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Soul.Harvest: One

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Luke 15:1—7

Luke 15:1 "Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 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."

Search engines are big business. Some of us have spent incredible amounts of hours searching for some of the weirdest stuff. But Jesus said if we follow *Him*, we're supposed to search for people, and to share our faith with them. But there are barriers that prevent people coming to faith, and barriers that prevent us from going after them, like the shepherd does. **What are some of the barriers that people must cross to become Biblical Christians?**

- **The image barrier**—a negative image. That church is irrelevant and boring. Many people today are okay with Jesus, they just don't like church. They don't like institutions, they don't like what the church has done, or hasn't done.
- **The cultural barrier**—a negative image. The language and the music doesn't engage them. (Acts 15). A lot of people don't understand our culture and churchy lingo. Church, how are we doing on this one?
- **The Gospel barrier**—the fact is, when Jesus himself gave the message that the Kingdom of God is here, and we just need to turn from ourselves and believe in him; some said yes, some said no. It's the same today. But if someone doesn't get past the "church-image" barrier or the "church culture" barrier, they'll never have the opportunity to encounter the most amazing message of their lives. And that's a barrier between themselves and God.
- **The Total commitment barrier**—this is holiness. Laying down your whole agenda and putting it at Jesus' feet. Surrender. As our Savior, Jesus offered himself for our forgiveness to make us right, no longer enemies with God. As our Lord, Jesus is our first love, our loyalty, our agenda, and our schedule goes to following him. When people become Christians, they proclaim Jesus Christ as "Savior" and "Lord." But it's more "Savior" than "Lord." Most of us have not yet accepted God's agenda for our lives. Many of us have missed this here, because we treat Jesus and church as one of our many agenda items, like one slice of our pie, rather than the center of our lives, like the whole crust.

C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* "The Church exists for nothing else but to draw people to Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became humanity for no other purpose. It is even doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose."

In our Soul.Harvest sermon series, we are affirming this church's mission to "*Go and make disciples of Jesus*

Christ.” It’s our main business. We’re discovering that this is the whole purpose of Christianity. As Peter Drucker says, there are really only two questions we need to ask: What’s your main business? And how’s business?

No single chapter in the Bible better demonstrates the heart of God and the focus of Jesus’ mission than Luke 15. To understand this mission you only need to look at the folks Jesus spent significant time with. Luke 15:1 & 2. *"Now all of the tax collectors and sinners (that includes me right there) were coming near to listen to Jesus, and the Pharisees and Scribes were grumbling and saying he welcomes sinners and eats with them."* So we're told right here in the beginning of this chapter that it's the religious folks who aren't understanding the heart of God. It's the religious folks that are missing the mission.

What we see in this story are the **different priorities** between the religious folk and Jesus, who is demonstrating the priority of God. The Pharisees have really gotten a bad rap. They were formed because the priesthood in Jerusalem had become so corrupted. Greek culture had watered down people’s view of Scripture. Pharisees were non-professionals who cared deeply about God. They felt that all of life should come under the law of God. They were against this separation of church and state. God is God and everything on planet Earth should be under the law of God. They were the purists. They were a movement that was a reaction to the watered down religion of the Sadducees. The Sadducees were the educated, professional priests who had been polluted by materialism and cultural humanism. The Pharisees focused on rules and laws. They were committed to the scriptures. They thought that knowing the Scriptures was the same as knowing God. Jesus said to the Pharisees, *"You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life. Life is not in the Scriptures. Life is in me, yet you refuse to come to me."* John 5:39—40. Because they were focused on rules and laws and knew the Scriptures inside out, they focused on the righteous. In other words, they believed that God rejoices in those who keep the Law, and thus God condemns those who don't. They believed that the angels in heaven strike up the band for those who are obedient. That’s what’s so crazy about this parable. Jesus says the angels in heaven strike up the band for the ninety-nine who are keeping the law. No, Jesus says the party starts when one repents who is not where they are supposed to be. Religious people focus on rules and laws. Jesus focuses on knowing God and loving people. Jesus said, *"You all cling to the letter of a particular passage while you miss the meaning of scripture as a whole. And the meaning of scripture as a whole is to love God and grab people."*

In this parable, Jesus never goes back to the ninety-nine sheep. The ninety-nine sheep are a set-up. Jesus has divided the flock into one sheep and ninety-nine sheep, and he's not trying to make two different groups. You know, ninety-nine who don't get lost, and one who does. I think the real meaning of the one and the ninety-nine is that the One lost sheep is the whole human race as it really is. And the ninety-nine "found" sheep who never get lost are the whole human race as we *think* we are. And the ninety-nine; therefore, are not a real piece of business in this. The one lost sheep stands for all of us, and this says that the only thing the shepherd—God, is interested in, is going after the lost. He doesn't want anything else. And then Jesus says, *"I say to you that there is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."* The proof of this is, of course, Did you ever meet any of those ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance? No, you didn't. There isn't one in the whole world.

Why did Jesus tell this story?

- Jesus proved that the good shepherd would go after a sheep; but in this case, it was something *infinitely more precious* than all the flocks of sheep in the entire Middle East. In this case, it was *the immortal soul* of every person he sought to save. “Whatever you would go after that you love, and follow in its track until you find it, how much more may I go after lost souls, and follow them until I can rescue them?” Your thing may not be sheep. But whatever *it* is, make sure you’re not into it more than you are into sharing your faith in Christ with people.
- Jesus said *"The shepherd lays down his life for his sheep, that they might have abundant life."* John 10:11, 10. The hired hand runs away, but the Shepherd abandons all else until he finds his lost One.
- Even when they wander, the sheep are *his* long before they know it.
- The minute you receive Christ, you are found. But you will never-not need Him.

5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home.

- The sheep is on the shepherd's shoulders. The weight of the sheep is his to bear. The Son of God became the servant to the sons and daughters of man! The maker of heaven and earth bowed his shoulders to bear the weight of sinners.
- His shoulders could have carried a great cape, a king's sash. But instead he carried the weight of the world. Every needy person, every lost, lonely, tired of the fight, drowning, empty, over-committed, frustrated, angry person: on his shoulders, if they allow Jesus to raise them up.
- And He gave the sheep rest.
- Jesus says "The penalty of their guilt has been laid on my shoulders that it may never be laid on them." (Isn't it interesting that our stress so often shows up physically in our shoulders?)
- Where are you in this story? I'll never think of myself as one of the 99 again. They don't exist! Then who? If you and I could ever *not* be that One, the lost sheep, maybe we could work with the shepherd, seeking to rescue and restore others. But there is one other part you can play... If we're not the One, and we're not the shepherd, the only other part to play in the story is the one who rejoices with the shepherd.

"Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'"
Luke 15:6

- Be a great partier, a great rejoicer, all for those who get brought back. When you first come to faith in Christ, some people are skeptical aren't they? But there will be some good people who celebrate! That's the role we can play. Share the joy of heaven, and enter into the music and dancing and delight when that lost One who was dead in sin is brought to new life in Him.

Let all our hearts go forth in love toward Jesus, who gave all his heart to work for our souls. As we filled all his heart, let him fill all our hearts! [Meditate during "You Raise Me Up", while a sheep is carried among the congregation....