

Russell Kelfer

Lost and Found

#1362-A

Series: The Parables of Scripture

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

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It has happened to all of us at one time or another. We might call it “The Case of the Missing Keys” or “The Case of the Missing Eyeglasses”. We know we left them right *there!* Or so we thought. But when we get *there*, the mystery is still a mystery. We think, “I’ll bet they’re under the sofa cushion,” so we rush into the front room, lift up the cushion, but to no avail. The mystery is still a mystery.

In many cases, the thing that is missing is not really that valuable. You *have* an extra set of keys. The glasses were \$10 reading glasses you picked up at the grocery store. The book you lost wasn’t interesting anyway. The pen you can’t find was one you never liked in the first place. Yet, still you search and search and search. It is an interesting phenomenon. We will spend hours looking for something we don’t need and never bother to search for the one thing everybody needs.

Today’s parable from Luke 15 is built around the premise of a search party. It is crafted by the Master into words we have no trouble understanding, and it leaves a message behind we have no excuse for ever forgetting. It is a story about that which is lost and then found. It is one of several parables about that very subject.

Jesus has been defining discipleship and He has been, in the process, both making the job description virtually impossible, and at the same time taking the legalistic religious traditions of His day and making mincemeat of them. So on the one hand, He had an attentive audience, but on the other hand, it was filled with skeptics. In Luke 14, the chapter concludes like this:

So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Salt *is* good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?

It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; *but* men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

(Luke 14:33-35)

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He had just concluded teaching them a Sunday school lesson on counting the cost. He had talked of a contractor who started building, but didn't pay close attention to his cost estimates. About halfway through the project, he ran out of funds and had to stop building, leaving a partly built edifice as a legacy to his poor planning, and as a joke the town folk could laugh about when he wasn't around to hear them. Jesus then told a parallel story about a general who declared war on his enemy, only to realize that his army was outnumbered two to one. Jesus asked if it wouldn't be wise to count the cost, realize the problem, and go back home and send an offer of a peace treaty before his troops got demolished.

Count the cost, the Master said, and the cost He was referring to comes to light in verse 33, where He says the cost is forsaking all that you have. We tend to downplay the cost of discipleship when we are trying to build numbers or attract crowds. Jesus never did that. The crowds at one point vanished into thin air, leaving only a remnant, but our Lord never changed the ground rules. His commandment on this occasion was for the believer to stop and count the cost of discipleship at the outset, and to realize that it had to be all or nothing.

He then likens the uncommitted believer to unusable salt. The only thing salt is good for if it has lost its saltiness is the garbage container. So it is with a man or woman who does not count the cost and count it wonderfully worth it.

As He spoke, the Pharisees and scribes began another whispering campaign, this time acting shocked that Jesus was out sharing His faith with unbelievers and sinners, when He could have stayed in the safe confines of the synagogue where He could fellowship only with those who were considered to be righteous. Jesus not only let sinners in the door, *He ate with them*. Shame.

Jesus responds once again with a parable:

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him.

And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness,

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and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.

And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find *it*?

And when she hath found *it*, she calleth *her* friends and *her* neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.

Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

(Luke 15:1-10)

Once again, Jesus tells two stories back to back with the same moral. One has to do with a shepherd who has a huge flock of 100 sheep, but one of them has wandered astray. He has two choices: he can leave the one in the wilderness to die, citing his need to stay with the majority, or he can leave the rest of the flock and go seeking, even at great personal risk, to rescue the one who has placed himself in such danger.

The second story is about a woman who is counting her money and realizes that she is missing one of ten coins she thought she had. Does she go on and invest the nine coins she has in her hand and forget the other one, or does she stop and spend perhaps hours looking for that one lost coin? Sounds a lot like she had the same problem we talked about earlier, only *what was lost was very valuable to her*.

Finally, Jesus draws a net around both stories and explains why these illustrations are slow-developing Polaroid pictures of the Kingdom of God and of God's love for lost sinners. Jesus would tell many parables in His ministry, but few would be more remembered than these two. The analogy of something being lost was a familiar one. Relating it to people being lost who were physically present was a new one. It would not necessarily fall on receptive ears. It still doesn't. To make it work, we have to

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understand the clarity of the salvation message. The words used over and over in the New Testament were saved and lost. That word *saved* which has been coined an evangelical invention by modern theologians is used fifty-nine times in the New Testament. Look at just a few of them. Those who listened in His day understood. Do we?

