

Lost and Found
[Luke 15:1-10](#)
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This is Baa. Baa was a gift Calvin received when he was baptized, and ever since then, Baa has been Calvin's constant companion. Which means that Baa gets lost all the time. She falls behind furniture or gets tossed under the bed, she's left in the car or at someone's house, on several occasions we've found her inside the refrigerator for some reason. And every time Baa gets lost, we all stop everything and search for her until she is found. To be perfectly honest with you, I don't really care for stuffed animals, but I am the only person in my family who thinks that way, so when Baa gets lost, or when any of the other precious stuffed animals belonging to the other three people in our family gets lost, we all stop everything and search for them until they are found. Because they are important to someone.

Today's parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are pretty relatable, because we've all been there. Something is lost, someone looks, something is found, someone is happy – that's a story we've all lived through, and so we all recognize it. But it's not quite so straightforward as all that. Despite how short and how approachable these parables are, there's more going on here than meets the eye. First of all, take a look at where and when Jesus tells this parable and who he tells it to. At this

point in Luke's gospel Jesus is on the road to Jerusalem, and he's been telling parables and teaching the crowds as he goes. In the last chapter, he told the crowds the parable of the great dinner, where those invited by the host refuse to come, so instead the host brings in the outcasts, the blind and the lame, and then he sends his servants out into the streets and highways to seek out and find anyone and everyone, to bring them in to the feast. And immediately after telling this story, Jesus tells the large crowds that if they want to follow him, if they want to be his disciples and follow him into Jerusalem, then it's going to cost them everything they hold dear, so they better stop and count the cost, count what they're giving up to follow Christ.

So now, after speaking these challenging words to the crowds who were following him, Jesus sees the tax collectors and the sinners and the outcasts are crowding still closer to him; despite the harshness of his words and the difficulty of following them, these outcasts are the ones who gather closer in, who still want to follow, regardless of the cost. The Pharisees and the scribes see this, all the well-regarded, upstanding sorts who would never be caught dead with rabble like tax collectors. They see that the only ones left with Jesus after his warning to count the cost, the ones still crowding in close to him are the sinners, the outcasts, and so they draw some pretty clear connections between Jesus and the kind of people he associates with. And in reply to these sneers from the

respectable, Jesus tells three parables, the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son, three stories about things that are lost and then found again.

In both the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin, though, you'll notice Jesus acts like these stories are perfectly normal and familiar. "Which one of you," he asks, "wouldn't act in exactly the same way if you were in the same situation as this shepherd and this woman?" – as if the answer was obvious, as if of course we'd all do the same thing. But when you hear the parables, it's not altogether clear that anyone in their right mind would. A man with 99 sheep loses one, and so he leaves the 99 out in the wilderness, where they are vulnerable, where they could be attacked by wild animals, where they could be stolen by bandits, where they could just wander off on their own, and he strikes out into the wild, searching endlessly until he finds that one lost sheep. Put yourself in the shepherd's shoes here – would you do that? Risk 99% of your property on a very small chance to regain 1%? Those aren't good odds – it's not good business – remember, Jesus just gave this entire speech about counting the cost, about not rashly rushing into things that aren't worth it, about weighing the pros and cons of a decision, and there are not a lot of pros and a whole lot of cons about following that one sheep into the woods. And again, if you think about it, you have 99 sheep, so chances are, if you just leave them to their business for a little while, pretty soon they will make you another sheep. If you really want exactly 100 sheep, well, just let the circle of life roll on, and your numbers will get back up

there on their own. I'm no rancher, but this seems like livestock management 101 here. To head out into the wilderness seeking one lost sheep is a bad decision. One lost sheep isn't worth that much.

And the same thing is true of the woman and the coin. Here is a woman with 10 silver coins, each one worth about a day's wages. That's not an insignificant amount, it's true, and you can understand why she'd be upset to lose it. But again, even if she loses one, she still has 9 days' wages saved up – it's not like losing this one coin is going to send her into starvation, it's not like her life depends on having that money on hand. But as soon as she loses it, without hesitation, she starts a search, a long and thorough search through her house to find that coin. She lights a lamp – and lamp oil costs money – and she spends a long time hunting in her house for that one coin. Again, if you spend an entire day searching for a coin worth a day's wages, then you haven't really come out ahead – if you'd just gone to work that day as usual, you'd have made the same amount and you'd still have the chance of accidentally finding the coin later on. The woman spends way more time and effort than can possibly be worth it for the return. One lost coin isn't worth that much.

