

If you read Jesus' parables, you discover that normally, when He tells a parable, He tells the story and then He goes on to explain what it means before telling another parable. But in [Luke 15](#), Jesus doesn't pause to explain. He just launches right into the next parable and then the next. Why? To get their attention!

If you recall, a couple of weeks ago, Pastor Claude spoke about the Parable of the Lost Son. He reminded us...no...he told us that we gotta get this right – that we must **know** that God loves us, in a real and personal way. We must know...not just in our heads, but in our hearts.

The parables are introduced by the first two verses of the chapter which say, "Now the tax collectors and 'sinners' were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them'" ([Luke 15:1-2](#)). The setting is developed by Luke as he paints the background of a group of critical, pious, religious folk. But in the foreground of this portrait is a group of sinners who are gathering around Jesus and hearing him gladly. The religious folk are there *because they want to find fault with Jesus*, and the sinners were there **because they were genuinely attracted to Jesus**.

The pious crowd thought they were the "in crowd." and that the others should be the outsiders. Well, I suppose if Jesus had catered to the devout people of his day and looked down his nose at the dirty sinners, they would have loved him. But because he showed an interest in the outsiders, they hated him, and as you know, were eventually successful in having him killed. They were always criticizing Jesus for not doing things right and following the time honored traditions. They accused him of doing wrong when he did things like heal on the Sabbath, and they never got it...that their hatred of him, and their plots to kill him, were **worse** than what Jesus did, simply because it was a result of the evil in their hearts.

The sinners, on the other hand, loved Jesus. He made them feel like God was interested in them and that there was hope for them.

Far from being put off by his preaching about repentance and faith, they found themselves hopelessly attracted to him. They couldn't get enough of what he had to say and were always wanting to be around him. They invited him to their parties and enjoyed his company. Far from being starchy and stiff, religious and self-righteous, he was genuine and real.

In the NIV version, the story of the Lost Sheep begins this way. "Suppose one of you...?" Literally this should be translated "Which of you, being a shepherd...?"

Remember, Jesus is delivering this story to a group of devoutly religious leaders.

Upper class Orthodox Jews. In their minds, in their day, being a shepherd was a lowly trade. Shepherds were lower-class citizens. – Isn't it interesting though that when Jesus was born, the newsflash from the angels went first to shepherds who were abiding in the fields by night?

Jesus knows that these men think of shepherds as second-class citizens, so he chooses to tell a story about a shepherd, to get their attention. He asks them a question about doing something they would never do. When he says, "Which of you, being a shepherd..." immediately all of them know the answer: "none of us would do whatever you're driving at, because none of us would ever become shepherds. If we had sheep, we'd hire someone to watch them for us."

Jesus gets their attention quickly. While they're all thinking about how despicable it was to be a shepherd, He tells them about a shepherd who loved his sheep.

The second shock comes to them when this shepherd actually loses a sheep. – Look at v. 4. "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them?"

In Middle Eastern cultures, just like in the Chinese culture, saving face is so important. If you were describing a sheep that had strayed, you would never say, "suppose the shepherd loses one of them..." To help him save face, you'd say, "suppose one of them wandered off."

You would not say, "I lost the sheep." You say, "The sheep got lost."

Jesus says, "The shepherd loses one of them."

So, this is a shepherd no Pharisee would definitely want to imitate.

But this shepherd loves his sheep.

The first thing that these parables teach us is: **God is interested in the least.** Of course, in God's eyes there are no "least." Every person is valuable. Even if they have tattoos and body piercing, even if they smell bad and have no money, even if they have poor grammar and no education...I mean education, they are valuable to God. It is important to understand that the lost coin was not more or less valuable than the ones which were not lost. The lost sheep was not any more special than the 99 others. As a matter of fact, the other sheep may have felt that it was unfair that the shepherd left them in order to search for the one which was lost. After all, they had not wandered away. They had followed the shepherd and listened to him. Didn't they deserve special treatment since they had not gone astray? Know what I say to that? Baaaa.... ☺

So often in the church we have an “Us and Them” mentality, when what we need to understand is “Them R Us.” Whether a person sitting in the congregation is a visitor or a lifelong member, they are us. I feel that here at Main Street. As a matter of fact, I and the rest of the family felt so welcomed and a part of the “us” after our visit that we ended up staying! And I thank you all for that 😊. We need to take seriously the words of Jesus as we consider those we think of as least. He said, “Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last” ([Luke 13:30](#)). We need to be reminded that the Bible says that at the judgment Jesus will say to us, “I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” ([Matthew 25:45](#)).

