

Intentionally Inclusive

Have you ever lost something, looked for it and then found it? Ex. *T.V remote, cell phone, car/house keys, glasses, shoes, wallets/purses. How did you respond?

Share my story about a Credit Card this week. I'm glad I could help you find that and celebrate with you!

Next month or so, go through what is often called the "lost chapter" in the Bible. It's Luke 15, and in this passage, Jesus talks in parables about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost sons. The Sheep got lost naturally; the coin got lost accidentally and the son got lost willfully. In every case, someone went out to look for what got lost.

What is a parable? A parable is a short story designed to convey a concept to be understood and/or a principle to be put into practice. The word "parable" in Greek literally means, "to set beside," as in the English word "comparison".

In the Jewish culture of biblical times, things were explained in word pictures. Word pictures do not draw attention to technicalities (like the Jewish law) but to attitudes, concepts, and characteristics. Jesus was speaking a language that all Jews could understand, but with an emphasis on attitudes rather than the outward appearances that the Pharisees focused on.

Parables required the listeners to be self-critical and put themselves in the appropriate place in the story.

Luke 15:1 (NIV) **Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.**

Tax collectors were viewed as traitors to their people, selling out their family to collect taxes for the oppressive Romans plus taking extra for themselves - stealing from their own people. Because of this, *synagogues would not accept their money and their testimony was not valid in Jewish courts*. They were considered worse than people from the pagan nations.

Beyond that Jesus welcomed other **sinners** whom the religious leaders avoided. The Greek verb translated "we're gathering" conveys this was an ongoing pattern in Jesus' ministry, not a one – time event. So, tax collectors and sinners seem to feel completely at ease around Jesus, even though He is a Jewish Rabbi.

People who weren't like Jesus, liked Jesus. Can the same be said of us? What did the religious figures of the day think about that? Doesn't take long to figure that out!

Luke 15:2 (NIV) ²**But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."**

Who are the Pharisees? An influential religious sect within Judaism in the time of Christ and the early church. Mostly middle-class businessmen and leaders of the synagogues.

- Known for their emphasis on personal piety (the word *Pharisee* comes from a Hebrew word meaning “**separated**”).

- Studied & obeyed the scripture and insisted that all Jews should observe the 600-plus laws in the Torah (first 5 books of the O.T. - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) which they memorized word for word.

Who were the teachers of the law? Scribes who were professionally trained to develop, teach and apply the OT law.

- The scribes went beyond interpretation of Scripture, however, and added many man-made traditions to what God had said.
- *Eventually*, the regulations and traditions the scribes added to the Law were considered *more important than the Law itself*.
- The teachers of the law were in conflict with Jesus and the disciples, b/c they taught with authority and condemned the outward religious acts that the Teachers of the Law had fostered.

*Pharisees didn't complain that Jesus is teaching sinners. They considered themselves righteous teachers and all others to be wicked. They couldn't condemn His preaching to “sinners”, but they condemned his eating w/them.

To sit down and eat w/someone in those days was a token of acceptance. “How dare Jesus reach out to sinners like that”. These types of people **NEVER** come to our services at the Synagogue! Why would they be drawn to Him & His teaching and not ours?” He can't be sharing truth w/them. He must be tickling their ears w/what they want to hear”.

The Pharisees thought Jesus was going to set the record straight, that is was all about them, but it went from saints to sinners gathering around Jesus.

The contrast between Jesus & the religious leaders meant they both couldn't be right, so the religious leaders had 2 options: 1) Either Jesus had it right and they had to change their methods and rub shoulders with tax collectors and sinners **OR**

2) They had it right and Jesus is a false prophet who affirms those sinners & their sinful actions.

If the Pharisees had it their way, Jesus would stop being so *inclusive* and start calling people out. But the good news is, the Good News for everyone! Jesus didn't only come to call the healthy; he came to call the sick (Luke 5:32).

Jesus was Intentionally Inclusive in Seeking and Loving the Lost.

Jesus intentionally looked out for and loved on the lost. Could have called out the Righteous Pharisees & condemned the immoral tax collectors. **Jesus was inclusive.**

Pharisees were *exclusive* & all about themselves. Their: life, success, wants, needs and notoriety. Instead of serving people, they wanted to be served *by the people*.

Lost people act like lost people. Surprise! The Pharisees condemned them; Jesus had compassion on them. Which do we have? Which do we want to receive?

