



Joyful And Ardent Labor In The Scriptures

Studying the Bible with humility and reverence.
Studying to get to know God in truth, then live accordingly.

Luke 15:1–10: It Is Personal

If you have been fathered by God, know that you are *and have always been* an object of personal concern to Him, an object of personal importance, an object of personal love. That is why He went after you, to find and rescue you from the eternal destruction you deserve for having violated His universal and unchanging rules of righteous living.

(Edited Transcript)

Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him [Jesus] to listen to Him. Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So He [Jesus] told them this parable, saying, "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' I tell you that in the same way, 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, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and 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 which I had lost!' In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:1–10).

Lord God, glorify Your name through the proper exposition of Your Word. Please, stand guard so that I represent You faithfully in order that, by getting to know You as You intend to be known, we may all be convicted, corrected, and edified. Amen.

The New American Standard Bible at Luke 15:1–10 reads:

- *sinners* and *sinner* four times (vv. 1, 2, 7, 10)
- *lost* and *loses* five times (vv. 4 *bis*, 6, 8, 9)
- *rejoicing*, *rejoice*, and *joy* five times (vv. 5, 6, 7, 9, 10)
- *finds* and *found* six times (vv. 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 *bis*)

Based on those keywords let us note four points:

1. the object lost
2. the personal interest of another in the object that is lost
3. the object found

4. the rejoicement over the recovery of the object that was lost

The last point is the main point. We see it in v. 7, "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents," and we see it in v. 10, "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Let us now examine and exposit the text.

Luke 15:1: "Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him [Jesus] to listen to Him."

This was not the first time the tax collectors and the sinners were seen with Jesus. An earlier occasion is at Mark 2:15-16:

And it happened that He [Jesus] was reclining at the table in his [Levi's] house, and many tax collectors and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. When the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they said to His disciples, "Why is He eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners?"

The tax collectors are distinguished from the sinners in these verses. But were not the tax collectors sinners too? Yes, in The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector at Luke 18:9-14 we find a tax collector humbly confessing himself as just that. Luke 18:13 reads, "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!'"

The tax collectors are distinguished from the sinners at the occasions of Mark 2:15-16 and Luke 15:1 perhaps because they were held in particular contempt by the Jews; tax collectors worked for Rome, for Gentiles! Any Jew (like Matthew/Levi at Matt. 9:9; Mark 2:14; Luke 5:27) who would collect taxes or revenue from other Jews for Gentiles would likely be viewed as a traitor. So in the self-righteous eyes of both the Pharisees and the scribes, the lowest of the low were coming to Jesus.

Luke 15:2: "Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

Convinced of their own righteousness, convinced of their own right standing with God, especially in contrast to the actions and beliefs of others, these Pharisees and scribes distinguished themselves from sinners. These are religious leaders of Israel grumbling (amongst themselves or perhaps emphatically) about the very thing Jesus came to do: "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10).

Luke 15:3: "So He [Jesus] told them this parable, saying,"

The parable was told because of or in response to the content of the grumbling in v. 2. On this occasion Jesus tells a parable, but at Mark 2:17 He answered with the maxim, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick"; He then applied that maxim to His mission by saying, "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

According to Grant Osborne in *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, Jesus' parables "center on life situations as illustrating kingdom realities."¹ Think on this. Ten times in Matthew's gospel Jesus says "the kingdom of heaven is like" or "the kingdom of heaven may/will be compared" then follows with a life situation to illustrate divine truth.

Now it is unwise to press the details of a parable too hard, if at all. For there is a real danger of becoming lost in conjecture. That is to say, if one is not cautious when interpreting parables one may wind up drawing conclusions based on guesswork or imagination.

For example, it has been said that since animals have a sense of awareness, then the lost sheep in Luke 15:4 might represent those who *know* they are "incomplete," they *know* something is missing from their lives but have neither the power nor resources to fill that void and find themselves. It has also been said that since the coin in Luke 15:8 is an inanimate object that is lost (but nearby), then it might represent those who are *unaware* they are lost (but "near" God in the sense of their Christian background and church membership).

