

BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

***The Lost Coin and the Father with Two Sons:
Rejoicing to Find What Was Lost
Luke 15:8-32***

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

Leaders' Responsibilities:

Important: Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a Unit of sessions needs to have access to the “Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study”. That information is often provided at the beginning of that Unit of sessions. The weekly session “Background” located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day’s study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

Prior to this Coming Session:

Gathering Time Leader:

Bible Study Leader:

You may choose to plan ahead and ask three members of your class to study the passage Luke 15:11-32. You could plan to dramatize the action of this story or you could ask three people to describe the feelings and actions of the younger son, the feelings and actions of the father and the feelings and actions of the older son.

Worship Time Leader:

If your youth group has chosen to dramatize the bible study on the lost sons, give them an opportunity to present to the larger group.

Music Sources:

How Deep is the Father's Love for Us, *The Worship Hymnal*, 2008, #101; CCLI # 1558110

Grace Alone, *The Worship Hymnal*, 2008, #112; CCLI # 2335524

Amazing Grace, many sources

Gathering Time: (Suggested time: 15 minutes)***The Lost Coin and the Father with Two Sons:
Rejoicing to Find What Was Lost*****Focal Text**

Luke 15:8-32

Background Text

Luke 15:1-32

Main Idea

When we recognize God's grace in our lives, we join in the celebration as God welcomes people back, regardless of who they are and what they have done.

Questions to Explore

Do you share the joy of God's welcoming all people who return to Him? Why Not?

Teaching Aim

To lead your church to accept God's grace in their lives and identify ways they will join in joyfully sharing it with all other people.

Gathering together:

Sing **Grace Alone**

First thoughts:

Recently two sets of grandparents got to be present for the baptism of their young grandson. Two aunts and uncles and six cousins were present as well. This grandson lives many miles away from all of these relatives so it was a wonderful thing that they could all be present. It occurred on January 3, but for the older members of this extended family, it was the highlight of the holiday season. There was great rejoicing and celebration over this much loved child's commitment to Christ. That's what Jesus tells us happens in heaven every time a sinner comes to repentance and to salvation.

Closing the Gathering Time:

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

Note to the Bible Study Leader: Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

Teacher Preparation

The Lost Coin and the Father with Two Sons: Rejoicing to Find What Was Lost

Focal Text

Luke 15:8-32

Background Text

Luke 15:1-32

Main Idea

When we recognize God’s grace in our lives, we join in the celebration as God welcomes people back, regardless of who they are and what they have done.

Questions to Explore

Do you share the joy of God’s welcoming all people who return to Him? Why Not?

Teaching Aim

To lead your church to accept God’s grace in their lives and identify ways they will join in joyfully sharing it with all other people.

Introduction to your personal study:

Most people will identify with the first parable we examine today. We have lost or misplaced something of value, looked for it, gave it up for lost and rejoiced when it was found. The writer remembers putting her pearl necklace away in a safe place while she was to be away on a trip. This was a special gift from her husband and much treasured. Upon her return from the trip, she searched diligently for the necklace and had her family join in the search. A full year and a half later, she took down a shoebox with a seldom worn pair of dress shoes and found the necklace safely tucked in the toe of the shoe. With some embarrassment, but a great deal of joy, she told of her find. Her son said, “Mom, you’d better not hide anything of value again without telling someone else where you have put it!”

We may also identify with the sad story most commonly called “The Prodigal Son”. Many parents have had children who made choices which led them away from the warm relationship which was desired. As we will see in our study this scripture story may also well be called “The Lost Brothers”, “A Man Had Two Sons”, “Lost Son” or “The Parable of the Prodigal Sons and Their Father” or “The Father of Two Lost Sons”. These interesting titles indicate that there is a depth to this story which we will try to examine in our study.

