Parables of Lost and Found

Deep Prep

Luke 15:1-32

The Big Idea: God always makes the extra effort to find the lost.

Learning Goal: Learners will empathize with the lost and celebrate the finding.

The "lost and found" parables of Luke 15 have a common theme—joy in finding the lost. They also have a common effect on the careful hearer and reader who does not think of himself or herself as being "lost"—in short, they offend. When we read these parables, we usually think their primary message is that God loves to find the lost. So true, but the context in which these stories are told is important and demands that we look at the hard question the parables pose for the (supposed) "nonlost." They just might be the real intended recipients of the message in these stories. Your students may not even have the concept of being lost in their experience. Thus, teaching the parables is a vital opportunity to proclaim this beginning point of our doctrine.

In Luke 14, Jesus is invited to eat with a leader of the Pharisees. He accepts, and on his way there, delivers a number of sometimes cryptic teachings leading up to the lost and found parables. Jesus continues teaching in Luke 15, bemused or angry at the muttering of the Pharisees and scribes over his welcoming and eating with sinners, and in that context the parables are given. Jesus begins with the story of the lost sheep, starting with "Which one of you..." (Luke 15:4). He continues with the story of the lost coin, leading with "What woman..." (Luke 15:8). The implication is clear: who wouldn't go search for the lost sheep or the lost coin? Well, a shepherd or a woman who didn't think the lost sheep or lost coin was worth much, the muttering Pharisees and scribes might have been thinking.

Not so with God, Jesus tells them. God loves the lost and sinful! This is good news! God is like the shepherd who leaves the 99 sheep who aren't lost to get the one that is lost. God is like the woman who has a party when she finds her lost coin. At least one of the meanings of these two seemingly simple parables is that God prizes what is lost even if it would seem to be of lesser value than what is still possessed (the 99 sheep or the nine coins).

The ante is upped in the parable of the prodigal son. This parable's message of grace is beautiful—the father running out to meet the son and putting his arms around him and kissing him before the lost son even has the chance to ask for forgiveness. That's grace in a nutshell. We don't often enough put ourselves in the place of the eldest son. He is our prideful self, the side of us that not only thinks we can make it into the "father's arms" on our own but also privately thinks we have. We've done the right things, albeit grudgingly in some instances. We've stayed home and worked hard. We've sat in the pews and confirmation class, even when we just as soon would have rather squandered that time doing something else. We're the righteous ones. We're the eldest son in this story.

The point of these parables is to call the eldest sons into the party. We fully experience God's grace when we can celebrate it with others and not keep insisting we've earned it and others have
not. Those who insist on living by merit can't ever know the true joy of grace. These parables expose our rather grudging spirits. We often think God is too good to everyone else and not good enough to us. We want mercy for ourselves but justice for others. These stories are a call for celebrating God's radical grace. God loves everyone, not because of what he or she has or hasn't done, or who he or she is or isn't. God loves each of us because that's who God is.

The question posed to the nonlost and the righteous, all of us, in these parables is simply this: Will you join the party and thereby share in God's mercy or will you clutch your self-bestowed merit badges and stay outside the party grumbling? At the end of the parable of the prodigal son, the question remains as to whether the older son goes into the party or not. That is the question directed at us, the reader and hearer of the parable.

Quick Prep

Luke 15:1-32

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- The context in which these stories are told is important and demands that we look at the hard question these parables pose for the (supposed) "nonlost." They just might be the real intended recipients of the message in these stories.
- This parable of the prodigal son has a beautiful picture of grace—the father running out to meet the son and putting his arms around him and kissing him before the lost son even has the chance to ask for forgiveness.
- We don't often enough put ourselves in the place of the eldest son. He is our prideful self, the side of us that not only thinks we can make it into the "father's arms" on our own but privately thinks we have.
- These stories are a call for celebrating God's radical grace. God loves each of us because that's who God is.

