

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**Luke 15:1-10**  
**“Someone’s Looking For You”**

July 13, 2014  
(5<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost)

Pastor Phil Thrailkill  
Main Street UMC  
211 North Main St., Greenwood, SC 29646  
Church Office: 864-229-7551  
Church Website: [www.msumc1.org](http://www.msumc1.org)

**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

## LUKE 15:1-10 "SOMEONE'S LOOKING FOR YOU!"

Why Miss The Kingdom Of Joy In Jesus? How Much More God!

### 1) vv.1-3 SETTING: JESUS AT TABLE WITH OUTCASTS. //Mk. 2:15-17, Next Marker = 16:1

Table Again, God Loves Each Individual

(Worked for Rome) (Not keep law, forbidden occupations, includes shepherd!) In Orient, Guests Honor Hosts

Jesus' Action → Complaint → Response (e.g. 5:29-32, 17-26, 11:37-44, 14-23)

1 a Now the tax (toll) collectors and sinners were *all* drawing near to *hear* him. 3:12-13, 18:11, (7:29-30, 14:35)

Holiness Group + Scholars: Identity, Clean/Unclean

2 b And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, Ex. 16:7-12, (//vv.27-30), Negative Reaction To Jesus

Is Jesus Host? They Respond To Him (v.2a), He To Them (v.3)

3 a' "This man *receives* (i.e. "hosts") sinners and eats with them." 19:1-10, Accusation Over Table (5:30, 7:34)

Them = 2 Audiences (Outsiders/Insiders)

3 b' So he told them this parable: //5:36-39, Two As One Story, Jesus Defends Conduct In 3 Stories:

(1) 15:4-7 Lost Sheep, (2) 8-10 Lost Coin, (3) 11-32 Lost Boys

### 2a) vv.4-7 PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP (MALE SEEKER). //Mt. 18:12-14, GT 107, Exod. Rab. 2.2

Shepherds Revered In Tradition, Despised In Life

4 a) "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, (Shock to Pharisees!) A) What man of you (Direct)

b) if he loses one of them, (Blamed after a count!) B) One Of A Hundred

c) does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, (With whom?) C) Ninety-Nine

Is. 40:11, 49:22, Ezek. 34, Jer. 23:1-8, Ps. 119:176

d) and go after the one which is *lost*, D) Lost Initiative

*one (hadh), joy (hedhwa)*

e) until he finds it, (5) and when he has found it, E) Find Not Shredded!

Is. 40:11

f) he lays it on his shoulders, **rejoicing**; F) Joy Other Shepherds Take Care

Is. 40:11

6 g) And when he comes home, (Not a bedouin, a peasant) G) Restoration

LONG QUESTION (vv.4-6) HE CALLS TOGETHER his friends and his neighbors,

HE CALLS TOGETHER his friends and his neighbors,

f') saying to them, '**Rejoice** with me, F') Joy

Can Pharisees Rejoice?

e') for I have found my sheep E') Find

Can Pharisees Rejoice?

d') which was *lost*? D') Lost

Loss (sorrow), Find (joy)

7 a') Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven A') I say to you (Direct)

Nimshal 1 b') over one sinner/ who repents (The seeking God enables our turning!) B') One Sinner

Theology c') than over ninety-nine righteous persons / who need no repentance. C')Ninety-Nine(Irony?Is. 53:6)

Climax: Jesus Knows The Mind Of Heaven, 2:13-15, 3:3, 5:32

### 2b) vv.8-10 PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN (FEMALE SEEKER). Only in Luke, 2 Identifications!

Character/Loss/ Recovery/Celebration, Heaven, Link = Or

8 a) "Or what woman, having ten silver coins (*drachma*) A) Ten Coins Family Savings

Escalation: 1 of 100 → 1 of 10 → 1 of 2

b) if she *loses* one coin, B) One Lost Of Ten

Money Scare In A Barter Culture

c) does not light a lamp/ and sweep the house/ and seek diligently/ until she finds it; C) Search Till Find

C) Search Till Find

9 d) And when she has found it, SHE CALLS TOGETHER her friends D) Restoration

D) Restoration

and neighbors, saying, '**Rejoice** with me, Grumbling v. Rejoicing

Can Pharisees Rejoice?

c') for I have found the coin C') She Found

C') She Found

b') which I had *lost*? B') What Was Lost

B') What Was Lost

10 a') Just so, I tell you, A') One Sinner

Nimshal 2 there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Join The Party! Heavenly Festival!