Background:

Please ask for and read the information contained in the **“Basic Information for Leading the Unit of Study”**, found at the beginning of this Unit. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

Ask the person who downloads and prints out your Bible study sessions to share with you a copy of the **“Rabbinic Teaching with Parables and Learning from Them”** that is found on the website at the beginning of this Unit of study on parables in the Gospel of Luke. That information will help you to teach the parables more effectively. We have now studied a number of parables as taught by Jesus and have gained insight into their power and application. This week we will add two more to our understanding.

Focusing on the Meaning:

Our first parable for consideration is titled The Lost Coin and it is found in Luke 15:8-10. These brief verses are packed with meaning.

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

The silver coin may have been one of the ten silver coins which were part of her dowry and were worn as ornamental decorations on her headdress. The modern equivalent might be a woman’s engagement ring and wedding band with studded diamonds. The loss of one of these diamonds causes dismay, anxiety and worry. The value to the owner goes far beyond any monetary value.

However, in the case of the Biblical story, this coin was probably one of the few valuable possessions this woman owned or ever would own. She needed to find it and she knew it probably had fallen off in her own home.

“Homes of the poorer class were constructed without windows. Near the ceiling, perhaps, a few stones were left out of the wall to provide some ventilation. But this opening, together with the entrance did not give the inside of the house much light. Even in the middle of the day it was dark in the house. The woman would have to light

a candle in order to search for the coin that was somewhere on the stone floor. Animals were frequently kept inside rural homes, though in a somewhat separate part of the family dwelling. Besides, the house served as a place where the poor owner stored his goods.

Somewhere in the house was the coin the woman had lost. She took a broom and with the light of the candle illuminating the room, she swept the house carefully. Every place where she might have been was searched, until at last she caught sight of a gleam of metal or heard the tinkle of the coin upon the hard floor. Her anxiety and worry suddenly disappeared and gave way to joy and jubilation.” (Kistemaker, S.J. *The Parables of Jesus*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1980, p. 212)

The happy woman called friends and neighbours to share her happiness. The parable ends with the terse statement “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

In the parable of the lost coin, we are told by Jesus that there is rejoicing in heaven when any one of the billions of people on earth repents of sin and renews his or her relationship with God. We identify with the joy of the poor woman who finds her lost coin and we identify to some extent with the rejoicing of the angels of God. We, too, have rejoiced when a child or a friend or even just an acquaintance accepts Christ as Saviour. There really is no other joy to compare.

In a church which we were privileged to help build and which we visit from time to time, the baptistery (the place where a person is baptized by immersion) is high up on the wall on the left side of the sanctuary. Baptisms occur there frequently and it is an amazing experience to watch as the new believer enters the water and answers the pastor’s question, “Have you repented of your sins and do you promise to follow Jesus all the days of your life.” “Yes” is always the affirmation and with it the congregation expresses their joy by clapping or saying “Amen” or by weeping and taking the hand of the person next to them. The church rejoices with the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

The second parable for consideration today is found in Luke 15:11-31. In this parable are three main characters: the father; the older son and the younger son. We have sometimes focused on the younger son, but all three characters have important things to say to the reader.

In verse 11 and 12 we are introduced to the younger son. The story begins with the astounding words, “Father, give me my share of the estate.” This would have amazed the listeners in Jesus’ day for the inheritance never passed to the children until the father’s death. In essence, the younger son is saying, “Father, I wish you were dead so I could have the money I think I have coming to me.”

Of course, the father could have refused this request. But we begin to see the character of the father demonstrated when the scripture simply says, ***“So he divided his property between them.”***

The older son as well as the younger son receives his inheritance at this time. However, in the custom of that day, the father would continue to exercise authority and decision-making over the assets. We see him doing that later when he welcomes the younger son home and orders a fatted calf to be killed and prepared for the feast.

This father probably knew that his younger son would waste his money. He undoubtedly sensed the rebellion and immaturity which led to this request. Nonetheless, he gave the son liberty to go and money to spend.

