

Title: **Search and Rescue**

Text: Luke 15

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We can get so complacent within the life of the church that we forget God's larger agenda here on earth. It is the very agenda that encompassed us so that we became Christians in the first place. It's a mission of search and rescue.

Mr. Glenn Ey, a 44-year-old Australian man, was lost at sea. What had been a relaxing two weeks of sailing down the coast became a brutal life-and-death ordeal. During a raging storm, a massive wave flipped the yacht and snapped the mast into three pieces. Helpless and adrift 270 nautical miles off the coast, Mr. Ey activated his emergency flare, and then waited.

Sheltering below deck on the broken boat, Ey couldn't have known that an airplane full of bored Canadians and home-bound Australians were about to be shaken from their mid-flight stupor by the pilot.

The plane's captain, Andrew Robertson, explained that they'd been asked by Australian search and rescue to help locate a distressed yacht. Captain Robertson then brought his plane down to 5,000 ft. and asked crew and passengers to watch for the boat. Robertson admitted that it was like finding "a needle in a haystack." Robertson said, "I had already made a PA announcement telling passengers what we were doing and as we got into the area, I said: "We're coming into the search area, please everybody look out to the window and if you seen anything let us know."

Several passengers and a flight officer using a passenger's binoculars almost immediately spotted the yacht. Robertson dropped the plane to less than 4,000 feet and determined it was the right boat. With the location reported, a coast guard rescue was launched.

After his rescue, Ey said, "I heard the jet overhead, but I didn't know it was for me—I wasn't aware of what had transpired until I got back to land. I think what they did is fantastic."

\* All of us love a good search-and-rescue story, as when first responders ran into the World Trade Center on 9/11 or excavators work around the clock to reach trapped coal miners. Such heroic scenes capture our attention, and we feel a thrilling sense of relief when we see someone rescued from certain death.

Such a scene touches God's heart as well. In fact, this yearning for search and rescue is at the very heart of God, at the very core of his mission.

### **I. Jesus used words like *lost, seek, find* and *save again* and *again*.**

1. These are key themes in his teachings and stories.
2. While this is evident throughout the gospels, one particular chapter pulls out all stops: Luke 15.

This chapter gives us a series of Jesus' stories about search-and-rescue missions, so let us look at the first.

\* These stories are told in a surprising scenario for first-century readers, as tax collectors and sinners drew close to listen to Jesus. These were the outcasts of Jewish society. When the religious leaders saw Jesus talking with such people, they grumbled and muttered. Why did Jesus spend time with them? He seemed to like them. The scribes and Pharisees couldn't understand why. In this setting, Jesus tells the first of three stories to help them understand what he was up to—and, ultimately, what God the Father is up to—in the midst of this fallen world.

#### ***Luke 15:3-6***

*Then Jesus told them this parable: [4] "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? [5] And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his*

*shoulders [6] and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'*

1. This scripture tells how a shepherd had a hundred sheep and one was lost.
2. This animal was more than just a choice pet; it represented the man's livelihood.
3. Each of these sheep was an investment that could someday bring a handsome return to provide for the shepherd's family.
4. When one of them wandered away and got lost, the shepherd went looking for it.

## **II. Notice what the parable says to us...**

1. Now the shepherd in this story clearly represents God.
2. The lost sheep represents a human being who wanders away from God's fold.
3. And the implication is clear: Every individual matters to God, just as every single sheep matters to the shepherd!
4. Each of us has great value in the eyes of God.

\* No matter what kind of upbringing we may have had, most of us knew that someone deeply cared about us. Mom, dad, uncle, aunt, grandparent, friend—someone, somewhere, really cared about us. We knew how it felt to be valued by another person. Take that feeling, multiply it by a trillion, and you begin to get some idea of how much God values you.

\* In a humorous 2011 Chevrolet commercial titled "Tommy," a Silverado pick-up truck acts like a modern-day Lassie, repeatedly rescuing a young boy named Tommy from various disasters. The ad begins as the truck rushes into the driveway and honks. Tommy's father listens to the truck "speak," and then the anxious father asks the truck, "What? Tommy slipped into a well?" Then the father and his faithful truck proceed to drive off and rescue the boy from danger.