That, I believe, is reading meaning into the details of the text. That is not to be done. And that we will not do. Suffice it to say the main point of this parable is rejoicement in Heaven over one's repentance that leads to salvation.

Now let us inspect the parable.

Luke 15:4: "What man among you, if he has a hundred sheep and has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?"

Notice first, the object lost is *one* sheep, illustrative of *one* sinner. Not a mass of sinners, just one.

Second, notice the personal interest in the object that is lost. The man leaves ninety-nine behind to go after the one.

Personal interest is accentuated by the type of search conducted. It is no cursory, hurried, hasty search; rather, the man sets out in search of his one lost sheep *until* he finds it.

Luke 15:5: "When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."

The man's search does not end in failure. He succeeds in finding the object of personal interest to him—and not one negative word comes from his mouth. He does not upbraid or revile the creature, "You stupid sheep! What are you doing out here when you're supposed to be over there?" Nor does he drive it back home with a staff or beat it as if to say, "Now get back over there! Move it!" No. At the recovery of the object that was lost, out from within the man comes neither rebuke nor reprimand nor reproach but rejoicing!

Luke 15:6: "And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!'"

"Rejoice with." The context indicates a joy that is marked by enthusiastic happiness or festive happiness. "Festive happiness" meaning you are so happy that you have found what was lost that you throw a feast, a festival, or a celebration so that you may enjoy your happiness with others.

Festive happiness is the very thing seen in Luke 15:24. The inception and unfolding of the sinner's repentance in Luke 15:17–19 reaches its climax in vv. 20–21: The younger son "came to his father" and "said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your

sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" Then festive happiness over the sinner repenting comes in v. 24 where the father says, "'This son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate."

Luke 15:7: "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Is this to say some people do not need to repent? No. The context suggests Jesus' words are ironical. There is a sharp difference between the mind-set of both the Pharisees and the scribes and what is really true: they held they were righteous with no need of repentance but that was simply false.

Think of the attitude of the prayer of the Pharisee in The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in Luke 18:9–14. We cited Luke 18:13 earlier, the attitude of the prayer of the tax collector, but now take a look at vv. 11–12: "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'"

There is no need of repentance in the mind of this "righteous" person.

But what does Luke 18:14 tell us? "I [Jesus] tell you, this man," which man? The Pharisee? No! The tax collector, standing at a distance, not even willing to look up to Heaven but beating his breast saying, "God, be merciful to me, sinner that I am," this man, "went to his house justified rather than the [Pharisee]."

Seeing himself for what a human is before his Creator, Sustainer, and Judge, it was the self-contemning, penitent, spiritually destitute tax collector who went home in a state of having been put in the right with God.

Then what does this say of that Pharisee? Despite his mind-set, despite his sense of no need of repentance, despite his prayer, despite his claims—even if his claims were true!—he went home in the wrong with God, for he was unwilling to confess that he was as destitute as the tax collector, a naked sinner before God in need of His mercy.

What about you? Do you regard yourself as a generally good person, that all is cool with you and God because you are nothing like those you perceive as villains and scoundrels of the earth?

Do you not know, my friend, that unless your righteousness far exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven? (Matt. 5:20)

If you are hoping to or trusting that you will enter the kingdom of heaven because you are not as bad as someone else, you are going to walk away from this paper in the wrong with God—except on the condition that you repent as the tax collector. And I tell you, there will be more joy in Heaven over you and your repentance than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to repent!

Now one might say, "Thomas, Jesus died in behalf of all. It's not as personal as you're making it. Second Corinthians 5:14–15 says He 'died for all.' First Timothy 2:6 says He 'gave Himself as a ransom for all.' Hebrews 2:9 says He experienced death 'for everyone.' Even John 10:11 says He laid down his life for 'the sheep,' plural!"

This is true. It is true that One died in behalf of all. However, reflect on the man in this parable. He has 100 sheep. For the sake of illustration, consider someone today who has, say, many pets. If one were to comment, "Sir, you have a *lot* of pets," the owner would, perhaps, reply, "Yes, I love them all." The owner holds an all-embracing love for his pets, love for them all.