And in both parables, take a look at what happens when they do, against all odds, find their lost property. They immediately rush out to their friends and neighbours, and they say "Rejoice with me, for I've found what I had lost." And then they throw a party for all these friends and neighbours, and parties are not cheap. In fact, they are substantially

more expensive than either a silver coin or a single sheep. They celebrate the finding of something by using up resources of far greater value. The shepherd's actions, the woman's actions, they just don't make sense, and yet Jesus asks his listeners, "Which one of you wouldn't do the same?" To that question, anyone sensible would answer, "Not Me." One lost sheep, one lost coin, they aren't worth that much.

But here's the thing. To the shepherd who has searched through the night, that sheep is not just any sheep. To the woman who has spent hours scouring and sweeping and searching, that coin is worth far more than any other coin. When you invest time and energy and passion and life into finding something, it is worth far more to you than it was before you started. You give more value to something when you've lived as if it is valuable, when you risk something to search for it and find it. The shepherd now knows "that's the sheep I went back into the wild for," The woman can tell in an instant which of her ten coins she hunted for all day. Searching gives value to the thing being sought, it becomes treasured and significant because it was not left for lost.

The Pharisees look at the crowds of tax collectors and sinners gathered around Jesus, and in their heads they are adding up the value of their humanity, they are considering how much their lives are worth, and they conclude that this rabble is not worthy of their consideration, not worth their time, not worth the dignity of their association, and if Jesus is willing to be seen with them, then neither is he. They are only too happy

to give them up as lost. They've done the math, and they don't consider any of those sinners as worth the effort, and they can't understand why Jesus thinks that they are. One Lost Sheep, One Lost Coin, One Lost Sinner isn't worth that much.

But to the Good Shepherd, a lost sinner is worth so much more than his enemies can understand, to Jesus, the souls of all those gathered around him, tax collectors and Pharisees, scribes and sinners, they are worth far more than they have ever imagined, because when you invest time and energy and passion and life into finding something, it is worth far more than it was before you started, because you give value to something when you've lived as if it is valuable, when you risk something to search for it and find it. In Jesus Christ the Creator of the Universe became the seeker of lost sinners, in Jesus Christ God became a human being and entered into humanity and invested his whole being into seeking out and saving the lost souls of this world, and gave his very life to rescue us from our fallen selves. When you consider what Christ has done for us, when you know that the Son of God became a human being and then died a shameful, painful death for the sake of a rabble of disobedient, selfish, arrogant rebels, hell-bent on our own destruction, there is no way that you can say that we were worth it. One Lost sinner, Eight Billion Lost sinners, can't possibly be worth the death of God's only Son. And yet when Jesus counted the Cost, when Jesus considered the paths that lay before him, there was no question in his mind. He could not imagine how

anyone could choose any other way, how anyone who had lost something could ever, ever, ever let it go. In the mind of God, when a sheep is lost, you go and find it, when a coin is lost, you search until it is found, when a human being is lost, you break through time and space and heaven and hell and you break your very self wide open on the cross until that sinner turns back, until that child comes home, until all the angels can join in rejoicing for that one soul who has been found by Jesus Christ.

And once you've been found, once Christ has ahold of you and the celebration has begun, then you can never again think of yourself as worthless, because Christ's death gives us a new worth. If searching gives value to the thing being sought, if it becomes treasured and significant because it was not left for lost, then how valuable are the souls of every man, woman and child on this planet if our God prized them above his very life, how precious are the sheep if the shepherd has risked everything for them? It doesn't make sense, it doesn't fit, and yet through his death Christ has transformed us from worthless sinners into precious children, from rebels without value to treasures beyond price. When you walk through the streets today as you go home, when you look around you wherever you go, if you look around you right now, every single human being you see is someone so precious in God's sight that he died for them, and he knows that they were worth it, and he can't begin to understand how anyone could see anything else.

So what do we see? Whose eyes do we see with? Do we have the eyes of the Pharisees, quick to calculate the pros and cons, the advantages and disadvantages, eager to weigh the value of each life? Or can we see with the eyes of Christ? Can we see with eyes that will live and die for the good of those around us? Can we see with eyes that will never stop searching until all the lost are found, all the hungry fed, all the broken made whole, until all of humanity can join the angels in rejoicing? Can we see how much one lost sinner is truly worth?

One more thing. Maybe you've come here today, and you feel like you are lost. You feel like you've been abandoned. You feel like you're trapped and alone and you can't find a way out. And if that's where you are, I want you to know that the Good Shepherd, the seeker of the lost, Jesus Christ is searching for you, and he will never give up, he will never stop searching until you have been found, until you are safe in his care, until heaven rings with celebration over you. All you need to do is come out from hiding, and let yourself be found. In the name of Jesus Christ - Amen.