

## The Lost Is Found

### Lesson Scope: [Luke 15](#)

*References in brackets refer to Luke 15 unless otherwise noted*

### Lesson Focus

Luke 15 opens with the publicans and sinners drawing near to Jesus to hear Him, indicating their receptivity to Jesus' message. However, the scribes and Pharisees murmured that Jesus welcomed sinners. They felt no need of repentance themselves, and were critical of Jesus for reaching out to publicans and sinners. Jesus then told three parables about lost things: The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coins, and the lost son illustrate what Jesus wanted to teach His audience.

Jesus wanted His audience to understand that all were lost but that only the ones who recognized they were lost were then saved. Jesus was helping His audience to understand that their attitude toward the publicans and sinners revealed their true heart condition. "All we like sheep have gone astray." God intensely desires that every person realize his true heart condition and be brought back into the fold of His care.

The Lord is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." He lovingly seeks the lost and desires to bring them back to the fold.

This lesson should stir the heart of each one. "All we like sheep have gone astray." Without God's work on our behalf, we would all be utterly lost. This lesson should challenge us to a walk with God that is more than an outward conformity. We need to have the burden and desire of God in intensely desiring that every sinner be brought back into the fold. We must seek to understand and to be a mirror of God's love, forgiveness, mercy, and compassion. In teaching the lesson, emphasize the heart of the Father.

**Lesson Aim:** To illustrate the Lord's compassion for lost humanity.

**Theme Verse:** [Luke 15:7](#). I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine

just persons, which need no repentance.

## Lesson Text

### Searching

**Luke 15:3-8** And he spake this parable unto them, saying, <sup>4</sup> What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? <sup>5</sup> And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. <sup>7</sup> I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance. <sup>8</sup> Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find *it*?

### Yearning

**Luke 15:11-24** And he said, A certain man had two sons: <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth *to me*. And he divided unto them *his* living. <sup>13</sup> And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. <sup>14</sup> And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. <sup>15</sup> And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. <sup>16</sup> And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. <sup>17</sup> And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, <sup>19</sup> And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. <sup>20</sup> And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet: <sup>23</sup> And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*; and let

us eat, and be merry: <sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

### **Entreating**

**Luke 15:25-32** Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. <sup>26</sup> And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup> And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. <sup>28</sup> And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. <sup>29</sup> And he answering said to *his* father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: <sup>30</sup> But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. <sup>31</sup> And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. <sup>32</sup> It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **Searching**

1. Why would a shepherd leave the ninety and nine to search for one lost sheep?
2. How does the Saviour seek to bring lost souls to repentance?
3. What joy does the Saviour have in the salvation of a lost soul?

#### **Yearning**

4. In what ways did the younger son bring loss to his father? What was the greatest loss to the father?
5. What often brings a selfish, rebellious person to the end of himself?
6. What does the Father's response to the son's repentance show about the heart of God?

#### **Entreating**

7. In what ways did the elder son fail his father? What was the greatest failure?
8. How could we fail our heavenly Father through wrong responses to His love for others?

## **Analyzing the Passage**

This chapter contains three parables, which explain one basic teaching. Jesus was illustrating the need of man's proper response to God's love. Yet each parable reveals three different aspects of the father heart of God. The parable of the lost sheep illustrates the suffering Saviour who sacrifices Himself to search for the lost sheep. The parable of the lost coin is an illustration of the work of the Spirit, seeking to bring the lost sinner to repentance. The parable of the lost son illustrates the rejoicing father, who has watched and waited with hopeful and long-suffering patience, and finally receives his son with joy.

The woman's ten pieces of silver were likely part of her marriage dowry, received as a wedding gift. She likely valued them much more than their actual monetary value. The absence of one of them could suggest a lack of affection for her husband or even unfaithfulness to him. Her effort in finding it and the rejoicing when it was found show its value to her. God searches for each individual, not because of his or her actual value, but because of His love for each soul.