Theology 5 Parts: 1)What man/woman, 2) one lost, 3) found, 4) call village to rejoice 5) summary

## A Brief Treatment Of Luke 15:1-10

The next thought unit in Jesus' journey is 15:1-32 which consists of an introduction (1. vv.1-3) and three *lost-and-found* parables (2a. vv.4-7 the lost sheep, 2b. vv.8-10 the lost coin, 2c. vv.11-32 the lost son [s]). Each includes the joy of recovery and an invitation to celebrate. There is an escalation from one sheep of a hundred (1%) to one coin of ten (10%) to one son of two (50%). The first two parables are single scenes; the third has two scenes (vv.11-24, 25-32). The first two are rounded off with clear *Just so, I tell you* endings; the parable of the prodigal is left open as if to say, "Will you join the party?" The lost sheep and lost coin have a similar concentric structure, end with similar refrains (v.7 // v.10), and are linked by a simple *or* (v.8) since they are twins. It is Luke's custom to pair male (v.4) and female (v.8) characters. The worlds of both men and women provide analogies to defend the welcome of Jesus against his adversaries. Some see the whole of the first two parables as a single question, as indicated in their opening phrases, *What man of you?* (v.4), *Or what woman?* (v.8), as if to say, "Is this not what happens?" the answer to which is, "Of course, this is exactly what happens with village shepherds and women who lose something." Jesus' argument is from the lesser to the greater: if a sheep or coin, why not a lost man or woman?

The introduction (vv.1-3) presents two provocations and responses. Jesus hosts a gathering of outsiders (*tax collectors and sinners*) who have regular contact with Gentiles and don't keep the law to Pharisaic standards. They live outside the circle of piety (a closed set; see note 2). Their response is to *murmur*. The second provocation is their assertion, "This man hosts sinners and eats with them," the implication being Jesus is loose in his associations and compromises Jewish identity. His response is to teach them and open a window into God's kingdom. They slander him; he tells a story; Jesus loves his enemies! Who's an insider here? It depends on whether one is rightly oriented to Jesus (an open set, note 2). Those who gladly hear him (v.1) are rightly related; those who murmur against him (v.2b) are not.

The lost sheep has a 9:1 concentric structure (abc-d-e-f-g-f'-e'-d-abc') with an invitation at the center (g. v.6a). This is bracketed in frames which share terms: f//f' *rejoicing - rejoice*, e//e' *found - found*, d//d' *lost - lost*. The outer frames are more complex (a-b-c [v.4] // a'-b'-c' [v.7]) with three parallel terms: *you, one, ninety-nine*. A second overlapping structure is the question (vv.4-6) and answer (v.7). While there is a parallel in Mt. 18:12-14, there are enough differences to rule out dependence; here we have two tellings of a tradition for different purposes. For Jesus to ask Pharisees to imagine themselves shepherds was itself offensive since it was an unapproved occupation. Jesus appeals to what happens when a sheep is lost. A flock of a hundred has more than one shepherd, so the ninety-nine are not abandoned. Others take the flock home; the shepherd eventually returns with the one on his shoulders (v.6a). Isolated sheep are vulnerable, and the shepherd seeks till he finds. Such is his joy, and that of the village, that he calls them together for a party, "for I have found my sheep which was lost." God takes the initiative to seek us out, and when we return through repentance, heaven has a gala. In the application or *nimshal* (v.7) Jesus speaks as one who knows the joyful secrets of heaven, "I say to you...." He is the revealer of God's ways.

The lost coin (only in Luke) shifts from a man to a woman, from outside to inside. One of ten silver coins, her savings, is lost. The intensity of her seeking is highlighted in three phrases: she lights a lamp, sweeps the house, seeks until she finds. She then *calls together her friends*. Life in a village is a shared life of little privacy. The structure is a 7:1 chiasm (a-b-c-d-c'-b'-a') with the invitation again at the center (d. v.9a). The grammatical form is again question (vv. 8-9 and answer (v.20). The frames again have common terms (c//c' *find - found*, b//b' *loses - lost*). Jesus' application is parallel but shorter (v.10). Why won't the Pharisees join God's party? Answer: their circle is too small. How about your own?

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## SOMEONE’S LOOKING FOR YOU

*“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.”*

What church looks like when Christ’s magnetic love is supreme.

### LUKE 15:1

**T**he author is gone, but his stories live on. I’m speaking of Charles Schultz, author of *Peanuts*. And of his character Charlie Brown, one thing is sure; he wants to be liked and treated with respect, especially by Lucy.

In one episode Charlie Brown is lying with his head resting on a stone as Lucy stands beside him, “If I tell you something, Lucy, will you promise not to laugh?”

“I promise.”

Unsured of her sincerity he says, “This is very personal, and I don’t want you to laugh.”

“You have my solemn promise,” swears Lucy.

So with these words Charlie Brown opens his heart, “Sometimes I lie awake at night listening for a voice that will cry, ‘We LIKE you, Charlie Brownnnnn!’”

