

## Luke 15:1 – 10

<sup>1</sup> Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near him to listen to him. <sup>2</sup> Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, ‘This man receives sinners and eats with them.’ <sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable, saying, <sup>4</sup> ‘What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’ <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

<sup>8</sup> Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!’ <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.’

### Historical and Cultural Background

- *Lost sheep*: Sheep are dumb animals, yet valued by Middle Eastern shepherds. Shepherds would name each one because they observed them so carefully and knew them so well. Shepherds also work in teams. So the shepherd wasn’t leaving the ninety-nine abandoned and defenseless. He was going after the one because it abandoned its true home and became defenseless.
- *Lost coin*: The one silver coin was part of *the set* of ten silver coins, as a necklace. It was a dowry gift given by her father to her when she got married. So losing one coin is more than losing just one-tenth of the total value of the necklace.

## Questions

1. Introduction to the series on *The Emotions of God*. In Luke's Gospel especially, Jesus asks us to reflect on our experience as human beings. He then says that God does that or feels that. For example, in Luke 11:11 – 13, Jesus says, <sup>11</sup> Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? <sup>12</sup> Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? <sup>13</sup> If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?' In other words, we know how to love a little bit. God knows how to love a lot. In fact, perfectly. The affection that we feel for our children, as humans is a small window of insight into God's affection that He feels for His children. Our emotions in general can be a small window of insight into God's emotions. And I think God designed us to make that connection. It's not perfect, and I'm not saying that all our emotions connect to something within God. But there is a small window. Does God have emotions? We'll see!
2. (Introduction, before reading the passage) Describe a time when you lost something. What was it? How did it feel? And did you ever find it?
3. Leader: Tell a personal story of finding an object you thought was lost. Then tell a personal story about getting back a relationship you thought was lost.
  - a. An object: Back in 2008, my wife Ming and I were in Barcelona, Spain and we were robbed. We had taken our two kids John and Zoe to visit Italy and Southern France because we had 200,000 frequent flyer miles on United that we were finally able to use. My younger sister and her husband live in the Toulouse area with their son, at the time, and now their daughter. We went to go visit them. And on one of the days, Ming and I drove their car across the France-Spain border to Barcelona. As soon as we got into the city proper, two young men on a scooter waved at us, and pointed to our tire. We had a flat. They said, 'Mechanico' and pointed behind us. When we pulled over and got out of the car to look at the tire, one of them reached into the car and grabbed a small bag with two passports, a credit card, a driver's license, and a flash drive with very precious pictures from Italy that we had not backed up. He hopped back onto the scooter with his buddy and drove off. Now how did we feel about losing those things? My wife was annoyed and panicked because we had to replace the passports and cancel the credit card. But after we did those things, she was fine. I, on the other hand, was furious, because I loved those pictures. But after a few more days, I had just written them off as lost and that my memories of those places would have to be enough. And when it comes to objects in our lives, even very sentimental ones, we feel desire for that thing. But then after a while, our desire for that thing wanes. That's a healthy response.
  - b. A similar thing happens in our desire for a person. Think of a girlfriend or boyfriend. Or a friend. Or maybe your dad, for example, if your dad left the family. For me, when I got married, I was 27 years old, and all of a sudden I felt a deep desire to have my dad tell me some wisdom about marriage. But by that time, he and my mom had been divorced for 5 years. Before that, their relationship had been terrible, going all the way back to the time I was just born and my mom temporarily ran away with me. My dad felt deeply ashamed of that area of his life. He didn't want to talk about it. I read the opening part of the biblical book of Proverbs because it's in the format of a father writing to a son. But my desire was still there. Sometimes when someone dies or leaves our life, we miss them intensely, but after a while the desire for that person is not on the front burner. It might always be somewhere in some way. Or it might not, depending on how we handle our emotions.
4. Now read through the three parables of lost things in Luke 15. What stands out to you?
5. Cultural points:
  - a. Lost sheep: sheep are dumb animals, yet carefully valued by Middle Eastern shepherds. This was a reasonable thing to do. Shepherds work in teams. So he wasn't leaving the 99 abandoned and defenseless. He was going after the one because it abandoned its true home and became defenseless.
    - i. I want you to notice a small little point. We tend to use the word 'seeker' for people who are not Christians, but who have started to ask questions about faith and spiritual life. That's okay, so long as we remember that the word 'seeker' in these parables is used for the shepherd who seeks the lost, the woman who seeks the lost coin. The lost are *lost*. The seeker is *Jesus*, and *us* who are on mission with him. He does not sit back and wait for people to become interested in coming back. He is out there. He is searching. There

is no passivity or apathy in God. And when he finds the lost, so that they are no longer lost, he rejoices!

