



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This weekend we have an incredible Gospel of God's love and mercy. This passage from Luke 15 shares the story of the Lost Sheep (the Good Shepherd), the Lost Coin (the Searching Woman), and the Prodigal Son (the Loving Father). The theme in all the parables is the person responsible **seeks** that which is lost – the sheep, the coin, the son.

Jesus uses these parables to show us the Heart of God. We talk about God as Father, but do we understand how much this Father loves us. After we (repeatedly) insult Him by our sin, He is still looking for us, and runs out to meet us when we desire to come back. He seeks us out, even when it means leaving the ninety-nine. He searches for us more than a woman who has lost one tenth of her wealth. He goes out to us even when we refuse to come in to the celebration because of resentment. As the song goes, "Oh the overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God! Oh it chases me down, fights till I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine!"

God chases us down! He's not trying to catch us because we're in trouble, but because He loves us so much! Just read the poem "The Hound of Heaven" by Francis Thompson, and you'll get a glimpse of God's love coming after us.

Do we let Him catch us? Do we let Him find us? I think of the play "Li'l Abner": Abner and Daisy Mae are talking about how he wants her to catch him, yet he always *just* pulls away from her grasp. For some reason, even though he wants to be caught, he doesn't want to. That can be us: we want to be loved, to experience God's mercy and peace, but something makes us run from Him. **Why?** This would be excellent fodder for our prayer time: asking God why we run from Him.

I think about the younger son in the parable. Even when he hit hard times, it took him awhile to realize he should just go back to his father. What shame must keep him down. What dread or resentment! I think about the fear he must have experienced – "What would my father say if he could see me now, tending the swine? How will my brother react? They'll laugh and mock me and say I got what I deserve." It is only in desperation that his pride is crushed and he is finally able to go where he knows his needs will be satisfied. And what happens in that humility? His needs are met, yes, but more than met! The father welcomes him back as a full son. He doesn't ask where he's been, what he's done with the money, or how he dares to come back after insulting him. Rather, the father "*Ran to his son, embrace him and kissed him*" (Luke 15: 20).

Do we believe this is the attitude of Almighty God toward us?

We have to repent, of course. We have to get up and return to the Father; we have to *let* the Shepherd carry us back home, so there is work on our part. God can do anything and everything, but He *will not* step on our freewill. If we choose to stay in our sin, in our distance from Him, He will come after us, but He will *not* force us to come home to Him. But, when we do repent – when we do get up and return to Him – He does all of the heavy lifting. He welcomes us back with open arms.

May we let the God of the universe – who loves us so much – catch us and bring us home.

