



Lost and Found

Desired Outcomes

1. To study the parables Jesus told about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son.
2. To understand God’s love for us and God’s desire to be in right relationship with us.
3. To experience the joy that comes when both we and others are in right relationship with God.

Session Key Verse

“This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate.
—Luke 15:24

Sneak Peek

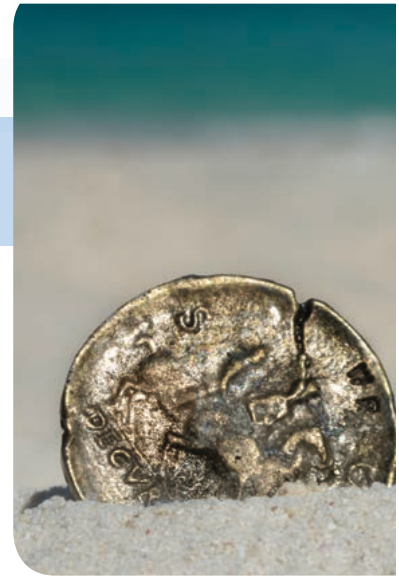
Jesus used a series of parables to teach about the abundant joy that comes when those who are separated from God return to God.

Optional Materials

- Internet access
- *For free digital resources to enhance this lesson, go to www.warnerpress.org/life-mosaic-resources.*

1 Get Acquainted

Today you are going to read and talk about three parables Jesus told about lost things—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. **Have you heard these parables? Have you studied them individually, in a class, or as a church?** Discuss with the group what you already know about these “lost” stories.



When we return to a familiar passage of scripture, we can find it comfortable—like a favorite sweater we enjoy wearing over and over. Sometimes we can even come to it with low expectations, not really anticipating that we will discover anything fresh or new. Rate yourself on this scale:

- 0—I have studied the “lost” parables a lot. I don’t expect to find anything new.
- 1—I have studied these parables a lot, but I might find something new when we go through them today.
- 2—I expect that I will learn a lot from our study of the “lost” parables today.

Discuss how you rated yourself, then take a moment to pray together, asking the Lord to reveal these stories to each of you in new ways today.

2 Discover



Read and discuss [Luke 15:1–32](#). The commentary sections can be used to generate dialogue, or for study prior to your meeting.

Luke 15:1–10

Commentary

Luke makes Jesus’ companionship with sinners a special point of emphasis. What was it about Jesus that attracted tax collectors and sinners to him?

Jesus sought to bring sinners to repentance, but not by scolding or correcting them. Instead, he ate with them. Four times Luke’s Gospel reports meals in which Jesus received criticism for his relationship with sinners, but Jesus never once commented on the sinners’ behavior.

Jesus distinguished here between sinners who repent and “righteous persons who need no repentance” (v 7). We may struggle with that distinction, but it is critical for engaging this passage on its own terms. Here lies the cutting edge of the passage: Jesus embraced the very people the rest of religious society rejected.

As with most of Jesus’ parables, there is a “hook,” something that seems out of place. That hook lies in a certain lavishness in the celebrations. In the ancient world, “rejoicing” implies eating. Would a shepherd really throw a party over the finding of a lost sheep? If the lost coin so concerned the woman, would we expect her to endure the expense of a party? This “hook” provides rich material for reflection. It invites us to recognize the extravagant joy with which God, present in Christ, welcomes sinners.¹

Questions

- **What is the significance of the people being described as “tax collectors and sinners”? Why would the Pharisees and scribes care who Jesus ate with?**
- **Is the number of sheep significant? Why return the sheep in this particular way—carried across the shoulders?**
- **Whom does the lost sheep represent? How about the shepherd? Whom would the Pharisees and scribes be? How might they feel about their place? Whom might be the modern-day equivalents of each?**
- **What is the significance of the ten coins? What might be significant about Jesus making the “star” of this parable a woman? What is similar between the lost sheep and lost coin stories?**

1. Adapted from “Commentary on Luke 15:1–10,” accessed August 10, 2016, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=674.

Luke 15:11–32

Commentary

We encounter at least two interpretive cruxes in this parable. First, did the younger son earnestly repent, or was he a manipulative scoundrel? The absence of repentance language is striking, particularly since the previous two parables condition readers to expect it. The son's rehearsed speech smacks of insincerity and a plan designed to tug at his gullible father's heartstrings. Perhaps Jesus' point was that even scoundrels are joyfully welcomed in God's household. Just pointing oneself toward home is what unleashes God's welcome. Any motive will do. However we judge the younger son's motives, still the story retains a deeply scandalous flavor in the father's exuberant response to his returned son. The father welcomed home a loser, as a loser, and restored him to his standing as a son. Coming home at rock bottom was all he had to do.