Adolescent Connection

Most youth have done something foolish; most adults have, as well. Making the identification with one of the brothers will help youth to connect with the prodigal son story. A good question to ask is, "When have you been the younger brother?" Then ask, "How did it feel?" You are incorporating two important factors of the learning brain: first, you help youth to personalize the story, connecting it to something they already know; and second, you engage their emotions. We know that learning is filtered through emotions. The more emotionally involved in the story that youth become, the greater the teaching's learning and impact. This particular story may touch off emotional reactions to the relationship the youth have with their fathers. Be prepared for some disclosures that may be revealing and may need to be debriefed further. This is a very personal story, because at one time we have all played each of the parts in the story.
Baptismal Connection

In the Rite of Affirmation of Baptism, a five-part question addresses each confirmand's intent to continue in the covenant God made with them in Holy Baptism. Here We Stand resources help adolescents—with support from parents, leaders, and the entire congregation—prepare to answer this question as they continue in their lifelong faith journey. Today's lesson focuses on the clause "to live among God's faithful people" (*Lutheran Book of Worship*, page 201; *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, page 236).

Welcoming

Prepare your large group space by playing upbeat music in the background and by welcoming learners as they arrive. Make a special effort to welcome and thank adult small group leaders for their presence and for being willing to help pass on the faith to the next generation.

- Begin by thanking learners for coming! Remind the group what a privilege you feel it is to serve God by leading confirmation, and what a gift from God you consider all of them to be.
- Ask learners to recall last week's Big Idea if they can. Reward the first person to get it right with a handful of candy or some other small treat to share with their small group. (Be aware of any food allergies in the group.) Ask for a volunteer to capture last week's lesson in their own words; affirm all genuine responses; keep going until you're satisfied everyone has been oriented.
- Project this week's Big Idea on the screen or write it in HUGE block letters on your presentation board or overhead slide. Invite learners to recite it with you aloud. Repeat it two or three times.

Skit: There Was an Old Woman

Ask or assign a small group to perform the skit. In a pinch, grab enough volunteers from the audience to form an impromptu 'readers' theater' troupe.

*CHARACTERS: narrator, old woman, old woman's children (up to 10 children, if possible—adjust the script as needed)*

*PROPS: old clothes, gray wig or scarf, shawl, and a cane for the woman*

The narrator is on one side of the stage. The woman is center stage.

*NARRATOR: Once upon a time, there was a woman who had 100 children. The woman was 309 years old and had a mind as sharp as a tack. One thing she loved dearly was gathering all of her children together for a nice hymn.*

*(All children start gathering onstage together facing the woman.)*

Parables of Lost and Found page 3
NARRATOR: They were all good children and gathered every year to participate in the fun event.

WOMAN: I appreciate you all coming once again to... Wait! (Counts the people gathered in front of her.) One, two...eight, 10. Not everyone is here! I'm missing 90 of my children! Sound the alarm!

NARRATOR: The woman loved each of her children.

CHILD 1: Mother, wait! You don't need to sound the alarm. It's okay. Fifty-three of them are at the Olympics. Johnny is running the 100-meter dash, you know.

WOMAN: Oh, yes, I had quite forgotten. I am relieved.

CHILD 2: And 27 of them are still in Winnipeg. They were snowed in. They'll be here as soon as they can.

WOMAN: Oh, good. Oh, good.

CHILD 3: Five of them are working in an orphanage and couldn't get anyone to work for them.

WOMAN: Oh, my goodness! How wonderful.

CHILD 4: Four of them are in line to use the bathroom.

WOMAN: Ah, I see....Wait! We're still missing one more! Sound the alarm!

CHILD 5: Wait! No, don't sound the alarm; we're only missing Charlie.

WOMAN: Well, I miss Charlie. Don't any of you miss him?

CHILD 2: Yeah. I think I miss him. He used to make me laugh. Poor Charlie, we'll never see him again now. No one knows where he is.

NARRATOR: But the old woman was not daunted by the fact that no one knew where Charlie was.

WOMAN: Bah. I'm going to find him anyway. (Using her cane, the woman starts walking very slowly across the stage.)

CHILD 1: Maybe I can help.

CHILDREN: (All chime in.) Yeah, me too. Yeah, I can look. Me too! Me too! Me too!

(The children scatter offstage before the woman is even halfway across the stage.)

NARRATOR: So the woman eventually found Charlie, whom she loved dearly. And Charlie's siblings learned that they each mattered to their mother—and to each other.

