

Joke: A couple whose marriage was on the rocks sought the advice of their pastor. The pastor encouraged them to patch up their quarrel and keep their vows, but the couple was adamant.

“Well,” said the pastor, “you know the consequences if you insist on a divorce. Remember this: you must divide your property equally.”

The wife flared up. “You mean the \$4,000 I have saved up? I must give him half? My money?”

“Yes,” said the pastor. “He gets \$2,000. You get \$2,000.”

“What about my furniture? I paid for that.”

“Same thing,” answered the pastor. “You split it equally.”

There was a challenging gleam in the wife’s eye. “What about our three children?”

The pastor was stumped at first but then quickly came up with a Solomonic solution. “Go back and live together until your fourth child is born. Then you take two children and your husband takes two.”

The wife shook her head. “No, I’m sure that wouldn’t work out. If I depended on him, I wouldn’t have the three I’ve got.”

I hope you have been finding value in this series. Next week we will be finishing up with how God is still restoring. I love that God has not changed over time and we can still experience him every single day in a very real way.

This week, I want us to look at how God is: **Still Pursuing**

How many of you have ever played the CLUE?

There are some things that you need to do when playing that game:

- You have to pay attention. . .
- You have to ask the right questions. . .
- You have to follow the right leads. . .
- You have to take some mental notes. . .
- You have to take risks. . .
- You have to be a little aggressive. . .

And the idea about this game is that it's not just the mystery behind it, but the fact that the game is not over until someone has chased the killer down, named the room in which the murder took place and discovered the weapon that was used.

9 rooms. 7 characters. 6 weapons.

There's no giving up. . .no quitting. . .it's not over until what is pursued is chased down!

Until we hear something like Professor Plum in the study with the lead pipe.

It's this kind of bold, aggressive, never-giving up pursuit that we read about and discover in Luke 15. We find in this chapter three parables that teach one big lesson.

And the lesson is this: **God pursues the lost.**

The reason for Jesus coming to earth was to pursue, chase down, seek out, search for those who are lost and in need of him. And in three of the most well-known parables in scripture – all right here in Luke 15, Jesus vividly illustrates for us what this pursuit of the lost looks like.

Now, before we get into our text, let's talk about what we mean when we use the term "lost." Because we will see this word:

- Twice in the first parable dealing with a LOST sheep (v. 4, v.6)...
- Twice in the second parable dealing with a LOST coin (v. 8, v. 10)...
- And then once in the third parable dealing with a LOST son (v. 24)...

Most of us know what it means to be lost or to lose something of value to us. An article from prnewswire said the average American spends 2.5 days each year looking for lost items which “collectively costs U.S. households \$2.7 billion dollars a year in replacement costs.”

Think about that. . .we lose that one sock, what do we do, spend time and look for it! We lose our keys, our glasses, our wallet, that remote for the TV.

If you ever see a mom or dad with an infant, they will have like 3 pacifiers on them at all times. . .those things have legs, you find them months later in the most unusual places. They now have clip on pacifiers that you attach it to the clothes. . .that makes it a little easier to keep track of.

We all know what it is to lose something or to simply just be lost.

With cell phones and GPS we don't have that problem as much anymore, but nothing can be as hopeless or as frustrating as losing something important to you or being lost and not knowing how to get where you need to be.

When I was growing up all we had was these things called maps. Maybe you have seen them. You could never drive alone needed to take someone with you that could open that think up and tell you to stay on 31 for another 3 lines (about 3 miles) until you take the exit onto highway 10.

There was no voice that told you what the number of the exit was either. You just had to hope the person knew which way was north, south, east, or west.

Well, Jesus takes this word “lost” and He applies it to describe those who are not in a relationship with him...and this word “lost” that he uses – it’s defined in a much stronger way in the original language of the Bible than our definition of “lost” today.

It’s actually a word that means “the state of being ruined.” It means, “utterly destroyed...totally decimated.”

It’s the same word found in John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish (same word – lost...to be wasted away) but have eternal life.”

Lost is a good word to describe those who don’t know Jesus.

The Bible actually refers to those who don’t know Jesus elsewhere in scripture as:

- Being “separated from Him, having no hope (Eph. 2:12).

Understand what is being communicated when we say God pursues the lost. What we are saying is He pursues these types of people:

- Those who are perishing.
- Those who are wasting their lives away.
- Those who are in a state of being ruined, decimated by the enemy.
- Those who are lost.

This is who God pursues. And this is exactly why Jesus tells these parables to a bunch of religious leaders gathered around Him that day. . .this is the context. Jesus is blowing up their idea of what they think they know about God.