And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace. (Luke 7:50)

And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee. (Luke 18:42)

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. (John 3:17)

I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. (John 10:9)

And it shall come to pass, *that* whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2:21)

And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. (Acts 2:47)

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

And (they) brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. (Acts 16:30,31)

Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. (Romans 10:1)

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (Romans 10:9)

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Romans 10:13)

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. (I Corinthians 1:18)

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (I Corinthians 3:15)

Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together

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with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (Ephesians 2:5)

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: (Ephesians 2:8)

Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. (I Timothy 2:4)

I would think that God wanted us to understand clearly what that word meant, don't you? He used it over and over. Likewise, that word *lost* has a profound but simple meaning. Here are just a few examples:

For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. (Luke 19:10)

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. (John 17:12)

That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none. (John 18:9)

But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: (II Corinthians 4:3)

Saved or lost. A simple analogy. A clear distinctive. Once someone is saved or found they are no longer lost. Once they are lost, nothing can be done until they are found. Jesus was preaching the gospel of the lost and found. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. That was His reason for coming to earth. Don't ever minimize it. Don't ever cloud it with grey area, and make it less than an absolute.

No one is ever other than either saved or lost. The parables He was about to share made it plain. When someone is lost they may think they are not, but the One who knows them understands that though they may be in pleasant surroundings from the world's perspective, and even happy, they are separated from the Shepherd, the Good One, the only One who can bring them safely into the sheepfold. They may be, at the moment, eating better than the rest of the flock. So be it. They may be at the edge of a cliff, viewing a most beautiful mountain range in the distance. Wonderful. That is all temporal and temporary. They are lost. They are unaccounted for and unable to find their way back to the Shepherd on their own. Unless they cry out for Him, they will be left to die, but that is not the Shepherd's desire. He does not will that even one of them should perish.

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The shepherd analogy is used over and over in Scripture, and for good reason. It spoke volumes to the people who surrounded Jesus, listening to His every word. They knew what a shepherd was, what a shepherd did, what sheep were like, how sheep behaved, and to what lengths a good shepherd would go to save one of his bleating family of four-legged friends. They knew how strong-willed sheep could be. They knew how much they needed to stay in the flock and follow the shepherd, for they did not have what it took to make it on their own. They knew the dangers that lurked everywhere, should one of them stray. They knew.

The shepherd in Judea had a tough life. Pasture was scarce. There was a narrow plateau only a few miles wide, but beyond it was a wall of rugged cliffs that plunged downward. There was the desert with its dry call to death. George Smith wrote of the shepherd in Jesus' day:

On some high moor across which at night the hyenas howl, when you meet him, sleepless, far-sighted, weather-beaten, armed, leaning on his staff and looking out over his scattered sheep, everyone of them on his heart, you understand why he sprang to the front in the people's history; why they gave his name to the king and made him the symbol of providence; why Christ took him as the type of self-sacrifice.

Remember, God did not happen to look around one day and determine that maybe sheep would make a good illustration of spiritual truth. He created sheep in eternity past and called David to be a shepherd because He wanted to create on the canvas of Scripture, a backdrop for His Son's role in redeeming man. He created sheep for this moment, and He made them as He did and gave shepherds the job He did, so that one day His dear Son could address this crowd of skeptical religious leaders with their self-satisfied brand of legalism and explain to them what really mattered and what the church, if it were being obedient, would be about until He came again.

It would be about what He was about—seeking and saving that which is lost. In the process of doing that, it would build buildings, it would teach seminars, it would train leaders, it would sing hymns, it would hear sermons, and it would have fellowships. All of that, however, would be things the church does. What the church is, however, is a body of people who are called out by God to seek and to save that which is lost. So long

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as the church remembers that and exalts that Cross so men can see their sins and be saved, the buildings will have a purpose, the seminars will make sense, the leaders will know why they are leading, and the songs, the sermons, and the fellowships will never call attention to themselves or become ends within themselves.

This thing of seeking the lost is not a thing to be taken lightly. Barclay writes,

The shepherd was personally responsible for the sheep. If a sheep was lost, the shepherd must at least bring home the fleece to show how it had died. These shepherds were experts at tracking, and could follow the straying sheep's footprints for miles across the hills. There was not a shepherd for whom it was not all in the day's work to lay down his life for his sheep.

