

The Adventures of Amari & Darius

Jesus is a Storyteller

Sunday afternoon in Memphis in July. It was very hot that day. Amari and Darius were sitting in the backyard under a tree with a popsicle. Next door, cousins Ghalen and Jabari came over. They got a popsicle from Memaw. They were going to hang out for a bit.

After a while, Mama appeared at the back door. She told Amari and Darius to come inside, clean their rooms, and get ready for Monday. As they stood up, she reminded them that next week was the last week of Street Reach Bible Club. Amari looked sad because she loved Bible Club. Ghalen and Jabari went home, promising to return later. Amari and Darius went in to do their chores. Mama smiled and said, "Don't look so sad. It won't take that long, and then you can go back out until suppertime." They did their chores. Both kids knew better than to argue with Mama. They got their chores done and had everything ready for Monday. Darius was wondering out loud, "I wonder if there will be an offer of a field trip next Saturday." Amari agreed that it would be fun.

By suppertime, the house smelled so good. They all loved Memaw's ham. Ghalen and Jabari came back over along with their mama, daddy, and Gramps. Everyone sat down for supper. Mama looked around the table. She said to the kids, "You know next week is the last week of Street Reach Bible Club for this summer, right?" They all nodded, yes. She continued, "Well, how about a baseball game next Saturday if you all have a good week? You know, to celebrate!" Darius was really excited. "Oh boy!" He exclaimed. "Can we picnic at the park before the game?" Mama looked over at Ghalen's daddy. He nodded, yes. "It's a deal," she said. "Just make sure there is good behavior from all four of you this week."

Monday morning arrived in a blaze of sunshine. Amari and Darius got dressed and went out front to wait for the church people. Gramps was out there with Ghalen and Jabari. Memaw sat down in the rocker next to Gramps to wait. Soon, the church people were coming down the road. The church leader paused for a moment to speak with Gramps and Memaw. Then all the kids joined the group and headed for their club site.

They got settled quickly and waited for the story leader to speak. She stood up and said, "Good morning, everyone! This week, we are going to learn about the lessons Jesus wanted to teach us through the stories he told. All week, we'll focus on understanding why Jesus used parables and what each one can teach us about how we live. Paying attention will help us remember these lessons and put them into practice in our own lives." And today's story goes something like this. Now, let's transition to the lesson Jesus shared with the crowd.

When Jesus taught people, he liked to tell stories called parables. These are not true stories; they are made-up stories to teach us important things about living or God's love.

Have you ever heard the story of Goldie Locks and the Three Bears? How about the Three Little Pigs? These stories are easy to remember, just like a parable. Jesus told them so the people would remember them. Children's stories are made up, like bears talking or pigs living in houses. But Jesus's stories, while not real, were about normal, everyday things for adults. There were no cartoons or pretend characters.

Even though you are young, you can learn these stories too. The main focus is how these parables show us ways to act towards others, how to please God, and what Heaven is like. They teach us practical lessons for our everyday lives and help us remember the right things to do in real situations.

After Jesus told a parable, he would explain what it meant, but only to his real friends who really wanted to know him better. An example of a longer parable is the one about the farmer, which goes something like this:

Jesus had gone out and sat by the lake by himself. Soon, such large crowds gathered around Him that He got into a boat near the shore. People stood on the land to hear him. Then he began telling them parables:

A farmer went out to plant his garden. As he was throwing the seed on the ground, some fell on the hard path nearby, and the birds came and ate them.

The next seeds fell near some rocks the farmer had piled nearby. There wasn't much dirt around the rocks. The seeds sprouted and grew the next day. When seeds aren't planted in the dirt, they don't grow roots. Roots help them stay strong and wet, which helps them grow properly. So, in the afternoon, when the sun was very hot, the little plants that started to grow among the rocks withered away and died because they had no roots in the ground.

As the farmer continued to throw seeds onto the ground, some of the seeds fell among the weeds and thorns that he hadn't pulled out. The thorns grew faster and taller than the seeds, so the seeds couldn't get enough sunlight and were choked out by the thorns.

