

## Luke 15:1-10

### Introduction

One of our most basic needs is to know that someone cares about us. When we're children, we want to know that our parents care about us. And it makes us sad when we hear about parents who don't care about their children. As we grow up and go to school, we want to know that our friends care about us. And it makes us sad when they act as though they don't and are mean to us. We want to know that grown-ups care about us. If you're a student, believe it or not, your teachers *do* care about you, and they want what's best for you.

But what about God? Does *he* care? The Bible says that he created the world we live in and gave us life. But what then? Is he interested in us? Does he care about who we are? Surely, we all want to know that the God who *made* us *cares* about us, too. It would be amazing to think that the God of the universe should care about you and me!

Jesus told these two stories to teach us that God doesn't just care about us...he will do everything it takes to bring us into a close, loving relationship with himself.

The first story is about a lost sheep.

### A lost sheep

Let's read the story again. Please look down at the passage with me. Starting at verse 3, which starts a new paragraph. **Then Jesus told them this parable: '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? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep."'**

We're to picture this man counting his flock of sheep. For those who are joining us from the Netherlands, I imagine your teachers have been doing a lot of counting on this trip already. Perhaps, when you got on the coach to come here, they counted you all on. And I hope that when you leave, they'll count you all again, to make sure that no-one gets left behind. But imagine that one of you has gone missing. One of you is nowhere to be seen. What would your teachers do? What they wouldn't do is just shrug their shoulders and say, 'Oh well. We've got most of them. That should be fine.' They might phone the police and report a missing person. Or, more likely, they'll start searching. They'll get the rest of you safely onboard your coach. And then they'll look everywhere they can think of. In the toilets. In the garden. Around the streets. Perhaps in the sweet shop.

That's what the man in our story does. He discovers that one of his sheep is missing. This sheep really matters to him. He's not going to abandon it or forget about it. Finding this

lost sheep is all that he thinks about. So, he leaves the other ninety-nine sheep in the open country – perhaps he’s got some friends who can look after them for him. And then he goes off in search of his lost sheep to find it and bring it home. And Jesus tells us the man’s reaction when, at last, at the end of a long search, he finds his lost sheep. He’s full of joy. At last, the sheep which was lost is found. He lifts it onto his shoulders and carries it home. And when he arrives, he calls all his neighbours to come and rejoice with him and to share his joy that the lost sheep has been found.

The next story is about a lost coin.

### A lost coin

Please look again at verse 8. Jesus goes on. **‘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? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.”’**

Each coin was worth about a day’s wages...so to lose one was a big deal. All that mattered to this woman was finding it.

Perhaps you’ve had that horrible feeling when you can’t find your wallet. You’ve changed your Euros into Pounds Sterling and put them in your wallet. But then you lose it. Suddenly, nothing else matters. You search everywhere. You look in your luggage. You check your pockets. You look under your bed. You think about where you’ve been and what you’ve done. That’s how this woman felt. Perhaps worse still, imagine how you would feel if you lost your mobile phone. Or imagine how you would feel, if you get to the end of this trip and you’re getting ready to go home. You reach into your suitcase to get your passport. But it’s not there. It’s missing. Perhaps you’ve all given your passports to your teacher to keep safe. How do you think your *teacher* would feel if one of them got lost?

That’s how we’re to imagine this woman. She searches everywhere. She lights a lamp so she can see into all the dark corners. She gets her broom and sweeps every inch of the floor. She searches and searches and doesn’t give up until she’s found it. And when, at last, she does find the lost coin, she calls all her friends and neighbours and invites them to come and celebrate the good news with her.

Here, then, are two stories about someone who does everything they can to find something that’s lost and then rejoices when it’s found. And Jesus told these stories for a reason; so that we might learn something about God’s concern for lost people, like you and me.

### You and me

Please look down again at the opening two verses and see what prompted Jesus to tell these stories.

Verse 1.

**Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering round to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.’**

They weren’t just muttering. They were criticising. The Pharisees were religious people who took the things of God very seriously. They took the Bible very seriously. They were strict about observing religious rules. They thought very highly of themselves and looked down on others, like tax collectors and sinners.

Tax collectors were hated by everyone because they worked for the Romans, who were the enemy. And the name ‘sinners’ was used for those who didn’t keep God’s laws. Men and women of bad character. Everyone agreed that tax collectors and sinners were a long way from God. And the Pharisees couldn’t understand why Jesus would spend time with them and even eat meals with them. And it’s in answer to their criticism that Jesus tells these two stories. He wants us to understand how much God cares about those who are lost. He’s like a shepherd who searches for a lost sheep, or a woman who searches for a lost coin, or a teacher who looks everywhere for a lost student, or a student who looks for a lost wallet.

God cares about those who are lost. And that’s great news for *us*, because by nature, we’re all lost. Like the tax collectors and the sinners, we’re all a long way from God. We’re like lost sheep, who have wandered far away from God and from his good design for our lives. We think we know better than God. We live life our own way, perhaps ignoring God altogether. It’s what the Bible calls sin. And it brings us under God’s judgement and the punishment of death.

But Jesus told us these stories to give us a glimpse into God’s heart. He doesn’t just shrug his shoulders and say, ‘Oh, well!’. He cares about lost people so deeply that he goes looking for them. And that’s why Jesus came into the world. He came to seek and save the lost. And Jesus cares so much about lost people that he even gave up his life on a cross to bring us home. On the cross, he died in our place. He took our punishment for us, if we trust in him. If you want to know how much God cares about you, look at the cross, where Jesus gave *his* life for *yours*.

And then, having died, he rose again to eternal life. Today, through the message about him, he still seeks those who are lost. He calls all of us to turn away from our sin and to live forever with him, through faith. And *this* is what causes God to rejoice. See how Jesus ends both stories. Having told us of the shepherd’s rejoicing, in verse 7 he says: **‘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 people who do not need to repent.’**

Jesus is saying that those who bring joy to God are not those who think they are basically good people who don’t need to change. It’s those who know they are not good people and

need to repent. He says the same in verse 10: **'In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'**

To repent is to stop living my own way and to start living God's way, through faith in Jesus. And when just one person does that, there's a great big party in heaven.

God made us to live in a loving relationship with him, enjoying him not just now but forever. It grieves him when we reject him. But he hasn't given up on us. He left the glory of heaven and came into the world to seek for us and save us, through his Son, Jesus Christ. And he rejoices in heaven when just one person comes back to him, through repentance and faith.

## Conclusion

So, these stories answer the question we started with: Does God care about you?

They teach us that God doesn't just care about you... he has come to search for you and bring you home. He has done everything it takes, even dying on a cross, to bring you back to himself. He loves you more than you can possibly dream.

So, the last question we *must* ask, is this: How will I respond to God's love? Will you just ignore it and carry on? Or will you find out more?

Perhaps, in your class, you have friends, who go to church and trust in Jesus. You're going to be spending a lot of time together over the next few days. Perhaps, on this trip, you might have opportunities to speak with them about what they believe and find out more. Please can I encourage you to do that.

And if you're not a student, and you want to find out more about Jesus, I would be very happy indeed to talk with you and let you know how you can do that here at Emmanuel.

Let me pray.

Loving Father, thank you for caring about us so much that you sent Jesus to die on a cross, so that we can be with you forever. Thank you that he took the punishment that our sin deserves so that we can be forgiven. Please help us to come to you through faith in him. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.