The Biblical account is clear that the son spent that money quickly and unwisely. ***“The younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country, and there squandered his wealth in wild living” Luke 15:13.***

After his money was gone, another reality came into play. There was a famine in the land and he had no means to get food. He hired himself out to a non-Jew (something which would have brought grief to his father) and he took a job feeding pigs which for the Jew would have been as disgraceful a job as could have been imagined.

Whatever food he was given in payment for his work was not enough to keep him from being so hungry that he wanted to eat the food the pigs were eating, but was not allowed to do so. This food would have been pods and seeds of the locust (carob) tree which constituted fodder for cattle and pigs and at times were eaten by the poor. This young man had fallen as low as he could fall.

He came to his senses and realized that he still had a home and even though he had no rights as the son of that home, he knew the character of his father. His father provided well for those he hired to work for him. If he returned home and was hired by his father, he would have enough to eat!

A final look at this first important person in the story shows him returning home and saying to his father, ***“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son”.***

This is an amazing change from the selfish young man whose attitude was that his father was standing in the way of his receiving the inheritance he would have coming to him on his father's death. That young man squandered his inheritance. The young man who returned home is changed indeed. This young man understood that he had sinned against God as well as against his father and his family. To understand that the evil we do impacts our relationship to God as well as to others is a mature understanding. This young man has grown up!

The primary character in this story is actually not the son who went away and spent his money. The primary character is the father. The father understood that to keep the son at home against his will would not serve a good purpose. The story does not tell us of the teaching the father had done and the probable discussions they had leading up to the son's decision to leave home, but we can imagine those without much difficulty. The father knew he could not keep his son by force.

However, the father obviously never gave up hoping for a good outcome to this situation. While the son was still a long way off, the father saw him and was filled with compassion and ran to him, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The picture is of a father who watched daily for a returning son and when he saw him coming cared nothing for his public appearance. He ran down the road in his long robe and embraced his son.

His response to the son's confession of sin was to say. ***"Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. So they began to celebrate"* Luke 15:22-24.**

Even though the father watched and waited for his son, he feared that he was dead. At the very least, he feared that he was lost to him forever. Only the grandest celebration could express his joy at his son's return.

The third character in this dramatic story is the son who stayed at home. When the father divided his property, this son received the larger portion – probably two-thirds of the property since he was the older son. It is true that he stayed home and worked while his brother went away, but he essentially was working for his own benefit. Whatever profit was made was profit which was a part of his inheritance.

However, when his younger brother returns and he comes in from the field to find a party in progress, he is angry. He was so angry he refused to go in to the party. The father left the party and came out to him, but his anger spilled over into hateful words, ***"Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him"* Luke 15:29-30.**

The father could have replied that he was in fact working for his own profit and could have, at any time, chosen to kill a fatted calf or a goat and had his own party. But he tenderly replied, ***"My son, you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found"* Luke 15: 31-32.**

These two parables speak of finding a valuable thing which was lost and wildly celebrating its return. The woman found a coin which had significance to her for its sentimental value as well as any monetary value it may have contained. The father

received home a son whose leaving had caused him great grief. The father hoped he might return, but that hope was probably so small at times as to be almost dead.

The father in the story must speak to us of God's love and concern. It also speaks of God's allowing us to make choices that hurt him and bring harm to us. This seems to be the hardest of all concepts for us as humans to grasp. We want the freedom to choose and when those choices bring heartache either because of personal tragedy or corporate misfortunes, we blame God. "Why does God allow suffering in the world?" we ask when our friend, a life-long smoker, is diagnosed with lung cancer. "Why does God allow suffering in the world" we ask when a man gets throat cancer after working as a young boy with chemicals and as a university student in a smoke-filled environment.

The young man spoke with wisdom when he said to his father, ***"I have sinned against heaven and against you."*** Our sins never just affect ourselves. Few choices we make have implications only for ourselves.

