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God's Heart for the Lost
Luke 15:1-10
April 2, 2017, Jeff Germo

Last week we finished our series called *Becoming Together*, which was essentially about what the first church was like. We spent six weeks digging into six short verses to see if we could find out what it was that caused that first church to explode with growth. What we saw, in Acts 2:42-47, was that the church was devoted to four things that strengthened them:

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The Apostles Teaching; Fellowship; Eating together; and Prayer. They gathered together often for the purpose of strategizing about the mission of Jesus, building each other up, and training each other to take the love of Jesus to their community. And then, armed with new strength, courage, and the grace of Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, they went out to dole out his grace and love. Everything they did was for the purpose of making more disciples of Jesus.

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Today we are going to take a look at a couple parables in which Jesus speaks to what God's heart is about. We are going to look at Luke 15 today where Jesus tells three parables about lost things. We are only going to dig into two of those parables, the lost sheep and the lost coin, because I've already preached a series on the Parable of the Lost Sons. These are three parables about lost things, each with a different nuance.

How many of you have lost something and looked high and low for it until you found it? Or maybe you didn't find it. Can you remember the feeling you had while you were looking for it? What are some adjectives you would use to describe how you felt while you were searching?

How about the feelings you had when you found it?

If you have felt that frustration and urgency for the lost thing, and the joy and relief you felt when you found it, you would know the emotion Jesus was trying to evoke when he told these parables.

Last week we did our taxes. We had this day planned for a few weeks. I always look forward with dread to tax day. It's my least favourite day of the year. Throughout the year we file everything tax related into file folders by the month so when it comes time to do our taxes we can just walk through each month, record it on a spreadsheet, and then give it to our accountant. It usually takes us several hours. And neither of us is particularly good at it.

For some reason I misplaced my T4. We looked everywhere. No pile was left untouched in our search. We have great intentions for a well organized filing system. It's sort of a two tiered system. When we are really busy we put things in a pile to be dealt with later. We have several of those piles in our piling system. We use the word "system" loosely. Let's just call them what they are. They are piles of mostly useless stuff with the odd important document that we will need sometime in the future. I am assuming my T4 is still in one of those piles somewhere. We desperately looked everywhere for it to no avail. Thankfully, I had emailed a copy of it to our accountant a couple weeks prior to that and she said it was sufficient.

The desperation I felt while trying to find my T4 was the emotion Jesus was trying to evoke when he told these parables. I think we have all experienced it before.

Let's read the parables and then we'll circle back and talk about them.

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Luke 15:1-10 (NLT)

¹ Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. ² This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them! ³ So Jesus told them this story:

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⁴ “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. ⁶ When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’

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⁷ In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!

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⁸ “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰ In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.”

Let's go back to the beginning now and notice what prompted Jesus to tell this parable. Remember why Jesus told parables. If you recall, we said previously that parables were sort of like spiritual defibrillators. They were meant to shock the spiritual hearts of his listeners back into rhythm with the heart of God.

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¹ Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach.

This is interesting, don't you think? These were the people who were attracted to Jesus. Tax collectors, the lowest of sinners in the eyes of the religious Jews, and other “sinners.” Luke is describing a group of people who, if he told the average religious person in that day about them, they would have turned up their noses and nodded with a knowing look. “Yeah, those kinds of people.”

We have a tendency of categorizing people. There are “those” people. And then there is “us.” There is the “in group.” And there is the “out group.” They are “out.” And we are “in.” We are good. They are bad. We are right. They are wrong.

The economy of Jesus was much different than ours. The kinds of people Jesus spent much of his time with were not exactly highly respected by most of society. The Greek literally says that these tax collectors and other sinners were “drawn” to Jesus. They moved towards him. They were attracted to him. They liked being with him. They knew who they were. They knew they

didn't measure up. They knew that other, more respectable people, snubbed their noses at them. Jesus didn't. He *welcomed* them.

This is interesting because Jesus was nothing like these people. Jesus was sinless. He was morally perfect.

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Jesus was nothing like these people — and yet — they liked him, and he liked them. It was actually he who first liked them, and they liked him back.

Jesus was so different than the Pharisees and teachers of the law. He was morally perfect and yet when tax collectors and sinners hung around him they didn't feel less valuable. They didn't feel judged. They didn't avoid Jesus. They were drawn towards him because he welcomed them.

The religious leaders, on the other hand, had an "us and them" mindset. They believed they were morally superior. They kept the law to the "T", and anyone who was not like them was made to feel small in their presence.

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The religious leaders were more about comparing than caring.

So, here was Jesus, who was supposed to be a religious leader. He was a rabbi with a huge following of disciples and he did not fit into the Pharisees' idea of what a rabbi should be. He did not fit the mold. *He* hung around "those kinds of people."

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² This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them!