He continues,

Many of the flocks were communal flocks, belonging, not to individuals, but to villages. There would be two or three shepherds in charge. Those whose flocks were safe, would arrive home on time, and they would bring news that one shepherd was still out on the mountainside searching for a sheep which was lost. The whole village would be upon the watch, and then, when, in the distance, they saw the shepherd striding home with the lost sheep across his shoulders, there would rise from the whole community a shout of joy and of thanksgiving.

This was the background for Jesus' comments in verses 7 and 10, where he refers to the angelic host rejoicing when one who was lost has been found. The gospel was, indeed, a gospel about being lost and found. It was the story of fallen man wandering off like a lost sheep from the oversight of a loving Shepherd, until he was separated by a forest of sin. On one side was a cliff which spiraled downward into an abyss. On the other side, a mirage called "good works" that looked like an oasis, but just on the inside, turned into a deadly desert, leading downward to the same black hole.

All the while, the Shepherd is proactive. He is seeking. He is searching. He is calling. At first, the sheep seem to turn their heads when they hear His voice. After a while, however, they get used to the sound, and it is as though His voice blends with the

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sounds of the wild, until they seem not to hear it at all. Sheep, you know, are not very smart. They can convince themselves that they are safe, even as they are about to fall to their death, and they soon forget how they got lost.

So the Shepherd continues to call. Brokenhearted, He leaves the ninety and nine and He searches; He cries out; He calls to that one lost sheep. Jesus, having given the analogy of the lost sheep, proceeds to tell a parallel parable; but first He wants to make sure we understand *why He told the first one*.

He jumps from the portrait of that lonely sheep, wandering farther and farther from the Shepherd's waiting arms, until the Shepherd finds him, hoists him upon his shoulders and carries him home, to the courts of heaven, where the angels are having choir practice. The occasion? One single sinner has been saved. One unbeliever has said "yes" to Christ. One wandering sheep has felt the Master's gentle touch, seen Him untangle them from the briars of sin, and felt His loving arms lift him and carry him all the way back into the fold. That's all it takes for all of heaven to have a praise party. One soul saved. One life transformed by the precious blood of the Good Shepherd, who laid down His life for His sheep.

Jesus wanted to be sure He made His point. So He followed one parable with another. He told another story, this one about a woman who had ten coins. Each coin was one drachma, worth about a day's wages. Somehow, she inadvertently dropped one. She had two choices. She could forget it and hope it turned up some day, or she could actively search for it, laying aside her other tasks until she found that one coin. To her it was worth it.

It probably wasn't easy. Palestinian houses in that day were usually extremely poorly lit. Normally, one small circular window about eighteen inches across gave all of the outside light. The floors were dirt floors covered with dried reeds and rushes. It was, as one commentator put it, "literally like looking for a needle in a haystack." But this coin-hunting episode was more than a game to her. That one coin would be the equivalent of perhaps \$125.00 of our currency. Unless we were extremely wealthy, I believe most of us who lost an envelope with \$125.00 cash in it would spend some time looking. Don't you?

She was so desperate to find that coin that she no doubt

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called out to her neighbors and told them the bad news that she had lost something so valuable. And she was so elated when she found it, Scripture records that she went back to those neighbors and said, "Rejoice with me. I found it." She was so happy, she was ready to have a party. Then, once more, Jesus gives the very same application. He catapults His hearers to heaven and shows them that three-dimensional picture of the angels having a praise gathering because someone who was lost has been found. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure out, then, what He was driving at. "He that hath ears to hear: let him (or her) be sure to hear."

Obviously, the lost sheep and the lost coin represent the unbelieving world. The shepherd who left the ninety and nine to seek out the one represents the Lord or those He has commissioned to be shepherds. The process of finding that which is lost is the process of salvation. The celebration that followed was the rejoicing that goes on in the courts of heaven (and it ought to go on in the courts of earth) when one person receives Jesus and His atonement for his sins.

So the truths are not hard to decipher, the pictures not hard to visualize. Somehow, however, it seems that we have heard these parables so many times, that instead of pleading with God for new truth or a renewal of old commitments, we tend to limit what God can teach us because the passage is so familiar.

