

LOSERS, WEEPERS!??

Luke 15:1-24

Kids' refrain: "Finders, keepers; losers, weepers!"

That refrain could serve as a focal point for our thinking about the three parables our Lord tells the Pharisees in Luke 15.

The premise of the refrain is that when something of value is lost, someone wins, and someone loses.

Your loss is my gain!

- The one who finds rejoices.
- The one who loses weeps.

That's the way God views lost people.

He's the loser. HE'S THE WEEPER!

The Pharisees didn't see it that way.

Luke is using incidents involving Jesus and the Pharisees to show the nature of their rejection.

One excuse Pharisees use for rejecting Jesus: unacceptable people who follow Him: tax collectors and sinners (2nd class citizens!) 15:1-2 *Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*

Focus on hearing—tax collectors and sinners are **listening**.

The religious leaders aren't interested in **listening**.

"They're grumbling!" They want to protest—NOT *listen* to Jesus

PHARISAIC COMPLAINT: HE ASSOCIATES WITH SINNERS

Pharisees have two main errors:

1. **Cultural error:** The "religiously correct" won't associate with *tax collectors and sinners*.
2. **Theological error:** God loves only good people – people like them!
**Because they're better than everybody else,
God loves them more.**

Stowell: Their "religious correctness" is based on theological error:

"good guys–bad guys" approach to theology.

Good guys keep the law–bad guys don't.

God loves the good guys–hates the bad guys.

No amount of judgment is enough for *those* bad guys.

THE MESSIANIC RESPONSE: THREE PARABLES 15:3-32

Three parables demonstrate God's attitude toward the lost.

A holy God cares about and seeks after lost sinners.

God is concerned about lost people!

- **Jesus, like His Father, is concerned about the lost.**
- **Those who identify with Him
must identify with God's concern.**

Do we care about the lost?

Do we pray regularly for those around us who don't know Christ?

Do we make friends with the lost so we can share Christ with them?

An "I couldn't care less" attitude identifies us with strange bedfellows!

Pharisees have that attitude about the lost.

- They aren't interested in their restoration.
- They want them to get what they have coming

People who think like Pharisees have a hard time with issues like:

- Can you spend time with sinners and not become *like* a sinner?

- How do you distinguish the contamination of sin and the worth of sinners?
- Can I stay separate, yet still involved with people in the world?
- A holy God can't have anything to do with sinful people could He?

Our Lord never struggles with such questions. *But we do!*

In response to that attitude,

Christ **demonstrates how God cares about the lost.**

Jesus addresses three parables to the Pharisaic leaders.

[All three parables introduce . . .]

THREE MAIN IDEAS:

1. GOD CARES SO MUCH ABOUT THE LOST THAT HE GOES OUT SEARCHING FOR THEM

God cares enough about tax collectors and sinners to seek and save them.

The focus in each of these parables is on the loss to the loser–

The loser is motivated by a sense of loss.

He wants what he's lost back. He misses it! **THAT'S GOD!**

GOD is motivated to seek the lost because it's HIS loss!

When we lose something of value,

we invest a lot of energy trying to find it.

You know how high a priority we place on finding car keys in the middle of an important conversation, when we suddenly realize we've misplaced them?

I loaned my keys to someone who then left.

In the middle of an important conversation I realized I didn't have my keys. Everything stopped, until the key situation was under control.

My keys are of great value to me.

That's the way it is with God.

The lost have such great value to God that He "drops everything" and dedicates Himself to finding them.

God doesn't just love the lovely!

He cares about politicians and criminals,
about alcoholics and homosexuals,
about wife beaters and child abusers,
about death-row inmates,

and about common ordinary sinners,

He cares enough to send His own Son to seek and to save them.

DO WE?

Even the outcasts of society are valuable to God.

[2nd main idea presented in all three parables:]

2. GOD CARES SO MUCH ABOUT THE LOST THAT HE LEAVES THE COMPANY OF THE FOUND in their place of security–to go seek the lost.

When we lose something valuable, we **LEAVE** the found things alone **(in a secure place!) in order to go after those which are lost.**

In two, an immediate search is made.

In third, his attention is fixed, looking out, away from the secure place, hoping to see the lost one coming back.

That's the opposite of the Pharisee's attitude.

They like to stay together in the security of the "society of the found".

*Do we care enough about the lost, are they valuable enough,
to leave the comfort of our "safe" friends (the "society of the found"),
to search the "not so secure" places to find the lost out there?*

*How do we respond when someone stays home from church to entertain a bunch of pagans.
Complain?*

Or do we pray for opportunity to share Christ?