Finally, some seed fell on the good soil. The farmer had worked the soil and dug holes for the seed to go into. Those seeds made plants. Those plants produced lots and lots of vegetables.

After Jesus told the parable, the disciples asked what it meant. He saw they were ready to listen and wanted to know Him better, so He explained. It goes like this:

Just like when you listen to your Sunday School teacher, your parents, or your pastor. They want to help you know more about God and how to get to Heaven. When they talk to you about these things, they are planting a pretend seed in your mind. The seed is a story about Jesus. As you learn more, the seed grows and gets bigger. Eventually, you will know a lot about God. Then you can tell others about Him.

If you hear about Jesus but don't understand, ask questions. If you don't, you might forget what you learned. That's like seeds on a path that birds eat. The story will leave your mind and not grow. Sometimes you might learn something about God and feel happy, but you do not learn more. It helps to read Bible stories, pray, and go to church if you can. If you do not do these things, you will not have a good friendship with God.

So if you don't learn more about God, the pretend seed in your mind won't grow, and it will be like the seed that fell on the rocks. It grew only briefly, then died.

The next seed is the one that was choked out by the thorns. This can happen when you hear a lesson about God and then start worrying about all kinds of things.

You might worry about your parents, your friends, or if you have all the coolest stuff. By worrying, you will choke out the pretend seed in your mind. Pray to God instead of worrying!

The last seed is the best; it landed on good ground. If you listen and learn at Sunday School and church, the seed in your mind will grow. You will be able to tell others how good God is. God will be your friend. Instead of planting a garden, you will help others know God. You will help Heaven grow by bringing in more people.

Amari liked that story. Since Memaw had a garden in the backyard, she understood seeds and things growing. After Bible Club ended for the day, the kids finished their rotations and had a snack before heading home. Once there, Memaw and Gramps were both on the front porch. The church leader gave them a thumbs up, then went down the road.

Group Discussion Questions:

Why did Jesus tell stories?

How does a seed grow well?

How can the seed in your mind grow?

Bible Verse:

"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." Matthew 13:23

Word of the Day: Parable

A simple, made-up story Jesus told using everyday things like sheep, seeds, or neighbors. He used these to teach a big, important truth about God's love, heaven, or how to live.

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Today's story shifts to The Prodigal Son, picking up after the events of the Bible Club.

Everyone went into the house. It was much cooler. This marked the start of a new afternoon at Amari's. Darius and Jabari played an energetic game of checkers. Gramps oversaw the game and offered suggestions.

After a while, Gramps announced it was time for Ghalen and Jabari to head back home. Mama asked how the Bible club was. Amari told her it was great. They were learning about Jesus stories. Mama said, "Oh, you're learning about Parables?" Amari nodded, yes. "Today we learned about The Sower and the Seed. We'll have one every day this week." Then Mama looked over at Memaw and asked, "How was the behavior today?" Memaw just smiled. "It was just fine for all the kids!"

Tuesday morning was another hot day in Memphis. But that didn't deter the kids. They got dressed and all went out front. There was Gramps in a rocker with Ghalen and Jabari. Memaw sat in her rocker as they waited for the church people. Soon they could be heard coming down the road. The kids all waved bye and joined the group going to their club site.

Soon they were sitting under the big tree just waiting for the story leader. She stood up and started talking. "Yesterday we learned about one of Jesus' stories. He had many stories. Today we will talk about a father and his sons. It's called the Prodigal Son. Does anyone know what Prodigal is?" (allow children to respond) "Well, let's get into our story and find out about this special son."

And our story goes something like this...

There once was a father who had two sons. One day, the younger son said to his father, "Father, could you give me my inheritance?" (Inheritance is money the father would give his children after he had died.) So, the father

thought about it and decided his sons could have the money now, and he split it evenly between them.

Very soon after the younger son received the money, he decided that, since he had so much, he would move to a different country and have some fun with it.

When he left, he left for good. He took every last thing he had and didn't plan on returning. He wanted to be grown up and spend all his money however he wanted, with no one telling him what to do.

So, he just left. He left a large farm with many hired men, with everything he needed; he left his family, and, more importantly, he left his father, who trusted him enough to give him the money. This probably made his father very sad, and I'm sure he missed him very much.

