

The Lost Sheep | How Do We Become Lost? | Luke 15

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. How are we? It's good to see you. Would you turn in your Bibles with me to Luke chapter 15?! And as Jen said, we were kind of working our way through this chapter. We wouldn't normally just take a chapter.

We'd normally take a whole book. But Luke, we've been there and done that a couple of times. And so we're looking at this chapter before we do a verse-by-verse study through the book of Ruth, which we think is probably going to take us about eight to ten weeks. And then I'm not going to give any spoilers for what's coming up next. So Luke chapter 15, I'm going to read you our text and then ask God to help us and then we'll get into it. So Luke 15, now the tax collectors and sinners were drawing near to him to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them. And so he told them this parable.

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. Just so I tell you that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for your word. Lord, we want to submit our hearts to it. Lord, and just say, well, Lord, whatever you've got for us this morning, Lord, we want to be okay with that. Lord, give us ears to hear what your spirit is saying to us. Lord, we pray, Lord, that you would, Lord, highlight these words to our hearts today. Lord, may there be good seed to us, good food for us. Lord, we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. A few years ago, you would have heard this story before, but I quite often tell it and Laurie and I often talk about it. We were in France when the kids were young and we were, we found ourselves in this huge shopping complex and, you know, multiple levels, crowds everywhere, noise, distractions, people coming and going, all in French. And we're, you know, obviously the best French speakers, not. And so we were kind of living by faith. And for a split second, we had kind of walking through the complex, the shopping center, and we realized that one of our daughters wasn't with us. And at first, it didn't feel serious. And you assume, you know, she's probably just around the corner. You know, she's probably with Laurie. Laurie's probably assuming, oh, she's with

[2 : 49] Simon. And we kind of looked at each other, realized that neither of us had her. And I don't know how old she was, but she was small. She was three years old. And for every moment that passed, the casual became more and more urgent. We stopped browsing. We stopped thinking about food or shopping or where we were going next. We were trying desperately to communicate to the security guard who spoke as much English as much English as we did French. And I can still remember that feeling. And Laurie and I will often, you know, refer to it, the panic, the scanning, the searching, and looking, you know, at every face, hoping to recognize her. And as I read this morning's text, what strikes me about that incident is that she hadn't tried to get lost. She didn't walk into the shopping center as a three-year-old and say, you know what I'm going to do today? I'm going to freak my parents out. I'm going to give my dad the best sermon illustration ever for the next 20 years. And I'm going to be lost. She wasn't even being rebellious. She was distracted for a moment, caught maybe by something that pulled her attention away.

Actually, if I remember rightly, we eventually found her sat amongst the clothes. And honestly, I think like that's a picture of how many people, how many of us, how many times I find myself and my own heart becoming more lost than I would care to admit.

Not through dramatic rebellion, but slowly and quietly being distracted. Before long, she wasn't where she was meant to be. She wasn't with the people that she was meant to be with. Now, the good news is we did find her and everything was fine after our hearts kind of returned to the normal beating.

And last week, look, we said something as we opened this chapter, pretty uncomfortable, but pretty important. And that is that lostness in the Bible. It's the condition of disconnection from God.

[5 : 26] When we talk about a person who is lost or as we're talking here with things that are lost, what are we saying? We're saying that these things or these people have a disconnection from God.

And just to remind you again, just really quickly, Jesus in this parable is using these, you know, the sheep, the coin, the two brothers, specifically because his audience know what he's talking about. Like he's using the sheep. We'll talk about that in a minute. He's using the coin. Last week we talked about how the coin represents exile. We talked about the book of Lamentations and how Jesus is just going, instead of saying, I'm going to give you a teaching on the book of Lamentations and on exile, he's going, oh, let me tell you about a story about a coin.

And then he goes on to two brothers, the younger brother who was rebuked and the younger brother, the older brother who was rebuked and the younger brother who was blessed. And how we saw that was a picture all the way through the Bible.

How you've got Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Reuben and Joseph. Younger brother, older brother. And Jesus is just going, hey, do you remember those stories?