God did!!! That's exactly what Jesus did! Do we?

*Do we care enough about God's loss,
to help Him recuperate what He has lost?*

*Are we willing to take the risks associated with making friendships with unlovely people, to
find the lost and give them to the One who has suffered the loss of such a valuable
possession?*

*Are we willing to spend time with pagan people carrying hurt of painful experiences, who
wear the bruises and stains of a sinful lifestyle?*

*Do we respond to those of other classes and races prejudicially,
or with care and concern for their lost condition?*

Stowell: As a student, I had little time or patience for the hippie movement and its immorality,
drugs, rebellion against authority, and uncleanness.

"I recall pulling onto an interstate and seeing a hippie,
with knapsack and guitar in hand, hitchhiking.

As I sped by, self-righteous thoughts filled my mind.

"Why doesn't he get a job and buy his own car?"

Besides, I wouldn't want to travel miles with someone whose philosophy of life is so
blatantly pagan."

That was the Pharisees' attitude—but not God's!

To be surrounded by sinners, seeking to save the lost,
is no contradiction to a godly lifestyle.

It may be *the* essence of a godly lifestyle!

[3rd idea presented in all three parables:]

3. GOD CARES SO MUCH ABOUT THE LOST THAT HE CELEBRATES WHEN THEY ARE FOUND

When the owner finds what he lost,
there's celebration throughout his entire household.

If finding the lost is such a delight to God, and we love Him,
how can we be content letting God be so concerned,
and not try to make Him happy?

Problem of Pharisees: *they don't care about God's happiness!*

They only care about themselves; they don't really love Him at all.

Why should they want to make Him happy?

*Is it possible that we don't care enough about God
to want to make Him happy?*

FIRST PARABLE: THE LOST SHEEP 15:3-7 Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴

"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? 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.

Contrast his attitude with the Pharisees' *uncaring* attitude!

Like the shepherd with one lost sheep,

Jesus' concern is not those who remain safe,
but the one who is lost, but able to be rescued.

The shepherd didn't know about "Little Bo Peep", but he knows about sheep.

He knows that lost sheep don't come home by themselves.

He isn't going to leave it alone to come home "dragging it's tail behind it!"

Lost sheep don't come home by themselves.

Someone has to bring them back.

He goes after the one, and keeps after it, UNTIL HE FINDS IT!

When he finds the lost one the celebration begins!

Great celebration over the return of the hopelessly lost

NOT over those who don't need help.

NOT over those who can help themselves!

SECOND PARABLE: THE LOST COIN 15:8-10 "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? 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."

Like a woman who loses one of her coins,

Jesus' concern is not those who remain securely where they belong;
but rather, that one who is away from God

but can be recovered and returned to his proper place.

She seeks, leaving no stone unturned, UNTIL SHE FINDS IT!

When she finds the lost one, the party begins.

Angels celebrate—perhaps singing Hallelujah Chorus—everytime a lost person turns to God! Do we? Pharisees *didn't*!

THIRD PARABLE: THE LOST SON 15:11-32 11-24 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ 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 men 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 men.' 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.

Like a father, who loses a son who wanders off,

waits and watches for him, and gladly receives him,
so God is anxious to restore those who go astray.

The son doesn't turn to His dad, until he realizes how great his need is.

The son never would have known how much he needed his Father's love, had he not wandered away and become desperate!

Plotting to make himself acceptable is useless.

The father doesn't accept the son because he's convinced

—because the son convinces him—twists his arm to take him back.

He accepts the son because he loves him

*and wants him home with the family! **THAT'S GOD'S LOVE!***

Jesus' concern is not those who remain secure where they belong.

He's concerned about the lost.

TWO APPLICATIONS—

1. FOR THE LOST—sinners—no matter how far away you've wandered, God wants you to come back.

Three ways of becoming lost:

- 1) Lost through wandering off
- 2) Lost through carelessness
- 3) Lost through deliberate defiant rebellion

It doesn't matter *how* we're lost, we're valuable—He wants us back.

2. FOR THE SECURE—in the fold, safe in His hand, securely at home with our Dad, He cares enough about the lost to go looking for them.

Stowell suggests three ways we should apply this passage.

If we're going to imitate God, who cares about the lost,

1. We must *REPENT* of our prejudice against sinners.
2. We must *OWN* the task of evangelism
3. We must *LEAVE* our comfort zone to seek the lost.

