

SEEKING THE LOST • EVANGELISM



Photograph by Greg Schneider/Worldwide Challenge

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

In Luke 19:10, Jesus defines His mission when He says that He came “to seek and to save what was lost.” In the three parables of Luke 15, Jesus discloses God’s intense compassion to rescue lost people and restore them to Himself.

We want to hear from you! Please send your feedback on this study to cru.comm@uscm.org.

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

LUKE 15

In Luke 15:1-3, Jesus is chastised by the Pharisees for consorting with tax collectors and sinners. These three parables are told in response to explain why He has focused His ministry on such a sorted group of individuals.

The Lost Sheep: Luke 15:4-7

As we read this story, we don’t often pause to consider the illogic, economically speaking, of leaving 99 sheep out in the open to go and rescue one that has wandered away. Yet the somewhat irrational response of the shepherd, displays an emotional decision based on care and concern for the sheep that is lost. In all three of these stories, we get a glimpse of the passion that God feels for those who are lost; here it is displayed in leaving 99 behind to go find the one. This compassion is also expressed in the rejoicing that takes place when the sheep is found.

As the story concludes, Jesus states that this great rejoicing is over the one that repents, not over the 99 that didn’t need to. The 99 who don’t need to repent are, most likely, in need of repentance but like the religious leaders did not see their need for repentance. Thus, the lack of rejoicing is not due to their righteousness but to their lack of repentance.

The feeling that the religious leaders had about Jesus reaching out to these “sinners” most likely has a link to 14:34, where Jesus has discussed the worthlessness of salt that has lost its saltiness. In the 1st century salt was used, primarily, as a preservative. The religious leaders in hardening their hearts to the lost, and those in need of God’s forgiveness had, indeed, lost their purpose as a moral preservative in Israel.

The Lost Coin: Luke 15:8-10

In this story, God’s compassion for the lost is highlighted in the phrases used to describe the woman’s pursuit of the lost coin. It says that she lights a lamp (perhaps referring to Jesus) and sweeps the house “searching intently” for the coin. It is really quite amazing to consider that this metaphor refers to how God cares and searches for lost people.

Again, there is the same emphasis on rejoicing. So why weren’t the Pharisees rejoicing? It would seem that their hearts were fixated on justice and judgement

for those who had wandered from God. They felt that their passion for judgement would be affirmed by God; it was not. Instead, Jesus models mercy. Giving what is not deserved. There is a sense that grace is not fair; people get what they don't deserve. Yet at the same time there is a fundamental fairness in that it is offered to all and needed by all. The religious leaders simply did not perceive their own need for repentance.

The Lost Son: Luke 15:11-31

This story is perhaps the most graphic, because it involves a lost person, not simply a sheep or a coin. This parable also goes a step further, in that it deals more pointedly with the attitude of the religious leaders, who are represented by the son who never leaves, and is angry at the mercy shown to the prodigal son.

While the older son never leaves, clearly his heart had lost sight of the important principle of grace. The father reminds the son that this same grace shown to his wandering son was always at his disposal, and he was not loved for his obedience in staying, but because his father loved him.

The religious leaders thought God accepted them for their meticulous observance of the Law. In reality, God had graciously chosen to love them and adopt them; their relationship was a result of His mercy and not their righteousness. It was a loss of this knowledge that caused them to bristle at the idea of mercy being shown to "sinners" who, in their eyes, had not earned the right to be shown mercy.

As the father, in the story, lovingly points these things out to the oldest son, Jesus is lovingly explaining them to the religious leaders (the true-life oldest sons) through these stories.

This study is accompanied by an article. Take the time to read it over before the study. Hand it out to the group at the end of the study and have them read it this week.

WHAT IF THERE'S A PROBLEM?

Some have suggested that the lost coin in the second parable was part of a frontlet (which was a necklace going around the forehead that had ten coins on the front) that an engaged woman might wear, making her search tantamount to looking for a lost engagement ring. While this is an attractive possibility that is not harmful to propose, the text itself doesn't seem to allude to this.

WHAT'S YOUR POINT?

The point of the three stories is two-fold. First, God cares intensely for people who are lost. Jesus defines that the very reason He came, was to “seek and save that which was lost.” Second, everyone is in need of receiving God’s mercy. Those who do not think they need mercy, or don’t experience God’s mercy, do not show mercy to others.

The application point is for the group to consider those close to them who are lost, to consider how God feels about them, and consider how God may use them to help find these lost people.

MEMORY VERSE

Luke 15:10 “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

WHAT ARE THE ANSWERS?

1. Why is Jesus focusing His ministry on “sinners” and tax collectors?
2. Economically speaking, leaving 99 in the open field to find one that was lost, was not a prudent decision.
3. As the 99 most likely represent the religious leaders, He is probably inferring that they simply don’t see their need to repent.
4. It answers why Jesus was pursuing sinners: they were willing to repent. The religious leaders, in having lost their heart for the lost, had become like salt that had lost its flavor, and with that its purpose.
5. It would seem that their hearts were fixated on justice and judgement for those who had wandered from God. They felt that their passion for judgement would be affirmed by God; it was not.
6. Help the group to make connections in their own lives where they are prone to judge rather than show mercy.
7. Besides dealing with a real person, the story spends a great deal more time focused on the attitude of the son who was not lost, which corresponds to the religious leaders.
8. He represents the sinners whom Jesus is welcoming into the kingdom.
9. Let the group share their thoughts; you are not looking for a correct answer.
10. There is a sense that grace is not fair; people get what they don’t deserve. Yet at the same time there is a fundamental fairness, in that it is offered to all and needed by all. The religious leaders simply did not perceive their own need for repentance.
11. The father reminds the son that the same grace was always at his disposal, and he was not loved for his obedience in staying, but because his father chose to love him.
12. Searched intently; swept the house; rejoiced; the father runs to meet the son.
13. Give the group time to write down a list.
14. Share Christ with them, or give them a 4 Spiritual Law booklet. Perhaps invite them to church, a meeting or Bible study.