



Introducing the Luke 15 Series

The inspiration for this series comes from the focus of our Bible Department at Namikango Mission this last year: Luke 15. At the beginning of Luke 15, we see Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, and the Pharisees and teachers of the law are there as well, grumbling about what Jesus is doing. Because of the grumbling of the righteous people, Luke says that Jesus told them a parable. One parable, 3 stories, so we know these stories are meant to go together.

This year, the Liu will focus on all three stories. This bulletin will discuss the story of the Good Shepherd and the lost sheep; the next will explain the story of the Good Woman and the lost coin; and the third will be on the story of the Good Father and his two lost sons. There will then be a fourth bulletin that will bring all the stories together and apply them to our lives today.

If you are not a Christian, and have never read the Bible, but want to learn about how God sees you and what Jesus is like, this is a wonderful place to begin. If you have been a Christian for many years and gone to church your entire life, then there is no better place to dig deep than here. I fit into the latter group. And as I continue to spend time in this parable, it's easy to see why it has been called the gospel within the gospel.

As someone has said, the parable creates a world to live inside, like a large house, with many rooms, and windows that look out over different views. The longer you stay in this house, the more

you begin to look at the world differently. In this parable Jesus explains to us many of the great themes of the Bible; sin, repentance, forgiveness and many more. The parable talks about the different ways we can be lost, separated from God. It tells the whole story of humanity since creation and the fall.

But the parable is mostly about you and me, and how we are lost. The final story in this parable is often called the parable of "prodigal son." The word prodigal can mean, "to spend until you have nothing left." If we read the story, we see that this also describes the father, the woman, the shepherd; it is about Jesus, who gives all the love he has in order to find and restore what is lost.

As you read, we encourage you to take your time; reflect and pray as you read. Imagine yourself in the story. Consider which character or characters you find yourself identifying with. We pray that as you read, you will be blessed by this incredible gift of a parable that Jesus has given us. May you see something about God that you have never seen before. God's blessings on you all.

By: Ben Hayes

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

In Luke 15, Jesus tells three parables in response to the Pharisees complaints. We read in Luke 15:1-2 that the Pharisees were upset with Jesus for welcoming and eating with sinners and tax collectors. The Pharisees were serious observers of the law, and followed the purity code in order to remain ritually clean. They believed that God was only interested in people who remained ritually clean, and that he only loved those people who were able to follow the law perfectly.

Anyone who was a sinner, however, was unclean, and the Pharisees tried to stay as far away from those people as possible. This is why they were angry with Jesus for welcoming and eating with sinners. Jesus was interacting with unclean people, the outcasts, and by eating with these sinners Jesus was risking becoming unclean! What kind of rabbi would welcome sinners and even eat with them?

Because of this grumbling, Jesus tells three parables to the gathered crowd, made up of Pharisees and sinners. We read the first parable in Luke 15:3-7. This is a very familiar story, of a lost sheep and the good shepherd. In this story, a shepherd realizes he is missing a sheep. He started with one hundred sheep, but now only has ninety-nine. The shepherd immediately leaves the ninety-nine sheep and goes out searching for the one lost sheep.

We notice that he has to go out into the wilderness in order to search properly. He searches in the mountains and in the valleys until he has located this lost sheep. And when the shepherd finds the sheep, he carefully puts the creature on his shoulders and carries it back to the flock, returning it to its place with the other sheep. Once the shepherd returns the sheep to the sheepfold, he celebrates with his friends, filled with so much joy at finding his lost sheep.

The good shepherd does not let the lost sheep remain lost, nor does he stop searching for the sheep when it gets difficult in the wilderness. The good shepherd will not give up on the lost

Luke 15:1-7

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So he told them this parable: “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ 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.”

sheep, but instead longs to find his sheep and return it to safety. The wilderness is a dangerous place for a sheep to be lost in. When the sheep is cut off from the safety of the flock and the protection of the shepherd, it finds itself surrounded by death.

In the wilderness there are wild animals that would love to eat a sheep. Also, without the direction of the shepherd, the sheep could fall in a hole, break a leg, starve, or get too cold and die. We also know that a lost sheep has a difficult time finding its way back home. A sheep cannot retrace its steps or ask for directions. Therefore, when the sheep is lost, it stays lost, and is in a dangerous situation.

Even though the wilderness is a dangerous place full of wild animals and rough terrain, the shepherd does not let that stop him from searching for the sheep. He searches and searches, fighting

off the wild animals and searching in every hole, cave, valley, and mountain. And what does Jesus say the good shepherd does when he finally finds his lost sheep? Does the shepherd beat the sheep for running away? Does the shepherd kick the sheep and call it names? Does the shepherd tell the sheep that it has sinned and now it must stay in the wilderness forever?