You know what happens next. Lucy explodes with an overdone, “HA HA HA,” and our embarrassed friend is bowled over from his reclining position.<sup>1</sup> Lucy has become Lucy-fer, and the tenderest longings of Charlie Brown’s heart are again subject to ridicule. Life is a cruel joke, and he’s the punch line. But the longing to be affirmed is still there, buried a little deeper now from the mockery.

The simple truth is the Jesus liked people others didn’t, hung out with them and threw parties in their honor and in anticipation of their being at the banquet table when the kingdom of God came in full power. As the visible member of the Trinity he speaks for the Father and the Spirit, “We like you, Charlie Brown! And we like you, Lucy, in spite of your deception and cruelty. And we like you, tax collectors and sinners; and we like you, Pharisees and scribes.” Jesus was a *people person* in the most comprehensive sense of the word. No one was outside his circle of concern.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Short, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 132.

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**Luke 15:1-10** ..... 5

And whereas *love* can sometimes take on the cast of the word *charity*, in the sense of doing good for someone you'd really rather not spend time with, the word *like* has a different feel, one of attraction, even delight and comradery.

“Yes, I know God loves me,” I once heard a woman say with some frustration, “but does he *like* me?” Max Lucado would answer that question with a *Yes*, and say:

“If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning... Face it, friend. He’s crazy about you!”<sup>2</sup>

If Jesus threw a party in Greenwood, your name would be on the guest list. He wants to hang out because he wants a relationship. He sees that we’re lost and need a guide and a map and a compass and a new destination. What if you let yourself be found? What if you turned to face the one who’s tapping on your shoulder?

Such language sounds irreverent because it speaks of an intimacy and friendship few of us know much about. Jesus enjoyed the presence of greedy tax collectors who fleeced their Jewish neighbors for the government and the presence of all sorts of disreputable, immoral people. Not because what they did was right but because they were being drawn into the web of his grace. From whatever distance they’d wandered, they were now turned towards him with open ears, verse 1: “Now the toll collectors and sinners were all drawing near *to hear him*.”<sup>3</sup>

With Jesus it was always grace first, then repentance. First light, then a new direction in which to walk. Acceptance, then a radical change of attitude and action. First love and its power to heal, then the things love demands for life to be whole and right again. It’s how Jesus did his work. Throw a party. Invite all the folk who never get invited. Enjoy their company. Tell kingdom stories about lost sheep and lost coins. Heal a few. Tell them the secrets of their hearts to get their attention. Honor them, then watch as God’s grace melts hearts and draws them back towards the Father’s house. It worked then, and it will work now if we, the people of God, stop thinking of evangelism as something that happens from a pulpit or by the pastor and

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<sup>2</sup> [www.goodreads.com/quotes/219593-if-god-had-a-refrigerator](http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/219593-if-god-had-a-refrigerator).

<sup>3</sup> That the last thought unit (14:35) ends with “He who has ears to hear, let him hear,” and this unit (15:1-32) begins with the echo, “to hear him” is an example of *anadiplosis*: an overlap of words that bridges and links two thought units.

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**Luke 15:1-10 ..... 6**

see it rather as something that happens naturally on your patio over a grill and in your den and at your table. Sunday morning is a formal thing: special building, special seating, special music, special words, special bulletins, special time, special day, special dress, but that’s not the case in the story before us. It did not happen in the synagogue or temple liturgy but around a dinner table in someone’s home, most likely one Jesus borrowed for a meal and his next *life-in-the-kingdom* session.

All I’ve done in this introduction is weave for us a feel for some of the issues Luke lays out in the first three verses, “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured saying, ‘*This man* receives sinners and eats with them.’” They didn’t like what he was doing, thought it dangerous to Jewish identity, a lowering of standards. And they were right; Jesus redefines what it means for God’s people to be salt and light. To give them a chance for a change of heart, he told some stories. He appealed to their imagination.

**TURNING TO THE TEXT**

**Attracted Sinners And Offended Leaderless (vv. 1-3)**

Some people fill every room they enter with ego, others with accomplishments or a fashion statement, but with Jesus it was love and its wisdom that filled whatever space he inhabited. In him the awesome holiness of God was cloaked in a warm humanity that was highly attractive, even to people who’d turned away from God and those who despaired of ever meeting the standards. This helps explain the ongoing phenomena that many who reject the church are still fascinated by Jesus. They laugh and say they might become a Christian if they ever met one. I agree. Jesus will always be more attractive than his people, though our experience is that when you meet him his people become much more attractive because you see them through new eyes. From a pack of hypocrites to fellow travelers on a long and steep and narrow trail. People love to complain that we Christians and our churches fall short. “Yes,” I reply, “but did you see the one we’re trying to follow? Can you think of a higher standard than Jesus and his perfect, sinless life? That’s the mark. At least give us credit for not lowering the bar to match our sloppy performance. And by the way, just who are you following? Who’s your hero? Hugh Hefner? Madonna? Mick Jagger? John Lennon? Jack Daniels? Cheech and Chong? No wonder you look so lost.” Regarding Jesus, all of us live on the same side of the line, whether our current tag is *tax collectors and sinners* or *Pharisees and scribes*. And he loves us both, though he treats us in different ways depending on how we respond to his kindness.