While the son was gone, he spent all the money he had right away. He didn't think to save any of it. He ate out every meal every day, he bought fancy things, he threw wild parties, and spent money on many other things that God wouldn't be happy with.

After he had spent all his money, the country he was living in became very poor, and they hardly had enough food for everyone. It was even worse for people who had no money, because food became even more expensive, making it very hard for poor people to get any.

The son was in trouble. He had no money, no place to live, and he had nothing to eat, so he had to get a job. The only job he could find was feeding pigs. He was so hungry he tried to eat the food that the pigs were eating, but his boss caught him and told him that if he ever saw him doing that again, he would lose his job.

That night, as the son was walking home, his stomach wouldn't stop growling; he was so hungry. He saw some people walking towards him and asked them for money for food, but no one would give him any. Everyone was so poor that it was hard to share with anyone.

The son went to bed hungry, and when he woke up, he realized something. When he lived with his father, even the hired men had more food than they needed, and now he was starving to death. At that moment, he made a plan. He would go back to his father's house and say

to him, 'I have sinned against God and against you. I don't deserve to be called your son, so hire me, and I will work for you.'

He knew that if he became like a hired man on his father's farm, he would still be better off than he was right now. He would always have a warm place to stay and food to eat. So, he headed home.

It took the son a long time to get home; he was just hoping his dad would let him work at the farm and be a hired man. The son was walking up to the farm, but while he was still a long way off, he could see someone notice him and start to run towards him. He was sure that they must have been expecting someone else; no one would be excited to see him. As the person got closer, he realized it was his father, and he was yelling, "My son! My son! You are finally home!" He couldn't believe it. His father threw his arms around him and kissed him. But the son quickly said, "Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I don't deserve to be called your son..." The son wanted to continue, but the father said to one of his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the biggest calf and kill it. Let's have a party and celebrate because my son was lost and is found!"

A little while later, the older son was working in the field and heard music and dancing. So, he called one of the servants and asked what was going on. "Your brother has come home, and your father is having a party for his return."

This upset the older brother, and he refused to join the party. The father heard that he was upset, so he went to talk to him and invited him to join the party. But the son refused, saying, "Look! I have been working for you all these years, and I've never disobeyed you. Yet you never had a big party for me to celebrate with my friends. But now my younger brother has come home, spent all the money you gave him, and you killed the biggest calf for him!"

"But, my son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was lost and now he is found."

In this parable, the father is like God. This is how God would be if we ran away from him and started doing things we shouldn't. He doesn't give up

on us when we do wrong, and he will always forgive us if we've truly changed and repented for what we've done.

Now, the older brother in this story just shows how most of us would act if this happened to us. I think we would all be upset if our younger brother or sister ran away for a long time, did a whole bunch of bad things, and then came home only to have our parents throw a big party for him. The wronged father was forgiving. But the eldest son, who had not been wronged, was unforgiving. In this parable, Jesus gives a clear picture of God and what God is like. God is truly kinder than we are.

Amari was very thoughtful. She understood about the younger brother being hungry and poor. She knew people in their own neighborhood who had lost their jobs and had no money to buy food. Of course, it wasn't because they were bad and spent their money on silly stuff. But still, she could relate a little bit. The kids finished their rotations, had a snack, and started home. They got home, where the church leader gave them a thumbs up!

Group Discussion Questions:

Why did the youngest son leave his family?

What did he do with all his money?

Did he feel sorry for what he did?

Bible Verse:

"For this, my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry." Luke 15:24

Word of the Day: Prodigal

To spend a lot of money on things you don't need and be very wasteful with what you have

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Wednesday was a cloudy day. It wasn't supposed to rain, but it was still hot. The kids were up and dressed quickly. They went to the kitchen, where Memaw had cereal bowls on the kitchen table. The kids both ate everything and helped her clear up before going out front. There was Gramps in his rocker with Ghalen and Jabari just hopping around. Very shortly, the church people came down the road. The kids waved bye and joined the group. Amari was excited to hear about the next parable!