With that said, let's look at our text for the day.

Luke 15:1–3 (NIV): Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” 3 Then Jesus told them this parable:

I love the first verse. I love them all really burnt this verse, verse one just speaks tons. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.

They drew near to him because He didn't pass judgment on them. . .look down on them. . .held up signs telling them how lost they were. He showed them love, care and concern.

Here's a question for us to answer and we'll come back to this at the end of today's message, but I wonder if those that are lost – I wonder if those that are not in right relationship with Jesus, feel as comfortable and as loved around me and you as they did around Jesus? Not comfortable because we are looking, and acting just like them. But comfortable because they sense the love of Jesus coming out of us.

Never in a million years did the religious leaders view God as a God that pursued those who were lost. . .as a God who sought after those who were not seeking him.

Commentator, William Barclay says,

“No Pharisee had ever dreamed of a God like that. A great Jewish scholar has admitted that this is the one absolutely new thing which Jesus taught about God – that he actually searched for us. A Jew might have agreed that those who came crawling home to God in self-abasement and prayed for pity might find it; but he would never have conceived of a God who went out to search for sinners.”

God's pursuit of the lost is illustrated so well in this parable:

In parable one, it's a lost sheep.

Luke 15:4–7 (NIV): 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? 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.' 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.

Here you have one little sheep that was lost. . .in danger. . .on his way to possible destruction. Do you know who this sheep represents? It was me, it was you.

Isaiah 53:6 (NIV): We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Laid on who. . .? Jesus and so Isaiah continues the prophecy. . .

Isaiah 53:7–10 (NIV): He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. 10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

And so we have this shepherd . . .Jesus referred to himself as “The Good Shepherd” in John 10.

This good shepherd leaves his ninety-nine sheep to go in search for the one lost sheep. . .and searches until he finds it. When He finds it, there is a celebration and rejoicing.

Same with the parable of the lost coin.

Luke 15:8–10 (NIV): 8 “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

This coin is of great value. It represented a day’s worth of wages. And so this woman puts everything on hold until she finds this coin. . .talk about a pursuit.

She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, “seeks diligently.” Nothing else gets on her agenda until what is lost is found.

And once she finds it. . .once it’s tracked down. . .once the pursuit is over, what follows? Celebration and rejoicing.

And then the third parable. The lost son. Now, we don’t have time to read the whole parable today, but most of you are familiar with the story. A young, immature son goes to his father and requests his share of the estate.

And I don’t know if you are aware of this point, but in the time of the Bible this is the equivalent of a son saying to his father, “You are dead to me.” Because it was only at the father’s death that the son would have received his inheritance.

The father, while broken-hearted, allows his son the freedom to make this decision and he hands him over his portion of the estate. And the Bible tells us that this son went into a far country.

It's interesting that he wanted to be as far away from home as possible. And there he "squandered his property". . .he wasted his inheritance in "reckless living."

It was soon after that he had to hire himself out as a servant and take a job feeding pigs. Can you imagine anything lower for a Jewish man than feeding pigs? No one could tell a story like Jesus!

And no doubt, the religious leaders of the day we're thinking that this kid is getting exactly what he deserved – because to them, he was just a rebellious kid that was reaping what he sowed.

And no doubt, he was. . .and he was absolutely miserable. In fact, look at Luke 15:16 - 24. . .

Luke 15:16–24 (NIV): He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 20 So he got up and went to his father. "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. 21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate What a picture. . .what an image. . .a Father running to hug and welcome his lost son home.

Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon called "Many Kisses for Returning Sinners" and he preached an entire sermon on that small phrase - "and kissed him."

He writes: "See the contrast. There is the son, scarcely daring to think of embracing his father, yet his father has scarcely seen him before he has fallen on his neck. He seems to stoop from His throne of glory to fall upon the neck of a repentant sinner. God on the neck of a sinner! What a wonderful picture!"

What a wonderful picture indeed. God not only running toward the wayward and lost, but embracing him.

And listen, God is still running after and pursuing the lost today.

I read these three parables and there is something that sticks out to me about them. God pursues the lost.

But I want you notice something else. . .

Did you notice the word "one" in the parables we read. It's highlighted over and over again. Wow, The Value of One.

Luke 15:4 (NIV): 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?

Again in verse 7. . .

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.

Same thing with the woman having ten silver coins

The Father. . .while he had two sons, it was the one that was lost in a far country that he grieved after and ran towards. . .the value of one! ONE!

- You see this value in the searching that takes place. . .leaving the ninety-nine. . .turning the house upside down!