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**Luke 15:1-10** ..... 7

I love the image in verse 1 of them all “drawing near to hear him.” Like moths to a flame, like ducks to a decoy, like eyes to a pretty woman, he was their focus. It’s a meal setting, which for Jesus is an image of the kingdom of God as a banquet. Luke implies that not only was Jesus eating with outcasts; he was the host who *received* them. It was his party; they were his honored guests. His symbolic behavior upset the Pharisees and their legal scholars the scribes who wanted people to *first* clean up their act, *first* abandon forbidden occupations and begin to keep the law *before* they were acceptable. Theirs was a *bounded set* in which one had to be inside the circle to be accepted. But with Jesus it was a *centered set*, not inside the fences but facing towards the center, no matter how far off one was: that was what counted.<sup>4</sup> These sinners were facing towards Jesus and moving in his direction, which is what repentance means: to do an about-face and walk in a new direction. Therefore they were rightly related to him, whereas the religious leaders were facing away from him and distancing themselves. To stand a foot from Jesus with your back to him means you are far from the kingdom, but to face in his direction from a distance of years of wandering means you are near the kingdom. Wherever people respond and turn in his direction, they are at that moment near God’s kingdom; the door is open.

There’s no way to avoid the fact that Jesus was and is a divider. How we stand with him determines where we stand with God because as the Son he comes to us from within the divine life as the approved ambassador and authorized agent with full power to do business, and when we killed him because we don’t like the intrusion, God raised him to vindicate him against the whole world. He is the only one so approved.<sup>5</sup> He came fully approved, and when we killed him, God demonstrated who he was all along in resurrection. Jesus was sent; it’s why he kept saying things like *I came and Truly as I say to you*. And when we killed him, the Father and the Spirit *sent him back to us*, only this time in a marvelous new form out of the reach of our spikes and nails and lances. You just can’t get rid of Jesus; he’s literally everywhere, equidistant from every point, and his light is shining either on your face or you back depending on which way you’re currently facing; every human being on the planet is his immediate concern, and he is not naive about our Enemy or our blind spots or any of the ways we stay lost. It shouldn’t surprise us that often it’s religious people

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<sup>4</sup> For Paul’ Hiebert contribution to this new insight in missions, see Michael Yoder, et. al., “Understanding Christian Identity In Terms Of Bounded And Centered Set Theory In The Writings Of Paul G. Hiebert,” TRINJ 30NS (2009), 177-188.

<sup>5</sup> For a treatment of the major NT resurrection passages, see my *Resurrection* (Fort Valley, GA: Bristol House, 2014).

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**Luke 15:1-10** ..... 8

who are most offended by Jesus and irreligious outsiders who are most attracted. He's just so full of life, such a wild man, and will not be controlled. Jesus was undermining the standards of the leaders, and they set up a public protest, "Why look at him! This man receives sinners and eats with them as if God loves them before they repent." You can hear their disgust. They didn't even call his name; they pointed and said, "*This man....*"

There are two kinds of holiness. One is fragile and needs to be constantly monitored. It takes pride in *what it doesn't do*. To survive it must be vigilantly protected from the wrong kind of people and bad settings. It draws to itself the like-minded who then form hermetically-sealed religious clubs of the safe and sanctified who congratulate themselves on keeping up standards and maintaining purity. It's man-made. Then there is the other kind, the kind Jesus had. The kind that can mix it up with the rough and tumble of the world without being stained, *in* but not *of* the world, and with little to protect. It's earthy and cannot be embarrassed, so deeply connected with the love of God that it looks down on no one and seeks to serve all. The Pharisees were the first type, Jesus the second. A church like the first will make the faith unattractive; one like the second will find all sorts of people drawing near because of the magnetic attraction of God's love.

Jesus' response is gracious. He does not fire back at those who slander him in public. Like a good rabbi he tells a story as a way to turn the other cheek. A story is an invitation, an offer to use your imagination and enter a new world for a few moments. It leaves the hearer a bit of space in which to find himself and draw his own conclusions. Jesus did not say, "You bunch of pious jerks! Get out of my party!" Instead he says, "Listen to my stories." Jesus is reaching out to both kinds of sinners, religious outsiders and religious insiders. Each get to find their place in his parables.

