




# LOST

PARABLES OF A  
GOD WHO PURSUES

## The Lost Sheep

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## DEVOTIONAL

At my house, I'm known as the finder of lost things—the reluctant recoverer of wayward car keys, remote controls, cellphones, and purses. Try as they might, my wife and our daughter cannot seem to find anything that goes missing. Apparently, I see differently than they do, and I have no idea why. Maybe I'm simply the domestic equivalent of a particular sleuth (and please pardon the pun): Sherlock “Holmes.”

Perhaps this is why I felt the gravitational pull of the Gospel of Luke's parable of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son when my Sunday School class studied them recently. Reverberating louder than anything else from these stories, at least for this reader, is the joy of the finder. “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance,” Luke 15:7 reads.

**That God delights in finding lost things—or rather, lost people—challenges me.**

For one thing, I'm uncomfortable with the way Christians use the term “lost” to describe those who do not follow Jesus, so I rarely associate delight with searching for those who have strayed. Labeling people almost always oversimplifies them, transforming otherwise complex creations of God into caricatures of themselves. It can also establish an us-and-them mentality that does not square with Scripture: Isaiah writes, “All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isa. 53:6). All of us, then, know or have known lostness. I know that even with Christ as my compass, I have wandered and desperately longed to be found. Then there's this:

***When I focus on God's joy at the prospect of finding that which is lost, I become aware that my heart does not beat in sync with His—my heart does not leap for my fellow wanderers the way my Maker's does.***

As a Christian, shouldn't I care about the things Jesus cares about? Compared to the steadfast rhythm of God's loving heart, I have something like spiritual arrhythmia, caring about the welfare of other people in fits and starts. Sometimes when I come across people fumbling in the darkness, I want to introduce them to my very bright friend, Jesus. Other times, I'm less motivated—because I'm fumbling in the dark myself, or I'm lazy, or I feel ill-equipped for the task.

Which brings me back to the three parables in Luke. Even though I'm challenged by a God who delights in entering the human fray “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), I am undeniably attracted to that aspect of the Creator's character, too. I love that God leaves no stone unturned in His search for us. The one He rolled away from the entrance to the tomb tells us He is even willing to pass through the valley of the shadow of death to find us.

Somehow, the joy God experiences at the prospect of finding us outweighs the suffering that comes with His relentless search. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus, “for the joy set before Him endured the cross.” That being said, I cannot help but wonder: Couldn't the same anticipatory joy that motivated the Savior to embrace the cross enable us to overcome our own reluctance to join God in His work? To co-labor with Him, recovering those runaway souls and beloved wanderers who desperately long to be found?

**May we see as God sees—and seek as God seeks—when it comes to the lost people we encounter.<sup>1</sup>**

## OPEN IT

1. **In a recent study of students, researchers identified various subsets of people groups within a school setting which are as follows: populars, jocks, floaters, fine arts, brains, normals, stoners, and loners. Which label best described you in school, and did you embrace this label?**

## READ IT

**Luke 15:1-32**

## EXPLORE IT

2. **Luke 15 begins with people drawing near to hear Jesus. What had Jesus been talking about in Luke 14:25-35 that might have caught people's attention?**
3. **What two groups were drawing near to Jesus?**
4. **How many sheep did the man have, and how many were lost?**
5. **What did the owner do after he learned one lamb was missing?**
6. **What was the shepherd's response when he found his sheep? Who does he call?**

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<sup>1</sup> The Joy of the Finder Devotional by Chad Thomas Johnston found @ <https://www.intouchcanada.org/read/magazine/faith-works/the-joy-of-the-finder> Copyright © 2019 In Touch Ministries

# APPLY IT

## A “MOTLEY CRUE”

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” What follows in the coming chapter are some of the most familiar images and popular parables of the whole of Luke’s gospel and, indeed, the New Testament. But to understand any of it, we need first to tarry over these opening verses.

Notice that the evangelist directs our attention to two groups, really two audiences paying attention to Jesus’ words. The first are the tax-collectors and sinners. As a reminder: the tax-collectors of the Bible have nothing in common with those who work for the Internal Revenue Service today. Nothing. Rather, they are those Jews who have been recruited by the Romans to collect a tax from their neighbors, a tax that in turn supports the ongoing Roman occupation of Israel. Moreover, tax-collectors were given a quota by their masters, and the more they exceeded that quota – that is, the more they could squeeze their neighbors on behalf of the occupying Romans – the richer they became. They were, therefore, considered traitors, cheats, and thoroughly and completely unrighteous.

The second group St. Luke describes as sinners, and we must take care to note that Luke is not a child of the Reformation that declared that all were sinners. Rather, he is using that term more precisely to describe those people who stood so far outside the pale of what was considered decent behavior that they were routinely shunned. As a colleague of mine recently said, yes, we’re all sinners, but these were the one who were called that to their face...regularly, relentlessly, publicly, and by everyone.