Here is the reason Jesus told the parable. Jesus was welcoming and hanging around people who were seen as undesirable in the eyes of the religious people. "Those people" didn't measure up to their standards. They judged the sinners and tax collectors and they judged Jesus for choosing that group instead of theirs. "If he really was a religious leader he would hang out with us, not those people." **The religious leaders were more about comparing than caring. They cared more about their image than the mission of Jesus.**

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³ So Jesus told them this story:

He actually told them three stories. He didn't just tell them one story. This is a trilogy of parables. With each story Jesus pushes his probe deeper into the hearts of these very religious, morally upright people who think they are okay, and have a habit of comparing and rating themselves as better than others. They would have felt the pain of his probe with each story, and with each one they would have gotten more and more angry.

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This parable is about the heart of God. What does God really care about?

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So, Jesus says,

4 “If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it?”

And at this point some people say, well, what Jesus is talking about here is people who leave the church, because the lost sheep was one of the shepherd’s one-hundred. But, all analogies break down. To understand who Jesus is talking about you simply need to check out the context. Why did Jesus tell the parable?

There are two groups in question here. One group is the religious people who believe they are okay. The other is the people who know they are not, the ones the Pharisees saw as less desirable. Jesus said, he gladly leaves the ninety-nine others in search of those who know they are lost.

Now, that in itself would have made the religious people raise their eyebrows and start getting uncomfortable. But it gets worse.

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5 And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. 6 When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’

Jesus is using hyperbole here to make his point. They all knew that, even though the shepherd would be happy to find his lost sheep, he’s not going to throw a party for it. This would have made them angry, just like the older brother was angry that his father threw a party for his younger brother when he came home after repenting of squandering his inheritance. The older brother was saying, “Hey what about me?” He didn’t care at all about the fact that his younger brother was lost and he didn’t care that he was now found. His only concern was for himself. So the religious people are getting more and more uncomfortable with each part of the story.

Jesus continues.

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7 In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!

The probe goes deeper in their religious hearts. It hurts and they are getting more uncomfortable and angrier. They are starting to see that Jesus is talking about them.

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Jesus is telling them what the heart of God is for lost people. It makes them angry. Why?

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...there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!

And actually, the Greek literally says, “***ninety-nine who don’t need to repent.***” This is another gross hyperbole. There is no one who does not need to repent. In other words, the ninety-nine are those who think they are okay when really there are blind and depraved.

“You mean God gets more joy from lost people who are found than from me? Don’t you know who I am? You should put all your effort into making sure my needs are met. You should be hanging out with us.”

This would have really made them mad. And he doesn’t stop there. He continues on with another parable.

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⁸ “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹ And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰ In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.”

And again, Jesus is using hyperbole. Nobody is going to invite all their friends and throw a party because they found one of their lost coins. That’s ridiculous. They all knew it. That’s what makes them mad. By using this hyperbole he is saying how important lost people are to God. That is God’s heart. That truth is repugnant to them. It makes them angry. “Don’t you know who I am? Don’t you know how devoted I am to God? I have earned the right to have God take care of me more than those people have. I’ve put in my time. I’m a charter member.”

This wasn’t just a nice story to prove a point. Jesus was trying to shock their spiritual hearts into rhythm with the heart of the Father.

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That desperate urgent feeling we have when we lose something and look under every pile is the same urgency with which we should be searching for lost people. And the joy we experience when we find the lost thing is the joy to look forward to when lost people are found. That shouldn’t make us feel bad and cause us to feel jealous as if God doesn’t have enough love for both them and for us. He *is* love. He has lots of it. He has an infinite supply of love.

His purpose for us while we are on this earth is to be his instruments to bring lost people into his kingdom. Our Heavenly Father did not send his Son to die so all the found people could gather and party. He has called us to be a part of his great rescue mission. That is why the church is here. That is what we are about.

All our energies, our time, talents and gifts, and our financial resources must be used to those ends. That is God’s heart. He wants to shake us up and make us feel uncomfortable so our hearts would begin to beat in rhythm with his. His desire for us is that we would search for lost people who need Jesus with that same kind of urgency we feel when we are searching for something as insignificant as a lost T4.

Jesus came to give us life — lots of it. There is enough for everyone. He has called us to share that life with as many people as possible.

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As we train with Jesus he is going to make us more like him. We will begin to see people through his eyes. We will begin to really care for people the way he does.

That's why I am going to Kenya today to see the great ministry Ngorika does. That is why Pastor Steve took a group to New York to get trained in reaching out to kids. Steve and a couple of his team members are going to come up now and share with us a bit of their experience. He shared some of the stories with the staff last week and we were so pumped with what God did through them.

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Steve Karadimas

My Spring break was fantastic. I spent eight days in New York with this amazing group of people. We helped out Metro World Child for a week, which is a group of fantastic people who devotes their whole lives to going out all over the city sharing Jesus with kids.

The week was awesome. We went out nearly every day and knocked on doors, telling people to come to Yogi Bear, which is what they call the Sunday School there. And the kids were pumped to go to Sunday school. We got to see thousands of kids get excited to hear about Jesus. It was so obvious that the Holy Spirit was working in New York. As we met on the last day together as a team, everybody on our team shared how they wanted to change their lives as they came back home, and I believe very strongly that each person who went on that trip is going to live a changed life from now on.