[6 : 33] Let me tell you what it means to you guys, scribes and Pharisees, what it means to be lost. And so that's what Jesus is doing in this chapter. He's just telling us what the Old Testament tells us.

And so today, look, in chapter 15, Jesus shows us just one way to become lost. And if you like, and we won't touch on this a massive great deal because I'm saving it for later.

But there is a different response of the people of God to different ways that you get lost. So, for example, the father goes out and I'll use this picture.

The father goes out in front of his house every morning waiting for his younger son to return from rebellion. The response of the father is different than the response of the shepherd who actually goes out and gets him.

There's no indication that the father goes out to the land of Gadarenes where the pigs are to find his son. Does that make sense? We'll explore that when we get there. That's a completely different sermon.

[7 : 39] So look, Jesus is addressing two groups of people. Look at it in verse one. He says, tax collectors and sinners. That's group one. So the people who knew that they were lost.

And another group, the Pharisees and scribes, the people who were convinced that they weren't lost. So we have a group who knew they were lost and another group who were convinced that they weren't lost.

And the issue seems to be that there was grumbling from the second group about how Jesus was interacting with the first group. Because they were saying this man received sinners and eats with them.

And so in response to that grumble, Jesus tells one story. And it's one story in four parts. It's one parable with four applications. And what I want to highlight from Jesus' teaching this morning is what he teaches about lostness.

And what we're going to see is that if we understand how people become lost, how they become disconnected from God, we're going to understand how we help them to be found.

[8 : 46] Does that make sense? So here's the first thing that I want to highlight is that all people need a good shepherd. Can you circle that word good?

Everyone needs a good shepherd. Why? Everybody has shepherds. Right? What we need is a good shepherd. Right? And so he says in verse four, this is Jesus' parable.

What man of you having a hundred sheep if he's lost one of them? Does not leave the 99 an open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? Now look, pause there.

There is a big Bible theme going on right now. That to you and I, unless we are sheep, shepherds and theologians, we probably miss. Right? There is a theme, it's called an intercanonical theme that runs through from Genesis through to Revelation about sheep and shepherding.

And if you know your Bible, you know this already. So this is just a recap. And I'm not going to give you kind of like a complete overview of that today. Suffice to say that humanity in this kind of perspective, paradigm, whatever, is portrayed as sheep who wander.

[10:02] That's what humans do. What do we do? We wander. We are sheep. And in that paradigm, God is revealed as the good shepherd who, through others, and most notably through Jesus, goes after the wandering sheep and brings them back into the flock.

So that's the theme that runs through the Bible, right? So you have the patriarchs, Abel. Who is he? He's a shepherd. Right? Like literally the second or third man after Adam, he's described as who? A shepherd. Then you get Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, all shepherds.

And the purpose isn't just to say, oh, these are shepherds because like they were living in a time and in a world where there probably was a whole bunch of shepherds. That was pretty normal. But this is a setup.

It's a pattern for how God acts towards us. Like grasp hold of that. We need a good shepherd. This is the whole point of what Jesus is trying to say.

[11:11] This is the setup to reveal that truth to us that we need a good shepherd. Look, just to highlight that, there is a deeply moving section of Genesis.

Towards the end of Genesis, you know the story. Obviously, Jacob has found himself with his family in Egypt. They've escaped famine and they've come to Egypt.

He meets Pharaoh. And Pharaoh says to him, he asked him about his life. And Jacob answers with remarkable sadness. He says, few and evil have been the days of the years of my life.

Isn't that sad? Like he's 130 years old at this point. And Pharaoh says to him, tell me about your life. And Jacob's testimony is, they've been short and they've been wicked. They've been evil. That's how Jacob saw his story.

[12:18] For decades, Jacob had carried around with that pain, believing that Joseph, the son that he really, really loved, had been violently torn apart by animals and lost forever. You know the story. And Jacob, in those times, needed to know, not that he just had a shepherd, but he had a good shepherd.

And in those words, you can almost hear him asking that question. Do I? Do I have a good shepherd? Will that shepherd who claims to be good turn out to be good? And his testimony is that one day he finds himself standing in front of Joseph, who is not only alive and well, but he is going to be the savior of Israel, the savior of Jacob and the savior of Egypt.