Parables of Lost and Found page 4
WOMAN: (Looks at narrator.) Yeah, I guess they learned. Confounded children, thinking that it doesn't matter if we find Charlie.

NARRATOR: Um, you can hear me?

WOMAN: I'm 307, by the way, not 309. Write that down in your book. Don't make me any older than I am. Would you please kind and help me offstage? (The narrator helps the woman off the stage.)

Quiz Show

As practical, set up a quiz show environment with horns or buzzers for the contestants. Organize two teams or have two individuals face off for the quiz. Ask a question, and the first person or group spokesperson to correctly answer the question gets a point. If the answer is wrong, the other team or person gets a chance to answer to win the point.

Multiple Choice

1. God's grace is for...
   a. Jews only.
   b. only those who do good works.
   c. saints, but not sinners.
   d. everyone. (Correct.)

2. The prodigal son...
   a. partied with his inheritance money.
   b. never returned home.
   c. sought his father's forgiveness.
   d. both A and C. (Correct.)

3. The older brother was angry because...
   a. he remained faithful.
   b. no one had thrown him a party.
   c. both A and B. (Correct.)
   d. none of the above.

4. The father was watching for his son's return because...
   a. he was going to demand repayment plus interest.
   b. he unconditionally loved his son. (Correct.)
   c. he wanted to punish his son.
   d. he wasn't really watching.

Parables of Lost and Found page 5
5. God's love and forgiveness...
   a. is unconditional.
   b. includes everyone.
   c. is for Y-O-U.
   d. all of the above. (Correct.)

6. In the parables of the lost and found in Luke 15...
   a. people were searching, but nothing was ever found.
   b. those who found their "lost items" celebrated.
   c. we discover that God's love is unconditional.
   d. both B and C. (Correct.)

True or False

1. The lost and found parables have a common theme: What is lost can never be replaced. (False. What is lost is worth finding.)

2. God is like the shepherd who leaves the 96 sheep to go find the 4 who are lost. (False. The Good Shepherd leaves 99 sheep to find the one that is lost.)

3. We receive God's love and mercy because we do good whenever we can. (False. God loves us and is merciful even when we mess up.)

4. God loves to find the lost and rejoices when they are found. (True.)

5. In the story of the prodigal son, the older son rejoiced to see his younger brother return home. (False. The older son was angry.)

6. As Christians, we do not need to fear ever being lost. (False. Anyone can become lost.)

Presenter's Interruptions

Keep this menu of short theme-related bits at the ready for those moments when you feel you're losing your audience.

• Yell, "Freeze!" Ask for three volunteers to act out the story of the prodigal son using only the items given to them in a bag (play money, ball of yarn/string, roll of toilet paper, old shoe, or other items). They have five minutes to prepare. During this time, have everyone else turn in their Bibles to Ephesians 2:8-9. Ask for a volunteer to read it aloud. Have the volunteers perform the skit. Reward the actors with gum, candy, or loud, enthusiastic applause.

• Yell, "Freeze!" Have everyone open The Lutheran Handbook to a "Notes & Stuff" page at the back of the book. Instruct them to write two ways they are like the younger brother in the parable of the prodigal son and two ways they are like the older brother. Ask for two volunteers to share what they wrote.

Opening Prayer

Parables of Lost and Found page 6
As a segue into the teaching time, begin by dimming the lights, and ask everyone to bow heads and close eyes as you pray this prayer:

**Gracious God, at times it's difficult to understand the depth of your grace and forgiveness. Forgive us for those times when we have wandered away from you to do our own thing or follow our own desires. Thank you for your unconditional love and forgiveness that welcome us back, with open arms. Help us, Lord, to understand that you love everybody, not because of what we have or have not done, but because we are your creation, created in your image. In your name we pray. Amen**

**My Faith Story**

Most people have done some foolish things in their lives. Can you identify with the younger brother? How did that affect your relationship with family and friends? How did that make you feel about yourself? If you cannot identify with the younger brother, can you identify with the older brother? How did that affect the way you perceived others? Were you angry, bitter, or jealous? How did you overcome those feelings?

**Guest Speaker**

Contact your local "Teen Challenge" addiction recovery center (or other similar agency) to invite someone to share his or her story of being "lost and then found." If an agency like this isn't near your location, try to find someone within your congregation who might be willing to share a lost and found story.