Soon they were sitting under the big tree, and the story leader stood up to speak. "Today, our story is about talents. Now, in this story, talents represented money. So, let's just dive in to understand."

And today's story goes something like this...

This story is called the Parable of the Talents. As you know, a parable is a type of story Jesus would tell to teach us something.

Jesus' stories had more than one meaning. For example, this story is about talents, which was a super large amount of money in Bible times. Today, a talent might be worth a million dollars!

A talent in this story can also mean our gifts or abilities. Something special and amazing God gives just to you, almost like a superpower.

The parable starts like this: A man decided to go on a long trip, so he called his servants and asked them to take care of his house, his stuff, and his money.

Keep in mind that the man in this story is like God, and the man's servants are God's people (you and me!) The man in this story trusted his servants and believed that they would take care of his special and valuable things. The man decided to give one servant five talents of money (let's say five million dollars), to another, two talents (two million), and to the last servant, one talent. He gave each servant a large amount, which he thought they could handle, or as much as they could.

Our abilities are the special gifts that God gave to each of us. He made some of us smarter about some things than others. Some of us are good at memorizing, some at certain sports, and some at helping others. Some can solve problems better, and some are more generous. Our ability is something special that sets us apart from everyone else.

Back to the story, the man left on his trip, and the servants each did something with the money that they received. The man with the five talents went right away, used his money, and got five more! The man with the two talents also used his money wisely and gained two more talents. But the man with one talent buried it in the ground to keep the money safe. He didn't even try to do something with it.

He reminds me a bit of a dog that buries a bone. He had lots of time to do something with his money. He could've bought some seeds and planted a garden and made some money, but he didn't do anything!

After a nice, long trip, the master came back and wanted to know what his servants did with his money. The first man with the five talents said, "You trusted me with five talents, and I made five more!"

His master smiled and replied, "Great job, good and faithful servant! You are trustworthy with a few things, so I will put you in charge of lots of things. Come celebrate with me!"

I think it's interesting that the master says he trusted him with a few things. He gave him five million dollars! That's A LOT of things. But to this master, it was small compared to what he would give and trust him with now. Then the man with the two talents came and said, "You trusted me with two talents, and I made two more!"

His master smiled and replied, "Great job, good and faithful servant! You are trustworthy with a few things, so I will put you in charge of lots of things. Come celebrate with me!"

Then the man who received the one talent came and told his master, "I know you work hard for your money, so I was afraid to lose any of it. I decided to bury it and keep it safe. Here is your one talent back."

The master was not impressed and said, "You lazy servant! At the very least, you could've taken the money to the bank, and you would've at least collected some interest from it."

He immediately took the talent away from the man and gave it to the first man who used his money to make more.

The point Jesus was trying to make is that if you use your special gifts and abilities, God will give you more to keep doing these things you are good at. He will trust you with so much more.

If you have a chance to do something for God for which he gave you special abilities, and you don't do it, you will lose your special gift.

God considers you very valuable and trusts you to do something for him using your gifts and abilities. If you have a chance to do something and don't because you want to watch TV, play video games, or just don't want to do anything, God will take that valuable gift and give it to someone who is using their gifts.

Maybe you're not sure what your special abilities are yet. Ask your parents or teachers what they think your gifts are.

Listen and watch when others compliment you or notice something good about what you're doing. To you, it might be something small, but to God it's a special, very valuable gift that only you can give. If you keep using it, God will continue to make it bigger and better.

Amari was already thinking about what her special talent might be. She would have to talk to Memaw and Mama about this one. The kids finished their rotations and had a snack before going home. Back at the house, Gramps and Memaw were on the porch just rocking and waiting. The church leader gave them a thumbs-up, which made everyone smile.

Group Discussion Questions:

Was the talent worth a little or a lot?

What happened to the servant who doubled his talents?

What does God want us to do with our "talents"?

Bible Verse:

"For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away." Matthew 25:29

Word of the Day: Talent

Anything special you are good at (art, sports, kindness, math) that God gave to use for good, not just for themselves.