And Jacob's question, do I have a good shepherd? Was answered as he came to realize that God has been with him all along.

And this man who 17 years earlier had described his life as few and evil speaks differently. He says, as he blesses Joseph, he says, the God who has been my shepherd all of my life.

Can you say that this morning? Do you have that testimony? The God who has been my shepherd all my life long. Like what's happened?

[13:47] Well, Jacob has finally realized that even in the wandering, he had never actually been abandoned. And God had been shepherding him the whole time.

And isn't that a mystery of the shepherding heart of God? Like sometimes we only recognize his faithfulness when we look backwards, don't we? Jacob thought his life had been defined by loss. But at the end, he realized that it had actually been held together by the relentless shepherding presence of God. And that's just the start of the paradigm of sheep and shepherding.

The setup is God wants to know that he is a good shepherd. And so you leave behind the patriarchs, you get to Moses, who in Numbers chapter 27 is described as a shepherd. Then you move from Moses to the kings.

And of course, we have King David, who's described in Psalm 78 as being taken from doing what? Shepherding, looking after his dad's flock. To doing what? Being the king, shepherd over all of Israel.

[14:51] David himself writes, doesn't he, in that very famous psalm, the Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He had come to realize himself that he needed a good shepherd.

Leaving the monarchy behind, moving to the times of the prophets, you see then this turn where you see this constant rebuke, particularly of the leaders of Israel, as they had failed to represent the heart of God by being good shepherds over the people.

Ezekiel 34 verse 4, God says to them, the weak you have not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, as a rebuke on the leaders of Israel.

God's issue with them is that they were present, but they weren't pursuing. And because of that, verse 6 of Ezekiel 34, my sheep, they're scattered over the whole face of the earth with none to search or seek for them.

And that line should deeply challenge the modern church. Because churches can be very good at lots of different things. Gathering crowds, putting on events.

[16:12] But you know what? They're not so good at noticing people. And that's the warning given to God's people in Ezekiel 34. God promised then in verse 11 of Ezekiel 34, behold, I myself will search for my sheep and I will seek them out.

If you're not going to do it, I'm going to provide a way for that to happen because I have a heart for sheep. I have a heart for people. And if you're not going to do it, I'm going to bypass you and I'm going to find some other way to do it.

And so he says, I myself am going to do that. And so what we see in the Gospels is that we see Jesus fulfilling the role of shepherd of God's people as he would describe himself in John chapter 10, I am the good shepherd.

Luke 19, the Son of Man has come to seek and save the lost. After the resurrection then, Jesus entrusts this to the church.

Moving in the power of the Spirit to take up roles of shepherds. Jesus said to Peter in John chapter 21, tend my sheep, feed my lambs. He didn't say go fishing.

[17:21] He could have used that analogy. It would have probably meant the same thing to us. But the fact that he keeps coming back to, and the Bible keeps coming back to this one kind of thread that goes through about sheep and shepherds, he wants us to know that God has a heart for people.

And we need to follow in that heart. And so Paul told the elders at Ephesus in Acts chapter 20, pay careful attention to what? Doctrine? No.

He says, pay careful attention to yourself and to the flock. He calls them flock. He could have just said the people of God. Peter says the same thing in 1 Peter chapter 5.

And then he tells us the reason that your adversary, in 5 verse 8, your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking who he might devour.

What is he saying? Well, he's saying that that sheep become prey when God's people stop pursuing. This week, David Attenborough turned 100 years old, right?

[18:30] And if there's one thing I've learned from, I don't watch a lot of nature documentaries, right? I'm not one of those, right? If you're one of those, God bless you, but I'm not one of those.

But if there's one thing, and it's only one thing I've learned from, watching those nature documentaries, is that apex predators tend to seek out isolated prey, don't they? The ones who have fallen behind the herd, the ones that are detached from the flock, the ones who are weak, young, and ill.

And so look, the danger is real. The failure to pursue drifting people is not a minor issue. It's a failure to reflect the heart of God himself. And then finally, we see in the book of Revelation, the Bible ends where it's always been heading.

