



Great stories often involve loss. Think about these stories/movies: *Braveheart* – Freedom. William Wallace is fighting for Scotland's lost freedoms.

Harry Potter – Parents. Harry is making sense of the world without the loving guidance of his parents.

Defender of the Galaxy – The orb. Peter Quill, the adventurer, tries to protect it and then get it back after he loses it.

Every sad country song – Love

Every *Rocky* movie – Brain cells

Divergent – Freedom. Tris wrestles with her freedom in deciding between Abnegation, Candor, Amity, Erudite or Dauntless. And as a society they are wrestling with larger issues of freedom. The tag line on *Divergent* says, "one choice can transform you."

That's an insightful phrase—"one choice can transform you"—because it relates to all great stories that involve loss. No matter what we lose we are faced with a choice, one choice that can transform you.

Will we rise to the challenge before us?

Will we struggle with self-doubt?

Will we let someone else deal with the problem?

Some people actually refuse to acknowledge a loss has occurred; they're usually the villains.

We're going to be presented with two parables today that involve loss. The questions that emerge are: Will I see the lost people in the world as God sees them? and, Will I share God's burden for lost people?

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1-2).

Jesus is eating a meal with these "sinners" and he's teaching them. He was always doing this. We're not told what he was saying to them. But it's thought provoking that these tax collectors and sinners were willingly gathered around to hear what Jesus had to teach them about true life, love, misplaced priorities, the path to knowing God the Father.

The Pharisees and teachers are mad about this. How dare Jesus associate with these low-lives. How dare a supposed righteous

teacher stoop to their level and corrupt himself. These are people who didn't even try to live in accordance with the righteous standards established by the rabbis. These people's lifestyle was insulting because they were defiant to teachings and lifestyle of the rabbis.

Jesus is bothered by the Pharisee's self-righteous, judgmental attitude. These men are supposed to be his representatives, his teachers, his shepherds. So he decides to take advantage of this opportunity to teach them a lesson.

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he 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. Doesn't she 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" (verses 3-10).

What's the point? God seeks sinners and rejoices over even one of them who repents.

The Dire Loss

Notice the tone of how Jesus describes the lost sheep and lost coin. In verse 4 the shepherd loses one of his sheep; in verse 8 the woman loses one of her coins. He doesn't blame them for getting lost. He doesn't condemn them like the so-called righteous Pharisees do. He doesn't judge them for making self-destructive decisions. He doesn't sneer at them.

No. He's filled with compassion because they are lost. Look at these words from the song, *Trouble* by Caedmon's Call.

Well, you say, I've got trouble
I've got trouble all over me
I've got trouble since the day I was born
And it's not just a struggle

Well, it's the blood running through my veins
And it's all the clothes I've ever worn

A sheep could easily get lost because they stared at the grass on the ground, eating one blade of grass at a time. In a short amount of time it was easy for them to stray from the flock, not because they were trying to defy the shepherd but because they were following their appetite for more grass.

On Wednesday my daughter Allie called me on her walk home from school. She's at a new school this year and this was her first time to walk home without an adult. We'd walked with her to school but the path looked differently on the return journey. She was lost. What attitude do I have if I say, "What do you mean you're lost? I'd never get lost on such an easy walk." Condemnation. Judgement. Self-Righteousness. What attitude do I have if I say, "It's OK. I can help you. Describe to me where you are. It's a horrible feeling to be lost. Let me help you." Compassion. Grace. Love. This is the kind of compassion Jesus has toward the lost.

Think about the coin. Similarly but even more innocently, the lost coin is lost by no fault of its own. It is dropped and it has no choice in the matter to roll. This reveals a lot about Jesus' heart of compassion toward those who are lost. In Luke 19:10 he said he came to seek and save the lost.

For the full Biblical picture we have to add to our original lost condition the fact that each and every person has made individual choices to rebel against God. This is clearly described throughout the Bible and very clearly in Romans 3.

But my point here is that this lost condition is a dire loss to God. He doesn't want us picturing him as sitting pompously on a throne. He wants us to understand his heartbreak. This is The Dire Loss.

The Search

In these parables we see a shepherd seeking one lost sheep and a woman searching for one lost coin. Verse 4 says the shepherd leaves the 99 and "goes after" the lost one. This was likely in the evening, the typical time for counting heads as the shepherds ended the day. They are ready to group their herd, cook some dinner and rest their tired feet. Oh no, one sheep is missing! No dinner, no rest. He's going out in the dark, retracing steps, going up and down hills, through creeks and searching ... "until he finds it."

In verse 8 the woman lights a lamp and sweeps the house carefully. This woman's house was dark, having either no windows or one small window. The floor was dirt. I imagine her clutching her ten precious coins and then one slips out. Oh no! As it falls, she loses sight of it in the darkness. She stoops to feel the ground directly below her hoping it landed and stayed in place. But no. It's not there. Like a coin usually does, it rolled when it landed.

Where did it go? She lights the lamp, gets the broom and "... searches carefully until she finds it." She's down on her knees, moving the small rocks and dust with her broom searching "until she finds it."