But, what if *one* of those pets goes missing? Will not the owner be crying out, "Bristol! Bristol! Where are you?" "Georgette! Georgette! Please come home, Georgette!"

That is personal love! Personal concern! Personal interest! So, too, it is with Jesus for those whom the Father gives to Him.

Galatians 2:20: "I [Paul] have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved *me* and gave Himself up for *me*."²

That is personal substitution!

When the blessed Lord Jesus Christ went to His execution, yes, One died in behalf of all; but it is also true that He died for each of His own individually.

The Son of God, out of His personal love for Paul, voluntarily substituted Himself for Paul, the Just for the unjust, and thus bore the blame, was wounded, crushed, endured the punishment, bled, and died, paying the penalty as if He Himself were responsible for every single sin of Paul. Think of it. Picture it. And while doing so, consider that if you are an actual Christian and commit an act of sin willfully, it is tantamount to standing before the Cross, watching your Substitute suffering and telling God the Father to crush the Christ harder!

Personal substitution is not all; divine mercy is personal: "I [Paul] was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet *I* was shown mercy" (1 Tim. 1:13).³

Not only personal substitution, not only personal mercy, but also personal indwelling!

John 6:56: "He who eats My [Jesus'] flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I *in him*."⁴

Singular! In the individual!

John 15:5: "He who abides in Me [Jesus] and I *in him*, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you [the Eleven] can do nothing."⁵

1 John 3:24: "The one who keeps His [God's] commandments abides in Him [God], and He [God] *in him*."⁶

1 John 4:15: "Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides *in him*, and he in God."⁷

1 John 4:16: "God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides *in him*."⁸

Dear reader, if you have been fathered by God you are *and have always been* an object of

personal concern to Him, an object of personal importance, an object of personal love. That is why He went after you, to find and rescue you from the eternal destruction you deserve for having wandered from the path, being unable to find the way.

Returning to Luke 15.

Luke 15:8: "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?"

It is not that God comes to realize that He does not know where you went then searches diligently all over to find you. No, the point is that God *will* find you—wherever you are at. That is His desire. That is His intent. If you are one of His He will find you, no matter how far-gone you might be.

Luke 15:9–10: "When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost!' In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

If you are one whom God by grace has ransomed from sin, triumphant joy arose in Heaven on the occasion of your personal rescue from condemnation and eternal ruin!

So the search in Luke 15:8–9, too, ends in joyful success, the dear object never to be lost again. For out of all who come to Jesus for remission and eternal life, Jesus will not lose one of them:

All that the Father gives Me [Jesus] will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him [the Father] who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that *of all that He has given Me I lose nothing*, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day (John 6:37–40).⁹

German hymnist Henriette Luise von Hayn penned in 1778 what came to be known in English as "I Am Jesus' Little Lamb." Allow me to close with the hymn's first stanza, for it views Jesus treating or noticing the believer individually, just as we have seen from Scripture.

I am Jesus' little lamb,
Ever glad at heart I am;
For my Shepherd gently guides *me*,
Knows *my* need, and well provides *me*,
Loves *me* every day the same,
Even calls *me* by *my* name.¹⁰

King of the ages, how possibly can I respond even adequately to such personal love from You, to Your personal interest in me, to You handing the Prince of Peace over to death in my behalf, to the mercy You show me as an individual, to You and Your Son for having taken up Your abode with me?

My Lord, please, by the Holy Spirit bless these biblical truths to my heart so that I live for You more than I have, that I work for You with thankfulness on account of the great and marvelous work You accomplished both for me and in me, the fallen and sinful creature that I am, who but by Your grace would be damned eternally.

The glory and the honor and the power be to You, Lord God, forevermore. Amen.

Notes

¹ Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 292.

² Emphasis added.

³ Emphasis added.

⁴ Emphasis added.

⁵ Emphasis added.

⁶ Emphasis added.

⁷ Emphasis added.

⁸ Emphasis added.

⁹ Emphasis added.

¹⁰ Emphasis added.