This scenario repeats itself several times. The truck peels up the driveway, horn blaring and lights flashing, as it "tells" about a new episode in Tommy's saga of getting in trouble. Each time the truck appears, the father blurts out his frustration: "Tommy's stuck in a cave?" or "Where did you get a [hot air] balloon?" or "How did you get trapped in the belly of a whale?" or "I didn't even know this town had a volcano!" But each time Tommy gets in trouble, the loyal truck shows up and powerfully delivers Tommy from his self-made disasters.

Like Tommy, some of us have a knack for getting in trouble. Who is going to help us out?

5. Jesus is saying that when a single person wanders away from God, something of great value is lost.
  - a. The shepherd in Jesus' story began an all-out search for the sheep that was lost.
  - b. The ninety-nine other sheep are left behind safely when the shepherd leaves to find the stray.

### **III. This reminds us of Jesus' final words to his disciples in Matthew 28, where he commands us to "go" and seek the lost.**

1. God and his people keep going and searching until the lost is found.
2. Can you catch a glimpse of God's amazing attitude in this story?

\* A 2011 article in *Time* reported that our emergency response system, or 911, is quickly becoming outdated and must be retooled in order to reach people in need. The 911 service was created in 1968 to find and rescue people who were injured or dying. The ability for emergency workers to respond was based on the landline telephone network, which immediately gave operators the location of people in need.

However, with the widespread use of cell phones and other phone services, landline phones are becoming obsolete and may someday disappear altogether. While the name of the primary cell phone customer appears, their location could be anywhere. Panicked or injured callers sometimes don't know where they are.

So on top of being hurt or endangered, they're also lost and disoriented. If the emergency is in a multi-storied building, the response crew must determine how to pick the right floor.

*Time* warned: "Such gaps leave us with a patchy emergency infrastructure that has become progressively less able to find people in need." Call centers are upgrading and diversifying their technology, but in the end the advanced technology can't always reach people in crisis. The article pointed to our best resource: "Emergencies are best served by smart people." In other words, the 911 operators must think creatively and quickly to find lost callers and then to send the help that the caller needs.

The purpose of 911 has not changed. People still find themselves injured, lost, or in danger, and in need of rescue. But now more than ever, the rescue operation depends not just on programs or technology, but on committed, compassionate people and a loving God.

3. He has so much love for a fallen world that he is on an all-out search.

As Peter says,

*God is "patient toward you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9 NIV).*

#### **IV. Finally, Jesus says the shepherd has a great celebration when the lost is found (Luke 15:5–6).**

1. When the shepherd finds the sheep, he places it on his shoulders and brings it home!
2. He pampers and nurtures it.
3. We can visualize him attending to whatever wounds it might have incurred.
4. Then he calls friends and neighbors to join in a celebration!

\* Some neighbor might say, "Are you kidding me? Sure, every sheep is valuable, but aren't you making a big deal out of this? We all have sheep, and we all lose some. But really, a party?"

#### **V. That is exactly Jesus' point.**

1. Considering how much the shepherd loves and values his sheep, the rescue is definitely worth celebrating.
2. Each one matters to the shepherd; each one matters to God.
3. In fact, Jesus says there is more rejoicing over the one who's rescued than over the ninety-nine that stayed in the fold.

***Matthew 18:13-14***

*And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. [14] In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.*

**Conclusion:** That's amazing, isn't it?

When one lost person comes to Christ, we have more reason to celebrate than for the "faithful few" who come to church every week, join a Bible study, or even serve in their gifted area of ministry. What we do faithfully, week after week, is altogether pleasing to God, but it doesn't cause him nearly as much rejoicing as one lost child who comes home.

You may find yourself saying, "What? Isn't that a bit of an overstatement?" If so, you feel just as the good Jewish leaders felt when Jesus told them this story the first time.

We must ask ourselves: Do we share God's passion and priority for the lost? When all is said and done, God is on a search-and-rescue mission in this world. So are we.