

## Lesson 3

# We All Get Lost...

## Introduction

I once was lost, but now I'm found...

John Newton's *Amazing Grace*

No one wants to admit that they're lost. It would require us going against one of our greatest instincts—it would require us to admit that we have zigged when we should have zagged. Humility is a virtue though. Humility empowers us and enables us to be found. Humility summed up is the first Christian virtue, because it acknowledges our own imperfect condition.

At one point or another, we all get lost... but we don't have to stay that way. In this study series, we want to explore what it means to "find the way." Before we talk about the particulars of that though, it's important that we talk about the very real problem of losing the way, what it means and how it comes about. Being lost is what necessitates finding the way or in some sense, being found.

The concept of people outside of Christ being "lost" is common 'Christianese'—part of our every day church vernacular. Is it possible that we have taken this concept for granted? Do we let the reality that we and every person at some point has fit into this category of losing their way slip through the framework of our worldview? We need to understand what it means to be lost—so we can understand the need for us and for others to find the way, and so we can appreciate the blessings God has given us to do that.

### For discussion:

1. What does it mean to be lost spiritually?
2. Were you ever lost spiritually? What was that like?

## Can We Be Lost?

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Matthew 7.13-14

Jesus said the way that leads to life is narrow. Being lost then is the idea of being on the wide road that leads to destruction. Jesus demands our intention with his teachings, and doesn't allow us to sit on the fence. He calls us to take him seriously, and evaluate his claims. If Jesus says it is possible to take a wrong road, we ought to give him the time of day to hear him out. Jesus says

there is a way that leads to destruction—this is the way of the lost. That destruction is eternal separation from God in hell. An unpleasant teaching, for sure.

Is it possible to lose our way? Is it possible to choose a wrong road with our spiritual lives? Many today say absolutely not, rejecting what Jesus said in Matthew 7. Many say there is no such thing as being lost. We hear this common objection to Jesus' teaching in many forms, but it's all the same essential message—

*“God wouldn't let anyone be lost.” “It's all relative.” “That's just your truth, but it's not mine.”*

In a 2020s world that emphasizes relativism as the prime philosophy, the idea that there even is “one true way” becomes less and less popular... but does popularity amount to truth? If all roads really do lead to Heaven, then no harm no foul—but Jesus had made the claim of a right and a wrong way to go. As such, the matter deserves our full attention and the attention of every one who seeks the truth.

### **For discussion:**

1. What did Jesus mean when he describes the wide and narrow way?
2. Do all roads lead to Heaven?

## **Would God Let Anyone Be Lost?**

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

2 Peter 3.9

So, would God allow people to be lost? We know that it is the last thing that the loving God of scripture could ever want. God does not want anyone to be separated from him in eternity. Everything God has done in our world has been to shine the way back home through every winding road we have walked down in this creation. To this end, God has given us innumerable blessings and evidences to reveal himself to us. Taking advantage of these blessings on the other hand, is entirely up to us.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.

Romans 1.24-25

Paul tells us that God ‘gives some people up.’ How can it be that a loving God would give anyone up? It's not that he maliciously or bitterly casts them aside, the Lord does so with great anguish. Why would God allow anyone to walk down the wrong road? Consider the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. When the lost son leaves home, the Father does not hunt him down and force him to come back and live with him—he gives him what he wants.

So, would God allow people to be lost? Yes. God allows us to freely choose the path we would like to take. This is because of his love. 1 Corinthians 13:5 tells us that love does not insist on its own way. Love is not forceful. In the same way, God does not impose his will onto us—he allows us to choose him or not, rather than forcing us to walk the path that leads to life.

**For discussion:**

1. What causes people to be lost?
2. How would you explain the idea that people will be lost in the face of someone saying “A good God wouldn’t let anyone be lost”?

## **How Do We Get Lost to Begin With?**

If what Jesus said is true, that there is a wide way that leads to destruction... we can be lost. Not only that, but it’s easier to get lost than it is to find the way. Why do we get lost to begin with? How does this happen?

The world has become twisted and broken beyond recognition of God’s original intention. In the previous lesson we discussed sin as being the cause of things becoming twisted and broken. There is a process by which we become lost, and by which we find ourselves further and further down the paths that lead us further from God.

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

Ephesians 4:18-19

First, individuals are darkened in their understanding. They begin to lose sight of the point of the journey of life in favor of other things. Then, their hearts become hardened. “I can’t be going the wrong way, not possible.” Then, they become numb to spiritual truths. After that point, with no sense of direction or purpose, they end up running as far from God as possible.

**For discussion:**

1. What is sin?
2. What is the effect of sin on the path of our life?

## **Purpose Determines Your Destination**

Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalm 37:4

It is important for us to understand that when we are pursuing this idea of “home” that we define the term. When we say home, this is not simply referencing “a place to live.” Embedded in every heart is a strong desire and a sense of journey for an ultimate end—a place where all is just and right. Embedded in every heart is a burning desire for joy, peace and purpose.

The greek words *telos* refers to an end or ultimate purpose.<sup>1</sup> Life is a journey, and one thing that characterizes a journey is a desired end. What is the destination of your life? What is your purpose? What is your *telos*? There are many dead ends that we pursue in this life. While some may be glaringly obvious—addiction, lust, rampant greed... other dead ends seem more reasonable to pursue.

When Jesus says “wide is the way” in Matthew 7, he is making a broad stroke. He is essentially covering all but a sincere and pure devotion to God as an ultimate end. This even includes the ones that society lifts up are not the true *telos*.

Here are some of the dead ends that fly under the radar;

- Money—Pursuing material gain is a common desire. While having money isn’t sinful, living for the dollar is. (Matthew 6.24)
- Career—We are not to work for our own glory but for God’s glory. (Ephesians 6.5-6)
- Power—Pure power simply for the sake of controlling others is an affront to God’s merciful nature. (Proverbs 14.31)
- Recognition—When living to appease the people in our lives as an ultimate end, we become wind-blown, tossed-to-and-fro and taken off the path. (Galatians 1.10)
- Family—Even being a family person can become twisted when it becomes our ultimate end. When family ranks over God, the entire intended foundation of the family structure is removed. (Luke 14.26)
- Religion—Religion without God is another dead end. Though it may temporarily satisfy the religious dimension of our appetite for life, it won’t lead us to Heaven. Only a relentless devotion to God will do that. (Galatians 2.21)

Jesus offers us something else—a different purpose. He offers us a narrow way that leads to life.

### **For discussion:**

1. What are some other dead ends you can think of?
2. What is the *telos* (purpose, ultimate end) that Jesus proposes?

Prayer for today—*Lord, help me to recognize how lost we are without you. Help me to find the narrow path every single day, and give me the strength to walk it.*

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<sup>1</sup> Strong, J. (1890). Strong’s exhaustive concordance of the Bible. 5056. Abingdon Press.