**Cartoon Connection: Lost: Soul. Reward: Eternal life.**

_The Funny Shape of Faith, page 50_

If only finding your way were as easy as dropping by the lost and found... "Yes, um, I seem to have lost my way...you haven't seen it, have you?" The good news? God is always waiting for us with open arms when we do find our way back. God even runs down the driveway to meet us halfway. But sometimes it feels as though we are too lost to ever be found. Too lost to even deserve being searched for. And that is when God's extravagant love leaves no stone unturned trying to find us. There is nowhere we can hide from the love and welcome of God.

Invite your students to think about a time when they felt lost. What reminders of God's love were around them? How did they find their way back? Encourage them to read the words to Amazing Grace—sing it together in closing.

Parables of Lost and Found page 7
Handbook Connection

Have everyone open *The Lutheran Handbook* to pages 128-130, "How to Be Saved (by Grace through Faith and Not by Your Good Works)." Read the first four paragraphs, and ask for volunteers to read sections 1-7 and "Be Aware." Address any questions the students ask.

On page 130, have students write the following in the box under "GRACE": "God's Riches at Christ's Expense." Talk about how this is a short definition of the word *grace*. We receive God's love and forgiveness because of the sacrifice that Jesus made for humankind. In the upper left corner of that same box, write, "Do"—then draw a circle around it and a diagonal line through the circle. In the upper right corner, write, "Done"—then draw a circle around it. Ask the students what they think this means in connection with God's grace. Share that God's grace, forgiveness, and salvation are not based on anything that we can do, but is totally based on what Christ has done for us. If you have access to PowerPoint®, a computer, and a projector, before class create a slide of the diagram on page 130, including what students are to add to the diagram, to project onto a screen or the wall.

Bible Connection: God's Grace Moments

• Have students open their Bibles to Luke 15. Ask for a volunteer to read verses 1-7, the parable of the lost sheep. Ask the students to identify the "grace" moment in this parable (verses 5-6) and read those verses again. Next, ask for a volunteer to read verses 8-10, the parable of the lost coin. Ask the students to identify the grace moment in this parable (verses 9-10) and read those verses again. Finally, ask for a couple of volunteers to share in the reading of verses 11-32, the parable of the lost son. Ask the students to identify the grace moment in this parable (verse 20) and read the verse again. What do we learn about grace through these parables? Grace is a gift that offers hope to all who are lost. Grace is unconditional love. We don't have to do anything to receive God's grace!

• Have everyone turn to Ephesians 2, and ask a volunteer to read verses 8-10. Ask the following questions: Are we saved by doing good works? (No, salvation is an unmerited gift of God's love made through Jesus Christ.) If not, what role do good works play in our life of faith? (Christians have a calling to be followers of Christ. God invites us, and expects us, to respond as disciples, not because we need to earn God's favor, but because we are God's people. We are enabled to do good works that reflect our faith in God.)

More Bible Connections

• Read Isaiah 26:10. Why do you think God shows grace to the wicked, even though they choose to ignore it? (God is always looking for the lost and wanting to save them.) Have you ever ignored God's grace?

• Read Romans 5:12-21. Verses 15-17 talk about the trespasses of the "one man." Who was that one man? (Adam.) Just like sin entered the world through one man, grace came through one man. Who is that one man? (Jesus.) Read verses 18-21 again and find the good news of God's grace. Note that the effect of God's gift of grace far outweighs the effect of one man's sin.
• Read Ezekiel 34:11-16. What will the Good Shepherd do for his sheep? *(Make it a priority to search for them when they are lost, bring them back home to good pasture and a safe place.)* Are you lost or have you been found?

**Object Lesson: The Wayward Son**

Find someone in your congregation or community who knows how to properly throw a boomerang. Invite him or her to show the group the proper techniques. Then invite a volunteer to throw the boomerang. Afterward, ask the following questions: Did you expect the boomerang to return to you after you threw it? Why or why not? How did you feel when it did—or did not—return to you? Did the father in the parable of the lost son expect his son to return? Why or why not? What does this parable teach us about our heavenly Father?