No! When the good shepherd finds the lost sheep, he carefully lays the sheep on his shoulders and carries the sheep back to the flock. In the same way, when God finds a lost person, when he searches and searches and finally sees the lost one in the wilderness, he does not beat them or call them names or demand that

I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.
John 10:14-16

they die alone in the wilderness. Instead, like the good shepherd, God carries that person back to the sheepfold, and restores them to himself. The good shepherd knows that it is not enough to simply find the sheep in the wilderness. He must sacrifice his strength and safety in order to carry the sheep out of the wilderness and back into safety. The good shepherd puts aside his safety to go into the wilderness searching, and uses all his strength to carry the sheep back out of the wilderness and to its home.

Jesus says that when the lost sheep is returned to the flock, the shepherd is so happy about its return that he calls his friends to come and rejoice with him. The shepherd throws a party to celebrate the return of the lost sheep, and Jesus says that in the same way there is great rejoicing in heaven whenever a sinner comes to repentance.

In fact, this story of the good shepherd is special in the New Testament. In this parable of the good shepherd, and in the next parable of the good woman (Luke 15:8-10), the text says that God has great joy when a sinner repents, or when a lost person is found and restored. This is the only place in the whole New Testament where the word “joy” is applied to God himself. In other words, in the whole New Testament, it is only in Luke 15 that we see God finding great joy in something, and that joy is in finding lost people

and returning them to himself. Not only is God passionate about finding lost people, but it is the thing that brings him the most joy! This is not just good news for us, this is great news! Our God, the good shepherd, loves finding lost sheep.

In this parable of the lost sheep, we see God’s passion lies with finding and restoring lost sheep. God does not care that the sheep are lost

out in the wilderness, where there are dangers and wild animals. He goes out searching for his lost sheep, and does not stop searching until he finds them and brings them back home. Jesus takes this parable one step further, by announcing that he himself is the good shepherd. In John 10:11-18 Jesus says that in the

same way a good shepherd gives up his life in order to save the sheep, so Jesus gives up his life in order to bring the lost sheep back to God. As the good shepherd, Jesus has a primary concern, and that is for finding lost sheep.

Like the good shepherd in Luke 15, Jesus tells us that he knows who his sheep are, and that his sheep know the sound of his voice. When he calls out to his sheep, they know that he is their true shepherd, and they can follow him. In John 10, Jesus reminds us that a good shepherd does not consider his life more important than the sheep. Instead, the good shepherd lays down his life for the sake of his sheep. The good shepherd goes out into the dangerous wilderness, risking his own safety and strength, all for the sake of that lost sheep. This is the good shepherd’s primary concern, and this is Jesus’ primary concern. Jesus says that the shepherd does all these things, “so there will be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16).

Jesus is our good shepherd, and his desire is that we all come into the flock of God. Jesus longs to have all his sheep together, living in unity and peace. When a sheep goes missing, or gets lost in the wilderness, Jesus does not let that sheep stay there. Instead, he goes out searching for that sheep until he finds it, and he spends all of his energy and strength to return that sheep to the sheepfold. This is good news for us sheep,

whether we find ourselves in the flock of God, or we find ourselves lost in the wilderness. We have a good shepherd, Jesus, who loves to find sheep, and he loves to celebrate when they are found and restored. Amen!

By: Eric Gephart

Take some time to reflect on the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:3-7. Use these questions to help guide you:

1. When you read Luke 15:3-7, what do you learn about God?
2. How does the shepherd treat the lost sheep when he finds it?
3. When you read this passage, what do you learn about people?
4. Read Isaiah 53:6. Isaiah says that we are like sheep that have gone astray. What are some ways that you can act like lost sheep?
5. According to Isaiah 53:6 and Luke 15:3-7, when you act like a lost sheep how does God respond to you?
6. Is there any good news in Luke 15:3-7? If so, what is it?
7. Now that you understand the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15 and how God is your good shepherd, how should you respond to God?
8. If this parable of the lost sheep is good news for you, how can you share that good news with your neighbor?

They shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God. You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture and I am your God, says the Lord God.
Ezekiel 34:30-31

Psalm 23
 Jeremiah 23:1-8
 Ezekiel 34:11-16
 Mark 6:30-44
 John 10:1-18

Further Reading

After studying Luke 15:3-7, do you want to go deeper? The image of the good shepherd is found in many places in the Bible. It is an image that God uses to talk about how he cares for and looks after people. We even see Jesus talk about the people he was ministering to as sheep who are lost. This image of God as the good shepherd who cares for his people (the sheep), shows us God's heart. He does not want anyone to remain lost, but goes out searching for people, even in the wilderness, so that he can bring them back into the sheepfold. Takes some time to do a Bible study on these passages:

As you read and reflect on these passages, answer these three questions:

1. What does this passage tell me about God?
2. What does this passage tell me about people?
3. How do I respond in obedience to this passage?