

*Text of a message delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 5th July 2026.
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Lost & Found: Luke 15:1-32

Luke 15 reveals the heart of God as one who relentlessly pursues the lost, values every individual as deeply precious, and celebrates joyfully when even one person is restored to Him through grace. In response, Jesus invites us to see ourselves and others through the Father's eyes - embracing His welcome, sharing His concern for 'the one,' and joining His celebration of redemption.

Introduction: King & Kingdom Come: The Gospel According to Luke

Welcome back to the third section of our series called, **King and Kingdom Come: The Gospel According to Luke**. As we've journeyed through Luke so far, three threads have kept repeatedly appearing:

1. **Firstly, we've seen that God works through ordinary people** - shepherds, fishermen, tax collectors, women, outsiders, and sinners. Again-and-again God chooses ordinary people and invites them into His extraordinary purposes.
2. **Secondly, we've seen that God's Spirit empowers God's people for God's mission.** The Holy Spirit is everywhere. God doesn't simply give people a task and wish them luck, He empowers them, leads them, and transforms them so they can participate in what He's doing in the world.

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3. **And thirdly, we've seen that the Kingdom of God changes everything.** Jesus turns expectations upside down as He shows that the kingdom of God consistently surprises us and is very different to our view of the kingdoms in this world.

The next section: Luke Chapter 15

Today we come to Luke 15 where we see that all three themes collide in one remarkable chapter, where we see a shepherd, a woman, and a father - three ordinary people, in three stories, with extraordinary revelations about the heart of God.

In many ways, Luke 15 is the beating heart of everything Luke has been showing us about Jesus. If you want to know what kind of king Jesus is, look at Luke 15. If you want to know what matters in His kingdom, look at Luke 15. If you want to know how God feels about people who are far from Him, look at Luke 15.

And Luke tells us exactly why Jesus told these stories. At the beginning of the chapter he writes in Verse 1-2, ***The tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus, but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*** The issue wasn't that Jesus welcomed sinners, the issue was that He welcomed the wrong sinners - the kind of sinners that respectable religious people preferred to avoid, and Luke 15 is Jesus' response to their muttering, and His answer reveals a God who is far more welcoming, far more gracious, and far more joyful than what many people imagine.

Through the telling of three popular parables, Jesus reveals the heart of an extravagant God, and three simple truths emerge:

1. **God pursues the one**
2. **Every one matters to God**
3. **God celebrates the one**

We're going to look at these three themes and then we'll see how they apply to our lives a long time after Jesus spoke these parables for the first time.

Theme 1: God pursues the one

The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3-7)

Jesus first tells a story about a lost sheep in Luke 15:3-7. A shepherd loses one sheep out of a hundred. Now we're a sheep-loving nation - I grew up watching Country Calendar and A Dog's Show and what most of us in Aotearoa know is that sheep aren't bright animals. No one has ever looked at a sheep and thought, *"That sheep's a strategic thinker."* Sheep wander. They get distracted. They follow the wrong thing. They drift. They get lost. And this is often how people drift away from God.

Sometimes we might think that every person who moves away from faith does so through some dramatic act of rebellion, and while that's occasionally true, more often it happens slowly. Nobody wakes up one morning and decides to be far from God, most people drift one small decision at a time. The songs change. Life gets busy. We get hurt. We get disappointed. We drift. One day becomes one week, one week becomes one month, and over time people can find themselves a long way from where they once were spiritually.

But what strikes me in this story is not the wandering sheep but the shepherd's determination. He leaves the ninety-nine *in the wilderness* and goes after the one that is lost **until he finds it**. Interestingly no timeline is given; the pursuit doesn't end until the lost sheep is found.

The Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)

Then Jesus tells a story about a lost coin in Verses 8-10. A woman loses one silver coin out of ten. The coin was worth about one day's pay, so it's not insignificant, but then again if we lost one day's pay, most of us could still probably get by. But this woman, she lights a lamp, she sweeps the house, and searches carefully **until she finds it**. Again, no timeline is given.

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The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Thirdly, Jesus tells a story about a father and two sons, but what happens in this story is perhaps one of the most shocking moments in all of Scripture.

In Verses 11-32 a son demands his inheritance, leaves home, wastes everything, and eventually finds himself feeding pigs. He reaches the end of himself and decides to return home and in one of the most counter-cultural and dramatic scenes in the entire New Testament, Verse 20 says, ***But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him ...*** From this picture we could imagine that every morning the father looked down the road and every evening he looked down the road. Another day. Another disappointment. Another sunset. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe never. But he never stops looking. And when he sees his son, he ***was filled with compassion for him...*** and he does something extraordinary, ***He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.***

That doesn't sound unusual to us, but in Jesus' world, dignified older men didn't run. Running meant lifting your robe, exposing your legs, and risking public embarrassment. The father abandons dignity to welcome his son, even before the son can prove himself, even before he can earn anything, even before he can work his way back into the family.