**Science Connection: Help! I'm Lost!**

*In advance of this lesson, assemble the following items and read through this experiment.*

- Safe area, such as a large carpeted hallway
- Folding chairs
- Bandannas for blindfolds

Ask the students if they have ever done a maze on paper, or been to a corn maze or something similar. Maybe some have been in a maze at a fun house at a carnival or fair. What does it feel like to be lost or stuck?

Ask for volunteers who would like to be blindfolded and give them bandannas to blindfold themselves. Have them sit on the floor at one end of the hall while the remaining students set the folding chairs in a maze formation down the length of the hallway. Make sure to set chairs to block anything that someone might bump into and possibly get hurt.

Now let the blindfolded volunteers attempt to make their way from one end of the maze to the other. You may want to pair each blindfolded student with someone who is not blindfolded so he or she can help prevent falls and injury.

Once all have made it safely through the maze, talk together about the experience of being lost. What does it feel like to be lost? Is it better to be alone or with someone else when you feel you are lost? How can someone guide or direct you? How does God guide or direct you when life seems hard and you feel lost?

**Video/DVD: Finding the Lost**

Option 1: Ice Age 2: The Meltdown

Start cue: (Chapter 6, 00:17:41) Scrat, a fanged, squirrel-like creature, skitters across the ice, sniffing to find his lost acorn.

End cue: (Chapter 7, 00:19:35) Scrat falls onto an ice floe, sending his acorn flying up to land on a high shelf. Chunks of the glacier break off and fall as the mastodon and saber-toothed tiger walk away.

A prehistoric squirrel-like creature searches for his lost acorn. When he sees it floating just beneath the ice's surface, he goes to great lengths to retrieve it. This clip provides a humorous comparison to the lost and found parables in the Bible.

- Describe a time when you lost something of great value. How did you feel when you thought it was gone for good? How did you feel when you finally found it?
- Do you have a favorite "lost and found" parable? What do the parables of things lost and found tell you about God's love for you? About God's love for the world?

*Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.*

**Option 2: A Lot Like Love**

Provide the movie *A Lot Like Love* (2005, PG-13).

Start cue: (Chapter 11, 1:36) Emily parks her car and looks in the mirror.

End cue: Oliver's sister says, "Oliver! What's going on?" (Be sure to turn off the movie at this point due to language.)

After years of an on-and-off romance, Emily searches for Oliver to ask for one last chance. When she arrives on the day of his sister's wedding, she thinks that Oliver is the one getting married.

- How is Oliver like the good shepherd seeking the lost sheep?
- Have you ever lost something of great value? What did you do?

*Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.*

**Option 3: The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants**

Provide the movie *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants* (2005, PG).

Start cue: (Chapter 33, 1:45) Highway signs flash by.

End cue: Dad takes the bride's hand. Carmen smiles.

Four friends are bound together by a mystical pair of jeans during a difficult summer. Carmen vehemently confronts her father about "replacing" her with his new family. Her struggle intensifies when her friends make her go to her dad's wedding.

*Parables of Lost and Found page 10*
• How is Carmen like both the eldest brother and the prodigal son?
• Who are the "Carmens" in your world who might need to hear a word of love and acceptance?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.

**NOTE:** Consult Christian Video Licensing International at Motion Picture Licensing Corporation (1.800.462.8855 or www.mplc.com) for its umbrella licensing program covering the use of videos/DVDs or video/DVD clips in any public gathering.

**Music: I'll Be There**

**Option 1: "Home"**

Provide the song "Home" by Daughtry (from *Daughtry*, RCA, 2006).

These parables tell stories of things and people who are lost and then found. The message in all of them is that God makes an extra effort to find the lost, and celebrates when they return to where they need to be. Chris Daughtry's "Home" speaks of being away from what is familiar and loved, and the pain, loneliness, and feelings of being lost. He sings of going home, of returning to where love is strong and wholeness is possible.

• Have you ever lost someone or something that you loved? How did that make you feel?
• Have you ever felt alone and lost? Did you do something to make that feeling go away?
• When you feel lost or alone, where is your "home"?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.

**Option 2: "Everything's Not Lost"**

Provide the song "Everything's Not Lost" by Coldplay (from *Parachutes*, Capitol, 2000).

