

## ***Lost and Found***

Sparky Anderson, the manager of a professional baseball team, made a candid admission in 1984. This team had just enjoyed success throughout the season, playoffs and World Series. Sparky told the news reporters: "I'm not lying when I say that religion is so important to me. If I had one great wish, it would be that I could honestly say that I was one of God's people. That's the one emptiness I have. I'd give up all the pennants and all the honors just to know that I was doing right by Him."

Welcome back to "Walking with Christ." It's the desire of my heart that everyone have this privilege of walking with Christ. From the quote by Mr. Anderson, we know people are hungry and thirsty to fill the emptiness in their lives that only God will satisfy. Take a moment in your small group to talk about your "lost and found" experience.



### **Fellowship**

1. Have you ever lost something that was very valuable to you? What was it, and how desperate were you to get it back?
2. How did Jesus lead you to Himself? What were the circumstances surrounding your being "found" by Him?



### **Discipleship**

Let me begin by welcoming you back both to this series and also to this lesson in particular. I know for a fact that it is no accident you are here tonight. We will talk about a passage that is so near and dear to God's heart that He repeated it three times in a row!

Turn with me to Luke 15, as we read verses 1-24.

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." Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And 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. Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 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." Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to 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 fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Now, if God says something once, that's enough. But I love the fact that God repeats this story in 3 different ways, to demonstrate how important this theme is to His heart... showing how important WE are to Him! In fact, He includes the same elements in each of the stories that we will talk about today.

In all three stories, something has been lost...first the sheep, then the coin, and then a son! Secondly, those 3 lost things were of great value.

A shepherd's role is to not lose sheep! Not even one! Any shepherd would make extraordinary efforts to save *even one* sheep. The coin: the woman had 10 and just lost one, leaving her with nine...but that one was very valuable to her! A son: in his father's eyes he was loved, wanted and longed for! The father valued the son! Thirdly, each of the lost items were worthy of extreme measures to find! The shepherd left the other ninety-nine sheep to go after the one until he found it! Verse 5 says, "**When** he finds it". He didn't give up his tireless search; failure was not acceptable in the shepherd's eyes. The woman swept the whole house and searched carefully...*until* she found it. And we know that father was watching and waiting for the son, as he saw him from "a long way off"! The son was worth waiting for.

Lastly, the common thread is that there was great rejoicing when the lost thing was found. The finding of the lost sheep resulted in a neighborhood party! The found coin? Another

calling together of friends and neighbors to join in the celebration. When the prodigal son returns home, the father calls for a robe, ring, sandals, fattened calf, feasting and celebration. Why? His son was lost and now was found.

Where was the scolding of the sheep or the reprimand to the son? Nowhere to be found. The Bible says, dear friends, that in the same way (verse 10) there will be a great party in heaven...rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God...over *one sinner* who repents. Why? Because each of us was at one time lost and separated from God. Ever since sin entered the world, the fellowship between God and human beings has been broken. Something precious to God was lost: His fellowship with you. And that lost thing is of great value! He is the Good Shepherd and it's not His will that ANY should perish, but that *all* should come to repentance. He values you! He deemed you worthy of extreme measures to find! He was willing to die an awful death to restore what was lost, in the hope that you will accept His gift and allow yourself to be found. Can you see Him? He's standing at the door, looking across to the horizon, straining His eyes to see YOUR return to fellowship with Him! He's waiting to announce another great party in heaven because YOU are a reason to celebrate!

I'll never forget the panic I experienced one day while shopping with my 3-year-old daughter. The Christmas season had brought the crowds to the stores and my hand firmly grasped hers. After a firm warning for her to "stay with me!" we headed into the clothing section. Somehow, she disentangled her hand from mine and quickly darted away to enjoy her sense of freedom! My heart felt like it dropped to my knees as the minutes seemed like hours and she was nowhere to be found! I remembered a horror story of some kidnapers and how they had changed a child's appearance in a matter of minutes, walking out of the store, child in tow...never to be seen again! Just in the midst of my frantic desperation, I glanced under a rack of clothes to see a set of small feet. The proceeding giggle from my daughter didn't strike me as funny; I knew that what she thought was freedom could have been deadly! But when we were reunited, the overwhelming emotion was one of relief!! She was found! She was safe!

You know, there are some people who don't want to be found. They are content in their lost state, hiding in ignorance or shame, refusing to heed the warnings of the shepherd. But Jesus came to call sinners! You, me, our neighbors...all have great value in His sight and are the apple of His eye. Let His heart for the lost become yours, as you help shepherd others to the Good Shepherd and rejoice in the lost being found!

3. Read Matthew 13:1-23. What are the dangers to the seed after it has been sown?
4. How might a lost person refuse to be found?
5. From verse 15, how can people close their eyes or harden their hearts against the truth?

6. Verse 18 shows the dangers of not understanding truth. Some of us may be in this situation now, or were in the past. Share with the group some issues of “understanding truth” that you might struggle with.

7. What’s your biggest challenge in loving the lost like Jesus does?

8. Read Luke 15:1, 2. Jesus hung out with tax-collectors and sinners. How can you follow His example? Is this a challenge?

9. Read Deuteronomy 4:29. What is God’s part and what is ours? Why do both parties need to cooperate?



## *Ministry*

10. As you discuss our topic for today, feel free to encourage each other with your testimonies. If there is anyone in your group who has not yet been “found”, encourage them to take this life-changing step...and walk them through it. Then celebrate!



## *Evangelism*

11. As we grow more and more into the image of Christ, His values become ours! He has a heart for the lost and we should too! Brainstorm in your small group on how you can reach out and seek the lost! Can you start another small group? Does a ministry to the homeless need your help? What practical ways can you expend the energy to go after the sick who need The Great Physician?

12. Next week we will be talking about death. There is no fear in death if you have accepted the free gift of forgiveness through Jesus Christ! Invite any unsaved people you think need to be challenged to think of the life beyond this one!



## *Worship*

13. We can grow callous to the desperation we felt when we were lost! Spend some time praising God for the creative ways He’s called us to Himself.