

FORGIVENESS

Deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay

The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1-7

MEMORY VERSE | *Colossians 3:13*

If you went to hear Jesus teach, there was no telling who you might meet in the crowd. You might come across a wealthy man. Or a group of kids. Or well-educated religious leaders and teachers.

But many of the people who crowded around Jesus were considered the lowest of the low. Tax collectors who cheated people by taking extra money for themselves and the Romans. Other men and women who had made wrong choices and broken God's laws.

Jesus was happy to see everyone, especially those who were eager to hear God's words and change their lives. But the religious leaders thought Jesus was bringing Himself down to the level of these "sinners."

"Look at that riffraff hanging out around Jesus," the religious leaders complained to each other. "He doesn't tell them to leave! He even ate dinner at the home of a tax collector."

Jesus overheard the loud whispers and knew just what the religious leaders were thinking in their hearts. But instead of arguing with them, He told a story. If He told it today, it might sound something like this.

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THERE ONCE WAS A MAN with one hundred sheep. We'll call him Bob.

Each day, Bob led his sheep out to the mountain pasture where they could munch on the rich, green grass and wander down to the creek for a drink of clear, cool water.

Every evening, Bob led his flock back home to the sheepfold with its impressive steel fence.

“Check out these special infrared detectors,” Bob explained to a neighbor. “I installed ‘em to zap all wolves, lions, bears and any of your other Type A predators.”

One evening, Bob herded all the sheep inside as usual. “Let’s see,” he said, patting an extra-furry lamb, “You’re number 98, Curly. Cotton, 99. And Snowflake . . . now where’s Snowflake?”

***“She’s out there all alone!”
Bob worried.
“I gotta find her.”***

Bob searched the sheepfold and re-counted his sheep. But the smallest one, Snowflake, was nowhere to be found! Bob made one more frantic sweep of the pen, but it quickly became clear.

“Snowflake’s back up there on the mountain!” he exclaimed.

Night was falling, and darkness crept through the valley. Bob could even hear a distant, lone wolf howl.

“She’s out there all alone!” Bob worried. “I gotta find her.”

Bob grabbed his flashlight and shut the door of the sheepfold. As he hurried across the field, he texted all his friends and neighbors:

FYI. Snowflake lost. Going 2 look.

Bob rushed back up the mountain, scrambling over loose rocks and through bramble patches. As the night grew darker, he thought he could hear a lion roar. Bob flashed his light behind craggy rocks and into tangled thickets . . . but no sheep.

“Back off, you!” he shouted to any predators that might be near. “I gotta find my Snowflake.”

Bob spun in a circle searching for any clues of his missing sheep. He listened hard . . . and finally heard a faint bleating.

“That’s gotta be her. I’m coming, Snowflake!” he called.

***“That’s gotta be her.
I’m coming, Snowflake!”
Bob called.***

Bob plunged into a deep ravine, slipping and sliding down the steep slope. Even though he scraped his knee and bashed his elbow, it was worth it. There, trapped in vines at the bottom of the ravine, was Snowflake!

Carefully, Bob freed his lost sheep. He draped her around his shoulders and clawed his way up out of the ravine. Filled with joy, he raced down the hillside—calling friends on his phone as he went.

“I found her!” he exclaimed. “She’s safe! Big party at my place, and you gotta come.”

The rest of the sheep were happy to see Snowflake back. And Bob shared his great joy with friends and neighbors late into the night.

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AS JESUS FINISHED THE STORY, the crowd listened in silence. Jesus looked directly at the religious leaders.

“I tell you,” He said, “it will be the same in heaven. There will be great joy when one sinner turns away from sin. Yes, there will be more joy than for 99 godly people who do not need to turn away from their sins.”

“Is Jesus saying we’re the other sheep?” one religious leader whispered to his friend. “It’s like Jesus is saying God actually loves all those lost sinners . . . losers . . . people.”

Not one of the religious leaders had the nerve to respond to Jesus. But many of them understood what He was saying. God is quick to seek out and forgive everyone—no matter who they are or what they’ve done.



**Let's
Talk!**

“Sin” is a tough word. But it simply means anything we do, think or say that doesn’t line up with the two things God says are most important—loving Him and loving others.

Even if you’ve gone to church your whole life, you’ve still sinned. You’ve messed up and done things that hurt God and hurt other people. Take a few moments right now to share with each other something you’ve done recently that you know was wrong, whether it was yelling at your sister or saying something that wasn’t quite true. I’m guessing it was pretty easy to think of something! And any time we sin, it puts distance between us and God. But here’s the amazing thing. God is always ready to forgive. There’s nothing you’ve done that’s so terrible that He won’t forgive you the moment you ask Him. Pray together now and ask God to forgive you for the things you shared. If what you did hurt someone else, too, go and ask that person for forgiveness this week.