When we think of being lost, we usually think in terms of something or someone not being able to be found. In the song "Everything's Not Lost" by Coldplay, the lyrics take a different twist on the word *lost*. They speak of how we can feel like we're alone in our despair, feelings of isolation, or struggle against bad choices or negative people. The lyrics offer hope that we are not alone in our struggles, and everything is eventually going to be alright. Just as God rejoices when those who are lost are found, we can rejoice that God is with us when we feel lost and alone, and God will never let us down.

• How does it feel to be lost and alone?
• Who do you turn to for help when you feel that way?

Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.

**Option 3: "Ain't No Mountain High Enough"**

Parables of Lost and Found page 11
Provide the song "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" by the singers from the show *American Idol* (from *American Idol Season 3: Greatest Soul Classics*, RCA, 2004).

This classic soul song depicts a love that will go to any lengths for the partners to be together. God's love for us is like this. Often we hear others talk about "finding God," but the reality is that God finds us no matter how far we wander and rejoices when we are found.

• When is a time you have felt God working through you? Have you seen God work through others?
• How can you see God pursuing you in your life?

*Please preview this content to determine its appropriateness for your setting.*

**Learning in Motion**

Tell the students that a $5 bill is hidden somewhere in your meeting space. They have five minutes to locate it. The first one to find it gets to keep it. After five minutes, gather everyone back together and ask the following questions: How did you feel when you were looking for the money? How desperately did you want to find it? How did finding it, or seeing someone else find it, make you feel? If you were searching intently for something that wasn't even yours in the first place, think how much more God intently searches for God's children who are lost.

**Closing Questions**

*Consider starting the Closing Time with a "Stump the Presenter!" moment in which learners may ask you questions that have come up during their small group discussions, but for which they want further explanation. This gives the small group leaders an "honorable out" when they get into sticky theological territory, and it's a great way to start out your final minutes together.*

*If there are no "Stump the Presenter!" questions, tickle learners with one or more of the following questions to connect Small Group Time with the larger conversation:*

• Why do you think "finding the lost" is so important to God?
• What can we do to help find the lost for Christ?
• Do you know of someone who is not a Christian?
• How would you explain God's grace to someone?
• How can you celebrate God's grace today?

**Closing Ritual**

Have the students kneel on the floor with their heads bowed. Quietly begin praying the Lord's Prayer together. As all slowly move to a standing position, the prayer gets louder and louder until everyone is close to shouting by the end of the prayer.
Closing Blessing

Before anyone leaves to go home, make sure each learner receives the following blessing from the small group leader, or from you! (Or, if you like, consider writing your own blessing, based on your teaching time.) Have leaders trace the cross on each learner's forehead as they say the blessing.

Remember that you are a child of God, and God's love and grace will always be with you.
Small Group Leader Sheet: Parables of Lost and Found

Instructions

Make sure each learner has a Learner Sheet for use during your discussion. At the end of the lesson they can take the Learner Take-Home Sheet to use with their household at dinner or bedtime.

Be sure to start on a positive note. Welcome each learner by name. Let them know you're glad they're here! If anyone is absent, mention you'll be praying for that person together. Small Group Time is for give-and-take discussion. Your main job is to draw learners out and get them talking about the theme. Ask open-ended questions that will provoke responses. Once the conversation begins, intervene only to bring it back on track or to stimulate more talk.

Quick Prep

Luke 15:1-32

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• The context in which these stories are told is important and demands that we look at the hard question these parables pose for the (supposed) "nonlost." They just might be the real intended recipients of the message in these stories.

• This parable of the prodigal son has a beautiful picture of grace—the father running out to meet the son and putting his arms around him and kissing him before the lost son even has the chance to ask for forgiveness.

• We don't often enough put ourselves in the place of the eldest son. He is our prideful self, the side of us that not only thinks we can make it into the "father's arms" on our own but privately thinks we have.

• These stories are a call for celebrating God's radical grace. God loves each of us because that's who God is.

Prayer Time

Go around the group and have each learner share the best and worst thing from his or her week. Remind learners to pay special attention to (for example) the person on their right, as they will be praying for that person in a moment (alternate prayer partners from week to week). When the group has finished, prayer partners can pray for each other.

Key Words
LOST is the result of having gone astray.