In Revelation 7, verse 17, the lamb, the lamb was in the midst of the throne, and he will be their shepherd. So the lamb becomes the shepherd.

And so this is the big thing, the big theme throughout the Bible, and this would not be lost on the Pharisees and scribes who he's talking to.

[19:41] Like, they didn't need the Old Testament unpacking for them, and Jesus is not showing them the paradigm of sheep and shepherding through the Old Testament. They get it. They're much better trained than we are.

God is revealing that God has a heart for people. It's a good heart for people. And that humanity is described as God's sheep.

And what is happening subtly, and you might want to make note of this and explore this later, but what is happening subtly in our text is that God is slowly moving over in the nation of Israel.

He's slowly setting them aside because they had failed in their mission to go after the lost. And this mission, as we've seen, through the Holy Spirit, then continues through the church.

God is still reaching people. He's still going after people. He's still seeking and saving lost people. And He's doing that through the Holy Spirit, through the church. Now look, the point is this.
[20 : 49] We all need, I need, you need a good shepherd. We just need, don't we? And God in His goodness has given us a good shepherd.

And the most, the most important ways He is the good shepherd is to His people today. It is through the church. That's how God moves today.

Primarily through His people. But listen, I also want you to see how Jesus describes how some people become lost.

So, point number one, we all need a good shepherd. Point number two, some people become lost through distraction. I'm not going to ask for a show of hands, but the world is full of distraction, isn't it?

Like there is, I get distracted by everything and nothing. Like I don't need help to be distracted. I can have my earplugs in in a dark room and get so distracted.

[22 : 07] I am lying awake at night wondering how many penguins are floating in. I don't need help. One man of you, he says, having a hundred sheep.

If he loses one, does not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it. Notice something immediately. The sheep is not rebelling.

It wanders. And that's important because most spiritual drift doesn't begin with rebellion. It begins with distraction. It begins with entanglement. It begins with gradual detachment.

And I don't, I don't really know anything about sheep. You know, like I don't. But what I can imagine in my mind as I think about sheep and as I've observed a handful of sheep maybe in my life is that they really sprint away from the flock.

I've never seen a flock and it's like this one little dude kind of sprinting away as fast as he can. What I have observed about sheep is that they nibbled themselves lost.

[23 : 24] They nibbled themselves lost. One patch of grass, then another patch of grass, then another patch of grass. Never really looking up. It's grass and they're nibbling and they're nibbling until eventually the flock is out of sight, the shepherd's voice grows faint and isolation feels normal.

And why this is so powerful is simply because we recognize this in ourselves, don't we? it's not through one catastrophic decision that we stop coming to church, is it?

It's through ordinary life. It's through the new job that takes up more time than expected. It's through the kids' schedules becoming overwhelmingly hard to juggle.

It's the renovation project that we said we'll just do on Saturdays but it always seems to run into Sunday. I remember having a conversation with a guy once who attended church several years ago.

He bought this boat like it needed work. It wasn't a boat that you could bottom water. That would become a submarine very quickly. And I said to him, look, did you know the danger is that we become slaves to the things that we think are going to bring us freedom.

[24 : 41] And eventually the thing that was supposed to add life to him slowly disconnected him from the people who were helping him to stay alive spiritually. And having a job and a kid's schedule and a reservation and even a boat like it's not sinful, is it?

None of those are sinful things. But over time they become reasons for detachment. And slowly prayer becomes inconsistent, church becomes occasional, community becomes optional, and our souls start to drift.

One nibble at a time. This is why the writer of the Hebrews in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1 says, let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely.

Notice the distinction. Lay aside every weight as well as sin. Weight and sin. Not everything that entangles you is outright sin.

Some things are simply weighing you down. These could be choices that you've made about your lifestyle. But look, these weights are also things that just happen to us.

[25 : 56] So these things could be choices. They might be things that just happen. And life sometimes does just happen, doesn't it? I'll give you an example.

I think we live, don't we? And I think you'll agree with me. I think we live in a bit of a poor mental health epidemic, don't we? If there's something that speaks to me about weight, it's the weight that many carry around because of poor mental health.