Secondly, these parables teach us that: God is interested in the lost. In the culture of Jesus’ day, a woman was given a dowry. Since women did not carry purses, they would wear their money — usually in a necklace or a head band which held down their veils. The coin which this woman lost was probably one of these dowry coins which came loose from the chain. It was not of greater value than the other coins, or of any less value. The thing that made it the center of her attention was *that it was lost*. In telling this story, Jesus was trying to help the religious folk understand that **all people** are important to God. They thought that God hated sinners and was not interested in them. They thought they were more important to God than sinners because they had never wandered away. They thought if someone wandered away, it was their responsibility to find their own way back. But God cares about lost people, and he searches for them like the woman searched for her coin.

So many lost people...alcoholism and drug addiction are rampant. Marriages are in trouble. Young people are lost. People are in desperate need of Jesus in their lives. And what are we doing about it?

We are walk by lost people every day who are ripe for God and ready to come to him, yet we fail to recognize it and make no attempt to bring them in. They are ripe and ready to give their lives to Christ, **if only** someone would invite them. If only someone showed that they cared and were concerned. If only someone would share what God has done in his or her life they would respond. Y’all probably heard this before... Everybody ends up thinking Anybody can do it, or surely Somebody will do it? But invariably what happens? Nobody does it!

The third thing these parables teach us is: God rejoices when the least and lost are found. When the shepherd finds his sheep, the scripture says, “When he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent” ([Luke 15:5-7](#)). When the woman finds her lost coin, the scripture says, “And when she finds

it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:9-10).

When we see people coming to Christ in church. It is cause of great joy. There is more joy over them than the many who have been in the church since they were carried in by their parents and never left. That is the way it should be. It is not that the new Christians are more important than the established Christians. It is that something new and wonderful has happened. Someone who was lost has been found, and we have the need to rejoice. It's a beautiful thing! We should all say Booyah!!

You see...it wouldn't be good to invite people in to "come just as you are", sing "just as I am", and they leave "just as they were"!!

So how do we apply this today? In my world it starts at home. I tell Betsy and the kids I love them...as a man, that's sometimes hard. So if I don't tell them, I show them. And yes, even then, sometimes not enough. It wasn't that long ago when I held Ashley our oldest, as a baby in my arms. As a father, I sometimes wonder if I have done enough. I wonder if I have done what God would have me do, or for that matter, what He would do. But God is good...all the time. And all the time...God is good. I have been infinitely blessed with a wonderful amazing family...and on this Father's Day, I tell Ashley, Kristen, and Rachel what beautiful gifts they are from God! And how important they are to me. If anything were to happen, I would go to the end of the world to make it right. You who are fathers know and understand what I mean. However, it doesn't stop at home...I don't want to just get it right with my family. I don't want to stop there. It starts at home, but cannot end at home. I have people I interact with at work, I notice people who visit church, I drive by people all the time. I want to get it right for them. Today is Father's Day, it's natural to think only of my family, but I cannot allow myself to stop there. I've got to get it right for my family...and for the others whose lives I touch. Why? Because that's what God's love calls and inspires me to do!

Each of us is infinitely important to God.

God is not using us to accomplish some great goal, ***we are the goal***. We are the purpose and end of his great plan. What God wants is us — the least of us, the lost among us. And when he finds us he places us on his shoulders and carries us home. He calls all the host of heaven to rejoice over what he has found. We are the prize — the purpose of his work — **the focus of his love**.

Happy Father's Day!