The Adventures of Amari and Darius

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Thursday has arrived. The sun is back out today and still hot – of course. The kids got dressed and went in for breakfast. Memaw had scrambled eggs and bacon with toast all ready for them. They enjoyed that and then helped clear off. Then out to the front porch, where Gramps was already rocking, a cup of coffee in one hand. Ghalen and Jabari were waiting. Just two more days of bible club, they thought. Soon, the church people were coming down the road. The kids waved bye to Gramps and Memaw before joining the group for Bible Club.

In short order, they were sitting under the big tree just waiting for the story leader. Soon she stood up and started talking. "We have arrived on Thursday. And another parable. This one is about a Good Samaritan. Does anyone here know what a Samaritan is?" (allow children time to respond and explain if necessary) "I think this story will explain it for you. So, let's dive right in."

And our story today goes something like this...

This next parable started with a man asking Jesus a question. The man who asked Jesus a question was very smart. Maybe he was trying to trick Jesus and see if he was a good teacher. This is what he asked: "Teacher, what should I do so I can go to Heaven and live forever?"

Jesus replied, "What is written in the Bible? What do you think?"

The man answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself."

"That is right!" Jesus said. "Do this, and you will live forever in Heaven."

But the man wanted to know more, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

Jesus decided to answer this question with a parable to help everyone who was listening understand.

Jesus said:

"There once was a Jewish man walking along a road. He was coming from Jerusalem and was heading to Jericho, which was a full day or two of walking. The road was rocky, with small hills on either side. The man was just humming to himself and enjoying the nice day when suddenly a group of men jumped out from behind a hill. They took all his belongings and tore off most of His clothes. They didn't want him to follow them, so they beat him up very badly and left him lying and bleeding on the side of the road.

A few minutes later, a priest was walking down the same path and noticed the man lying on the side of the road. Do you know what he did? You'd think he would run over and help the man. Instead, he crossed the road and walked on the other side and acted like he didn't see the man. About an hour later, another man, a Levite, was walking down the road. Levites were people who assisted priests with their work. He would probably help the man. But you know what he did? He slowed down and walked a little closer to the man, but then kept walking without helping him at all.

You might be thinking that the man lying by the side of the road looked like he was resting, which is why the priest and the Levite didn't stop to help. The trouble is, it was easy to tell he was badly hurt. The man was bleeding, had most of his clothes ripped off him, and he was bruised and hardly breathing.

Just a few minutes later, another man came walking. He was a Samaritan. One thing you should know about Samaritans is that Jews didn't like them. Jews usually didn't treat Samaritans very well, so they never got along. The man who was dying on the road was a Jew. So, what do you think the Samaritan did? You would think he would walk by and maybe even laugh at the man.

But as soon as he saw the man, he went over to him and felt compassion for him. He put bandages on his sores and poured oil and wine (which were quite expensive) on the sores to prevent them from getting worse. Then he lifted the man onto his own donkey and took him to a hotel to care for him.

The next day, the Samaritan took out enough money so the man could stay at the hotel until he was well enough to leave. He paid the man at the

front desk and asked him to take care of the man. If he wasn't better after about two months, the Samaritan would come back and pay for any extra cost."

After Jesus finished the story, he asked, "Which of the three men do you think was a neighbor to the man who was left beaten on the side of the road?" The man who asked him the question at the beginning replied, "The one who had compassion and helped him." Jesus told him, "Go and do the same."

Well, that was a very clear picture in Amari's mind of how people should be. The Samaritan was definitely the good guy here. The kids finished their rotations and had a snack before heading home. When they arrived, the church leader gave Gramps and Memaw a thumbs up, then started walking down the road. The kids hopped up on the porch, telling Gramps and Memaw about the Good Samaritan. Gramps told them that it was one of his favorite stories of Jesus' parables because it relates so well even today.

Group Discussion Questions:

What is a Samaritan?

How many people passed the injured man without stopping to help?

What did the good Samaritan do?

Who is your neighbor?

Bible Verse:

"So he answered and said, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself'." Luke 10:27

Word of the Day: Good Samaritan

A "Good Samaritan" is someone who helps anyone in need, even a stranger or someone different from them

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By the time they finished their chores, Mama was home, and it was time for supper. They all sat down for a yummy supper. Mama asked how their day was. Amari told her she was a little sad that tomorrow was the last day of Bible Club for the summer. Mama nodded sympathetically. "Yes, it will be a while before it's time for Spring Bible Club next March. But just think how much you have learned and how much fun you've had this summer!" Amari had to agree. It wouldn't be long before school would start, and there would be new teachers and subjects.