FOUND is the result of searching to locate, attain, or obtain that which was lost.

GRACE is the freely given, unmerited favor and love of God.

CELEBRATE is to make known publicly or to proclaim or praise widely when something special has happened, such as the lost being found.

FORGIVENESS is to pardon an offense or an offender, to hold a person blameless, as God freely does for us.

Discussion Time

Use the following questions to kick off a conversation about the theme:

• Think of a friend who has done something hurtful to you or to someone else you know. What steps can you take to forgive the person? If it's possible to restore the friendship, what can you do to make that happen?

• Pages 131-133 in The Lutheran Handbook, "How to Reform the Church When It Strays from the Gospel," talks about Martin Luther and other believers coming under fire for their viewpoint about God's grace. Have you ever been teased or ridiculed for talking about your faith in God? Have you ever teased or ridiculed someone else for talking freely about God? How did that make you feel?

• In the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), the woman desperately searched for her coin until she found it, and then she celebrated her finding. Have you ever lost something important to you? How did that make you feel? Were you able to celebrate your finding? How did you celebrate?

• Pass out sheets of paper to the students and have them write examples in their lives when they recognized God's grace in action. Suggest that they tape the example on a mirror or pin it to a bulletin board at home as a reminder of the constant presence of God's grace in their lives.

• Work together as a group to come up with your own definition of grace. Use the definition to make a colorful poster or banner to hang in the classroom.

Big Fun Idea

Go on a "spiritual" scavenger hunt to find a cross, a Bible bookmark, a plaque with a favorite scripture verse, any Christian symbol/sticker, a devotion book, a prayer book, a Bible. Once the items have been collected, deliver them to a new Christian or a person who is homebound as a gift from your group.

Big Serving Idea

Go to a discount store to purchase toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, and other personal care items. Wrap them in small bags and attach the following verse to each bag: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). As a group, travel to a nearby homeless shelter and pass out the bags.
Funny Shape of Faith Small Group Devotions: Parables of Lost and Found

Have a volunteer read the devotion that corresponds with this cartoon: "Lost: Soul. Reward: Eternal life." The Funny Shape of Faith: Devotions for the Rest of Us (Augsburg Fortress, 2007), p. 51. Then use the following questions to spark group discussion.

Tell about finding something you lost. How did you feel when you found this item?

Name your most prized possession. If you lost this item, how long would you look for it?

You have been asked to work a shift at heaven's Lost and Found. You answer the phones and handle questions from people who walk up. What are they asking you? What is the day like? Who's visiting? Why?
Learner Sheet: Parables of Lost and Found

Luke 15:1-32

The Big Idea: God always makes the extra effort to find the lost.

Big Fun Idea

Go on a "spiritual" scavenger hunt to find a cross, a Bible bookmark, a plaque with a favorite scripture verse, any Christian symbol/sticker, a devotion book, a prayer book, a Bible. Once the items have been collected, deliver them to a new Christian or a person who is homebound as a gift from your group.

Big Serving Idea

Go to a discount store to purchase toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, and other personal care items. Wrap them in small bags and attach the following verse to each bag: "So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). As a group, travel to a nearby homeless shelter and pass out the bags.

Prayer Time

* Remember your partner's prayer needs—record them here.

Discussion Time

* Think of a friend who has done something hurtful to you or to someone else you know. What steps can you take to forgive the person? If it's possible to restore the friendship, what can you do to make that happen?
* Pages 131-133 in The Lutheran Handbook, "How to Reform the Church When It Strays from the Gospel," talks about Martin Luther and other believers coming under fire for their viewpoint about God's grace. Have you ever been teased or ridiculed for talking about your faith in God? Have you ever teased or ridiculed someone else for talking freely about God? How did that make you feel?
* In the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), the woman desperately searched for her coin until she found it, and then she celebrated her finding. Have you ever lost something important to you? How did that make you feel? Were you able to celebrate your finding? How did you celebrate?
* On a sheet of paper write an example from your life when you recognized God's grace in action. Tape the example on a mirror or pin it to a bulletin board at home as a reminder of the constant presence of God's grace in your life.
* Work together with your group to come up with your own definition of grace. Use the definition to make a colorful poster or banner to hang in the classroom.
Learner Take-Home Sheet: Parables of Lost and Found

Luke 15:1-32

Take this sheet home and keep it someplace near the dinner table, like on the fridge. At least three times next week at dinner, use Prayer Time and one other family activity to make your confirmation learning come alive!

