

Weekly Devotions

Week 1 – The Wanderers/Lost

Texts: Ezekiel 34:11-24
Luke 15:1-10

“Two Parables; Lost Sheep, Lost Coin”

By Orv Moe

We may not like to be categorized as “sheep,” but we have many of the same problems. The Bible is filled with images that are intended to convey some aspect of Biblical truth. Since we have a “Western” mind set of “give us the facts,” we wonder what the authors were trying to say.

In Luke 15, Jesus uses this style of story-telling. The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin convey a similar meaning. Four key messages seem to be clear from both Luke and Ezekiel:

1. We are of great value to the Great Shepherd, and He will choose those whom He will save.
2. We are prone to mess things up at every opportunity even when God provides great gifts.
3. We desperately need to be saved from our self-made problems (sin).
4. Jesus, the Son of God, the Good Shepherd, is both willing and able to save us even when we are too lost and confused to realize that we need him.

Putting the message down by the numbers may make it clear to us but it loses the poetic beauty of the old language. Reading more of the Old Testament shows how its way of conveying ideas has worked over the centuries to bring truth to every time.

LOST in OURSELVES. . . FOUND in CHRIST

Faith Group Discussion

Week 1



Sharing. . .

What are some things you are fearful of losing and why?



Growing. . .

Part One

1. How can we welcome “sinners” without affirming or ignoring sinful behavior, on one hand, or adopting the judgmental attitude of the Pharisees and scribes, on the other?
2. What drove the shepherd and the woman to search so obsessively for objects of little value? Have you ever done that? What made it so compelling to find the lost object?
3. What does it mean to repent? What motivates people to do so? Where does the need for repentance fit into our witness to Christ and his love for sinners?

Part Two

1. The video suggested that “people have an innate sense that they are lost or exiled from God.” Do you agree? Have you experienced that in your life or seen evidence of it in others?
2. Is it possible to convince people who do not believe they are lost that they actually are? How?
3. Why do people naturally believe that we can or must find our way to God? Why is it good news that Jesus chases after lost sinners? Why might that strike people as bad news instead?
4. In light of Luke 15:1-10, discuss our mission as Christ’s followers and how to pursue it.



Serving. . .

Pray earnestly and daily for those who are “lost” to come to faith.

Weekly Devotions

Week 2 – The Connivers

Texts: Amos 8:4-7

Luke 16:1-15

“Good Things...Bad People?”

By Jan Kreie

Where do you see yourself in this parable? I see myself as the shrewd manager. Ouch!

I have spent my life toiling along, using the resources given – but I have not used them as efficiently as I should. I have not used them with the purpose, direction and guidance of the Master. I have been selfish, lazy, and – I have been a bad person!! I, I, and more I ... lost in myself.

Suddenly – I sense the judgment day arriving, I realize my Lord is going to hold me accountable!

What can I do to position myself better? What will it take to put myself right with the Master who has given me all resources? I connive, I conspire to make things right.

What should I do? I should stop conniving and repent. I should let God be God. He is in charge of his kingdom and eternal life.

I see my sinful nature always taking me down a path of conniving to try to justify myself to God. I am thankful that God has a salvation plan that takes the bad me, forgives me, and has restored me to a right relationship with him. Why do good things happen to bad people? God knows, but I do know this: good things happen to bad me because of Christ!

LOST in OURSELVES. . . FOUND in CHRIST

Faith Group Discussion

Week 2



Sharing. . .

Was there ever a time when you felt you were a slave to money or possessions? Explain.



Growing. . .

Part One

1. How have you seen the wicked prosper in our world?
2. If you had your way, what would you like to see God do to the wicked? Be specific.
3. How would you classify whether a person is “good” or “bad”?
4. Read how the Psalmist resolves his struggle in Psalm 73: 21-28. Where did he find peace?

Part Two

1. Do you agree that we are, in the end, all “bad people”?
2. What “yeah, buts” come to mind when you concede this?
3. How does God, by using the law, cut through your “yeah, buts”?
4. How is Jesus the answer to the question, “why doesn’t God do something?”?



Serving. . .

Most have a relative or friend who may be “lost.” Pray specifically and daily for that person to come to know Jesus’ saving grace.

Weekly Devotions

Week 3 – The Comfortable

Texts: Amos 6:1-8
Luke 16:19-31

“Does it Really Matter How We Live?”

By Marlin Torgerson

Are you comfortable? That's good! But somewhere there is someone who is uncomfortable! That should, somehow, make you uncomfortable, too!

We have a tendency to get ourselves wrapped up in our own comfortable existence and forget that someone close, even a family member, may be hurting, lonely or just needing someone to call and say “Hello...I've been thinking of you.”

So I challenge you. Pick one person a day and make him or her feel special. Your comfort zone would inspire everyone you talk with and those you know.

LOST in OURSELVES. . . FOUND in CHRIST

Faith Group Discussion Week 3



Sharing. . .

What are some things you are fearful of losing and why?



Growing. . .

