

Text: Luke 15.1-3, 8-12  
St Stephen's

Feb 11/12, 2006  
Sat PM/Sun AM

## Searching High and Low

We are in a series on Luke 15 for the whole month. That chapter features 3 of the most **famous stories** in the bible. Take out your Bible... Turn to page...

*By this time a lot of men and women of doubtful reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, "He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends." Their grumbling triggered this story.*

Luke 15:1-3 (Msg)

Last week we talked about how people get lost (by **wandering off** (the sheep) and **being misplaced** (the coin) and **getting stubborn** (the first son) – and a surprising fourth way – by **being good** (the second son) – by doing everything right and **thinking God owes you for it** – that can get you lost, too.

And last week we talked about **how God loves lost people**. God wants us to get **our passion for lost people back**. Would you make that your prayer this month?

So Jesus told these **three stories**, and in every one of them **something of great value was lost**. The shepherd lost a sheep, the woman lost a silver coin and the Father lost not one, but two sons.

These three stories had another theme in common. In each of these stories, there was **an all out search**. I want to pay attention to that today.

**An All-Out Search Means:**

## 1. Leaving - What is Comfortable and Going Where It is Hard

*Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? **Luke 15.4***

No sheep wanders away and comes back of its own accord. Sheep were famous for getting lost and staying lost. So there was no way to recover the sheep except to go after it. So the shepherd goes.

It was **not easy to find that lost sheep**. In the **rugged hills** of Judea, this may have taken several days. Many tourists have walked in boldly to those hills only be carried out on stretchers. But the shepherd just went.

People are like sheep. No matter how we get lost, it is surprisingly **easy to stay lost**. Surprisingly hard to find our way back. And did you ever notice that people we get lost in hard places. Rough places. Dangerous places.

You simply can't be in the ministry of reaching lost people if you are not willing to get your hands dirty. Not willing to **get out of your comfort zone**.

You have to tell yourself again and again...

No matter their **race**, their **sex**, their **past**, or their **behavior** or their football team. **They matter**.

No matter their **religion** or **nationality** or their **age** or **wealth** or their voting preferences. **They matter**.

The sheep are worth an all-out search.

**An All-Out Search Means:**

**2. Risking - What is Safe to Find What is in Danger**

*Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? **Luke 15.4***

The shepherd **leaves the 99**, where? "*In the open country*". Putting them at risk?

(Lady in Shreveport who said, "I hate that passage" I think she was the only one who understood it.)

and goes off into the backcountry to find that wayward animal.

In the days of Jesus, there were **wild animals**. And sheep tasted good!

I've heard people say, well, '**everyone understood** that leaving them in the open country meant leaving them with an undershepherd, leaving them guarded...' but actually **we aren't told that**, and sometimes shepherds had to watch sheep on their own. And when one of those sheep wandered off, well, the shepherd would have to choose. And off he would go.

I think he left because he knew that **the timeline on that lost sheep was short**. That sheep wasn't likely to make it long. Once a sheep left the herd, its hours were numbered. Wild animals were near. Stress induced sickness would immobilize and kill it if the animals didn't. So off he went in an all out search, **driven by the level of danger** that lost sheep faced.

The **Pharisees** would **never be driven by danger**. They would never leave what was safe and comfortable to rescue lost people. They just would write people off... Matter of fact, the Pharisees would **loose all 100 sheep**, one at a time, rather than go off into the dangers of the wilderness after any one of them.

But Jesus wants us to get this clear. **People are worth an all out search**. Every single one of them. **No matter what the hardship, no matter what the danger**.

## An All-Out Search Means:

### 3. Interrupting - What You are Working On

*Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?* **Luke 15.8**

This was a **woman of modest means** from a simple home. Let me tell you how she spent her days. The chores had to be done, the clothes washed, the food secured, the meals prepared, the animals tended, the children guided and trained. No appliances. No electricity. No plumbing. No help. All done by persistent physical labor. She didn't have an extra hour to relax. She didn't spend her afternoons at the mall – she didn't have that option. She rose early in the morning on her normal days and worked hard until the sun set and she collapsed. And this routine day after day **was essential** to her home and her family.

But now, she had lost a 'silver coin'. Women like her didn't have coins like that – not unless they were **an inheritance, a dowry**. That coin was 10% of her safety net. Her future. Her retirement fund. It was maybe irreplaceable. She had lost what was of great value to her.

So what does she do? She **interrupts her long day**. She lights a lamp, gets a broom, and goes through that house from one end to another. Why? Because **the coin was worth the interruption**.