Jesus invites the Pharisees/Teachers of the Law into the story. Why? *Jesus is intentionally inclusive in seeking & loving the lost.*

To understand the significance of this parable we need to get a picture of Jewish culture in Biblical days. It is a shame/honor driven society that used shame/honor to develop a caste system (class structure). Virtually everything that is done in Jewish culture brings either shame or honor to a person and their family. Motivation is seeking honor for oneself & avoiding shame *at all costs*.

Luke 15:3 - 4 (NIV) ³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?"

Anyone who owned a flock of sheep would understand this story describing a good shepherd who cares for the welfare of his sheep - leaving the 99 to search for the one who is lost. Why was there so little concern for the 99 sheep that he left?

They were not left unattended. In ancient Near East a shepherd would rarely go out alone with 100 sheep. If a sheep was lost, the head shepherd would leave the rest of the flock safe and content w/hired helpers, while he went to search for his lost sheep. Jesus doesn't abandon his followers, he intentionally seeks after the lost.

Further, Jewish people understood these terms because God had placed leaders in Israel - whom He called 'shepherds' - to take care of His flock. Ezekiel 34 demonstrates how these former shepherds had failed the people, not caring for them.

Ezekiel 34:4 (NIV) You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally.

God judges these shepherds and then says,

Ezekiel 34:15 – 16 (NIV) I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁶ I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice.

John 10:14 (NIV) "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me."

Here's why I am here: to be intentionally inclusive in seeking & loving the lost!

Luke 15:5 - 6 (NIV) ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'

Did the shepherd scold or punish the wandering sheep? No! He warmly greets it and places it on his shoulders, carrying it back to the flock.

The Shepherd Intentionally Seeks, Finds and Celebrates.

If We Lose Sight that We Were Lost, We Lose Sight of the Lost.

The Pharisees lost sight of why Jesus came. They missed His mission.

Luke 19:10 (NIV) **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."**

I was lost. You were lost. We were lost. Weighted down by sin. Jesus sought us out. He came after us when we were lost. We can lose sight of the reason Jesus came just like the Pharisees.

The second we lost sight of Jesus' mission, we lose sight of the lost around us.

If you are a Christ – follower, His mission is our mission. Jesus came for everybody.

Build Relational Bridges to Love the Lost.

This is what Jesus did! As followers of Jesus, the invitation is to do the same. It is to create room in our lives to love those who are lost. It is to create a church that makes room for sinners, tax collectors, and Pharisees. A place where *every person* brings their questions, unique personalities, and gifts to the table! He is here for everyone! It doesn't matter if you are a lonely Tax Collector or a self-righteous Pharisee. The message of Jesus is for you!

What's your circle look like? In our neighborhoods? Our offices? In your classes in middle/high school, in college? In our own families? Jesus was intentionally inclusive in seeking and loving the lost. Are we? Watch what happens when we are!!

Luke 15:7 (NIV) ⁷ **I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.**

There is rejoicing! It is a celebration!! And Heaven throws a party over one who repents - more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

A party in heaven...over **ONE**? The reason Jesus was Intentionally Inclusive *in seeking and loving the lost* is b/c ONE transformed life is worthy of the search.

Share my story from this past week.

Jesus was Intentionally Inclusive in Seeking and Loving the Lost. Are we? If We Lose Sight that We Were Lost, We Lose Sight of the Lost. Who in your circle, can you begin

to build relational bridges with to love them to Jesus? Who is the “**one**” in your life? How can you love them well this week? Will you?

Small Group Questions

1. What was challenging, convicting, encouraging, or timely for your current circumstances?
2. Have you ever lost something, searched for it and found it? Share about the experience and how you responded when you found it.
3. What was the most impactful conversation you had this week? Who was it with and what was it about?
4. Read Luke 15:1 – 7. What are your initial reactions to this story? What do you think Jesus is trying to accomplish here?
5. It is obvious that, “People who weren’t like Jesus, liked Jesus”. Why do you think people were drawn to Jesus? What message was Jesus sending to everybody by eating with “tax collectors and sinners”? How did the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law respond to Jesus eating with them? Why?
6. What did the shepherd do when he realized he had a “lost sheep”? How did he respond when he found his lost sheep? What does he do next?
7. Steve said, “If we lose sight that we were lost, we lose sight of the lost”. What was your life like before Jesus found you? How has it changed since Jesus found you and put you “on His shoulders”? How can remembering what we were like before Jesus found us motivate us to reach the lost around us?
8. Luke 15:7 is one of the most convicting verses in Scripture. What emotions come to mind when you read Luke 15:7? What message do you think Jesus was trying to convey in this verse?
9. Who is “the one” in your life you are building a relational bridge to? How can you love them well this week? Will you be intentional about taking that step?