take from the box the piece of blue felt and place it to your far left on the green underlay. Smooth it out.

Bend over and look into the “window” or “mirror.”

Next, take from the box the three pieces of black felt. Hold each piece in the palms of your hands and show them to the children before placing each one on your far right on the part of the underlay nearest the children. The longer strip is placed opposite the two smaller ones, so the sheep can pass between the long one on one side and the two smaller ones on the other side.

WORDS

◆ I wonder what this could really be? It is certainly green. Green. There is nothing here but green.

◆ I wonder if this could be one of those things that frogs sit on in a pond? (*Children will fill in the name if they know it.*)

I wonder if this could be the top of a tree?

◆ I wonder if this could be a leaf from a giant tree? It would have to be really tall.

Yes, it is a piece of cloth, but I wonder what is on the other side?

◆ See, there is always the other side.

◆ I wonder what this could really be?

I wonder if this could be a place to look through to the other side?

◆ I wonder if it is one of those things you look into and see your own face.

◆ Look, there is no light in there at all. I wonder what they could really be? I wonder if they are so deep that the light cannot get there? It's like holding a shadow in your hand.

MOVEMENTS

When the wondering about the black pieces of felt is about to conclude, take out a single brown strip and lay it close to you along your bottom right of the underlay. You can walk your fingers along it to suggest a path. Try to stretch it like a rubber band.

The second strip is placed parallel to the first one, but further from you on the overlay.

The third piece is placed to the left to connect the first two parallel pieces. It could suggest goal posts for football.

When the figure is closed it looks like a square, but it also could look like a diamond for playing baseball.

Move one of the four strips to suggest the movement of a gate, then lay it flat again to make the square or diamond.

Lay the other strips on top of the strips already laid down, so that you build up the shape you have made to a depth of three strips each.

Take a single sheep out of the box and place it in the sheepfold. Take out the remaining four sheep, one by one. When you are wondering how many there really are, take one away, then another, until there is only one. As you begin to wonder if there are more, you place the sheep back into the sheepfold until all five are back.

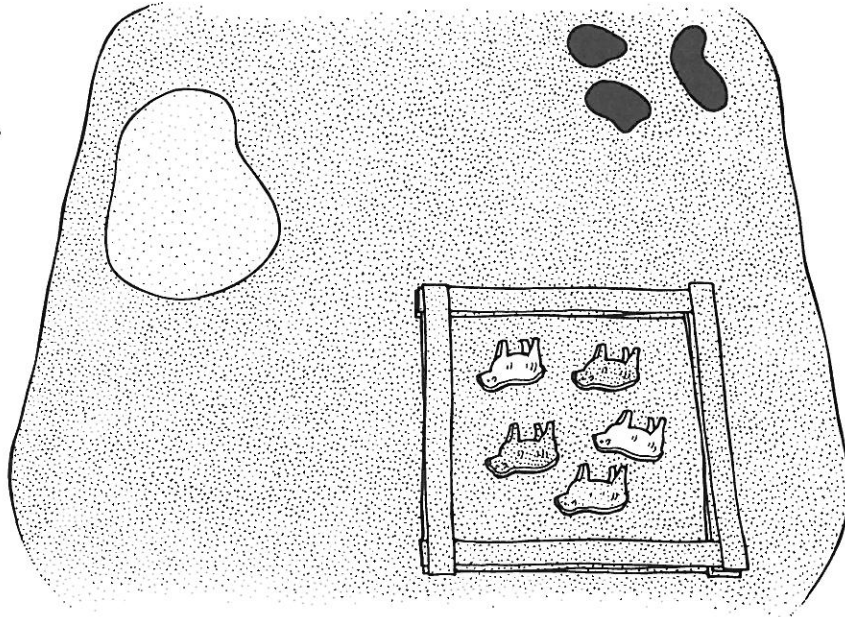
WORDS

Sometimes people who sit over there think they see a face. Oh, there is no light in the eyes. There is no light in the smile.

- I wonder what this could be? A path? A flat log? A stick? No, it is not a rubber band.
- Here's another one. Maybe the path is in between.
- Here's another one. Look. Football? The goal posts? I wonder if it is a bridge between the two paths?
- Here's another one. Baseball? Now there is an inside and an outside.
- Let's make a gate, so if there is someone inside he or she can go outside. Or someone outside can go inside.
- There are more. It is getting stronger. I wonder what this could really be? Yes, it could be a house, a kind of flat house, but everything's flat in the parable. It could be a place for animals or people. I wonder who lives there?
- Oh, it's a place for sheep. I wonder how many sheep there really are. This many? This many? This many? This many? Maybe only this many? Or maybe there are this many and more.

MOVEMENTS

WORDS



THE SHEEP IN THE SHEEPFOLD (STORYTELLER'S PERSPECTIVE)

You are now ready to begin the parable. The building of the metaphor is completed. Sit back and reflect for a moment. Then begin with added focus.

When you say, "I am the Good Shepherd," take the Good Shepherd from the gold box and hold it in the palms of your hands. Show it to the children by moving your hands from one side to the other. Then place the Good Shepherd to your right of the sheepfold between the sheepfold and the edge of the green underlay.