The story also speaks to us of God's joy at our decision to return to him. We don't have to clean up our act, do penance, or work for a while as a hired hand. We come straight home from the pig pen, confess our sin and ask for forgiveness. Before the words are out of our mouth, the celebration begins. In the story of the lost coin, Jesus says, ***"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"*** (Luke 15:10).

But there is one more character in this story and we may find ourselves identifying with him more than we like to admit. This is the son who always did the outwardly right thing. He didn't leave home; he kept working on the family farm; he was obedient to his father; he didn't have unnecessary parties. But in the process, he lost the ability to really love his father and he certainly no longer loved his brother. In fact, he refers to ***"the son of yours"*** in such a way as to indicate that he no longer has any capacity to feel compassion for his own brother. He is as spiritually hungry as his brother was physically hungry. And unlike his brother, he seems to have no capacity to realize his need.

Yet the father has compassion on him. He understands why he doesn't come into the party and he leaves the party and goes personally to speak with him. He affirms, ***"you are always with me and everything I have is yours."*** But he also insists that welcoming home the brother who was dead and is alive again; was lost and is found is his priority.

Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:

These two beautiful parables need to be a part of every believer's understanding. We think of "The Prodigal Son" as a well-known Bible story, but it undoubtedly is not known to many of those who may study this material. Focus on the joy expressed by the woman who found the coin and by the father whose son returned home. As believers

our greatest goal in life should be to see other people come home to the Father. We should rejoice as the angels of God over every sinner who repents.

For Personal Reflection:

What have I learned from this study?

What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?

What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?

Bible Study Plan (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

The Lost Coin and the Father with Two Sons: Rejoicing to Find What Was Lost

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

Begin by helping the group locate the Focal Text in their Bibles. Also, share with them the Main Idea to be learned from the Scriptures, and the Questions to be Explored by the group.

Focal Text

Luke 15:8-32

Background Text

Luke 15:1-32

Main Idea

When we recognize God's grace in our lives, we join in the celebration as God welcomes people back, regardless of who they are and what they have done.

Questions to Explore

Do you share the joy of God's welcoming all people who return to Him? Why Not?

Teaching Aim

To lead your church to accept God's grace in their lives and identify ways they will join in joyfully sharing it with all other people.

Connect with Life:

Share this story: A young man named Thomas lived in a small town with his family. The mother of the family suffered from the consequences of mismanaged cancer treatments and would eventually die from the results. This young man also suffered from extreme bullying by other youth in the community. The moment he graduated from high school, Thomas joined the Navy and left, never to return to that town. Eventually, he began to drink alcohol to "fit in" with the other sailors. Though he served his nation well for eight years, he was honourably but forcefully discharged due to his then severe

alcoholism. After that, he spent several more years as an alcoholic, living on the streets of a large city.

His father never gave up on his son. Every night, without fail, this humble, Christian father would be on his knees by his bed praying for his lost son. Finally, after 16 years of prayer, the son found the help he needed to stop drinking. Late one night, he called his younger brother with the news that he had “dried out”, never again to touch alcohol. Rejoicing broke out among the whole family. Thirty-seven years later, they continue to rejoice. Thomas, highly capable with all things electrical and electronic, found work as an electrical contractor with a large university. He continued connecting with the organizations that had helped him and, for his entire career, he served as counsellor to alcohol and drug addicted young men in that city—staying on call to meet their needs 24 hours, every day of every week.

The family had mostly despaired of Thomas’ return. Most, that is, except the father who never doubted that God would bring him back. Faith, hope, and love provided the answer. Now retired, Thomas continues with his ministry to the hurting youth of his city. And the family gives thanks to the Lord, daily.

Guide the Study:

Have someone read Luke 15:8-10.

Ask: Has anyone lost their wedding ring? How did you feel or how would you imagine that you would feel if such a thing happened?

Explain from the background material the significance of this coin to the lady. Describe how the home might have been built and why it was necessary for her to light a lamp to search for it.

Seek an answer: In this short Bible passage what words are absolutely amazing?

