

Luke 15: 1-7 (ESV): The Lost Sheep

Main point: God's heart always seeks the lost, including us.

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: Jesus is eating with "sinners."

v. 1-2: "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

Questions:

1. *Who is Jesus hanging around with?*
 - a. Tax collectors – hated among the Jewish people for working for the Romans and skimming off money from their own people
 - b. "sinners" – outcasts from society, prostitutes, etc.
2. *Who are the Pharisees and scribes?*
 - a. The religious rulers, the high class, the "cleaned up," the "important people"
3. *Why are they upset with Jesus?*
 - a. They are shocked and suspicious; think that if Jesus professes to being a religious teacher, he should NOT be associating with the "unclean"

Focus of the study:

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Questions:

1. *What kind of people have sheep?*
 - a. shepherds
2. *Tell me how a shepherd works – what does he do? What is his job description?*
 - a. take care of the sheep; watch over them; protect them; count them all to make sure they're all there; feed and water them
 - b. *How dependent are the sheep on the shepherd?* Completely
3. *How does this particular shepherd act? What happens in the story first?*
 - a. v. 4: He starts out with 100 sheep and one gets lost
 - b. *Does he wait around to see what happens to the one that's lost? Does he just figure, oh well, it's just 1 out of 100 – it's OK to lose one ...?*
 - i. No; he leaves the 99 and goes out to find it
 - c. *What do you make of the fact that he leaves the 99 in open country? Is that a smart shepherd?*

- i. No! that's a risky thing to do
 - d. *Why does he do it?*
 - i. Every single one of his sheep is important to him, and so he goes out to find the one that is most in danger, most vulnerable, most lost
 - e. *How long does he look for it?*
 - i. He keeps looking until he has found it. How long could this take??
 - f. *Is he successful? Why?* Because he doesn't stop until he's found it.
- 4. *What is the shepherd's reaction when he finds the lost sheep?*
 - a. v. 5: Puts it on his shoulders – *why? Why would you pick up a sheep?*
 - i. Maybe it's too tired or injured to walk; he wants to make sure it makes it home
 - b. *Does he scold it, whip it, punish it for wandering off?*
 - i. No; he rejoices!
 - c. v. 6: *And then what does he do? Does he keep his celebration to himself?* No – he calls together his friends and neighbors
 - d. *What does he say?*
 - i. "rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost."
 - ii. *How does he feel about this sheep?? Is it just a sheep, just 1 out of a 100, nothing special?*
 - 1. He loves the lost and found sheep, enough to celebrate with relief and joy when he finds it
- 5. *Who do you think the shepherd is in this story?*
 - a. God himself
- 6. *Who are we in this story?*
 - a. the sheep – wandering around, dependent, sometimes lost
- 7. *What is God's attitude toward his flock, toward us? What is in his heart for his people?*
 - a. so much love that he will do *anything* to find us and bring us home
- 8. *What about our attitude toward our fellow sheep?*
 - a. we should know and embody God's heart to seek the lost, not give up on anyone, keep looking, keep praying for others
 - b. Pope Francis: "God doesn't know our current throwaway culture. God throws nobody away. God loves everyone, seeks out everyone, everybody – one by one."¹
- 9. Ask for prayer requests for today.
- 10. Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
- 11. End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

¹ <http://www.catholicnews.com/services/englishnews/2016/nothing-can-keep-god-from-seeking-those-who-stray-pope-says.cfm>