

Vision: To Connect People to Jesus

January 26, 2020

Daily Devotions

Day One

Read Luke 15:1-7.

In this scene, Jesus was surrounded by "tax collectors and sinners." Surrounding himself with those whom the Pharisees and teachers of the law deemed less-than and unworthy was a common occurrence for Jesus. It's important to know who the Pharisees were. The Pharisees were an ancient Jewish sect, distinguished by strict observance of the traditional and written law (what we know as the Old Testament) and commonly held to have pretensions to superior sanctity. In other words, the Pharisees were the most "religious" of their day. Yet, ironically, they failed to recognize the most important religious figure of all time. They were undoubtedly aghast at the company Jesus had chosen. They said, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). The Pharisees didn't realize the truth in their statement. They failed to grasp that because Jesus welcomed sinners, he would have welcomed them too. Jesus welcomed all who came to him –

No matter their profession,
no matter their background,
no matter what they had done or hadn't done,
no matter their gender or social status.

Sensing the Pharisees' disapproval, Jesus told a parable to teach a valuable lesson.

He began by asking the question, "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?" (verse 4). The obvious answer to the question is yes.

The shepherd was willing to leave the ninety-nine sheep and search for the lost one. Did the sinners who gathered around Jesus recognize themselves in the parable? Was it clear to them God was willing to search for them in their lost condition? Consider how the Pharisees may have discerned this parable. Were they ready to see themselves as lost sheep? Were they willing to accept that God seeks after anyone who is lost, even those viewed as unworthy sinners?

The primary vision of The Creek is to connect people to Jesus. We can't connect someone to Jesus if we're not connected to him ourselves. When we read the parable of the lost sheep, we need to bear in mind several important points:

We were once lost sheep.

Jesus Christ is the shepherd who searched for us when we were lost.

Sheep, who are found, should be moved to compassion for those who are lost.

If we want to become more and more like Jesus, then we must seek to cultivate compassion for those who are far from him.

Questions for thought:

Because he loved the lost, Jesus willingly associated with those who were looked down upon, scorned, and hated. Are you willing to do the same? Do you struggle associating with others who are different from you? How does Jesus' example encourage you to think differently?

What are some practical things you can do to be near those who may be different from you?

How can you "go after a lost sheep" this week?

Take a moment and write a short prayer, thanking God that he sent his son to seek and save you.

Day Two

Read Luke 15:8-10.

This parable is a continuation of the scene we read yesterday. You will recall that Jesus is surrounded by those discarded and shunned by the Pharisees, the most "religious" of his day. Undoubtedly, the "sinners" listened with delight as they grasped the true meaning of the parable – God himself was seeking after them! And as if that weren't enough, to also learn there was rejoicing in heaven when one of them repented? What a stark contrast to the treatment they had received from those who taught the law! Have you ever wondered how those who diligently studied God's word denied his unfailing love and compassion? If we fail to embrace God's unfailing love for us, then we will fail to demonstrate it to others. The good news is, the opposite is also true. When we remember Jesus came to seek and save us, and we joyfully embrace our salvation, then we will desire for others to experience his salvation as well.

Re-read Luke 15:10.

Questions for thought:

Place yourself in the parable as the lost coin. What is your response to the effort put into finding it?

Have you considered the rejoicing that took place when God found you? How does this affect your mindset toward those you know who are lost?

Consider writing down the names of those you know who do not yet know Jesus as their Savior. Commit to praying for them daily during this sermon series. It may be helpful to set a reminder on your phone to pray for them at the same time each day. Remember, God never grew tired of seeking you. Persevere in prayer for your lost friends and family. God won't grow tired of seeking after them, either.

Day Three

Read Luke 15:11-31.

This is the third parable Jesus taught the crowd introduced to us on Day One. This particular crowd consisted of those whom society deemed as the most unwanted (sinners and tax collectors), alongside the Pharisees and teachers of the law, the most "religious." Anyone genuinely listening to this parable would identify with someone in the story. How they responded to it was entirely up to them. Would they repent and return home? Or, would they refuse to welcome those coming back? The choice was theirs.

If we don't want to miss the significance and meaning of this parable, then we must pay attention to the characteristics of the father. The father in this story represents our heavenly Father.

- The father did not impose his will on his son.

Although the son's will was in direct opposition to his father's will, the father did not force him to remain at home.

- No matter the son's choices, the father never stopped loving his son.

Even though the son turned his back on his father, nevertheless, the father continued to wait with an expectant heart that his son would someday return home.

- When the son returned, his father embraced him and welcomed him home without condemnation.

The father could have –

demanding his son pay the inheritance back,

required his son work to pay off his debt,

taken away his status as his son and instead made him a slave.

But instead, the father –

embraced his son with full forgiveness, mercy, love, and grace,

celebrated his return,

and declared him alive again.

Does the description of the father in the parable reflect your understanding of your Father in heaven? If so, how? If not, identify how you can change your understanding to reflect what the Bible teaches about God as our Father. You can begin by identifying the characteristics of the father in the parable, then state them as descriptions of our Father in heaven.

Jesus was painting a clear picture of our Father in heaven. Like the father in the parable, our Father never imposes his will on us. We are free to choose whether we want to follow him or follow our own

way. No matter what we decide, the Father's love for us will never waiver. Anytime we stray from his will, he always welcomes us back with open arms.