My prayer is that you prayed before you picked up this lesson that God would "open your eyes that you might behold wondrous things out of His law." If you did, He will, *because when you ask anything according to His will, He heareth you, and when you know that He hears you, whatever you ask, you know that you have the petitions you have desired of Him.* So answered prayer is a given when you ask God to reveal truth, and then search truth for the revelation you asked for. Let's look, in closing, at four questions we ought to ask ourselves in the light of these two stories:

1- Why do we condone saltless Christianity if it is good for nothing but to be trampled underfoot? Saltless Christianity is that brand of belief that doesn't reflect itself in a life. It doesn't permeate the atmosphere about it, creating an appetite for that for which it stands. It may be characterized by dead orthodoxy that dots all the "i's" and crosses all the "t's" but shows no evidence

of vibrancy. Or it may be characterized by a life that is trying in its own energy to duplicate Christian virtues, either without the indwelling Spirit to accomplish it or without an understanding as a believer that Christ does it; we just let Him. In either case, that person can live in a neighborhood, work in an office, spend time in a Bible class, interact with his or her family, and *those around them never particularly want what he or she has; in fact they never notice anything different enough to want.*

The characteristic of the early church was, “These are they which have turned the world upside down.” So incredible was their character, so intense their convictions, so gentle their sensitivity, so compassionate their spirits, so unselfish their lifestyles, that the incredible agape love of God poured from their lives to such a degree that others were overwhelmed and intrigued.

Does your life affect others that way? Is there a softness in your demeanor but a firmness in your beliefs that causes you to lovingly be different when the heat is on? Is there a calm in your life that remains intact, even when the waves of adversity are tossing and turning the ship of your life in every direction? Then you are a “salty” Christian. You are flavoring your world. These scribes and Pharisees were worried that Jesus was being contaminated by eating with sinners, but they weren’t in the slightest concerned with the souls of the sinners with whom He was eating.

They missed the whole point of it all. They were a team of empty salt shakers. They had a big, bold “S” on their shirts for “salty” or “super-spiritual” or something, but inside they were full of dead men’s bones. So Satan has tried and in some measure succeeded in polarizing believers into one of two camps—the somewhat haughty, Bible-proud believer who drives around with Jesus bumper stickers on his car, all the while screaming at the first driver that dares to cut in front of him, or the soft, emotional, loving church member who loves everybody but never tells them why and thinks that by *imitating Christianity he can change the world.*

Only God can change the world, beloved. He doesn’t need us to imitate Him; He needs us to die *and let His incredible Spirit living in us, live through us that inexplicable, almost indefinable life called the Christian life.* He is the salt; we are the shakers. If we never let Him fill the shaker, nothing will come out. If we pour

sugar into the shaker and pretend it's salt, something will come out, but it will produce the wrong flavor, and those who taste it will never know what salt can do. The salt of the earth. We may not act like it, but Jesus said "YE ARE the salt....but if..." He rebuked those pious Pharisees by likening them to saltless salt. We may need to do a sodium test on our own hearts and hear what they missed.

2- If being lost and found is still life's one great issue, why is teaching and preaching on it becoming, in many circles, a rarity? Wherever you are, be sure you're not a part of the deception. It is oh, so popular, in many Christian circles to avoid both the words and the concept of being lost. To imply that someone is bound for an eternity in hell has become a symbol of arrogance or condescension. The key is to always speak the truth in love, to preach the truth in love, to teach the truth in love. Jesus loved, healed, gave, served, and even wept as He spoke about hell and eternal damnation. But He never changed the message. He never omitted the hard parts. He never failed to preach the truth for fear someone would be offended by the truth and think less of Him. Instead, He always spoke the truth in love. So must we.

We approach people today so often as though Jesus were some kind of cocoon they could enter that will shield them from life's hurts and give them a better life. Spiritually, He does that. But that's not what He is. He is Savior! He came to seek and to save that which is lost. Salvation is still the act of a holy God seeking and saving those who are lost in sin. When you witness, you are seeking to tell someone that there is a solution to the sin problem. It is a Savior. Praise God, there is one. And only one, the perfect one who came to earth, never sinned, died, was buried, and rose again, triumphant over death. He paid the price. Now they can be (here's the word) *saved*. If they do not receive Him, they are (here's the word) *lost*.

Those are God's words, and that is God's plan. Don't change it. Don't soften it to make it more palatable to the flesh. If sin were not the problem, Jesus would not have had to go to that awful Cross. If sin were not the problem, He would have set up His kingdom, reformed society, cured man's social ills, fed the hungry, healed the sick, and gone home to heaven, having left us with an earthly way for us to change mankind. That's what the Jews expected. It's what the disciples expected. It's man's easy way out. No sin. No suffering. No savior. No way. Engrave it

on your heart. Saved...Lost. Two very key words in the Christian vocabulary. Don't discard them at any price.

