



THE GOSPEL OF  
**Luke**

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: LUKE 15:1-10**

To understand to value God places on the lost who are found.

## The Lost Ones Matter

There is an old, Hasidic story about the Exodus. The story tells of a great celebration in heaven after the Israelites are delivered from the Egyptians at the Red Sea, and the Egyptian armies are drowned. Moses had just parted the Red Sea and passed through it, and shortly after crossing had held up his staff and watched the waters close in on the entire Egyptian army. The story recalls the reaction in heaven. The angels are cheering and dancing. Everyone in heaven is full of joy. And then, one of the angels asks the archangel Michael, "Where is God? Why isn't God here celebrating?" Michael answers solemnly, "God is not here because He is off by himself weeping. You see, many thousands were drowned today." According to the tale, God is more concerned with that which is lost than that which has already been found.

While there are certainly some aspects of the story that are a little problematic theologically, the tale does illustrate the heart of God towards the lost. In Luke 15:1-10, Jesus tells two parables concerning the heart of God towards those who are lost. He describes a lost sheep and a lost coin, and the lengths that owner of these items goes through to find them, and the subsequent celebration in heaven after they are retrieved: "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" (Lk. 15:7). God cares about the lost ones. He rejoices when they are found in repentance and faith.

## A Change of Crowds

Luke 15:1-10 is yet again a collection of parables that Jesus tells the crowds around Him. This pattern will continue through this chapter and on for some time. It's important to remember that parables are simple stories that are meant to illustrate one big idea. Often interpreters can get caught in a trap of trying to allegorize every detail in the parable they are reading, and they will do to their own detriment. The point of parables is to reflect one simple idea. With that in mind, Jesus' audience changes a little bit in chapter 15. Prior to this, His audience was made up of Pharisees as He dined with them (Lk. 14:1; 12; 15), and then great crowds gathered thereafter to listen to Him (Lk. 14:25). Now, at the beginning of chapter 15, the dynamics of the crowd change to "the tax collectors and sinners" (Lk. 15:1), much to the chagrin of the "Pharisees and the scribes" (Lk. 15:2). In fact, Luke records that they "grumbled" against Jesus (Lk. 15:2).

### **GRUMBLING IS BAD NEWS**

Grumbling has an extraordinarily negative connotation to it. It's what the Israelites did in the wilderness towards God (Ex. 16:2). It's what the Israelites did against the elders of the congregation who swore not to harm the Gibeonites (Josh. 9:18). Grumbling is associated with deep dissatisfaction in trusting in the LORD. The word is almost certainly intentionally used by Luke to record the chief of Israel's representatives and their reaction to the work of Christ. They grumble specific words recorded in verse 2b: "This man receives sinners and eats with them. Gathering the crowd together, Jesus begins to tell more parables in response to the Pharisees grumbling.

## More Parables

Below is a breakdown of the two parables in this passage with a special interest in key themes, ideas, and words.

### **THE NINETY-NINE SHEEP**

The first parable begins in verse 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?" Jesus' parables usually draw the listener into a relatable life experience, and this one is no exception. While tending to sheep is not as common of a practice in the modern world, it was something many were intimately aware of during Jesus' time. The parable begins with the shepherd losing a sheep, and leaving the ninety-nine in the field to go and find it. Matthew's recollection of the parable says "mountains" instead of "open field" or "desert," but one should not worry about this difference. The "open fields" of this region were stony and elevated, and one could refer to them as either. The fact that the shepherd has 100 sheep is also likely not a major detail, but rather a reflection of rabbinic tradition to use the numbers 99 and 100 in storytelling and teaching.

The point of the parable is that a good shepherd will leave the many to search for one lost sheep. The theme of shepherding in both the Old and New Testaments is central to understanding God's relationship with His people. God is often depicted as shepherd (Ps 23; 80:1; Isa 40:11). David, prior to being anointed as king was a shepherd, and this motif is transferred onto him once he begins to lead (2 Sam 5:2). Jesus Himself uses this imagery as well to describe His relationship to His people as the "good shepherd" (John 10:1-16). His shepherding stands in contrast to the religious leaders of Israel who had long been willing to let sheep wander off and die while they only fed themselves (Ez. 34:1-10). The details of this parable are certainly intentional considering the mixture of Pharisees and religious leaders in attendance who were the shepherds of Israel, similar to those described in Ezekiel 34.

The point of the parable is that God is a good shepherd who is willing to stop, leave the righteous behind, and go to the lost sheep to reclaim him. God is not willing to count His losses when it comes to His sheep. They are precious to Him. Jesus says in John 10:16, “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” Jesus is speaking of His people of a “different fold.” Not only is Jesus interested in the sinners and tax collectors, but the Gentiles as well (that’s us!). And when the sheep is found, there is a massive celebration in heaven: “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” (Lk. 15:7).

### **THE LOST COIN**

Jesus doubles this point with a second parable concerning a lost coin in verses 8 and 9: “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’” This time, the main character in the parable moves from a shepherd to a woman, and they seem to be in different economic statuses. While the shepherd didn’t necessarily need to go find the other one, the sheep mattered enough to him to go anyways. In this parable, the woman only has ten coins indicating she is poor, and therefore is motivated to find the coin because of how much it matters to her. The point of the parable, regardless of the differences in details, is the same: “Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (Lk. 15:10).

Following these two parables, Jesus tells a final parable that we will consider next week about a prodigal son, a grateful father, and a jealous brother, and again He is going to illustrate the depths of love the Father has for those who repent and come back to Him.

## **What About Now?**

One takeaway is simply marveling at the love of God for His people. The Lord celebrates when sinners repent and turn to Him. Another takeaway might be that if God is motivated to go after the lost one, we should be motivated to do the same. So often we downplay the importance of evangelism because it’s uncomfortable or scary, but the reality is that it is something near and dear to the Father’s heart. Finally, a third takeaway is the importance of celebrating when people are born again. If heaven celebrates, we in the church should too. It’s a joyous occasion when someone believes the Gospel.

## **Study Questions**

### **Day One**

1. Read Luke 15:1. Who came to hear Jesus speak?

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2. Read Luke 15:2. What was the response of the scribes and Pharisees to Jesus’ interaction with the sinners and tax collectors? What is the significance of grumbling?

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### Day Two

1. Read Luke 15:3-4. Who is Jesus speaking to when He begins the parable? How does the parable begin?

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2. Read Luke 15:5. What is significant about the imagery of the shepherd placing the sheep on his shoulders?

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### Day Three

1. Read Luke 15:6. What does the shepherd do when he arrives home with the sheep he has found?

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2. Read Luke 15:7. What is the main thrust of this first parable?

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### Day Four

1. Read Luke 15:8-9. In your own words, summarize this parable.

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2. Read Luke 15:10. What is the main thrust of this second parable?

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## Week 56 Discussion: Celebrate!

In Luke 15:1-10, Jesus tells two parables concerning the heart of God towards the lost and the celebration that breaks out in heaven when someone repents. Talk as a group about the importance of celebrating when people come to faith.

1. Icebreaker: Talk about your experience coming to faith in Jesus. Who led you to the Lord?
2. What are some fun ways you could celebrate someone coming to faith?
3. What's the most excited you've ever been for someone coming to faith?
4. How long should you seek after a lost person before giving up?
5. How can the church better celebrate when people believe the Gospel?

## Takeaways:

1. Jesus tells two parables concerning the heart of God towards the lost.
2. Jesus tells us that heaven rejoices every time a sinner repents and turns towards Christ.