

THE JOY OF BEING FOUND
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Text: Luke 15:1-10

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.

“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Have you ever lost something—not just your car keys or the TV remote, but something that made your stomach drop when you realized it was gone? Like your wedding ring or your passport. Think about the panicky feeling you got, the frantic searching, trying to remember the last place you saw it, and then the wave of relief when it finally turned up. That’s the kind of experience Luke draws us into with these two parables—the lost sheep and the lost coin. But first he sets the scene.

A group of tax collectors and sinners—the lowest of the low—are crowding around Jesus to hear him speak, while a group of Pharisees and scribes—the highest of the high—grumble about how shameful it is that he’s actually welcoming these people instead of shooing them away.

Now, let’s pause for a sec and think about what sin was in Jesus’ day. Back then, a sin was when you did something that violated the Jewish law—like when you ate a kind of food the law said you shouldn’t eat, or you worked on a day of the week when the law said you shouldn’t work.

So, it was a very specific term—which is not how it is today. Today a sin is when you do something bad, which could mean just about anything, depending on who you ask. I might think drinking alcohol is a sin, and you might think it’s fine. So, what happens is, we come to

church, we say the prayer of confession, we hear the assurance of grace, but there’s still this lingering uncertainty—this nagging sense that we could be messing up all the time and not even know it.

It’s not a good place to be. I mean, none of us is perfect. We all make mistakes. But how can we even try to do better when we don’t have a clear understanding of what better is? I’m not saying we should go back to using the law as a measuring stick. But wouldn’t it be nice if there was a way to think about sin that was more objective—a way that didn’t depend on our individual sense of right and wrong? So, we could have a better idea of where we stand—with God, with each other, and with ourselves.

Well, there is a way, and it starts with looking at what we’re created to be.

As human beings, we’re created to be in relationship with God. God gives us life, calls us to participate in the world around us, forms a covenant with us, and waits for us to respond. The whole biblical witness shows human beings as creatures to whom God speaks and from whom God looks for a reply. And the gospels, in particular, give us a clear picture of what that looks like. Jesus exemplifies what it is to live every moment in relationship with God.

Everything he says, everything he does, is shaped by his obedience to God's will and his trust in God's grace. He shows us what it is to be truly and fully human.

But we're not only created to be in relationship with God. We're also created to be in relationship with each other. In fact, we literally can't survive without each other. I think about my kids when they were little. From the moment they were born, their lives, their growth, their happiness depended entirely on the love and care they got from other people. They came into the world wired for human contact. And that doesn't change as we get older. Aristotle said human beings are "political animals," meaning we're made to live in community. And we hear the same thing in Genesis. After God creates Adam, God says, "It is not good that the man should be alone." So, God creates Eve to be his companion. The point being, we're made for life together. And again, Jesus shows us what that looks like. His whole life is about people—healing them, teaching them, challenging them, praying for them. Everything he does is about people.

But here's the thing: as lovely as that picture is—life with God, life with one another—we know it's not the whole story. We know our lives don't always line up with what we're created to be. Somewhere between God's intention and the reality of our everyday lives, things get bent out of shape. And that's where we have to start talking about sin.

If being human means living in relationship with God, and living in relationship with people, then by that measuring stick sin is when we turn away from those relationships. Sin is when we reject the whole reason for our being. Sometimes that looks like arrogant pride—thinking we don't need anyone else, we can do everything for ourselves. Sometimes it looks like fear—shrinking back from life, retreating into our own little worlds, not trusting in God's goodness. Sometimes it looks like anger—giving in to hurt or jealousy or whatever. But whatever the cause may be, the result is the same: we end up alone, estranged from God, estranged from each other, and estranged from ourselves—from our true selves.

Now, having a clear understanding of what sin is can still leave us feeling weighed down—like the gap between who we are and who we're meant to be is just too wide, and we'll

never be able to close the distance. But that's why Jesus tells these parables.

A sheep wanders off. A coin slips through the cracks. And what happens? Does the shepherd say, "Oh well, I've still got the rest of the flock"? Does the woman say, "Oh well, I still have enough money for groceries"? No, they both search for what they lost, and they don't stop until they find it. And that's what God does, too. That's the good news. When we get lost, when we turn away from who we're supposed to be, God doesn't give up on us. God keeps looking for us, keeps calling our names, until we're finally found.

So the story doesn't end with brokenness. It ends with joy. It ends with us being gathered back into relationship. It ends with us being restored—to God, to each other, and to ourselves. And here's the thing: when you've been found like that—when you've been sought out and brought home—you can't help but feel grateful, and you can't help but live differently. The joy of being found shows up in the way you look at other people. It shows up in the patience you extend when someone disappoints you. It shows up in the compassion that takes the place of judgment; in the welcome that replaces suspicion; in the hope that refuses to give up on anyone, including yourself.

That's the joy of being found. It's not just a feeling we carry in our hearts. It's a way of life—a life that has its beginning in the love and the grace of God.

Pray with me:

Gracious God, we give you thanks that you never give up on us—that when we wander, you come searching, and when we are lost, you rejoice to bring us home. Teach us to trust in your mercy, to rest in your love, and to share the joy of being found with others. May our lives reflect your grace, so that all may know the welcome of your kingdom. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.