Riotous living is wild extravagance and unrestrained indulgence. For a Jew to feed pigs, which were unclean animals, and then to eat pig food himself, shows the extreme degraded state he was in. "He came to himself" means that the prodigal finally faced reality, and it may indicate repentance. His request to be made as the hired servants demonstrates humility and a drastic change from his earlier attitude.

The best robe, ring, and sandals marked him as the son of the master. The servants put them on him in recognition of his being the son. He was completely reinstated. The fatted calf was a grain-fed animal kept ready for special occasions.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Searching**

1. God has a heart of genuine love and abundant care for all (15:4). Each individual is a prized possession to God. He is concerned with each one's well-being, and is not satisfied till each one is safe in the fold. His deep concern moves Him to action. He takes particular care to seek out His erring, perishing sheep. Because of His deep love, it hurts Him greatly when one chooses rebellion and the path to destruction.
2. The Lord seeks diligently to bring the erring back to the safety of His

care (15:4-5). God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." He expends Himself for the salvation of each perishing soul. He searches and calls for him until He finds him. Without God diligently seeking us, we would all be utterly lost.

3. The Lord joyfully forgives and restores each one who repents (15:6-7). Each conversion is a triumph of God's grace that calls for rejoicing. Saints and angels rejoice with God and the restored individual who was saved from the clutches of Satan and the doom of eternal death. All praise belongs to God, whose grace alone can transform a sin-blighted soul into an heir of eternal life.

4. The Lord compassionately enlightens the lost through His Holy Spirit (15:8). He "lighteth every man that cometh into the world." He convicts the lost of sin, and He reveals truth to the sincere seeker.

### **Yearning**

5. The Lord will not coerce people to serve Him against their will (15:12, 13). When individuals choose rebellion and sin, demanding their own way, God allows them to go their way. They are choosing against their own better knowledge, and they are choosing to reject their kind and all-knowing God, but God has given them free choice. They choose to follow the course their fallen nature desires and the course Satan is enticing them into.

6. The Lord uses the consequences of sin to bring the erring to the realization of their condition (15:14-17). Although the life of sin may appear appealing with glamour and pleasure and self-service, it is only a short time till the reaping comes. Corruption and rotteness set in as does the bitterness of pursuing fulfillment but finding only wantonness. The unsatisfied appetite of fleshly desires leaves the sinner empty and miserable. The bondage to sin and Satan and the chains of bad habits become realities that God uses to bring sinners to the end of themselves.

7. The Lord mercifully shows the erring where to find soul rest (15:18-19). There is an answer for the needs of the soul that is in deep distress and darkness. There is salvation for the perishing sinner. When misery and yearning turn the perishing individual to seek for an answer, God is already seeking and calling. When the sinner hears the call, he must acknowledge that his only hope is in returning to God.

8. The Lord extends unqualified mercy and compassion to the repentant sinner (15:20-22). God has no reservations in His mercy and compas-

sion. He does not hold back, requiring a person to first prove his sincerity. God knows the heart of a man, and He discerns the sincere prayer of repentance and responds with complete forgiveness, holding nothing against him. We must freely present the Gospel to all, viewing no one as unfit for salvation.

### **Entreating**

9. The self-righteous do not understand the heart of the seeking father (15:25-27). They have been so taken up in their own affairs that they no longer have a burden for the wayward. Their egotistical attitude causes them to respond in anger and ill will, preventing an understanding of God's love and forgiveness. They cannot rejoice with the Father, because they see no joy at the return and repentance of the prodigal. Their lack of understanding the Father's heart will result in their life being only dead works, and will finally bar them from fellowship with God and with the household of God.

10. The Lord entreats the self-righteous to understand divine compassion and genuine repentance (15:28-32). The self-righteous are so impressed with their own "goodness" that they fail to understand how much they themselves have been forgiven, and how God's grace can transform a sinner. God's appeal to them is as tender and loving as His reception of the prodigal.