**2a. The Lost Sheep (vv.4-7)**

Ever lost your keys? Your wallet? Something valuable that belonged to someone else? A child at the mall? Then you know something about anxiety and frantic searching. And when you find what's lost, the emotions are relief and joy, perhaps even a prayer, "Thank you, O God of the lost and found." The spectrum from anxiety to joy is the range of Jesus' twin parables: the lost sheep and the lost coin.

As odd as it may sound to us who are used to the phrase "The Lord is my shepherd" from Psalm 23, keeping sheep was a despised occupation in first century

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**Luke 15:1-10** ..... 9

Judaism.<sup>6</sup> Revered in tradition; after all both Moses and David were shepherds, but despised in current practice. Shepherds were a despicable lot, just as liable to rustle a few of your sheep as protect their own, and always tempted to the theft of grazing on someone else’s land. We find their names on more than one rabbinic list of forbidden occupations. So put aside your romantic associations of still waters and green pastures and think instead of a video-poker owner who lost a wheel barrow full of quarters or a liquor store owner who had five cases of premium scotch come up missing in the inventory. No Pharisee or scribe would ever consider being a shepherd; it was beneath them. So when Jesus started his story with the direct address, “What man of *you*, having a hundred sheep...” he was deliberately asking them to identify with people they despised, and it would have been highly offensive.

Now because our shepherd eventually makes it home with the lost sheep, we know he’s not a wandering bedouin who lives outside as a nomad but a peasant who lives in a village with a stick and mud corral where the sheep are enclosed at night. And since a hundred sheep is a good-sized flock, he would not be alone. Everyone who heard the story knew that; perhaps three others shared the care. Out in the morning, back in the evening after a count. Each of the sheep has a pet name and is known by the shepherd. Some are his; the rest were those of family and neighbors, a community affair. Our shepherd is not an isolated herdsman but embedded in a village that’s been tending sheep as far back as tradition remembers. Shepherding a hundred sheep is a team effort, each having responsibility for a part and for the whole.

Some people use counting sheep as a cure for insomnia, but here it’s an accounting method to insure profitability. I’ve been in prisons during a lock down and count; it’s a serious event. Bank tellers can be fired if the count is wrong. “Ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine.... Let’s count again. Ninety-seven, ninety-eight, ninety-nine, one’s missing! Jacob, it’s one of yours. Were you asleep?”

The clear implication in verse 4 is that the shepherd is responsible, “if *he* loses one of them...”<sup>7</sup> It’s his job to keep a watch. And so for a second time in just two lines Jesus takes a dig at the religious leaders. They’ve let the people stray. They’ve

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<sup>6</sup> I am heavily dependent for cultural and rhetorical background on the work of Kenneth Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to The Parables In Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 142-157. For an update on subsequent research, see Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 93-117.

<sup>7</sup> This point alone is enough to ensure that this is a parable and not an allegory.

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**Luke 15:1-10** ..... **10**

not been faithful in their pastoring. Jesus is doing what they should have been doing all along. He's reaching out to strays, *to the lost sheep of the house of Israel*, to the ignored and the forgotten. And when we stop doing that, we lose touch with the Lord, because that's where you'll always find him. With those who've wandered off.

More than once I've heard preachers extol the love of the shepherd for the one lost sheep. "So great was his love, he left the ninety-nine alone in the wilderness to seek out the one that was lost." Baloney! You can only preach such drivel if you haven't done your homework. He left them *in the wilderness* but *with other shepherds*, then searches til he finds. He must either bring home a live sheep or a dead carcass to prove he didn't steal the sheep while the others weren't looking. So why, if the sheep wandered off, does it have to be carried on his shoulders? Because lost, frightened sheep refuse to do anything but lay down and bleat! Kind of like church members! A joy to find, a burden to carry home. When the lost are found, the work has only begun. Evangelists find them; pastors have to care for them!

The other shepherds come home with ninety-nine in tow. Everyone's worried about the lone shepherd and the lost sheep. One man with a staff is no match for an evening predator. So when he finally trudges in with the lost one across his back, it's joy for the whole village. "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." Jesus' message is not lost on his hearers. The tax collectors and sinners feel blessed because Jesus defends his association with them; the Pharisees and scribes are challenged because Jesus exposed their prejudices and accuses them of not tending God's flock. "I know you don't like these people and what they do," said Jesus, "but it's partly your fault they're lost, and why can't you rejoice now that I'm finding them? Which is more important, keeping your rules or finding God's strays?"