Second, was the elder son correct? He was resentful because he felt he had been taken for granted. No extravagance celebrated his reliable service. He accused his father of showing preferential treatment. The elder son forces us both to digest just how scandalous were the father's actions and to ask what this son's reactions say to us. By the elder son's own reckoning, he was correct. And many of us need to be brought to the realization that, deep down, we tend to reckon things in similar ways, according to similar standards of fairness and belonging.

The father did not cast the elder son away. The parable denies a zero-sum economics that would have one child accepted and another rejected. The father called the elder son "son" and confirmed his full place and favored standing within the family. All that remained to be seen was how this son would respond.²

2. Adapted from "Commentary on Luke 15:1–3, 11b–32," accessed August 10, 2016, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=533.



Questions

- **How did the father respond to his youngest son’s “demand?”**
- While the son was away, “no one gave him anything.” Contrast this with how his father treated him when he got home.
- **Who is who in this story? Whom do you identify most with, and why?**
- **Why did Jesus talk about three different lost things—a sheep, a coin, and a son? Is there a difference in their value? What were the different reasons for these things being lost?**
- **How might the different groups of people listening to Jesus have responded to these parables?**

3 Experience



Option 1

Dramatize either the lost sheep or the lost coin parable. Consider who the characters are in each. **How does the sheep get lost? How does the coin get lost? What has to happen to find either of those things?** Consider what the woman’s home—specifically the floor she sweeps—might look like. Verbalize what each character in the story, including the sheep, is thinking and feeling at the beginning of the story and then again at the end.

Option 2

Compose a journal entry for one of the three main characters in the prodigal son parable. Choose a point in the story you want to explore. For the younger son, you might choose the day before he asks for his share, or the day before he decides to go home. For the father, you might choose the day after the youngest leaves, or the day before he returns. For the older brother, you might choose the day after his brother leaves, or the day he returns. Consider the thoughts and feelings of your character at that particular moment. **What would that person record in a personal journal?** Record your thoughts below, then share them with the group as you are willing:

4 Apply



Read and respond to the following questions, then form pairs or small groups to share your thoughts:

Whom do you struggle to identify with in these parables, and why? Are you frustrated by the thought of the shepherd leaving the flock to seek out a lost sheep? Does the woman searching for her coin strike you as careless? Do you have a hard time with a son who would demand his own way or a father who would concede to the son and then welcome him back later? Does the anger and bitterness of the older brother annoy you?

Now focus on your own role as the recipient of the love and concern expressed in these parables. **How do you feel about a Father who would set aside all of your past failures and love you unconditionally, just as you are at this moment? How does it feel to consider that anyone would find you**

so precious that he or she would look high and low for you? Can you imagine the joy that erupted in heaven when you repented and embraced Christ—or the joy that will erupt when you make that decision?



Conclude



The nameless characters in today's parables allow us to write our own names into the story. At some point in life, we have all been lost, or searched for something we deeply cared about. Our discipleship calls us to a love that searches, a love that waits, a love that rejoices when one who was lost is found.

With a partner, pray through your response to today's study. Whether you are currently feeling lost, or you feel grateful to be found, share that in prayer. Maybe you are searching for something that has been lost—a wayward child, a dream, an anticipated future that isn't reality yet. Share that with the Lord, too. Revisit the rating you gave yourself at the beginning of your gathering. **Where do you stand now?**

- 0—Everything I studied before was confirmed today.
- 1—I discovered a new insight into these parables or into my own life today.
- 2—I have gained a new appreciation of these familiar parables today.

Daily Bible Readings Week 1	<i>Sunday</i> Luke 15:1–32 <i>Lost and Found</i>	<i>Monday</i> Deuteronomy 21:15–17 <i>The Law of Inheritance</i>	<i>Tuesday</i> Deuteronomy 21:18–21 <i>Dealing with Rebelliousness</i>
	<i>Wednesday</i> Psalm 51 <i>A Psalm of Penitence</i>	<i>Thursday</i> Proverbs 21:1–5 <i>A Righteous Heart</i>	<i>Friday</i> Luke 16:1–13 <i>A Dishonest Manager</i>

Notes