### **Important Teachings**

1. God has a heart of genuine love and abundant care for all (15:4).
2. The Lord seeks diligently to bring the erring back to the safety of His care (15:4-5).
3. The Lord joyfully forgives and restores each one who repents (15:6-7).
4. The Lord compassionately enlightens the lost through His Holy Spirit (15:8).
5. The Lord will not coerce people to serve Him against their will (15:12-13).
6. The Lord uses the consequences of sin to bring the erring to the realization of their condition (15:14-17).
7. The Lord mercifully shows the erring where to find soul rest (15:18-19).
8. The Lord extends unqualified mercy and compassion to the repentant

sinner (15:20-22).

9. The self-righteous do not understand the heart of the seeking father (15:25-27).

10. The Lord entreats the self-righteous to understand divine compassion and genuine repentance (15:28-32).

11. The Lord rejoices when spiritual life is born anew (15:23-24).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. Why would a shepherd leave the ninety and nine to search for one lost sheep?

The shepherd likely searched for one lost sheep more out of compassion, love, and attachment than for actual monetary value. One lost sheep was of small value compared to the many the shepherd still had. The shepherd realized the plight and the danger of the lost sheep, and desired to recover it to protect it. He was so concerned for the well-being of the lost sheep that he suffered himself to search it out.

2. How does the Saviour seek to bring lost souls to repentance?

The Saviour seeks through the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the rebellious. The Saviour seeks through a person's conscience. He seeks by directing those who are faithful to reach out to the lost. And He seeks by working through circumstances to bring a person to a place of decision.

3. What joy does the Saviour have in the salvation of a lost soul?

The Saviour rejoices because salvation prevents final punishment and loss of a person He loves. The Saviour has joy in a person who repents, because it is a victory over Satan and sin. The Saviour has joy in salvation because it is a reward for His sacrifice as a soul avails itself of the provisions the sacrifice provided. The Saviour rejoices in the salvation of a soul because it brings one of His own back to Him.

4. In what ways did the younger son bring loss to his father? What was the greatest loss to the father?

The younger son brought loss in a material way to his father, in demanding his father's money and then taking it and wasting it. He brought loss in that there was a breaking of the father-son relationship. He brought loss in a breaking of his father's trust in him. He brought loss in hurting his father and in not valuing the love his father had for him. The greatest loss to the father was the loss of his dear son.

5. What often brings a selfish, rebellious person to the end of himself. God works through circumstances to bring a person to the end of himself. Many find when the money is gone and hard times come, that those they thought to be their friends forsake them. God works through the effects of the Fall and the reaping of sin to bring a person to repentance. Many seek God's help when they realize they cannot help themselves.

6. What does the Father's response to the son's repentance show about the heart of God?

The Father's heart is full of love and longing for each of His sons. The Father desires to reinstate all through their repentance and His forgiveness, holding nothing against them. The Father's heart is full of compassion and mercy. The Father's heart is rejoicing at the return of His son.

7. In what ways did the elder son fail his father? What was the greatest failure?

The elder son failed to enter into his father's burden for the younger brother. The elder son failed to enter into the father's loss and grief over the younger son's rebellion. He failed to enter into the father's watching and waiting and longing for the younger son's return. He also failed when he became angry with the father for the father's complete acceptance of the younger son and his joy in the younger son's repentance.

His greatest failure was in not following his father's example in accepting the younger son's repentance with forgiveness and restoration.

8. How could we fail our heavenly Father through wrong responses to His love for others?

We could fail by not showing compassion to those who are in the depths of sin. We could fail by not understanding the struggles of those who are coming to the love of God. We could fail by a lack of burden for the lost and a reaching out with the Good News of salvation. We could fail to speak a word for God when the Spirit leads us and we have an opportunity. We could fail by not being patient and long-suffering with those who have been long rebellious. We fail if we express a self-righteous attitude toward those who have failed but have come to repentance.

## **Summarizing the Lesson**

The Lord continues to seek and entreat the lost, both those living riotous lives in the world, and those living a self-righteous life in the Father's house. In these parables, the lost was found, but the elder son remained unreconciled. All are lost, but only those who recognize their need can be saved.

## **Research Guide**

1. Read the chapter titled "Shepherding" in *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*.
2. Read the article "Dowry" in *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*.