Now ask if anyone can share a story when they were so glad about someone’s coming to Christ that they were “rejoicing with the angels of God”?

Have members read the entire story of the parable of the lost son and his angry brother. You may want to have one person read verses **11-16**; another read **17-24** and a third read **25-32**.

Note: You may want to ask three people to read these verses ahead of time and be prepared to describe the attitudes involved. (See suggestions under the Bible Study Leader in Prior to the Coming Session).

Look for responses: Have you known any young person who acted in a way similar to the younger son?

Search for comments from the group: Why did the father give the money to the son and let him go? (Spend time here discussing the way in which God the Father allows us freedom to make choices. He may equip us with talent, opportunities and even finances which we chose to use for evil rather than good).

Discuss the father's attitude of welcoming the son home.

Call for opinions on this: What does the best robe, ring and sandals as well as the killing of the fatted calf symbolize? (He is dressed as the son of the house; he is given a ring which is probably a signet ring with which he could authorize expenditures and give directions; he is given sandals – only servants went barefoot. The fatted calf (the best animal available) was saved for feasts where the host wanted to honor the guest.)

Promote a brief discussion on this key question: What was the attitude of the older son?

Pose this question: Who does the older son remind us of?

The younger son experienced great physical hunger and came home to find food. The older son experienced great spiritual hunger. Where will he find food for his soul?

Have the class read verse 31 together two times. Discuss the deep meaning of the verse.

Seek answers to: How does the content of this verse make you feel?

Encourage Application:

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

Ask someone to summarize the core teaching of these two parables. (There is great rejoicing in heaven when a lost person repents and comes home to a right relationship with the Father. We should join in that rejoicing.)

Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time. Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

Youth!!! Take Ten

Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

The Lost Coin and the Father with Two Sons: Rejoicing to Find What Was Lost Luke 15:8-32

A youth will lead the following activity and comments. No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

Finding Lost Treasure

Either of these parables would be fun to dramatize. Only one character would be needed for the woman searching for the lost coin. Three people would be needed for the story of the father and his two sons.

You may want to dramatize these without words. Facial expressions and actions can express the feelings adequately especially since your group will have studied the Bible passage before the worship time.

Plan ahead for this activity and bring a few props – ragged clothes for the prodigal son, a long robe for the father, a rich robe for the returning son, a ring, and sandals. The woman searching for the lost coin would need a simple robe, a coin and a candle or lantern.

Worship Time (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***The Lost Coin and the Father with Two Sons:
Rejoicing to Find What Was Lost
Luke 15:8-32*****Beginning the Service:**

Sing **Amazing Grace** and **How Deep the Father's Love for Us**

Have someone read Psalm 23.

Offering:**Praying for the World:**

Violence caused by the drug wars in Ciudad Juarez, Mexico has caused many people to leave the city. They have returned to homes in the center of Mexico or moved across the border into El Paso, Texas. Estimates are that as many as 420,000 of the 1.5 million residents have moved.

Leaders of the cell church and house church network, Communities of Hope, are praying about purchasing property which has been offered to them at a good price. They are concerned that some from their congregation have moved. They don't want to make a commitment to build which they cannot complete.

The ministry of this congregation has been extensive in these difficult days in Juarez. Pray for protection for the pastor and his family and for each person who participates. Pray that the violence in the city will bring people to seek the Prince of Peace. Pray that the ministry of the church will continue to grow.

Sharing Guide:

This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader

may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.

The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1-7

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “ This man welcomes sinners and eats with them”

The Jesus told them this parable: “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls to his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep’ 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.”

To complete our consideration of the emphasis Jesus placed on rejoicing over the repentance of one lost sinner, we need to look at the third parable which Jesus included in his teaching on his subject.