3- If one saved soul is worth a heaven-wide praise meeting, isn't one lost soul worth a city-wide prayer meeting? And when someone comes to Christ, ought we not to fall on our faces in worship and adoration and praise? Jesus has said that salvation is the difference between night and day. It is the difference between being saved and lost. It is, beloved, the difference between heaven and hell. When someone you pray for comes to genuine repentance and gives his or her heart to Christ, the Satanic forces that have so labored to oppose that decision fall in disgust and despair. The courts of hell have lost another battle. They have come up against the blood of Jesus Christ and a precious human soul has been snatched out of the grips of eternal damnation and placed in the bosom of the Father to be kept there for all eternity.

That's why we send missionaries. That's why we build churches. That's why we invest in teaching and preaching and witnessing. It isn't some project we hope to achieve to win favor on earth. The cosmic conflict between God and Satan has yielded another soul. The courts of heaven prepare another home for an eternal guest. The Spirit of the Living God has entered into another life with all of the power, and all of the hope, and all of the joy of heaven itself. And so everything stops in the King's Courtyard. A choir of angels breaks out in a heavenly anthem of eternal hallelujahs. A soul has been born again! Why then, do we take it less seriously than the angels? Why, then, do we not labor on our knees in intercession for those whose lives hang in the balance? And why, beloved, when someone comes to Christ, does not the whole church gather around them and sing anthems of hallelujahs on earth? I do not know why. Do you?

4- If Jesus Christ left the Father and the joys of heaven to come to earth, to suffer and die for one reason: to save us from our sins, why are so many of us as believers unwilling to go to the ends of the earth, if need be, to sell all our belongings and send the money, if need be, to see one person come to saving faith in Christ? It makes no sense, does it? Churches will spend millions of dollars to build facilities to house more believers, many of whom are simply moving from one church to another to be more comfortable or have more activities to meet their needs, *when throughout the world men and women are dying every day by the*

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thousands without Christ and without hope. In other parts of the world, meanwhile, men and women are giving their lives for the gospel, living with nothing in this life in order for others to find life. Dear God, may we all in the days to come, see evangelism and missions, not as an adjunct to an otherwise self-serving program, but as the basic reason for our existence. Men and women are lost. Dear God, may we have a part in their being saved.

Try to picture that parable one more time. The flock is about to be taken to the sheepfold for the evening. Almost all of the sheep are accounted for. 97,98,99. Wait. There is one missing. It doesn't matter how late the hour. That one is worth it. It doesn't matter how weary the shepherd. That one is worth it. Love fills his heart. He goes seeking. He goes calling. He goes searching. Through the valley of sin, he goes looking. Through the forest of man's works, he goes searching.

He will not rest until he finds that one. He does not desire that any should perish. *Neither should we.*

He will not, therefore, rest until all that will come, have come. *Neither should we.*

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A Challenge to Further Study

1- Take a concordance and look up the word “salt”. What else can you learn from Scripture about salt? How can you gauge the “saltiness” of your own life?

2- In Luke 15:1,2, the Pharisees and scribes were murmuring. What were they murmuring about? How does this remind you of the setting in which Jesus taught the parable of the talents in Matthew 25?

3- Why do you think God went to so much trouble to use the word “saved”? Reread the verses listed on pages 5 and 6. Do you think the early church understood what that word meant? On what do you base your answer?

4- The portrait of the shepherd is a constant one in Scripture. What do we need to do in our generation to better understand it? What can we learn from this about how to use illustrations that are understandable in our sharing of truth?

A Challenge to Further Application

1- Ask those closest to you if they consider your life a life that demonstrates the salt of the earth. If not, ask them to help you see ways you can better let your life season the lives of those you touch.

2- Make a fresh prayer list of all of the lost people you know. Divide them, if need be, by days of the week. Agree with God to pray for them *until they are saved or God lifts the burden from your heart*. Be constantly asking Him to bring more unsaved people into your life. Don't be afraid to go where they are. Remember, *that is why you are here. To seek and to save*.

3- Do you know anyone who has come to Christ in the last three months? Have you told them of your joy at their salvation? Have you prayed with them and expressed that joy?

A Challenge to Scripture Memory

Memorize Luke 15:6,7

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