And these are the kinds of folks who are flocking to hear Jesus, eager to sit at his feet and listen as he spun yarns about God’s coming kingdom. It’s not hard to imagine what they loved about Jesus, for he described for them a kingdom where everyone was welcome, where power and status and social stigma were no more, and where God would set to right all the injustice of the world, healing the sick, feeding the hungry, freeing the imprisoned, and elevating the downtrodden. No, it’s not hard to imagine why they loved Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

**7. What do we learn about Jesus from the information above? How might you have responded to a large group of people following you all the time wherever you went?**

**8. Do you regularly and purposefully welcome the “sinners” in your neighborhood, in your office, or in your family into your home or spend quality time sharing a meal with them? Are there certain “sinners” you might associate with and other “sinners” that you would never associate with? Why or why not?**

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<sup>2</sup> Devotional by David Lose found @ <http://www.davidlose.net/2013/11/luke-15-1-2/>

Luke gives us some details about the setting of Luke 15. Luke says, "all the tax collectors and publicans were drawing near". This tells us two things: First, it was a large group of people, and second, Luke uses a tense that says this drawing near was incessant meaning they continued to come to Jesus again and again.

**9. What barriers or excuses could Jesus have used to keep the people away? Are there ever times when such barriers might be wise to put up?**

**10. While many came to interact and learn from Jesus, others came ready to criticize. Jesus seems to ignore the criticism and use his time to teach the people. How do you respond to criticism, and what can we learn from Jesus's approach to critical people?**

### **STORY TIME WITH JESUS**

*<sup>3</sup>So He told them a parable...*

*A parable is, literally, something "cast alongside" something else. Jesus's parables were stories that were "cast alongside" a truth in order to illustrate that truth. His parables were teaching aids and can be thought of as extended analogies or inspired comparisons. A common description of a parable is that it is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning.*

**11. What is it about stories that help us to understand things better? What modern day parable or story has impacted your life?**

**12. In what ways do the three parables that Jesus shares in this chapter connect with the crowd?**

## WALKING IN THE SHEPHERD'S SHOES

*(4)What man of you having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them,*

*No creature strays more easily than a sheep; none is more heedless; and none so incapable of finding its way back to the flock, when once gone astray: it will bleat for the flock, and still run on in an opposite direction to the place where the flock is: this I have often noticed. No creature is more defenseless than a sheep, and more exposed to be devoured by dogs and wild beasts. Even the fowls of the air seek their destruction. I have known ravens often attempt to destroy lambs by picking out their eyes, in which, when they have succeeded, as the creature does not see whither it is going, it soon falls an easy prey to its destroyer.<sup>3</sup>*

**13. While it is not stated in the text, what are some possible things that may have caused the sheep to be separated from the flock?**

### **Isaiah 53:6**

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way*

**14. What things cause us to be separated from God? Read Isaiah 59:6-9. What does it mean to be lost? What truths does Isaiah want us to grasp about ourselves when he compares humans to sheep?**

**15. While nothing more is said of the lost sheep, the shepherd seems to be actively looking for the lost sheep. What does it mean that the lost sheep is seemingly so passive in this parable? What can the sheep do? What can only God do? How does this affect the way we relate to God?**

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<sup>3</sup> Clarke, Adam. "Commentary on Luke 15:4". "The Adam Clarke Commentary". <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/luke-15.html>. 1832.

**16. This shepherd leaves the ninety-nine in open country to go find the one who was missing. Why would the “ninety-nine” be safe? What protection comes from being in the fold? Does this have any connection to our own lives, and what lesson can be learned from the ninety-nine in this parable?**

*The parable gives no indication of the shepherd ever rebuking or chiding. Instead, he hoists the sheep upon his shoulders and takes it home. An adult sheep may weigh anywhere from 110 to 125 pounds; it would be no small effort to carry one over the shoulder. For joy over finding that which was lost, the shepherd bears the discomfort.<sup>4</sup>*

**17. In what ways did Jesus, our Good Shepherd, bear discomfort in his rescue of us? Does this compel you to do anything in response?**

*Finally, the parable of the lost sheep offers an extraordinary glimpse of heavenly emotions. The shepherd calls his friends and neighbors together, saying, “Rejoice with me.” The rescue of the lost sheep was a cause for proclamation and celebration. Similarly, Heaven rejoices when a sinner repents and is restored to fellowship with God. This joy is cheerfulness; it is calm, considered delight. It is a deliberate emotion -- thoughtful and sustained. This is not a picture of raucous dancing and carousing but of lasting pleasure and heartfelt satisfaction. Why? A sinner has come home! Such news delights the heart of heaven.<sup>5</sup>*

**18. How did God rescue you when you were lost? How does knowing that He came searching for you specifically make such a rescue even sweeter?**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/parable-of-the-lost-sheep-faq.htm>

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

**19. If Jesus says that finding lost sheep brings great joy and celebration, what keeps us from joining His "search party"?**

*There is no chapter of the New Testament so well known and so dearly loved as the fifteenth chapter of Luke's gospel. It has been called "the gospel in the gospel," as if it contained the very distilled essence of the good news that Jesus came to tell.<sup>6</sup>*

**20. What about Luke 15 makes it such a special chapter? What is impactful to your own salvation story?**

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<sup>6</sup> Barclay, William. "Commentary on Luke 15:4". "William Barclay's Daily Study Bible".  
<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/dsb/luke-15.html>. 1956-1959.

**Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. [www.villagebible.church/smallgroups](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroups)**