- You see this value in the celebration that ensues! He picks up the sheep and puts it on his shoulders. . .the woman calls her friends and says, “Rejoice with me.” The Father throws a party, putting the best robe on his son, a ring on his finger, shoes on his feet!”

You can’t read these parables without the value of that which is lost coming off the page. . .and the clear teaching from Jesus here is that the lost – those outside of a relationship with him – are of great value to him! Every one that is lost is of value to Jesus.

This is why He went on the ultimate “search and rescue mission” leaving the confines of heaven and coming to earth and in his own words, states the mission of his life in Luke 19:10. . .

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

This is the gospel. This is why Jesus came to earth and lived a perfect life and died for me and you.

- It was the ultimate way God would show how he pursues us.
- It was the ultimate way God would show the lost how much they are valued. . .how much he loves them.

Romans 5:8 (NIV): But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Don’t buy into this idea that you don’t matter. . .that your life isn’t worth anything. . .that’s straight from the pit of hell.

Suicide is up 33% over the last two decades. It’s the 2nd leading cause of death between those 10-34 years of age.

Don't listen to the enemy telling you that your life is hopeless, meaningless and that you don't have value. You do matter and have since before you were born.

Psalm 139:16–18 (NIV): 16 Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. 17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! 18 Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand— when I awake, I am still with you.

If you're here this morning, or listening online and not in a relationship with Jesus. . .

God brought you here today as a way of pursuing you so you could hear this message of His love and surrender your life to him.

- Give up going your own way. . .
- Give up doing your own thing. . .
- Give up running. . .

Because you can't outrun the one who has been referred to as the "hound of heaven."

Let me share a minute about Francis Thompson – he was born in England in 1859. He grew up wanting to become a writer but his father wanted him to follow in his steps to become a physician. He tried it for a season, but ended up leaving school and going to the big city of London to pursue his original dreams of being a writer.

While in London, he became sick and after getting some medical treatment became addicted to the opium that was prescribed to him. He became so strung out on it, that it eventually led to his poverty and homelessness. His biographer noted that he would actually sleep on the banks of the Thames River and sold matches to stay alive.

It was at some point during this time that he found strength in his faith and wrote a poem that he is known for called, *"The Hound of Heaven."*

He ended up dying at 47 from tuberculosis. G.K. Chesterton preached his funeral and he is famous for influencing writers J.R.R Tolkien, and C.S. Lewis. Spurgeon was known to use the title of his poem "Hound of Heaven" in his sermons.

The poem is too long for us to read today, but I do want to read a commentary on it that is offered by writer John O'Coner:

"The meaning is understood. As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing nearer in the chase, with unhurried and imperturbable pace, so does God follow the fleeing soul by His Divine grace. And though in sin or in human love, away from God it seeks to hide itself, Divine grace follows after, unwearyingly follows ever after, till the soul feels its pressure forcing it to turn to Him alone in that never-ending pursuit."

God... "the hound of heaven" will chase you down and continue to pursue you with an everlasting love.

I want to encourage those that are lost to run no more. God loves you. ..the value of one. You! And what happens once you allow yourself to be found by God?

It's a party. . .a celebration! All of heaven rejoices over one person that is found.

Now before I close this morning I think it's all important for me to mention that once we are found, in relationship with Jesus, know His voice and call ourselves His friend.

God desires for us to pursue after Him.

Just as he ran after us so we could know him. He wants us to run after him to get to now Him better.

So let me give you some scriptures on us pursuing Him before we go today. . .

Psalm 27:4 (NIV): One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple.

Matthew 5:6 (NIV): Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

1 Chronicles 16:11 (NIV): Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.

Proverbs 8:17 (NIV): 17 I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me.

1 Corinthians 14:1 (NIV): Follow the way of love and eagerly desire gifts of the Spirit, especially prophecy.

Psalm 27:8 (NIV): My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, Lord, I will seek.

Psalm 34:10 (NIV): The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.

Ephesians 5:1–2 (NIV): Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Colossians 3:1 (NIV): Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Matthew 7:7–8 (NIV): 7 "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. 8 For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

Let me close with this. I believe we need to pursue after things of God the same way God pursued after us to bring us into right relationship with himself.

There is always more. More revelation, more of God for us to take hold of.

So pursue after Him with the same tenacity that He pursued you with before you came to know Him. Pursue his promises, get into His Word, pray, love, seek His face today, tomorrow, next week, next month, every day of your life.

King David put it this way. . .

Psalm 42:1–2 (NIV): As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. 2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

Let's pray.