Prayer Time

Join hands together as a family and take turns thanking God for one thing in your life that is evidence of God's love and grace to you.

Key Words

Keep a family white board someplace near the dinner table, and write these words on it. Try writing a family definition for each one during the week.

LOST
FOUND
GRACE
CELEBRATE
FORGIVENESS

Talk Time

• As a family, come up with a list of five things you can do to share the message of God's grace with people in your neighborhood, your school, or your workplace.
• Even though no one is deserving of God's grace, why do you think we can't live without it?
• Open a Bible to Luke 15 and read verses 1-7, the parable of the lost sheep. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will never stop looking for his sheep? Do you think everyone is deserving of this kind of search? Why or why not?

Web Time

Sit together at the computer and do an Internet search for "grace." How many hits did you get? Now do a search for "God's grace." How many hits did you get? Pick one or two to explore further. Did you learn anything new? What was the strangest hit you found?

Ritual Time
Have a separate sheet of paper for each member of the family with his or her name printed at the top. Pass the papers around and have family members write something they're thankful for about that specific individual. When all the papers have been passed around, each person gets his or her own sheet to see what others have written. Encourage all to save their papers in a special place and periodically take it out and read it.
Via a security camera monitor, we see a young man searching for his keys. He scans the ground, checks under parked cars, and looks behind stumps. Eventually, he finds his keys, picks them up, and jogs away.

- Describe a time when you lost something of great value to you. How did you feel when you realized it was lost? How did you feel when you found it?
- What do the parables of lost and found teach us about God's search and rescue mission?
- How far will God go to retrieve the lost? At what point might God give up the search?
Video 1 (Low Resolution): Lost and Found

*Media file: ParablesofLostandFound.mp4*

Via a security camera monitor, we see a young man searching for his keys. He scans the ground, checks under parked cars, and looks behind stumps. Eventually, he finds his keys, picks them up, and jogs away.

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Video 2: Lost and Found

*Media file: ParablesofLostandFound.mpg*

Describe a time when you got lost in a store, a new school, or a different town or neighborhood. How did you feel when you were found? What a relief to be in the right place after wandering in fear and confusion! In these "lost and found" parables, Jesus uses this common experience to illustrate God's devotion to us. Whether we are like the younger son (disrespectful, disobedient, naive, selfish) or the elder son (proud, angry, unloving, self-righteous), God finds us wherever we wander.

God never ceases in the search and rescue mission to find the lost. When we realize what a gift we've been given by our gracious, forgiving, welcoming Savior, how can we help but be thankful! Who can you share the joy of being "found" with this week?
Music Clip: Light for the Darkness

*Media file: ParablesofLostandFound.mp3*

Song: "Open unto Me"
CD: *Worldmaking* (www.worldmaking.net)
Artist: Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan
© Richard Bruxvoort-Colligan

Open unto me light for my darkness
Light for my darkness open unto me
Open unto me light for my darkness
Open unto me, O God

In the Bible, being "lost" is synonymous with being in darkness. In the dark there is fear, panic, loss of vision, and loss of hope. For believers, God's "light" has chased away the darkness. Sharing God's "light" with those who need it does not diminish our own; it makes the "light" even more intense. Play the song, then ask the following questions.

• Do you remember dark times in your life? What made those times so difficult?
• Did people reach out to you? How?
• Did you look to God for help?

Note: You can purchase the CD featuring this song from the Augsburg Fortress online store (www.augsburgfortress.org).
PPT® Presentation (versions 2002 and later)

This presentation includes a video file and an audio file. All three (the presentation, the video, and the audio) will download at once as a ZIP archive. Unzipping the archive will produce a single folder containing all three files. **For the presentation to work properly, the files must all be in the same folder**; therefore, we recommend you not remove them from the folder produced when you unzip the archive, but rather move the entire folder as a single unit.

*Media file: ParablesOfLostandFound.zip*
Cartoon

Media file: ParablesofLostandFound.tif

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