But then Jesus pushed the envelope. He moved from storyteller to prophet and claimed to know what was going on in heaven, as if he had a private line- which he did! The issue shifted from what he was doing for sinners to who he was in his own person, "Just so, *I tell you* (a formula of authority), there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need to repentance." For men who were used to thinking of themselves as those God loved because of their piety, here was yet another shock from the offensive Jesus. Their thinking may have gone like this:

"If he's right, and if he hears the party in heaven in a way we do not, then he's doing is God's will and what we're doing with our complaining is not, so we have a choice to make. Shall we change our

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minds and join him, or shall we keep our religion as is? And who is it that needs to repent here? The tax collectors and sinners, or us? They are glad in his presence and eager to hear what he has to say; we stand here angry and offended making public pronouncements about *this man*. But if he doesn't know what's going on in heaven, then he's a false prophet, leading the people astray and deserves whatever he gets as punishment, even a cross. So which way is it?"

The issue is not finally what Jesus does or the stories he tells, though these are pointers, but *who he is*. That's the issue: his identity. If he is God's the Son, God in the flesh and the final prophet, then his every word is truth and his every action revelatory. He's the one who's looking for each of us, the one who does not mind bearing the burden of our full restoration, even if it means a cross cutting into his shoulders and a whip gouging out his flesh. It's a joy for Jesus to seek and save the lost. He does it without grumbling. And he invites all heaven to join in a party when one sinner lets themselves be found and carried home. People matter; no one's a throw-away, and everyone has some repentance left to do; the whole of life with Jesus is about walking deeper and deeper into the light. But finally the lost have to be restored to community, which is *the Jesus people* who are called *the church*. Sheep thrive in flocks, and Christians apart from churches are highly vulnerable. I really have only two important questions to ask people, though I have lots of creative ways to ask them: 1) Are you a follower of Jesus Christ? and 2) Are you a faithful member of a local church? In other words, Do you know the shepherd, and are you surrounded by other sheep who know him as well? If the Jesus people claim to follow does not carry them back to some flock, it's not Jesus. And if you are too good for a flock, then you are too good for Jesus, because he loves his flock, even if they bite one another, stink and are largely out of touch with reality.

Some churches have not seen anyone saved in such a long time they let themselves fall into thinking of outsiders as the enemy instead of the opportunity. We the church are the only society I know of that exists for the benefit of those who are not yet members,<sup>8</sup> and we are to be about our business with joy because the very angels of heaven are cheering for us. "Go for souls," wrote William Booth the

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<sup>8</sup> Paraphrase of D.T. Niles, [www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/the-equipping-church/what-is-gods-mission-in-the-world](http://www.theologyofwork.org/key-topics/the-equipping-church/what-is-gods-mission-in-the-world).

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**Luke 15:1-10** ..... 12

founder of the Salvation Army, “and go for the worst.”<sup>9</sup> We are not here to make people nice and to raise their tastes so that they like our style of music and have good, Southern manners. We exist to introduce men and women to our Savior, Jesus Christ, the one who rescued us. And if our way of doing church gets in the way of that mission, we need to change our way of doing church. What would make this a magnetic church? One to which pre-Christians and ex-believers are drawn as they were to the Lord? It’s a good question. It is one thing to be a *tradition-driven church* and quite another to be a *mission-driven people who pursue Jesus*.

**2b. The Lost Coin (vv.8-10)**

There must have been women in the audience that day. The tax collectors were all men, but among those labeled *sinner*s were also some women. I infer this because in verses 8 through 10 Jesus tells a second parable drawn not from the male world of shepherding but from the domestic sphere of village women. It’s an invitation for the women to say from the heart, “Jesus understands my world too,” and for the males in the audience to understand that stories from the world of women can also be windows into the kingdom of God. A pastor who only tells sports or hunting or car stories is excluding half his audience. Jesus treats the sexes with an understanding and equality much of the church has yet to catch up with. I’m sorry, but the Southern Baptists are wrong on this one, and I fully expect them in the future to draw fewer and fewer professional women because it is hard to go to a church that treats you like a second class citizen when the world outside increasingly treats you like an equal. They are right on evangelism- people are lost, right on missions- the Great Commission is still in force, right on tithing as God’s local church finance plan, right on a lot of stuff we Methodists have neglected, but they are wrong on women and the call to preach and teach. It will hurt them, I’m afraid. But it may help the Methodists!

*The Parable Of The Lost Coin* is structurally the same story as *The Parable Of The Lost Sheep*- a sort of female twin.<sup>10</sup> A hundred sheep, now ten coins, and one lost, the effort of a diligent search, a joyful finding, a party and a refrain at the end, “Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Backhouse, *The Ultimate Speaker’s Handbook* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1997), 61.