DO WE CARE ABOUT THOSE HE CONSIDERS SO PRECIOUS

that no effort is spared in seeking them?

In Guatemala we received invitations from unsaved neighbors to come to celebrations. People mingled with cocktails in hand. As the crowd changed from proper to noisy, we would question what we were doing there. I'd get that "what's a nice boy like you doing in a place like this" feeling. "What if people see me here? What will they think?" Struck with a desire to be "religiously correct" I'd struggle with the issue: what about the lost condition of these people? What should we do?

We can imitate the errors of the Pharisees:

Culturally, not want to associate with sinners

Theologically, think that God loves good people—like us!

Our theologically "correct" views of divine sovereignty and separation,

our ethically "correct" work load,

our socially "correct" selection of family and friends,

COULD be the very things that produce apathy and keep us from imitating God's heart, from reaching out to seek and to save what is lost!

GOD, THE LOSER, WEEPS. DO WE CARE? What will we do about it?

LESSONS FROM A FATHER'S LOVE

1. THE FATHER SHOWS NO PREFERENCE 15:12

The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

Preferential treatment—good child/bad child syndrome—basis for division and quarreling among siblings.

One child seeks attention by being good, the other by being bad.

But both get their attention.

This father doesn't show preference for the "good" son.

He loves them both—seeks the good of each

—and deals with them according to their need at the moment.

When one son turns rebellious and wants his share,
the Father divides the estate between them.

"Good" child—who stays home as expected—seethes on the inside.

But the Father's love is constant toward them both.

2. When the younger son packs to leave, the Father loves him enough that HE LETS HIM GO 15:13

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

He doesn't cling to him. —doesn't bawl him out —doesn't hang on

Notice— The son goes a long way off. He squanders everything.

He dedicates himself to loose living

The father seems to know his son well enough to believe
he'll work through it—and come back in time.

He can trust God with his son

***It took a moment of need to bring the son to his senses!* 15:14-17**

After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ 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 men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!

The son squandered it. He lost everything

He took his father's hard-earned fortune—and lost it all!

3. THE FATHER DEMONSTRATES NO ANGER

Did he hurt for his son? Sure he hurt!

Did he bawl him out? NO!

HIS SON IS MORE IMPORTANT TO HIM THAN HIS THINGS!

He's concerned about the person

—Not his reputation —Not his things

4. THE FATHER CONSISTENTLY MODELS LOVE FOR HIS SON

15:17-19 *"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men 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 men.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.*

The son has no fear to go home.

He knows his father will treat him fairly.

At least he can join the workers and trust his dad's just treatment.

When "the chips are down,"

his assurance of his father's fairness brings him back home.

5. THE FATHER ANXIOUSLY WAITS FOR HIS SON'S RETURN – HE SEES HIM COMING a long way off! 15:20

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.

He's always hoping for his return—never gives up hoping.

6. THE FATHER RECEIVES HIS WAYWARD SON JOYFULLY

15:20b-24 ... *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.*

He's so glad to have his son back, there's no anger

– no vengeance – no punishment

His son's home—that's all that matters.

7. THE FATHER REACHES OUT TO THE ANGRY BROTHER

25-32 *"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷*

'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ *"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, '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. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'*

³¹ *"My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² 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.'"*

He's concerned about response of "the good child" who resents his brother's return.

– The brother expects to *profit* from his brother's fall.

– He doesn't want him to come back.

Father loves the older brother too much to let him go on in his anger.

He reaches out to him.

– not in anger – not bawling him out

He tries to show him what His love is all about

– a **FATHER'S LOVE** isn't earned – it's given!

That's a lesson Pharisees have to learn

about God's love for outcasts—and His love for them!

IMITATING A FATHER'S LOVE – Application

1. GOD LOVES US LIKE THAT

Remember what this story's about.

It's one of three tales about a person who suffers loss,
and isn't willing to rest until they find it again.

They leave the secure ones at home
and seek the lost because they are valuable to them.

That's what God's love is like.

Though we have gone astray,

He wants to find us and bring us home again.

Then the celebration begins – because the lost has been found.

God loves us that much.

He lets us go. His love draws us back

He never stops waiting for us to turn back to Him.

2. WE OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER LIKE THAT

As parents – with our own children

As children of the Father Who care about the lost

– we join cause with Him, seeking those who are lost.

As brothers and sisters in Christ – with one another

– knowing how much "Dad" cares – we love one another also.