The father embraces him and immediately restores him. He honours him and welcomes him home. **This is the upside-down Kingdom Jesus came to announce.** In the kingdoms of this world acceptance is usually earned, but in God's Kingdom **grace comes first**. The father is extravagant. Lavish. This is actually what being prodigal means – this parable should really be called The Parable of the Prodigal Father. And perhaps that's the real scandal of Luke 15. Not that a son comes home, but that a father watched and waited for him, longing for his return, and then welcomed him so completely.

Last week we heard Liam's testimony about coming home to Jesus, especially as it related to attending a Windsor Alpha course. I loved it. His very first words were, *'Recently I found my way back to Christianity.'* Such powerful words ... Jesus had been waiting for him all along, pursuing

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him even, but Liam had to find his way back. I've had that testimony buzzing around in my head all week! If you didn't hear it, check it out on our social media channels – you'll be buzzing after hearing it too.

So in these three stories we see that:

- The **shepherd** searched for the **one** lost sheep.
- The **woman** searched for the **one** lost coin.
- The **father** watched and waited for the **one** lost son. Different action, same heart.

Together these stories reveal the lengths God will go to bring lost people home.

God pursues us ... in Jesus

One of the most remarkable truths of the Christian faith is that the story of salvation begins not with humanity searching for God but with God searching for humanity. From the opening pages of Scripture, after Adam and Eve have hidden themselves in shame, God comes into the garden and asks (in Genesis 3:9), *Where are you?* and throughout the Bible we meet a God who takes the initiative, a God who moves towards broken people, a God who pursues rather than withdraws.

That pursuit reaches its ultimate expression in Jesus Himself. God doesn't merely send a message. He comes. He enters our world. He walks our streets. He sits at our tables. He seeks and saves the lost.

Perhaps some of you need to hear that today. Maybe you've drifted. Maybe faith feels distant. Maybe disappointment or grief or failure has left you wondering whether God is still interested in you. Luke 15 reminds us that God has not stopped looking. You may have stopped looking for Him, but He's never stopped looking for you. Come back, and you might you be able to sing the line of the song we know so well, ***I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see.***

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Theme 2: Every one matters to God

The second theme that stands out in Luke 15 is the extraordinary value that God places on the one. Notice how the stories escalate:

1. A shepherd loses **one sheep out of a hundred** – 1%
2. A woman loses **one coin out of ten** – 10%
3. A father loses **one son out of two** – 50%

With each story the loss becomes more personal and more costly. Jesus is drawing us closer-and-closer to the Father's heart. A sheep is valuable, a coin is valuable, but a child is priceless. Jesus is making a profound point: **Every one matters deeply to God**. Because we live in a world of numbers - Auckland has more than 1.7 million people, churches talk about attendance, governments talk about demographics, and businesses talk about customers, it's easy to see people as analytics and statistics. But God never sees a crowd. **God sees every one**.

He sees the one teenager wrestling with anxiety and wondering where they belong. He sees the one exhausted parent trying to hold everything together. He sees the one person sitting quietly in church carrying grief that nobody else knows about. He sees the one neighbour next door who appears to have everything but feels empty inside. God values the one person everyone else has given up on. The one person others avoid. The one person others write off. The one person others think will never change. **God sees the one, because the ones matter to Him**.

In Luke 15 we see that:

- The shepherd leaves ninety-nine because **one** matters.
- The woman searches for a coin because **one** matters.
- The father waits for his son because **one** matters.

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Who's your one?

I wonder who your one is. Who has God placed in your world? Not humanity in general. Not Auckland in general. One person. One colleague. One neighbour. One family member. One friend. Some**one** who has drifted. Some**one** who is searching. Some**one** who has never truly encountered Jesus, because every story of transformation begins with **one** person. Every baptism has **one** name attached to it. Every testimony has **one** face behind it. Every life changed by Jesus was once somebody's one.

At Windsor we often talk about mission, but mission is not ultimately about programmes, strategies, or events. Those things can be helpful, but mission begins with people because people matter to God. That's why we say **one life at a time**.

Over a decade ago one of our pastors at the time, Andy Doncaster, built a box for a service we had back then when we were talking about mission. It's hung around in the office ever since. I still remember the one name I put in the box. I still pray for him, I still reach out to him. There's not a dramatic conversion story yet, but I'm trying to be persistent like the shepherd, like the woman, like the father.

Maybe you could write down one name. Put it in your phone. Put it in your Bible. Put it on your fridge. Put it in the box. And pray for that person every day for the next month, or ... longer.

Just one person. It might be you that God is pursuing, but the mission of God is about the ones.

Theme 3: God celebrates the one

Thirdly, there's something remarkable about these three stories – they all end the same way.

- In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the shepherd ***calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'***
- In the Parable of the Lost Coin, the woman, ***calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'***

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- In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the father says, ***Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.***

Every story ends in celebration. In these stories Jesus reveals a Father who delights in restoration. A Father who celebrates redemption. A Father whose heart is filled with joy when lost people are found. Heaven celebrates what God values.