Weights like sorrow and anxiety and burnout and depression and trauma and exhaustion or emotional pain that slowly drains the soul. These things wrap around the heart and before long you're physically present but spiritually detached.

And regardless of what people say, it's still a taboo subject, isn't it? We don't talk about it enough. We don't talk about it openly and frankly enough. These things go unaddressed and people can begin then to isolate themselves from community and make themselves feel spiritually detached. Look, some people don't always drift because they're rebellious. They drift because they're exhausted or sick. And exhausted or sick people often isolate which is dangerous because isolation normalizes disconnection.

[27 : 21] Now look, the third thing I want us to see, point three, most people remain lost because we let them. I'm just going to say it. Most people remain lost because we let them.

Let me put it like this. The church bears responsibility for unnoticed people. And you might want to put it into like a real personal way and say, I bear responsibility for the empty chairs that are next to me this morning.

see how Jesus frames this. Jesus doesn't frame this as a passive issue where people just wander off, does he?

Did you notice that? Look at what Jesus says in verse 4. He says, if he has lost one of them. Again, Jesus is comparing good shepherds and bad shepherds.

That's his purpose. And make no mistake about pointing out that the scribes and Pharisees, the group 2, they are the bad shepherds. But the language here isn't passive.

[28 : 33] It's not that the sheep got lost. It's that the shepherd lost the sheep. Jesus doesn't say, how many of you, if you had sheep and one wandered off.

He says, how many of you who had sheep and you lost one? The sheep had no belonging or attachment to the flock.

Right from the start, Jesus makes it clear that the blame for the sheep remaining lost lay squarely on the back of the shepherd. Now, back in this time in the first century, and even in some places of the world today, shepherds were not necessarily the owners of the sheep.

And we need to kind of remove this idea that we've got one sole shepherd who is out on the fields and with the flocks by night, and he's by himself and he leaves all of the other sheep unattended, ready for the wolves to come in and devour.

That's not a picture that Jesus is painting. It's not the culture of a shepherd in the first century.

There were shepherds over flocks. many people in the village would own sheep and the shepherds would be hired to take the sheep out into the fields to graze them often for days or weeks at a time.

[30 : 03] And sheep tend to wander off. Like, that's what they do. That is normal. Like, that's a good description of the human heart, isn't it?

What do we tend to do? Well, captured in that famous 18th century song, prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.

Like, whenever we sing that song, it resonates with us, doesn't it? Because it's true. Jesus sought me when a stranger wandering from the fold of God.

the writer of Psalms echoed that when he wrote in Psalm 119, with my whole heart I seek you, let me not wander.

But that happens to sheep. And listen, it happens to sheep of good shepherds, and it happens to sheep of bad shepherds. Why? Because sheep wander.

[31 : 05] We wander. The key difference is what shepherds do about the wandering. That's the difference between a good shepherd and a bad shepherd. And so Jesus is not highlighting that the sheep has wandered.

What he's highlighting is what the shepherd does in response. Notice what he says. If one has lost him, or if he has lost one of them, does not leave the 99 in the open country, and the culture again is that he's left them in the open country, they're not unguarded, right?

They're with shepherds, and go after the one is lost, until. Like he's not going out and going, I don't know where he is, and returns.

It's an until. And look, we should all be grateful for that, shouldn't we? that Jesus sought us and sought us out, until. So the shepherd's responsibility, look, is to find lost sheep.

And so clearly, Jesus is comparing himself with the Pharisees and scribes. The Pharisees and scribes, who were so concerned about their own reputation, are actually being told by Jesus that

they have a bad reputation because they're bad shepherds.

[32 : 29] They don't reflect the heart of God. And so look, let me close by asking some questions. Who have you stopped noticing?

It might be impossible to answer that question because maybe you don't know. Or who has disappeared quietly? Who is slowly isolating?

Who used to sit beside you but you've just assumed that they're probably fine? We do that, don't we? Look, spiritual drift rarely feels dramatic.

Rarely. Which means you don't defeat it or you don't rescue people, lost people, like sheep people, with dramatic decisions.

You defeat it with small rhythms of return. in just the same way as they are nibbling themselves lost, they nibble themselves found. Prioritizing worship, prioritizing community, prioritizing meals, we've got our meal next week, prioritizing prayer and presence.