As you begin to speak, lay back part of the sheepfold (to open the gate). Move the Good Shepherd to your left on the underlay. Then move the sheep, one by one, slowly out of the sheepfold into the grass. They move

■ There was once someone who said such amazing things and did such wonderful things that people followed him. They couldn't help it. They wanted to know who he was, so they just had to ask him.

■ Once when they asked him who he was, he said, "I am the Good Shepherd."

■ "I know each one of the sheep by name. When I take them from the sheepfold they follow me. I walk in front of the sheep to show them the way."

MOVEMENTS

in single file. Move the first one, then the others so they catch up one by one.

Move your hand over the grass to the left of the sheepfold.

Moving the sheep needs to be a slow, fluid movement. Focus on each one as you move them to the piece of blue felt.

Move the Good Shepherd between the black pieces of felt and then begin to move the sheep through. Remember the times you have had to go through danger and let those feelings come into your awareness.

Move the sheep through one at a time. Move them slowly. They do not want to go. They turn this way and that. Finally, each one is through but one. Place that last and lost sheep under one of the pieces of black felt with only the head showing.

There is silence while the sheep go through. Be comfortable with it.

Bring the four sheep just to the door of the sheepfold. The Good Shepherd is back in the position he started from.

Move each sheep into the sheepfold. You nod your head and silently count each one. The children may join you.

You then move your hand as if the lost sheep is going in. Clearly that sheep is not there. You look under and above your hand. Where could it be?

WORDS

◆ "I show them the way to the good grass..."

◆ "...and I show them the way to the cool, still, fresh water."

◆ "When there are places of danger..."

◆ "...I show them how to go through."

◆ "I count each one as the sheep goes inside."

◆ "If one of the sheep is missing I would go anywhere to look for the lost sheep..."

MOVEMENTS

Move the Good Shepherd in front of the sheepfold and then slowly to the grass, to the water, and through the dangerous place. The gate to the sheepfold is left open.

Take the sheep from behind the felt piece and tuck it in behind the shoulders of the Good Shepherd. If your Good Shepherd already has a sheep on his back, don't worry. That seldom bothers the children. They will speak up if it does, and you can say, "There's really only one."

Move the Good Shepherd and the lost sheep through the dangerous place toward the sheepfold. Remove the lost sheep and leave it in front of the sheepfold. Place the Good Shepherd back in his original position. Move the lost sheep into the sheepfold and close the gate.

Sit back and pause. Older children sometimes say, "Sure, and they ate the sheep!" Take that very seriously. Take your time. "You know, the sheep die every time, but the feast is about finding."

Put the Good Shepherd in the box and take out the ordinary shepherd. Hold this figure in the palm of your hand. Show it to the children and then place the figure on the underlay midway between the water, the dangerous place and the sheepfold.

Move the sheep slowly out of the sheepfold so that one goes to the right, one to the left, one to the far right, one to the far left, and the fifth one goes past the ordinary shepherd toward the far edge of the underlay.

WORDS

- ◆ "...in the grass, by the water, even in places of danger."
- ◆ "And when the lost sheep is found I would put it on my back, even if it is heavy, and carry it back safely to the sheepfold."
- ◆ "When all the sheep are safe inside, I am so happy that I can't be happy just by myself, so I invite all of my friends and we have a great feast."
- ◆ This is the ordinary shepherd. When the ordinary shepherd takes the sheep from the sheepfold, he does not always show the way.
- ◆ The sheep wander.

MOVEMENTS

Take the wolf from the box and show it to the children, as you have the other figures. Place it by the dangerous place facing toward the sheep.

Move the ordinary shepherd off the underlay to your near left and place him in the box.

Take the Good Shepherd from the box and place it between the wolf and the sheep. Put it down firmly and leave your hand on it for a moment to establish the strength of this move.

Turn each sheep slowly around so each one faces the sheepfold.

You then move each one slowly back inside and close the gate.

Place the Good Shepherd back in his starting place beside the sheepfold. Put the wolf back in the box.

Sit back and reflect for a moment on the whole parable. You are preparing to lead the wondering, so you need to be in a wondering frame of mind first.

Point to the sheepfold.

Move your hand over the good grass to your near left.

WORDS

When the wolf comes, the ordinary shepherd runs away...

...but the Good Shepherd stays between the wolf and the sheep and would even give his life for the sheep...

...so they can come back safely to the sheepfold.

Now, I wonder if these sheep have names?

I wonder if the sheep are happy inside this place?

I wonder where this place could really be?

I wonder if you have ever come close to such a place?

I wonder if you have ever found the good grass?

I wonder if you have ever had the cool, clear, fresh water touch you?

I wonder if you ever had to go through a place of danger?

I wonder how you got through?

MOVEMENTS

As the wondering begins to slow down, you need to be alert, because you want to end the wondering with some energy still in it.

When the wondering is over you then begin to place each one of the objects back into the parable box with great care. Do not hurry. You do not know what feelings these pieces of the parable have been invested with. Name the pieces as they are returned to the box.

When all is put away you then return the parable box to its place on the parable shelves and begin to help the children decide what work they are going to get out.

WORDS

I wonder if you have ever been lost?

I wonder if you have ever been found?

I wonder if the Good Shepherd has ever called your name?

■ I wonder where this whole place could really be?

■ Here is the Good Shepherd.

Look. The sheep.

The water.

The dangerous place.

The sheepfold.

The grass.

■ Now, I wonder what work you would like to get out today?