<sup>10</sup> For a listing of the male/female pairings in Luke, see Simon Kistemaker, *The Parables Of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 211; K.E. Bailey, *Finding The Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15* (St. Louis, MI: Concorida, 1992), 97-100.

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**Luke 15:1-10 ..... 13**

Jesus looks into the smiling face of a village woman lifting up her lost coin and sees the angels breaking out the champagne!

Sheep lose themselves in stupid wanderings; they're not very bright animals, but a coin has no choice. Some go down the wrong path like a wandering sheep, and others just fall through the cracks and become invisible. A coin falls off a necklace and get covered with the dust of a dirt floor. But people are different, aren't they? We bear a continuing moral responsibility for our lostness and for every time we have turned away from the light that is upon us. So we notice a deliberate tension set up by Jesus between the parables about lost sheep and lost coins and the refrain of joy that ends them both. People have to agree to be found, which means at some level admitting you're lost, which is a blow to pride and self-sufficiency. And that means a confession of the truth about yourself and a willingness to be restored to the household of God through baptism and faithful membership and ongoing transformation. Lewis Smedes is clear when he writes about what confession is not:

“Confession is different from spilling the beans to the public. Celebrities are not confessing when they hire writers to tell a prurient public their boring stories of sexual trysts; they are not after forgiveness, they are after publicity with royalties attached. Nor do you and I confess when we tell to an understanding psychiatrist; we don't want forgiveness, we want to feel good. When confess when we cannot stand the hurt we caused another. We confess when we put ourselves in the hands of a person we wronged and trust him or her with our souls. We confess when, naked in the eyes of the person we unfairly wounded, we plead nothing but the hope of grace.”<sup>11</sup>

People really are lost. That is not a Baptist but a biblical concept, and it is an offensive one in our politically correct world. People apart from Jesus Christ and his community are lost and wandering, pointed in the wrong direction. Satan has blinded them with false security. They may have it all and be lost, or they may have very little and be lost. And until God wakes them up, they see no need to be found. Only the Holy Spirit can awaken people to their true condition. We are cracked mirrors reflecting light and broken signs pointing to the truth, but only the Holy Spirit is the prosecuting attorney who makes the case. It is an awesome thing to see a dead conscience made alive and aware of sin; it's watching a soul be raised from the dead.

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<sup>11</sup> “Forgiving People Who Do Not Care,” [www.sermonillustrations.com/nti/luke/15\\_1-10, html](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/nti/luke/15_1-10.html).

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CONCLUSION

On November 5, 1900 Mark Twain made an address to the Society of American Authors in which he declared his true values:

“I am constructed like everybody else and enjoy a compliment as well as any other fool, but I do like to have the other side presented. And there is another side. I have a wicked side. Estimable friends who know all about it would tell you and take a certain delight in telling you things that I have done and things further that I have not repented. The real life I live, and the real life that I suppose all of you live, is a life of interior sin.”

To this point I can agree with Mr. Twain. He’s telling not only his story but mine as well. I know something about interior sin. But then in the last three sentences he shows himself to be a clever fool:

“The real life I live, and the real life that I suppose all of you live, is a life of interior sin.” And then the three fatal sentences, “*That is what makes life valuable and pleasant. To lead a life of undiscovered sin. That is true joy.*”<sup>12</sup>

Now we know the truth. This brilliant, humorous man is still lost. Undiscovered sin? Who are you kidding, Mr. Twain? God know. True joy? Not according to Jesus. Joy is being found and then finding out that you were worth finding in the first place. That is biblical self esteem. Joy is believing what Jesus says about heaven, that it’s a real place in a parallel but invisible-to-us universe where angels throw parties for sinners. Joy is being part of a community that has the happy business of being God’s lost and found department. Joy is when Jesus uses you and your story and your prayers to help some stray find their way home.

Little Bo Peep was wrong. The nursery rhyme is way too optimistic, “Leave them alone, and they’ll come home, wagging their tails behind them.” No, we have to search them out and carry them home, get out our lamps and brooms and search for them. It’s not enough to open the doors and then complain why people don’t come. We have to seek them out, like the shepherd and the woman, until we find them. Will Main Street remain a passive *you are welcome to find us* church, or will we become

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<sup>12</sup> [www.sermonillustrations.com/nti/luke/15\\_1-10.html](http://www.sermonillustrations.com/nti/luke/15_1-10.html).

**Luke 15:1-10 ..... 15**

a *go and find them* church that takes the initiative and the trouble to join the Lord in his mission of seeking the lost? If we do, it will make us into a different people. Mission-driven instead of tradition-driven. Whatever it takes to reach the lost and grow disciples, that is what we will do. And change is hard.