It actually begins Luke Chapter 15 and is addressed, as are the other two parables, to a group of tax collectors and “sinners” with Pharisees and teachers of the law listening in. The tax collectors were such a hated group that they were grouped with “sinners”. Imagine another group of workers being included in this manner – shopkeepers and “sinners”, shepherds and “sinners”, carpenters and “sinners”. No, only the tax collectors, as a group, engendered such hatred. No wonder the Pharisees and teachers of the law wondered why Jesus would associate with them.

“Sinners” would have included Jews who failed to keep the teachings of the Torah, participate in the life of the synagogue, did commerce with the Gentiles, drunkards, prostitutes and many others no doubt. We would today have our list of those we consider “sinners” and we, like the Pharisees and teachers of the law, would mutter if our religious leaders associated too closely with them.

But Jesus did associate with all kinds of people. This was one of the annoying things about him. He explains why he did that in this parable.

The life of a shepherd would be well known to most of his listeners. If they did not have sheep themselves, they were well aware of those who did. They knew, too, of the constant care which sheep required. They were prone to graze following the greenest grass until they found themselves on the edge of a precipice or in some cases, over the

edge of a precipice. They were always at risk from the wild animals who roamed the same grasslands where they grazed.

Yet every sheep was important to the shepherd. These were poor people and the loss of one sheep could be devastating to the family economy. Not only would they lose the meat, but they also lost the wool and the sheepskin which had many uses in the typical Israelite family.

Further, the shepherd led a lonely life. He was often alone with his sheep for days at a time as they sought good grass and water. The herdsmen had gathering places where they might meet, such as a good watering place, and they shared some talk and companionship. But for much of the time the shepherd was alone. He became well acquainted with his sheep. He may have given them names. He knew the special ways of each one and which ones might be the most likely to wander away.

Even if a shepherd had a big herd like one hundred, every sheep would be considered important. So if even one sheep got lost, the shepherd would hunt for it. Leaving the larger group unattended was dangerous, but sometimes it had to be done. And having risked the larger herd to find the one sheep, the shepherd would have been especially glad to find and rescue the lost sheep. Sometimes the rescue effort would have required the shepherd to risk his own life to climb down into a ravine and lift the sheep to his shoulders and carry it back to the larger flock.

If others were there – other shepherds at the watering place or when he returned home to his family, he would celebrate. He had saved the life of a creature for whom he had affection and he had saved the sheep for the use of his family.

Jesus uses the shepherd illustration to describe us. He is our shepherd; he guides us and care for us. He calls us by name and he is constantly concerned for our wandering ways. And when we wander off into danger, he searches for us. When he finds us, he lifts us on his shoulders and carries us to safety. And then he has a celebration.

The celebration happens in heaven.. *“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”*

Call to Commitment:

Of course, at some time in our life, each one of us has been the lost sheep whom Jesus has sought. Some had not wandered far – they were still within the reach of a loving family and a nurturing church community and coming to Jesus was not a difficult thing. But for many others, the shepherd searched long and hard and in dangerous places to find us and we may have been bruised and bloody as he lifted us on his shoulders to carry us to safety.

But for every one of us, there was rejoicing in heaven.

We are often prone to ask, “What will heaven be like?” One of the clearest views of heaven is given in these parables. In heaven there will be rejoicing over every one of the nearly seven billion people currently living on this earth who is sought by the shepherd and brought safely home.

May we experience heaven on earth as we rejoice over the lost person who comes to Christ. May we be one means by which the Shepherd searches for and finds the lost sheep.

Concluding the Service:

Leader: Ask the church to stand with bowed heads and closed eyes. Then read the following scripture blessing to them:

***“May God be gracious to us and bless us
And make his face shine upon us,
That your ways, O Lord, may be known on the earth,
your salvation among all nations.”***

***May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you.
May the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you rule the peoples justly
and guide the nations of the earth.***

***May the peoples praise you, O God;
may all the peoples praise you.***

***Then the land will yield its harvest,
and God, our God, will bless us.
God will bless us,
and all the ends of the earth will fear him.”*** (Psalm 67)