Part One

1. What questions, concerns or curiosities do you have about life after death? Does the parable of Lazarus and the rich man help address them or not?
2. How was the rich man able to walk past Lazarus every day and not notice him? Are there people “lying at the gate” of our lives or community? Do we notice them?
3. In urban areas, people are generally urged *not* to give money to panhandlers. Why? What are effective ways of helping people in need?
4. Why do people—believers or not—desire more than God's Word in order to believe? In Luke 16:31, was Abraham right

Part Two

1. To be “comfortable” is good, but how can it drive us away from God and our neighbors?
2. What “comforts” in your life do you value most? Which would be the hardest to give up?
3. If a dead ancestor appeared to you or your family, what message might s/he give?



Serving. . .

It has been said, “Everyone is fighting some kind of battle.” Offer a word of encouragement to those with whom you come in contact this week. Include them daily in your prayers.

Weekly Devotions

Week 4 – The Unworthy

Texts: Habakkuk 1:1-4; 2:1-4
Luke 17:1-10

“Utterly Unworthy of Our God”

By Emma Wollan

“Be on your guard! If another disciple sins, you must rebuke the offender, and if there is repentance, you must forgive.”
Luke 17:3 NRSV

Forgiveness has never been easy. I often find myself plotting revenge or holding a grudge when people wrong me. *They deserve whatever’s coming to them, don’t they? They have sinned, so they don’t deserve forgiveness. Give it time, and if they make it up to me, then I’ll forgive them.* These are some of the thoughts I and many others have about forgiveness.

However, I often fail to realize that I am also dead in my sin. It is the human condition to fall short of perfection. We continue to fail, and are utterly unworthy of our God.

But wait, we are not hopeless. Nearly 2,000 years ago, all of our sin and wrongdoings were taken straight to the foot of the cross, as a Nazarene named Jesus, a blameless man, died in agony. This man, this Messiah, perfected us to be worthy of God’s love, and forgave us. We were unworthy of his forgiveness, yet it was poured out for us in Jesus’ body and blood. Therefore, we must do unto others as Jesus has done for us, forgiving anyone who repents, because we are all unworthy without the grace of Jesus.

LOST in OURSELVES. . . FOUND in CHRIST

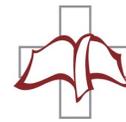
Faith Group Discussion

Week 4



Sharing. . .

What makes you unique from anyone else in your group? Explain.



Growing. . .

1. How have you seen “faith” misunderstood in our society?
2. Pastor Dave reminded us that faith is not something we come up with, but that it is a gift given by the Holy Spirit. How and/or when does this faith come to us? How and/or when is it strengthened?
3. Describe a time in your life where you had to “use” your faith. What did you do “by faith”?
4. How does clinging to God’s promises help you through the struggles and temptations of life?
5. Read Matthew 14:22-33. How did Peter “use” his faith?
 - a. What caused him to falter?
 - b. What happens to us when we have “little faith” and “doubt”?
6. Read 2 Timothy 1:5-7. Paul describes some influences in Timothy’s life of faith. Who has God used to strengthen your faith?
 - a. How do we “fan into flame the gift of God”?



Serving. . .

Pray daily for the opportunity to connect with the “lost” in some way that they will be receptive to learning about Jesus.

Weekly Devotions

Week 5 – The Ungrateful

Texts: Ruth 1:1-19a
Luke 17:11-19

“True Gratitude – a Lifestyle of Trust”

By Paulus Pilgrim

As children we were taught to say, “Thank you.” If we forgot, we were coaxed: “What do you say?” Feeling it or not, we automatically said the correct words. “Thank you.”

Some of that happens in Jesus’ encounter with the ten lepers He miraculously healed. He speaks of His disappointment at a mere 10% “thank you” return for His healing miracles.

Yet far beyond a mere “Say thanks,” Jesus points to an entire lifestyle that understands who is my source of absolutely everything good for my whole life, from daily necessities to forgiveness and eternal life. Still more than that, how important it is for me to stay connected to Him who is always gifting me far beyond anything I could ever deserve, day after day.

One of ten people returned to Jesus, not merely to say thanks, but for an on-going trust relationship in which God will keep His promises to grant both “daily bread” and life in heaven. Call it economic and spiritual security, if you wish. This leper’s life would never be the same!

Nine of ten missed all that. They didn’t return to this gracious Lord in gratitude or trust. Life would never be the same for them either.

Where am I?

LOST in OURSELVES. . . FOUND in CHRIST

Faith Group Discussion Week 5



Sharing. . .

If you could learn a new skill, what would it be and why?



Growing. . .

Part One

1. Try to imagine what life was like as a leper. What would be the hardest part of it?
2. If you were one of the nine lepers, why would you not turn back to Jesus? If you were the tenth, why would you delay going to the priest to get a clean bill of health?
3. In the Bible, non-Israelites like the Samaritan leper often show more devotion to God than the Chosen People. “The zeal of the convert” is an old phrase describing the same reality among Christians. Why would that be? How can life-long Christians maintain passionate faith in God?