This raises an important question for us: What do we celebrate? Because what we celebrate reveals what we truly value. There's nothing wrong with celebrating a graduation, a new job, or an All Blacks victory. Churches celebrate attendance, finances, programmes, and buildings. None of those things are bad, but according to Jesus, heaven's greatest celebrations occur when people encounter grace, when relationships are restored, when lives are transformed, and when people find their way home to God. If heaven celebrates those things, then surely, we should too.

The older brother

As Luke 15 draws to a close, one detail stands out. The sheep and the coin have been found. The younger son has come home, and the celebration has begun. Music is playing, the table is set, and the father is rejoicing. Everything in these stories moves toward joy.

But Jesus doesn't end the story there. There's still one person outside. The older brother. And what's striking is how unnoticed he seems to be. The house is full of celebration but he's still standing in the driveway. He's near the music, near the table, near the father, yet still outside the celebration.

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And Jesus leaves the story hanging there. Because now the question moves beyond the page and into our lives. Will we come inside? Will we celebrate what the Father celebrates, or will we stay at a distance from the joy of God even while it's happening right in front of us?

One of the quiet warnings in this story is that we can be close to the Father yet still miss His heart. The younger son is lost in rebellion; the older son is lost in religion. One ran from home, while the other stayed home but refused to join the celebration. Jesus gently presses the question: will you enter the Father's joy?

Luke 15 is not only about what God does for the lost, but also about God inviting the people who are found to not just receive grace, but to reflect grace. People who don't just celebrate their own forgiveness but learn to celebrate the forgiveness of others.

And we're left with a picture of the Father. A Father who runs. A Father who waits. A Father who welcomes. A Father who opens the door and says, "*Come in.*" There's no lecture, no hesitation, no barriers, no conditions. Just joy, and grace, and welcome.

Conclusion

So where are you in the story?

- Maybe you're the younger son. You know what it is to be far from home, and something in you knows it's time to come back. There's still a Father who runs toward you.
- Maybe you're the older brother. You've done the right things, stayed close, held things together ... but somewhere along the way, joy has drained out of your faith, and it's hard to celebrate what God is doing in others. There's still a Father who wants you to experience the joy of celebration.
- Or maybe you're simply being invited again into the Father's heart. Not to perform. Not to prove. Not to compare. But just to come in and enjoy.

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Jesus is clear in this last section: you can't stay outside the party and claim to love the Father. The Father's heart is always toward the lost, and the Father's house is always full of celebration when they're found.

So maybe the invitation today is simply to come home. To step back into grace. To step back into joy. To step back into the Father's heart. Or maybe the invitation is to lay down whatever keeps you standing outside the celebration. If we learn to see what the Father sees, and love what the Father loves, and celebrate what the Father celebrates, then something begins to change in us. Not just our mission. Not just our church. But in our hearts.

And to remind you again of the question that I think a lot of us can ask: Who's our one?

One person. One name. One life that matters deeply to God. Because heaven still rejoices every time one person comes home, and maybe the invitation of Luke 15 is as simple as this: don't just admire that truth ... live it. Carry one name. Pray for one person. Love one person toward Jesus. Because that's what it means to live in the kingdom of God; to be people who carry the heart of the Father into the world, and who trust Him to do what only He can do.

Amen.

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Reflecting on Sunday 28th June 2026:

Last week Pastor Caleb Finlayson talked about how we use the gifts that God has given us to be a Spirit-filled community, showing what God can do in a local church. What gifts have you identified in yourself and how can you put them to use for the benefit of others?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. Which character in Luke 15 do you most identify with right now - the younger son, the older brother, the shepherd, the woman, or the father? Why?
2. Can you think of a time when God was pursuing you, even when you had drifted or weren't paying much attention to Him? What was that experience like?
3. Who is your 'one' - someone God may be calling you to pray for, encourage, or journey alongside? What is one practical step you could take this week?
4. Luke 15 shows that heaven celebrates when lost people are found. What does that teach us about God's heart, and how might it shape what we value and celebrate as followers of Jesus?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at care@windsorpark.org.nz; **we're better together** and **no perfect people are allowed**.

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. **The Bible Project** does an excellent job of placing Luke 15 within the larger story of Luke's Gospel. Their videos and articles help people see how the lost sheep, the lost coin, and lost sons fit into Jesus' wider mission of seeking and saving the lost. Click below to read a section on Luke 9:51 – Luke 19:27 and follow the links for further resources.
<https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-luke/#luke-951-1927-jesus-inclusion-of-outsiders-scandalizes-leaders>
2. If you're looking for a good book to read, Tim Keller's book, **The Prodigal God: Rediscovering the Heart of the Christian Faith** is an excellent book based in Luke 15. Click here to see more information:
https://timothykeller.com/books/the-prodigal-god?utm_source=chatgpt.com
3. If you want to watch something visual, this short dramatised **video of the Prodigal Son** can be excellent to provoke some discussion in your home of Life Group:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_QCQ5i7NKs