

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

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



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

Background: Jesus is eating with “sinners.” Luke 15: 1-2: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Jesus. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

Background Questions:

1. *Who is Jesus hanging around with?*
 - a. Tax collectors – people who were hated among the Jews for working for the occupying army (the Romans) and skimming off money from their own people
 - b. “sinners” – outcasts from society, prostitutes, criminals, etc.
2. *Who are the Pharisees and scribes?*
 - a. The religious rulers of the day, the high class, the “cleaned up,” the “important people”
3. *Why are the religious rulers upset with Jesus?*
 - a. They are shocked and suspicious; think that if Jesus claims to be a religious teacher, he should not be associating with the “unclean”

Focus of the study:

³ So Jesus 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 the man who lost the sheep has found it, he lays the sheep on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when the man 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 a shepherd do? What is a shepherd's job description?*
 - a. Takes care of sheep. *What does that involve?*
 - i. watches over the sheep, protects them, counts them all to make sure they're all there, feeds and waters them
 - b. *How dependent are the sheep on the shepherd?*
 - i. Completely! Sheep are vulnerable: they have no way to defend themselves, and they're not very bright (they get lost!)
3. *In the story that Jesus tells, how does this particular shepherd act? What happens first?*
 - a. v. 4: The shepherd starts out with 100 sheep and one gets lost
 - b. *In the story, does the shepherd wait around to see what happens to the sheep that's lost? Does he figure, oh well, it's just 1 out of 100 – it's OK to lose one ...?*

- i. No; the shepherd leaves the 99 and goes out to find that one sheep
 - c. *What do you make of the fact that the shepherd leaves the 99 in open country? Do you think a typical shepherd would do this?*
 - i. No! that's a risky thing to do
 - d. *Why does this shepherd go find the one sheep that is lost?*
 - i. Every single one of his sheep is priceless to him, so he goes out to find the one that is most in danger, most vulnerable, most lost
 - e. *How long does the shepherd look for the lost sheep?*
 - i. Keeps looking until he has found it; doesn't give up
 - f. *Is the shepherd successful? Why?*
 - i. Because he doesn't stop until he's found the lost sheep
4. *What is the shepherd's reaction when he finds his lost sheep?*
 - a. v. 5: Puts the sheep on his shoulders – *why? Why would you pick up a sheep?*
 - i. Maybe the sheep is too tired or injured to walk; the shepherd wants to make sure the sheep makes it home, so the shepherd carries the burden
 - b. *Does the shepherd scold the sheep or punish it for wandering off? No! What is the shepherd's reaction when he finds that sheep? He rejoices!*
 - c. v. 6: *And then what does the shepherd do? Does he keep his celebration to himself?*
 - i. No – he calls together his friends and neighbors to join the party
 - d. *What does the shepherd say to his friends?*
 - i. "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost."
 5. *So: How does this crazy shepherd feel about his lost sheep?? Is it "just" a sheep, just 1 out of 100, nothing special?*
 - a. The shepherd *loves* the lost and found sheep, enough to celebrate with relief and joy when he finds it and to spread his joy to everyone around him
 6. *Why does Jesus tell this story? Who do you think the shepherd is in this story? And who are we in this story?*
 - a. God himself is the shepherd
 - b. We are the sheep – wandering around, dependent, defenseless, sometimes lost
 7. *Why were the religious rulers cranky about the company Jesus kept?*
 - a. The religious rulers didn't think that sinners, "icky" people, lost people, deserved the love and attention Jesus gave them – that God is too holy to love these people.
 8. *With this story, what does Jesus say is God's attitude toward his flock, toward us? What is in God's heart for people?*
 - a. So much love that God will do *anything* to find us and bring us home
 9. *What about our attitude toward our fellow sheep?*
 - a. We should act with 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

- Ask for any prayer requests for today.
- Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
- 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>

Luke 15: 1-7

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