Part Two

1. Have you ever received a life-changing gift like the ten lepers did? Describe your reaction to it.
2. The Lost theme this week is “The Ungrateful,” but it can hardly be that any of the ten lepers were not thankful. What does the text teach about gratitude?
3. How do gratitude and faith connect in your life? Do we remember to “turn back” to Jesus?
4. In light of this text, what is the difference between being healed and being made well?



Serving. . .

Think of ways we can serve someone who may be “wandering” or who needs reinforcement about his or her faith. Do something about it.

Weekly Devotions

Week 6 – The Demanding

Texts: Genesis 32:22-30
Luke 18:1-8

“Fear...Respect...Justice”

By Alice Fransen

Jesus tells his disciples a parable about a judge giving justice to a woman so she won't keep bothering him. He tells them that God promises to answer prayer and give justice to His chosen ones who come to Him in faith and prayer, too.

Can it get much plainer than that? Too often we don't seem satisfied with that promise. We continue to worry and struggle, and our anxiety announces to Him and to the world that we don't trust Him. What we're saying is this:

“Lord, I don't believe your promises really apply to me. It might have been alright for the Palestine of long ago but you just don't know the problems of the world in 2016.”

Not true! He knows! As we study the Bible, we realize that Jesus' every word and act were meant to show us that God is powerful, loving, ready and willing to help whenever we ask.

Christians – believe, pray, trust, give thanks. God is good!

LOST in OURSELVES. . . FOUND in CHRIST

Faith Group Discussion Week 6



Sharing. . .

If you were stranded on a deserted island, would you prefer to be alone or with someone you disliked? Explain.



Growing. . .

Part 1

1. When have you questioned God for his seeming inaction in the face of injustice?
2. At the end of Part 1 Pastor Dave asked, “What do we say then? Is God slumbering? Is he weak? Is he even real?”
 - A. How do you respond to these questions often asked in the face of injustice?
 - B. What are better questions to ask in the face of injustice?

Part 2

1. One of the toughest accusations against God was raised up by the Psalmist and then cried out by Jesus on the cross. Read Psalm 22:1-19. How is the psalmist's feeling of forsakenness balanced by his faith?
 - A. How did Jesus, despite his feeling of forsakenness, receive justice?
2. What do you think by Pastor Dave's assertion that God's mission is not to make you happy?
3. As Christians, why can we expect a measure of trouble and suffering in this life?
4. Tough question: Is justification, and the promise of eternal life- a new home in heaven- and a restored relationship with God enough for us? Does that satisfy your demand for justice?



Serving. . .

“Reach out and touch someone” was an advertising slogan years ago. Who might you “touch” with your personal story of God's grace? Do so.

Weekly Devotions

Week 7 – The Proudful

Texts: Genesis 4:1-15
Luke 18:9-17

“No First. No Last.”

By Gladys Bonnema

The Pharisees based their righteousness on a law they were “following perfectly”. Good thing we don’t confuse our worth and righteousness today, right? Nice try... I’m embarrassed but honest to say that these types of thoughts have crossed my mind. “Thank you... I’m not like them.”

God doesn’t call us to a world of competition and comparison when it comes to salvation or simply living, though it is what our culture operates on. He calls us to look to Jesus for our worth and trust in God for our salvation.

The tax collector was very confident of one thing - his sin. He knew he did not have a good standing with God. “God, be merciful to me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13). In our competitive culture, we must stop comparing ourselves and feeling like we come out on top. Our worth is not defined by our great earthly actions, what we own, or how many friends we have. Our worth and righteousness is defined by one heavenly action: Jesus’ great love that loved us all the way to the cross. And back. “God, be merciful to me, a sinner.”

LOST in OURSELVES. . . FOUND in CHRIST

Faith Group Discussion

Week 7



Sharing. . .

What are some things you are fearful of losing and why?



Growing. . .

Part One

1. Does it seem odd to you to find humor or satire in the Bible? Why or why not?
2. Re-cast the parable to fit our day. Who might the characters be? What would they say or do? (Remember how surprising these portrayals would have sounded to Jesus’ audience.)
3. Do you ever see your inner Pharisee start to come out? When or why? What kinds of subtle self-righteousness or pride have you seen at work in yourself or other Christians?
4. By definition, a tax collector was no paragon of virtue. What is the implication of confessing our sin for how we then live? Do you think the tax collector turned his life around?

Part Two

1. Our day has been called the Age of Self-Esteem, yet pride is said to be the worst of the Seven Deadly Sins. How does confidence or pride in oneself relate to the Pharisee’s pride?
2. How can we uphold the importance of right living, without fostering the Pharisee’s contempt for sinners? How does forgiveness not become a way to excuse our favorite sins?
3. Does it comfort or offend you that Jesus made little children the model of God’s kingdom? What does it mean for you in your life—not just as a sweet idea or an abstraction?



Serving. . .

Pray earnestly and daily for those who are “lost” to come to faith.