[33 : 45] It doesn't mean that you are present for every available church meeting. There's lots, isn't there? There's lots going on. It's a great thing. It's a good thing. There are opportunities, not mandatory.

But listen, it does mean that as a church and as ourselves, as people of God, we stop normalizing isolation.

We stop that. I want to tell you what that means. I want to tell you what it means really, really practically, and I've really hesitated to tell you this. I know that's got everybody's attention now. I asked Laurie, I got Laurie's wisdom. I asked Norma, I got Norma's wisdom. And they both said, tell the people. And so I'm like, so I'm going to tell you. Currently, how many people attend our church? Pause there. We have, I don't know whether you guys know, most of you do know, we have this thing called Church Suite. It's a terrible name. It's basically just a list of people who come to our church.

[34 : 50] A list of people who have said, we are part of your church, we don't have a formal membership, but if we did, that would be our membership. Make sense? We have 52 people on Church Suite as members of the church.

Now, I know I'm preaching to the choir. Why? Because you're here. And if we were like super Pentecostal, we'd be clapping at this moment. Right? Instead, instead, we'd be providing you coffee just to keep you going.

However, look, I wanted to define that in terms that help us. On any given Sunday, 20 of those will not be here.

That's nearly 50%. Now, you might respond as I respond. It's like, yeah, but they might be sick. They might be this. They might be that. Stephen asked, they've had a baby. Like, come on, give them a break. I get that. I get all of that. Right? Like, this isn't me saying, where are you?

[35 : 56] You know, I'm not doing that. Right? What I'm saying is, look, have we noticed that? Do we know that as a church? Are we encouraging people who have been away for a little while?

Are we encouraging them to come back? And that may be life groups. That may be just stopping off for a coffee. That may be inviting him over for a meal. It might be sending him a text message. Hey, haven't seen you in a while.

Been praying for you. Hope you're doing okay. How can I help? The danger is, and look, this is not to shame anyone who's listening to this on YouTube or podcast later and go, I wasn't a Sunday, Sabbath's having a go at me.

I'm not, I'm not, I'm not, I'm not. This is not to shame anyone. But we are in danger. And I speak to many, many church leaders and they will tell you the same thing about their own churches.

We are in danger of making church a club and an event that we attend when we're free. We've said it a billion times and that is not hyperbole.

[37 : 13] That God has saved us from sin and he has saved us from solitude. Okay? The immediate effect of the fall was what?

Disconnection. And God has righted that. And yet we still walk and we choose to walk often and we allow others to walk in disconnection and isolation, which is a product of the fall.

We've been saved from our sin, absolutely, praise God. But we've also been saved from isolation and solitude. Where we are prone to wander, we must be prone to seek after.

This week, look, don't just attend church. Shepherd someone. Text someone who's disappeared.

Invite someone for a meal. Notice someone sitting alone. Ask a deeper question. Refuse as a church to let people drift quietly. pray. Because sheep become prey when we stop pursuing. [38 : 21] Now, look, I said I was going to close. That's a complete lie. Because we've still got verses to cover. Sorry. So, look, let's look at verse five.

Let's look at verse five. Everybody feel sufficiently convicted this morning? Like, I do, I do, and I'm talking. I don't know. I just kind of want to finish and pray and go home and find some dark, quiet place where I can not be distracted.

Verse five. When he has found it, so the sheep, excuse me, the sheep has wandered. The shepherd has gone after the sheep proactively.

He hasn't said, well, I'm just going to wait till the sheep nibbles its way home. When he has found it, what does he do?

He lays it on his shoulders. I don't know how long that takes, but I would be there. There would be a pause in that verse if that was me. He lays on his shoulders. And finally, Simon struggled.

[39 : 23] He lays on his shoulders. The shepherd is doing the thing that the sheep can't do for itself to return home.

Right? That's really important. The father with the younger son, he just lets the younger son return. The sheep, the shepherd, the shepherd is doing the very thing that the sheep needs to do to return. And he was rejoicing. And I love that. When he comes home, he calls together all of his friends and his neighbours and they all say, what's the big deal?

