

## **Celebrating Lost and Found (Scripture: Luke 15:1–10)**

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Growing up in India, I had a strange experience in my life when I was in sixth grade. In India, one of the luxuries that middle-class families enjoy is having a paid helper or maid to do daily chores. Labor is cheap, and typically, poor women take these jobs. My mother hired a new maid, and after just ten days of starting work, she came home one day, sobbing and wailing uncontrollably, her voice choking with emotion. My mother comforted her and asked what had happened. With a heavy voice, she said that her Regi had not been seen since the previous night, and Regi was last seen sleeping on the porch. Our maid used the pronouns 'she' and 'her' to refer to Regi. Additionally, the name Regi is typically feminine. We assumed that Regi was a girl and, therefore, thought she might be her daughter. Panicking, we asked her to file a police report. A crowd gathered, looking at her in shock and concern. Our maid told us how good Regi was—obedient, caring, and loving. Her description led us to believe that it was her daughter who was missing. The police arrived and asked questions. First, they inquired about Regi's age. She said she was six years old. Our sympathies grew, and by then some of us joined our maid in crying. But I noticed something strange in the behavior of a butcher standing in the crowd; he looked nervous. The police later returned with a complaint, and the crowd dispersed. A few hours later, our maid came back very happy, holding a goat, and she joyfully told everyone that her Regi was back home. The butcher was the one who stole the goat—Regi—and released it, fearing police action.

Everyone was confused and puzzled. We failed to distinguish between a common noun and a proper noun, assuming a girl when it was actually a goat. Anyway, what was lost was found, and a celebration followed. We cheered our mistaken judgment. Our perspective on what was lost and found was clouded and flawed.

But God’s perspective on the lost is different from human understanding. God does not rejoice in judgment, no matter whether it is good or bad, but in redemption. And also, redemption is not a private matter for God. It is a communal triumph, hard-won and joyfully received.

### **1. God’s Perspective on the Lost**

The Pharisees criticized Jesus for welcoming “sinners” and eating with them. For them, the “lost” were people who were different from us and, therefore, to be avoided, judged, and dismissed. But Jesus flips their perspective:

- To God, the lost are not disposable; they are precious.
- A shepherd with 100 sheep still feels incomplete when even one goes missing.
- A woman with 10 coins feels poorer when one is gone.

The message is clear: no one is too small, too sinful, or too insignificant to be outside the circle of God’s care. Let us ponder the issues we are debating and fighting over, particularly those related to identities, differences, political parties, and power structures. The world is divided over these issues, and there is growing intolerance among nations, societies, and churches. It gives way to exclusionary attitudes and practices within every sphere of life, drawing a line between “us” and the “other.” Drawing upon this theme, this reflection examines how Jesus not only seeks the lost but celebrates their return—and how that

model prompts the nations, societies, and the church toward radical inclusion and shared joy. The term "sinners" in Luke's Gospel is historically laden with sectarian judgment and exclusion. Groups like the Pharisees often labeled those with different practices or beliefs as "other," thereby drawing boundaries that fractured communal life. Jesus disrupts that dynamic by staging two related parables where what is lost—whether a sheep or a coin—holds significant value by virtue of belonging.

## **2. The Cost of Searching (and the Value of Restoration)**

In each parable, the one who searches—the shepherd and the woman—not only recognizes the inherent value of what is lost but also takes active steps to find it: the shepherd leaves the ninety-nine; the woman lights a lamp in the darkness; both search diligently. Their efforts highlight that restoration isn't passive but costly, intentional, and personal. These actions demonstrate what inclusion must look like in society, nations, and the church: not just accepting those on the margins, but actively seeking them out, affirming their belonging, and welcoming them home. The "lost" are also entitled to receive God's grace. It is already given to them as a prevenient grace. It is God's grace that redeems humanity and is freely given to all, especially to the one who is "lost." It is a priceless gift given to us through Jesus' death. Whether we are redeemed or still sinners, each of us is deserving of these gifts, even though we are unworthy to receive them. Those considered sinners and labeled as the "other" should not be excluded from receiving this grace. The lost sheep and the lost coin are just as valuable as the sheep and coin that remain safe.

## **3. Joy as Communal Celebration—and Cosmic Rejoicing**

Jesus concludes both parables with a festive note: neighbors are called to rejoice in the shepherd's return, and friends are invited to celebrate

finding the lost coin. Likewise, heaven itself "rejoices over one sinner who repents." This joy shifts the focus from moral performance to relational restoration. Redemption is viewed as restoring a relationship through inclusion, acceptance, tolerance, and welcoming those who are different from what we believe and practice. Therefore, Jesus calls us to seek reconciliation actively. Redemption is both an individualistic and a collective experience. The process of redemption does not begin with viewing the "other" as transgressors, violators, aliens, tabooed, or aggressors. However, it is a process that starts with a psychological and social reevaluation of viewing the "other." Redemption is a two-way process, starting first with the excluders and then the return of the "other." It involves turning from judgment to humility, which requires action—listening, outreach, and creating space for healing. If the lost are to be found, we are expected to reframe our society, nations, and the churches not as a fortress but as a festival: When someone is restored or welcomed, the country, the people, and the church should rejoice, proclaiming the glad news that none are beyond God's embrace.

The challenge is clear: the Gospel calls us to stand with the lost, to proclaim to the world that all are valuable to God, and to claim our joy in restoration together. So today, let us celebrate—celebrate the God who never gives up on us, celebrate the community that rejoices over every life restored, and celebrate the truth that in Christ, what was lost is found, and what was broken is made whole.

**Amen.**