

## Lost

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Proper 19C | 1 Timothy 1; Luke 15

Have you ever been lost?

I remember getting lost once when I was 10 years old.

We were on vacation England in 1972;

as I recall we were site seeing at a castle in Edinburgh when I got separated from my parents.

I don't recall exactly what happened or how I got found.

I just remember the feeling of relief when I did,

and my parent's fear that something had happened to me.

What are your experiences of being lost?

What stories could you tell?

Sometimes, we know that we're lost.

Othertimes, we may not even be aware

we've been separated from those we love.

Joe Stowell tells the story of a time when his family was on their annual Christmas trek to Chicago:

*Each year we brought our family to spend time with Grandpa and Grandma and to visit the museums.*

*This year we decided to finish our Christmas shopping at suburban Woodfield Mall.*

*In the midst of all the fun and excitement, one of us noticed that*

*little three-and-a-half-year-old Matthew was gone.*

*Terror immediately struck our hearts.*

*We had heard the horror stories:*

*little children kidnapped in malls, rushed to a restroom, donned in different clothes and altered hairstyle,*

*and then swiftly smuggled out, never to be seen again.*

*We split up, each taking an assigned location.  
Mine was the parking lot. I'll never forget that night —  
kicking through the newly fallen snow,  
calling out his name at the top of my lungs.  
I felt like an abject fool,  
yet my concern for his safety  
outweighed all other feelings.  
Unsuccessful, I trudged back to our meeting point.  
My wife, Martie, had not found him, nor had my mother.  
And then my dad appeared,  
holding little Matthew by the hand.*

*Our hearts leapt for joy!  
Interestingly enough, Matthew was untraumatized.  
He hadn't been crying.  
To him, there had been no problem.  
I asked my father where he had found him.  
"The candy counter," he replied.  
"You should have seen him.  
His eyes came just about as high as the candy.  
He held his little hands behind his back  
and moved his head back and forth,  
surveying all the delicious options."  
Matthew didn't look lost. He didn't know he was lost.  
He was oblivious to the phenomenal danger he was in.<sup>i</sup>*

What are your experiences of being lost?  
What stories could you tell?  
Throughout our life we are quite often lost,  
if the truth be told.

We are typically at a loss, lost,  
when we experience something new, something unknown;  
when we go down paths we've never taken,  
into ventures of which we cannot see the ending.  
I was lost the first time I fell in love.  
I was lost when I married Karen.  
I was really lost when Abby was born.  
I was lost when my father died  
and I began to manage my mother's financial affairs;  
I was lost again two weeks ago  
when we got off the plane with Amy.  
I'm often at loss at how best to act  
as a father, husband, son, pastor.

Being lost, at a loss, in unfamiliar territory  
is at the heart of what it means to be human,  
and at the heart of today's parable from Luke's gospel.  
As we hear these parables we may think  
they're talking about someone else;  
you know, those who are *really* lost –  
the poor, lonely, downcast.  
You know – the *losers* Jesus came to save.  
I once saw a T-shirt that had that sentiment written on it:  
*Jesus is for losers*  
it said in great big letters across the back.  
At first I thought it was a put-down,  
perhaps from some teenager who decided  
he was too cool to be associated with religion.  
But then I noticed there was a Bible reference  
in the parentheses beneath the bold statement.  
It was actually a Christian T-shirt,  
witnessing to the gospel.

Of course Jesus is *for* losers, not against them.  
Of course Jesus is *for* the lost, not against them.  
Jesus came into the world to dine with outcasts and misfits  
and to proclaim the good news to the disadvantaged,  
the neglected, the lost: the tax collectors, men and women  
of questionable reputation, Samaritans, lepers, losers all;  
mothers, fathers, children, students, CPAs, doctors,  
teachers, retirees, neighbors and friends, co-workers and  
family, even long-time and first time worshippers at Hope  
– lost and at a loss, every one of us.

How willing are we to admit you and I are lost, at a loss,  
uncertain and befuddled?  
If we can admit that you and I might be, say,  
a little lost at school, lost in a relationship,  
a marriage, lost in a job, lost in a lifestyle, a country;  
if it seems reasonable to say at times that we are *at a loss*  
– for the right words, at a loss for good reasons,  
at a loss for being certain of what lies ahead;  
then you are in store for the grandest announcement  
available. Once we recognize our *lostness*,  
once we get in touch with *not knowing where we are going*  
*or how best to get there*  
then these parables become amazingly personal,  
powerful and poignant.

Listen to what happens to us,  
the lost, as Jesus would have it:

You and I are placed on God's shoulder and carried home.  
God then calls in friends and neighbors and says,  
*Let's celebrate! I've found my lost sheep.*

God lights a lamp, sweeps the floor,  
and looks carefully until we are found.  
Then God calls in friends and neighbors and says,  
*Let's celebrate! I've found the coin I lost.*

Listen to what our God has to say to you,  
to me, to everyone today:  
*I have come to find the lost.  
I have come to find you, just you!  
When I find you my heart overflows with joy.  
When the lost are found  
everyone in heaven gathers for a party.  
The very party you are celebrating this hour.  
Join me at my table, the God of Jesus says.  
Join me at this mealtime party.  
Let's eat and celebrate!  
This is still the place on earth  
that I welcome sinners and eat with them.*<sup>ii</sup>

*Gracious Lord God, you have called us to ventures of which  
we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through  
perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not  
knowing where we go, but only that your hand is leading us  
and your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen*

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<sup>i</sup> *10,000 Sermon Illustrations*. 2000 (electronic ed.). Dallas: Biblical Studies Press.

<sup>ii</sup> Richard Jensen, *Preaching Luke's Gospel*, 170.