There are so many stories that I want to share, I got to meet my sponsor kid Isaiah in the Bronx, I saw Jesus working through our team in amazing ways but I'm going to tell you just one story.

This was the last day we were in New York, what we did was we spent the whole day picking up kids on busses and brought them all to the church in Brooklyn. The last bus of the day was probably the most challenging one. There was a kid on that bus named Tyler. Tyler was about 12 years old, and he was a troubled kid. He was trying to start fights on the bus, he was threatening to beat up little kids. He was angry. This bus ride seemed like it would never end but finally the bus arrived at the church and the bus captain told all the kids to stand up and form a line and go to Sunday school. Everybody listened except Tyler.

The bus captain was stuck, she had forty kids all doing what they were supposed to be doing and this one kid who just wasn't behaving. He was the problem child. Sunday school was starting and here were these forty kids who were anxious to get inside, so she did what most of us would do. She saw that I was sitting next to Tyler and frantically she just kinda said, "Steve can you deal with that?" and she went off with the forty to Sunday school.

I started talking with Tyler. I asked him some questions and found out that his three older brothers were all currently in prison, and he said, "That's where I'm gonna end up too so I should just kill myself."

He showed weakness for a moment, but he then switched his persona and pulled out three long sharp metal picks and he held them in his hand like Wolverine. He started talking about how he needed to protect his younger siblings at Sunday school. This got me a little bit concerned. I was like, "Hey how about you hand me those picks and then we can go to Sunday school?" He then turned them right at me and started threatening me. This was concerning, I really didn't want to die on this trip.

Eventually he calmed down and we left the bus, he then started messing with some busses he was ripping on the stop sign of one of the busses. The bus driver who was hired out by the city started yelling at Tyler. Tyler then obviously started talking back. The bus drivers then looked out the window and told Tyler that he's going to be stupid forever.

It was going so downhill so quickly then Tyler grabbed some ice on the ground, I turned to him I said don't do it man, it's not worth it, but of course he chucked it at the bus driver. The bus driver comes out and they start yelling. We calmed down the bus driver. And now we're with the metro staff and they tell Tyler that he's going to be suspended from Sunday school for a couple weeks. Tyler is devastated and runs off and I went to talk with him again. I was confused. There was this kid who didn't want to go to Sunday School and now he is devastated because he doesn't get to go to Sunday school anymore, this didn't make any sense.

So I asked him why is he so upset that he got suspended. He told me that his mom will tell his dad that he wasn't behaving and his dad will beat him. He then went right back to what he first told me I should just kill myself. "If I don't do that I'll just end up in prison and I'll be stupid forever."

It hurts to hear stuff like that, and in that moment I felt like I had a word from the Holy Spirit. I told him you know what, that bus driver is wrong. He doesn't know you, and he's wrong. But when you talk back to him and throw ice at him, in that moment your proving him right. And you don't want to prove him right because he's wrong.

You know what would really shock that bus driver? If you start coming to Sunday school every week and listening to the lessons. If you graduate high school, go to college and get a sick job. If you become the most successful kid at Sunday school and you have the best relationship with Jesus. Then he might have to eat those words, because they were wrong, so prove him wrong.

For the first time since I saw him it seemed like something clicked. He then went back home on the bus and I don't know what happened to him. But the reason why I shared that story is because how many times are we the bus captain that has 40 kids all doing one thing and one problem kid that we just can't deal with right now? How often do we turn to someone and just say you deal with that and then carry on? How often do we leave the one to take care of the many. And what happens to the ones that are constantly ignored?

In that moment I was called to reach the one, but I think I miss the call to the one far too often, I am constantly drawn to the crowd and ignore the one who needs me, and how much do we miss out by ignoring the one?

[Communion]



The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1-10

Week of April 2, 2017

Objective of this study: To allow God to change our hearts so we see people through his eyes.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 23** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything jump out at you?**

Welcome

Describe a time you lost something. What were your feelings while searching for it?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Luke 15:1-32.
3. What prompted Jesus to tell these three parables? What was his purpose in telling them? (i.e. What response was he looking for?)
4. What are the different nuances in each of the parables?
5. Which of the three parables speaks most to your heart? Why?

Work (30-45 minutes)

That desperate, urgent feeling you have when you are searching for something important you have lost is the same urgency Jesus feels for lost people and wants us to have too.

6. Do you have a heart for lost people right now? Be honest. Why or why not?
7. When you see someone who isn't in "your group", or someone you cannot relate to for some reason, do you tend towards caring, or comparing?
8. How has the Lord been speaking to you about this lately?
9. During this study, have you thought of some people who don't know Jesus?
 1. Spend the rest of the time praying for them.

[Be sure to have an outward focus in your prayers. Who is the Holy Spirit laying on your heart to reach out to with the love of Jesus.]