The search is deliberate, thoughtful and persistent. Neither of them are giving up until, it says in both scenarios, they find it.

I was watching my kids and others playing Hide and Seek yesterday. That's a fun game. But how long would you search for someone who had a hiding spot that was so good that they couldn't be found in 5 minutes? 10? 20? How long would you go? Maybe 10 but not 20. God is so burdened for the lost that he searches and searches and searches until the lost person is found.

The Party

Both stories start with a party of one. In verse 5 the shepherd joyfully puts the sheep on his shoulders. In verse 9 the woman's heart is filled with rejoicing. Then the party grows. In verse 6 the shepherd calls his friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep." In verse 9 the woman says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin."

They are bursting with excitement. Their hearts are flooded with relief that what was lost is now found. And this is such a major switch they have to acknowledge it with other people. So a party is thrown.

The Lesson

In verse 7 it says there is "... more rejoicing in heaven over 1 sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent." Before I get to the point of this verse, let me clear up who the 99 sheep, the 99 "righteous" people in verse 7 are. What does this mean?

One interpretation is these people did repent at one time in the past. And since they have already repented they no longer need to repent. This would be a Christian: They have repented, accepted Jesus into their life and they are living in a herd. Strangely then, the shepherd leaves them. Doesn't being a good shepherd mean caring for your sheep too?

Another interpretation is these people call themselves "righteous" but they are not righteous in God's eyes. I think this is the better interpretation. Remember, Jesus is addressing the Pharisees. Verses 1 and 2 set up this parable by telling us that the Pharisees were questioning him and accusing him of welcoming sinners. Furthermore, the Pharisees often called themselves righteous. What they meant was "self-righteous." In Luke 18:9 we see an example. *"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable:"*

What I think is happening here is Jesus just slammed the Pharisees. The Pharisees didn't think they needed to repent. They

thought they were so good, so moral, such good rule followers. Jesus was not impressed with their so-called righteousness. In fact, he tells them that when one of these detestable sinners repents, there is a huge party in their honor. What an offense to the Pharisees who considered themselves so much better. In their estimation, a party should be thrown for them, not some low-life sinner.

Both verses include the repentance of a lost person—the sinner—when found by God, the Good Shepherd, the Savior of the world, is called to repent. The sequence goes like this: The sinner has gotten lost, Jesus searches for them, Jesus finds them, the sinner repents for their part in getting lost, Jesus throws a big party.

People are different than sheep and a coin. We have a will that takes us down rebellious paths. When we're found we need to acknowledge our rebellious heart. We need to confess our sin and acknowledge the One who has saved us—Jesus!

So you see the point in the lesson. God seeks sinners and rejoices over even one of them who repents. God has a yearning love for the lost. Jesus associated with them in order to deliver them from their sinful ways and to save them. He had a clear purpose. He had no conflict simultaneously loving them for who they were and believing that their life would be better if they'd repent.

You see, when Jesus associated with sinners he always did so with a redemptive purpose. Each person is so precious to God that his heart bursts with celebration and a party when they repent, the turning away from a self-reliant life to a God-reliant life.

The point relates to us in this way. God seeks sinners and rejoices over even one of them who repents. So should we.

This weekend my family is camping over in Little Basin with some friends. I'll be rejoining them after church today. Yesterday it dawned on me that I hadn't seen my daughter Allie in a long time—30 minutes, 45, 1 hour; it's hard to keep track of time in the woods. I had seen the kids she'd been playing with. After asking them where Allie was and nobody knew, I took a look for myself in the woods. No sign of her.

Maybe she was on the swings, way down the road. No.

Someone said she was in the bathroom with Cassie. But that was wrong because Cassie had left camp to shop at a yard sale.

Maybe Allie went with Cassie to this yard sale, but no one knew this. No kids were told. No adults were told. And cell phones don't work at Little Basin.

You know that feeling of dread that grips your gut? I had it. Although logic told me my daughter probably went on this shopping trip, my emotions weren't soothed until she returned with her mom.

I asked my two sons to share with me the most important thing they've ever lost. I think I raised the stakes really high because they were stumped. As I tried to coax answers out of them, they didn't really bite on anything. I was pretty surprised by this and I was pondering why this was such a difficult question for them.

And then it dawned on me. In order to feel the raw, emotional impact of a loss, you have to love it deeply. My sons, at the ages of 12 and 8, haven't lost anything that they love deeply yet. That's ok and probably to be expected. I was asking them a question that they had difficulty engaging on a deep emotional level. Maybe that's like you today.

God feels deeply for his lost children. God's seeking is driven by love. So should ours. This seeking will involve emotional energy. This seeking will involve our time and physical energy. This seeking will involve endurance. This seeking will involve inconveniences.

Let me remind you that we worship a God with unlimited banks of emotional fuel and spiritual fuel. As we step out in faith to seek sinners, he will fill us up and empower us. As we pray for them, God's Spirit will move.

Let me ask you one question. If you are not searching for the lost like God wants you to, why not start searching today.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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