We have a letter from the third century. It was penned by a man anticipating death and writing his final reflections to a friend:

“It’s a bad world, an incredibly bad world. But I have discovered in the midst of it a quiet and holy people who have learned a great secret. They have found a joy which is a thousand times better than any pleasure of our sinful life. They are despised and persecuted, but they care not. They are masters of their own souls. They have overcome the world. They are Christians, and I am one of them.”<sup>13</sup>

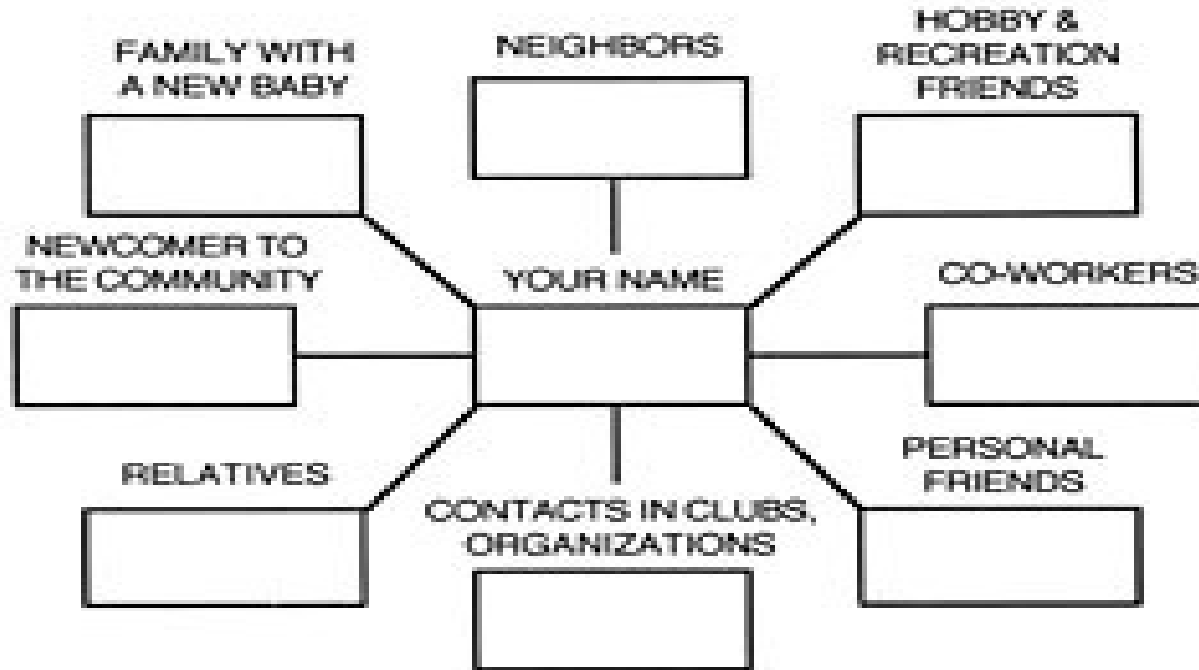
Can you say that? “They are Christians, and I am one of them.” Have you been found? Have you been restored to the household of God? Or are you still lost, even if you’ve been in the church all your life? If so, then I have some news for you. Someone’s looking for you, someone strong enough to put you on his broad shoulders and bear you all the way home to a new life! His name is Jesus, and he knows what you look like, where you live, what your concerns are. Your picture is on his refrigerator and in his wallet.

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<sup>13</sup> Cyprian of Carthage (200-258 AD), “Letter to Donatus,” [www.mainlesson.com/display.php?author=hodges&book=saints&story=cyprian](http://www.mainlesson.com/display.php?author=hodges&book=saints&story=cyprian).

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## *My Circle of Contacts*



### SIMPLE IDEAS TO MAKE A BEGINNING

1. Fill out the above chart concerning your circle of influence, put it in the front of your Bible or in your DayTimer and begin to pray for these persons by name. Then, watch for God to open multiple opportunities for friendship and practical service. Mark the times that God brings them to mind. Don't be pushy, but let conversations about your church, your life and faith, emerge naturally. Find some way to share a meal with as many as you can.
2. Sketch out an outline of your own faith journey with important turning points noted. It doesn't have to be dramatic or over-the-top, just real. There will be a time when you are called to the witness stand by the Holy Spirit. People want to know how what you believe and what you've experienced makes a difference in life. Your simple story can be a major bridge for others.

Birth

Present

3. Find some way to be directly involved with people outside your comfort zone and normal circle of acquaintances. Mentor someone at the Women's Prison. Give an afternoon at month at the MSUMC Foot Pantry. Volunteer at the soup kitchen. Ask Suzanne how you can help with the reading and mentoring program we are about to begin. Become a bridge-builder, and God will use you to influence other towards Jesus Christ. Major in servant-evangelism.