It's just sheep. Which, of course, they don't, do they? They rejoice along with him. He says, for I have found my sheep that was lost. Just so, verse 7, 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.

So notice something about this story. The shepherd does not come home frustrated. He doesn't come home annoyed that the sheep wandered.

[40 : 40] He comes home rejoicing. And he calls his friends. He gathers his neighbours. And he throws a celebration, which seems a little bit over the top, doesn't it? But it isn't.

And the reason it isn't is because there is deep joy in finding what was almost lost. Deep joy. And this is so important because sometimes when churches talk about reaching lost people, it can sound like a strategy.

This is the plan. This is the three-year plan for reaching lost people. And it never leaves the piece of paper. But in Luke 15, Jesus is showing us something much, much deeper.

That reaching lost people is about joy. It's a celebration. this is about the beauty of someone coming home. The church is never more like Jesus when it is noticing drifting people.

Not with judgment or superiority, but with pursuit. Because behind every quiet, absent person is a person deeply loved by God.

[41 : 56] God. Sometimes the most sacred thing you will ever do, the most sacred thing is to help someone just take one step.

To do that thing that they can't do for themselves. That might come in the form of one text message reaching out. That might come form an invitation for coffee.

And by the way, if you didn't know, we do love coffee here, it might be one prayer, it might be one honest conversation. Like when was the last time you just looked into someone's eyes and just said, man, I fear for you.

I fear for your future. Maybe God hasn't given up on them at all.

Maybe we have. love. Never underestimate what hangs in the balance of simple intentional love.

And you know, actually, you know what's really powerful? Most people who come back to God, who have been lost and have been wandering and have been kind of just, you know, a nibble at a time, can normally name the person who refused to give up on them.

[43 : 15] Someone kept calling, they were bothering me to death. You know, they kept inviting. I refused their invitation dozens of times, but they just kept inviting and I went along just to keep them quiet.

Someone kept praying, someone kept noticing, they noticed when I wasn't there. And years later, they realized that that just wasn't just kindness, that was the shepherd heart of God reaching for me through another person.

Look, church, this is our calling. This is why we exist. Not just to gather crowds, but to notice people. Not just to run services and events, but to pursue the wandering.

And look, some of you today, you might feel like I am one of those wandering sheep. You're tired, you're disconnected, you're spiritually numb, you haven't been around for a while, you've drifted slowly and quietly, other things have become a priority, and maybe you thought nobody noticed. But the good news of Luke 15 is that Jesus is still the good shepherd. He's a good shepherd. And he is still pursuing people, and he's still calling people home.

[44 : 28] He's still lifting weary He's still lifting sheep onto his shoulders, still rejoicing when people are found, still doing that. And for others of us here, maybe this morning, maybe the question isn't are you wandering, wandering, but maybe the question who has God placed on your heart?

Who have you stopped noticing? Who has quietly disappeared? Who needs a text? Who needs a taxi? Who needs a meal? Who needs an invitation? Who needs a conversation?

Because heaven rejoices. That idea of repentance is that wandering sheep that gets found and turns the other direction. That's what repentance means. And heaven rejoices when people come home.

Which means every act of loving pursuit participates in the joy of God himself. And honestly, there's fewer greater privileges than that, isn't there?

Than being part of someone else's story, finding their way home again. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for your word. Lord, we lack so much and we need you so much.

[45 : 46] Lord, we thank you this morning, Lord. We have a good shepherd in you. Thank you, Lord, that you have placed us here in this moment of time, in this place, in this family.

And Lord, we pray, and it's a flock. Lord, we pray for our own wandering hearts. Lord, we would echo that song, prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.

Lord, we thank you that Jesus sought us while we were strangers, wandering. And we want to be people this morning, God, that are reflecting, embodying your heart to reach lost people.

Lord, help us this morning. Lord, as your people, to be shepherds to the lost. Lord, we don't want just more information about this stuff.

Lord, we want to be able to walk out of here, or even before we've walked out, reaching out, in faith. Lord, help us to do that.

[47 : 10] Help us to be the church you've called us to be. Lord, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.