There is another essential aspect of this parable we don't want to overlook. What about the older son? You know, the one who wasn't happy his baby brother came to his senses and returned home, but was quite grouchy about his return instead. It may be uncomfortable to do so, but we should all ask ourselves if we are like the older brother. He should have left his work and searched for his younger sibling, but he didn't. He should have rejoiced when his brother returned home, but he didn't. Why? Perhaps the older brother was working to please his father and didn't understand that his father loved him, not because of what he did, but simply because he was his son.

Questions for thought:

How do you think the story would have been different if the older brother understood that his father loved him and his younger brother equally? Do you think it would have compelled him to search for his younger brother and bring him home?

What about us? Do you think we grasp the great love the Father has lavished on us that we are called his children (1 John 3:1)? Do we understand that our status as God's child is based on his love for us, and not what we do? Are we moved with a heart of compassion for our brothers and sisters who are far from the Father? Do we rejoice when they come home?

Anyone who heard Jesus teach this parable could identify with one of the characters. Which character do you most identify with?

Day Four

As stated on Day One, our vision at The Creek is to connect people to Jesus. During the first three days of content, we talked about how God calls everyone, no matter who they are, to trust in him. But connecting to Jesus isn't solely for the forgiveness of our sins. Connecting to Jesus is also about growing in our knowledge of God and deepening our relationship with him as our heavenly Father.

Read John 15:1-8.

The words of Jesus recorded in John 15 were spoken soon after the Last Supper and just hours before his arrest and crucifixion. During the final hours of Jesus' life, he shared with his disciples the importance of remaining in him. The imagery he used was clear: if a branch doesn't stay connected to the vine, it won't bear fruit. The same is true for us. If we don't remain in Jesus, we won't bear fruit. The question we need to ask is this: What does it mean to remain in Jesus?

The Greek word translated as remain is *menō*, and it means "to tarry, to be held, kept, continually, not to depart" (BlueLetterBible.org). Sometimes it's helpful to read a passage from a different translation to better understand its intended meaning. Read John 15:4-9 from The Message version:

Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you. In the same way that a branch can't bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, you can't bear fruit unless you are joined with me. I am the Vine, you are the branches. When you're joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant. Separated, you can't produce a thing. Anyone who separates from me is deadwood, gathered up and thrown on the bonfire. But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon. This is how my Father shows who he is—when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.

Shortly after Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, he said to the disciples, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20).

Spreading the good news, making disciples, and teaching others to obey everything Jesus commanded was not something the disciples could do on their own. They had to remain in him.

So do you and I.

Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing (John 15:5), but with God, all things are possible (Matthew 19:26).

How do we remain in Jesus? He said, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you..." (John 15:7). It stands to reason – before his words can *remain* in us, they must first be *in* us. There is no substitute for reading the word of God for ourselves. There are many different ways we can do this:

- download a Bible app on our phone (YouVersion is a fantastic resource with many different Bible translations at our fingertips)
- listen to the Bible (sonicbiblia.org or try the Dwell Bible app)

- sign up for a daily Bible verse via text or email (dailyverses.net)
- go the old-fashioned route and pick up a literal Bible and read the words on the page

If we want to remain in Jesus, then we must choose for his word to remain in us.

Questions for thought:

What are the most significant obstacles that prevent you from reading God's word?

What changes do you need to make for God's word to become a priority in your daily life?

Day Five

Read Mark 2:1-11.

How far are you willing to go to connect people to Jesus?

The friends of the paralyzed man were willing to go to extreme lengths to get their friend to the one they knew could heal him. They didn't let anything stand in their way – not a crowd or even a roof! The paralyzed man was unable to get to Jesus by himself. Thankfully, his friends cared enough about him to make a way when there was no way.

As believers and followers of Jesus, our role is to connect people to Jesus. Like the paralyzed man's friends, we should make every effort to bring others to Jesus. Their faith compelled them, and our faith should compel us. Jesus saw the faith of the man's friends, and he responded to it.

Do we demonstrate the same kind of faith? Are we compelled to bring our friends to Jesus, no matter what obstacles may be in the way? Do we show the type of faith that Jesus responds to?

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). He is still the Savior and Healer. Do we believe he can save those we bring to him?

How can you and I exercise the same faith of the paralyzed man's friends? There are many ways we can bring others to Jesus. Consider the following ways:

- Pray for those who are far from Jesus.

When Paul presented the Gospel to Lydia in Philippi, "the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:14). Pray the Lord will open the hearts of those far from Christ to respond to the good news of Jesus.

- Look for ways to demonstrate God's love to someone who doesn't know Christ.

The paralyzed man could not go to Jesus himself; his friends had to carry him. Do you know someone who has a need they cannot meet themselves? Look for opportunities to meet the needs of others in the name of Jesus.

- Don't allow obstacles to prevent or discourage you from sharing Jesus with someone who needs him.

Not even a roof could get in the way of the paralyzed man's friends from getting him to Jesus! Choose to see obstacles as opportunities – opportunities for God's power to be displayed and victory to be gained.

You may be the only person in someone's life who can connect them to Jesus. Are you willing to do whatever it takes?

Questions for thought:

List any fears or obstacles preventing you from sharing Jesus with someone you know who needs him.

How can you share Jesus with someone who needs him this week?

Connect People to Jesus

This week we read:

Luke 15:1-7

Luke 15:8-10

Luke 15:11-32

John 15:1-8

Mark 2:1-11

Review the Scripture passages and consider the following questions.

What stood out to you the most from the Scripture readings?

What did you learn about Jesus?

What did you learn about God the Father?

What challenged you the most?

How did you relate to the parables?

What changes did you decide to make?

How were you encouraged?