- b. Lost coin: The one silver coin was part of the set of ten silver coins, as a necklace. It was a dowry gift given by her father to her when she got married. Losing one coin is more than losing just 1/10<sup>th</sup> of the value.
    - i. God never says, 'Oh well, I have 90% of all the people I created. I'll stop pursuing them. I'm satisfied.' No! God is never satisfied while some people are lost. And yes, I am using the word 'satisfaction' *theologically*. God is not *satisfied* under any condition of lostness.
    - ii. God always keeps looking, pursuing, calling! Hell is the attempt to hide from God, avoid God, and clutch onto the corruption in your human nature when all the while God calls for you to surrender.
  - c. Lost son: We'll look into this section next time.
  - d. Celebration is with the community: he calls together his friends and his neighbors (v.6), she calls together her friends and neighbors (v.9), and the father involves the servants and presumably the rest of the family and the community as well.
  - e. Illus: Now these stories might be a little removed for us. So let me tell you a modern story that you will appreciate. In Florida, there are sometimes man made ponds or lakes that people build their houses around so you can just go into your backyard and then swim in the lake. Occasionally, alligators find their way into those lakes and ponds. So one day, a mom was just in her kitchen cleaning dishes in the sink when she looked up and saw her 10 year old son and his friend swimming in the lake. She saw this huge alligator swimming towards her son. The friend saw the alligator coming and tried to shout, but the boy was swimming with a mask and snorkel in the water. The mom watched in absolute horror and panic as the alligator's jaws came down on the head of her son. And they disappeared under the water. The friend immediately swam for shore and the mom ran outside screaming, thinking that her son was lost for good. Now the boy who had been snorkeling one moment suddenly found himself looking down into the throat of a huge alligator. The alligator's jaws had come down on the plastic snorkel. The snorkel prevented its jaws from closing. So the boy pulled his face out of the mask and started to swim. The mom couldn't believe it when she saw her son come up from the water and start swimming towards her. She rushed into the shallow part of the lake and grabbed hold of his wrists just as the alligator came up and closed his jaws on the boy's feet. So what happened was a tug of war between the mom and the alligator with this boy as the rope. But the boy was wearing flippers! So he wiggled his feet free! They all rushed inside the house and were safe. And the only cuts on the boy were where his mom's fingernails dug into his arms to rescue him! But she had saved her boy. And she cried and rejoiced!
  - f. Human beings are lost. And we are being dragged down not by an external enemy, but an internal enemy – the corruption within our human nature. It is devouring us. So God leaves His house. He throws himself into our world in the person of Jesus. Jesus fights the internal enemy within himself, conquers it, and raises his humanity new as a new humanity. Then he comes after us by his Spirit, grabs hold of us and says, 'Receive me! Hold onto my hand!' And if we take hold and hold on, he rescues us. He pulls us up. And he cries and rejoices.
6. Our emotional dynamics
    - a. Notice that for us as humans, we tend to de-value the thing we lose. Or we replace it right away. If Dad left the family, we devalue Dad. If we lose a friend, we devalue that person. If we lose an object, we typically buy another one. Yet if we de-value the object or person we lose, we undercut our own ability to feel joy when we find it.
  7. God's emotional dynamics and God's nature
    - a. God longs for us.
      - i. Somehow, God doesn't de-value any single person He loses. He maintains a fierce search for that person. Just as the shepherd searches until he finds the lost sheep, the woman searches until she finds the lost coin, and the father searches the horizon to see if the lost son comes back, God always searches.
      - ii. Then He rejoices when we return to Him. God can experience emotions (as we would call them), and even a change of emotions, but only emotions that are consistent with His nature of Triune love. God is changeless (immutable) in the sense that He is Triune love;

that is, His Triune love is immutable. But God can experience longing and joy, that is, emotional change (mutability) in the sense that His love for us produces either the longing or the joy. When we talk about God being changeless, we have to ask, 'What about God is changeless?'

- b. God feels joy. What is Jesus saying about his own joy in this moment?
  - i. God feels joy!!! He is not okay for anyone to be lost and remain lost. Yet in the view of some, God is indifferent! If you choose to believe in Jesus, great. You get God's mercy. If you choose to reject Jesus, great. You get God's justice. And either way, God is okay, because you experience one or the other attribute of God. And it's as if God is indifferent between the two. Believe in Jesus or not. Either way, I get to be in charge. NO WAY!!
  - ii. But God is not indifferent. He wants everyone to come to Him. Every single person. The only way this can be true is if God is a Trinity. Because if God is a Trinity, He is love at the core of His being. At the core of who He is, He is Father and Son who love each other eternally, in the Holy Spirit which is the bond of their love. In his nature, in his character, God is love. So God can only be consistent with His own character. So therefore He must love every single person, and *must try to save every single person in a loving way*. Once He created us, He was committed. There was never a moment when God could have just given up on humanity after the fall, even in theory. Because love makes that not possible! God has to love because that is who God is!
  - iii. Illus: I talked with someone over dinner at Harvard who was struggling with something he heard. He had heard from another Christian teacher that God does not actually try to save every single person. That's totally wrong.
  - iv. Application: God wants others to share in His joy that He has found something or someone who was lost. What helps us connect with God in His joy? Celebrating a person's coming to faith? Remembering stories of others' decisions?