Well, it's Friday. The last day of Street Reach Summer Bible Club. The only comfort Darius could think of was the promised picnic and baseball game on Saturday. The kids got dressed and went to the kitchen for breakfast. Memaw must have sensed their sadness. They ate their breakfast and helped to clear off before all heading out front. There was Gramps, as always, in his rocker, coffee cup in hand. Ghaleen and Jabari were patiently waiting on the porch. Soon, the church team had arrived. They waved bye to Gramps and Memaw before joining the group going to their site. It took no time to get there, and then they were sitting under the big tree waiting for the story leader. Soon she stood up to speak. "We have really enjoyed being with you all this week. You are a special bunch of kiddos. I hope we can come again next year! Today is our last Parable. There are more that we didn't cover, but this one you should enjoy. So let's jump in and see where it takes us."

And today's story goes something like this...

This week, we are going to learn about another parable. Do you remember what a parable is? It's a story Jesus told to teach a lesson. The story should be easy to remember and will have a special meaning for us to learn from.

This is the parable of the lost sheep. Jesus started by telling the story to men called tax collectors and Pharisees. These were men who thought they were more important than everyone else, and they weren't very nice.

They were whispering about Jesus, saying he shouldn't eat with or talk to sinners.

It's funny they would say that because we all are sinners, we all do things we shouldn't. The tax collectors and Pharisees thought that they were better than everyone else. In fact, they didn't think they had to repent or say sorry to God for their mistakes.

Have you ever felt really bad for something you've done? Maybe you've hit your brother or sister, and afterwards you wished you hadn't. When you really feel sorry for something and tell that person you are sorry, that is what we do when we repent.

Just like with our family, we need to feel bad and say sorry to God when we've done something wrong. The Pharisees and tax collectors didn't think that they had to do this because they were so important.

Of course, Jesus knew what they were thinking, so he told this parable: Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine sheep and go find the one sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he is so excited that he carries the sheep all the way home. Then he phones all his friends and neighbors and has a party to celebrate the sheep that was found.

Then Jesus told what the parable meant: Just like there was a big party over the one lost sheep, there will be a big party in heaven over just one sinner who repents, rather than over ninety-nine people who think they are perfect and don't need to repent.

Just imagine, when you say "you're sorry" to God, all of heaven has a big party just for what you've done! God is much more excited when we say we're sorry than when we act as if nothing has happened and refuse to repent. But you know, Jesus just kept going, and he told another parable. Listen and see if this sounds like something you've already heard.

Suppose a woman has ten-dollar coins and loses one. Does she not turn on all her lights, sweep the whole house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls all her friends and neighbors and has a party to celebrate finding the lost coin. Just like the lost coin, there is great joy with all of God's angels over one sinner who repents.

I think the lesson here is that nobody is perfect (except God, of course).

It's very important that when we make a mistake, we realize we have done

something wrong and we tell God we're sorry. It's as simple as taking a couple of minutes, going somewhere quiet (but you can talk to God anywhere), and just saying you're sorry for the wrong thing you've done and asking God to forgive you.

When you ask God to forgive you, He immediately erases the mistake from His mind, and He won't think of it again. It's pretty easy, huh?! Just think how happy God will be when you do it, and you'll feel better too (at this point, allow comments from the children)

Amari understood this story very well. She thought about how she should ask forgiveness when she has made a mistake. But she still has questions about how to do this. She resolved to talk to Memaw and Mama for answers. They would help her. In the meantime, they finished their rotations, had snack and started home for the last time. Once home, the church leader told Gramps and Memaw they had some great kids and gave them a two-thumbs-up!
See you next year!

Group Discussion Questions:

What should we do if we've done something wrong?

What happens after the farmer finds the lost sheep?

What happens when we "say sorry" to God?

Bible Verse:

"I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." Luke 15:7