I am studying for a Lenten message series, called **“Living the Life-Style of Jesus”**. I am reading through the Gospel of Luke to see not just what Jesus taught, but also **how he lived. What he did**. What **his life-style** was like. I am not talking about the sandals and robes and Middle-eastern diet as much as

I am interested in **how he ordered his days**. The fabric of his life in between all the memorable moments.

Do you know that in the first five chapters of Jesus' ministry in Luke, he **responded to interruptions 11 times**. Luke records **more interruptions than planned events**. Someone who was lost was pushing into his day, interrupting his schedule. And **every time Jesus stopped** and responded. And it became 'God changed life' moment.

**People are worth interrupting what you are working on.** Because **people are the agenda**. Above every other agenda.

## **An All-Out Search Means:**

### **4. Longing and Looking**

*"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."*

Luke 15:20 (NIV)

You know the story. Once his Son left, this Dad never stopped longing, never stopped looking.

On the way out to the fields in the **morning**, he would stop to look at that road where it crested the hill. Every **noon** as he came in for lunch he would lift his eyes towards that road. Every **night** after work he would go out to that porch and sit and look. Months ago he watched that boy walk out, but this Dad could **never write him off**, never give up, never forget, never stop praying, never stop looking.

You know why? Because he was one of **God's Dads**. He had God's heart for his boy, a never give up, NEVER GIVE UP kind of passion for that boy. It didn't matter how lost he was. Or maybe it did. Maybe the more lost he got, the more that Dad's passion flowed. He had God's passion for that boy.

**No Pharisee ever dreamed of a God who was ready to search for the lost.** They might well have thought that if a lost sinner came back, crawled back, begging and pleading for mercy... well then there might be a possibility...

But **a God who sets everything else aside** and sweeps the whole house until the lost coin is found... a God who leaves the 99 who are safe to search for the one that is in danger... a God who sits on the back porch every night with his eyes locked on the horizon... no Pharisee ever dreamed of that!

**Here's the point: Jesus was always after people because people matter to God.** We have got to get this straight. He is **in the people business** and He wants all his followers to be in the people business. The 'all-out search' has got to be what we are about.

If this is not what we are about, what ARE we about?

I want to finish with another look at the older brother. You remember the story. When the prodigal son came home, and the Dad threw a party, the older son wouldn't come in.

### **The Brother Who Wouldn't Join the Search**

*"The older brother became angry and refused to go in."*

Lk 15:28 (NIV)

Did you know it was **the responsibility of the older brother to seek the younger and bring him home?** But not this brother. He wasn't buying it. He wouldn't go. Why not?

**He had lost sight of his younger brother.** It is easy to lose sight of people. We stop seeing them as they really are.

Let me tell you **who you are**. You are a **'never ceasing spiritual being, with an eternal destiny in Gods great universe'**. You are going to live forever. There is nothing you can do about it. It is only a question of how you will live and what you shall be. You can do a lot about that.

You think – it's just a screwed up family member. Or, it's just another messed up person. **I haven't got time**. Yes you do.

You think, I've got **too much else to do**. **No, you do not!!!**

When his disciples would put something else at the top of their list, whether it was power or prestige or possessions, **Jesus would stop and turn them around** and wrap a towel around his waist and wash their feet... reminding them, **"It's all about people."**

When they were interrupted by little children and the disciple were on a fast track to more important things, Jesus would stop... reminding them, **"There's no thing more important."**

Whether the people were the **worst** kind of people, in the worst kind of trouble... Or **normal** kind of people in normal kind of struggles... Or even **high and mighty** kind of people trapped by their goodness, believing that God owed them – even then, Jesus would go into their homes or invite them over... because **this agenda topped every agenda**.

They were the lost sheep and lost coin and the lost son. They are **worth the search**... no matter what the danger, the difficulty, the interruption.

Why? **Nothing else lasts**. Only people make it past death. Treasures on earth don't last. Clothes don't last. Houses don't last. Stock portfolios don't last. Looks don't last. Buildings

don't last. Popularity doesn't last. What matters to you? **Only people last**. Only people make it past death. Into one eternity or another, he taught, people make it past death. That **eternal perspective** gripped him, giving him a **passion for people**.

*"He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends."* Luke 15.2 (Msg)

You bet he did. Yo bet he still does. And you and I get to be **partners with him** in this ministry. **"Friend of sinners"** was his label. Would you say it with me?

Let's wear it. Let's live it.