



Theme: Authentic FAith in a World of Artificial Intelligence



"Waiting Patiently to Be Found"

Weekly Memory Verses:

^{20b} ...while [the lost young man] was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.
–Luke 15:20b


Meditation Moments for Monday, January 26 – Read **Ezekiel 34:1-10** and **Luke 15:1-2**.


Ezekiel prophesied among the Israelites during their exile in Babylon, around 550 years before Jesus. Through him God said Israel's leaders had failed, being self-absorbed and indifferent to what happened to their people. The religious leaders in Jesus' day seemed to have this same struggle. It's not unlike what we may experience today when we are treated as an object or a soulless consumer by technology, instead of human beings. When Jesus reached out to outcasts and those who felt lost, the religious leaders grumbled about it, showing that they didn't care about the people who were hurting and felt far from God.

-  Jesus acted as though God deeply loved all people. Did what you learned early in life about God and "church" agree more with the Pharisees who snubbed some people, or with Jesus? How comfortable are you with loving today's "tax collectors and sinners" (including yourself), both inside and outside the church?
-  The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament said, "[Ezekiel's] metaphor goes beyond the normal responsibilities of making sure the sheep were protected and fed ... it focuses on ...caring for the sick and finding the lost. These would equate to the need for kings to bring about justice for alienated and disenfranchised people." What are some of the ways you actively support and work for justice for the alienated and disenfranchised people around you? How can you slow down in today's world to see people as children of God and not distractions or inconveniences?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for those who've planted the seed of your kingdom in my life. Teach me how to discern when to speak, and when to silently let your love shine through me to others. Amen


Tuesday, January 27 – Read **Luke 15:3-7**. Jesus told three stories to the Pharisees and legal experts who grumbled about him mingling with “tax collectors and sinners.” Probably echoing the image from Ezekiel 34, the first story was about a shepherd who lost one sheep from his flock. This shepherd, though, was not at all indifferent to the loss. He dropped everything, searched everywhere until he found the lost sheep—and then threw a party to celebrate finding it.


 Pastor Bruce Larson wrote, “A shepherd once explained to me that sheep nibble their way into lostness. They move from one tuft of green grass to the next, sometimes right through a hole in the fence. When they're done nibbling, they can't find the hole and they're lost. Some of us know what that is—to nibble ourselves bit by bit into the far country.” When have you been like the lost sheep, not sure how to find your way home? Have you ever felt lost in the digital world, nibbling through social media or news feeds? What “shepherd(s)” has God used to find you and bring you home?

 Have you ever wondered why Jesus used phrase, “ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to change their hearts and lives?” We can be quite sure he was using irony to show his critics' attitude. In fact, we all need to change and grow in God's kingdom. In what areas of your life is God inviting and challenging you today to change and grow?

Prayer: O Jesus, thank you for seeking and finding me, for being “thrilled” and placing me on your shoulders! Give me eyes to see others who want to be found and drawn into your great heart of steadfast love. Amen.


Wednesday, January 28 – Read **Luke 15:8-10**. Each of the woman's coins was probably worth about a day's wages. In her dimly lit peasant home, with a straw-covered floor, the woman searched tirelessly until she found the coin. Jesus ended this parable by saying again, “In the same way ... joy breaks out in the presence of God's angels over one sinner who changes both heart and life.”


 When have you felt like the lost coin in a sea of straw? How does it feel to know that was and is looking for you? Who are your “coins,” the people you value enough to go out of your way to reach out and touch? Is there a family member, friend or co-worker you particularly sense Jesus calling you to “seek and find”? Ask God to give you a heart that sees the world as God does, that refuses to limit love only to notable or “perfect” people.

 Think of a time when you joined in celebrating really good news for a family member or friend. What was the cause, and what was the celebration like? Have you ever been part of celebrating that someone you care about has “changed both heart and life”? What are your inner feelings if it's someone you don't like very much who makes such a change?

Prayer: Gracious God, you came in the person of Jesus to seek and save the lost. Come into me each day to touch lives you are still seeking. Amen.


Thursday, January 29 – Read **Luke 15:11-24**. Losing a sheep or a silver coin was costly. Finding either was cause for joy. But what of a son who was “lost” through his own choice? Jesus’ story vividly pictured the naive young man rashly using up his resources. But the father kept watching and never gave up. Then the father’s extravagant love embraced him with robe, ring, sandals and the fattened calf, saying, “This son of mine ... was lost and is found!” The big idea is that God is always waiting and watching for us no matter how far away we might feel we are from God.


 In today’s culture, we expect children to “grow up and leave home.” But scholar N. T. Wright wrote in his commentary *Luke for Everyone*, that in the culture of Jesus’ day, this was a story of shameful behavior, “with the younger son abandoning his obligation to care for his father in his old age.” Have you had times when you were like the younger son in Jesus’ story? When have you been on the receiving end of forgiveness and welcome something like what the father in the story gave the son?

 Wright also noted that, “in a culture where senior figures are far too dignified to run anywhere, this man takes to his heels as soon as he sees his young son dragging himself home.” This is one of Jesus’ great pictures of what God is really like. Do you picture God high up, intimidating, looking down on you sternly? Or do you see him as a loving parent who waits patiently and is always eager to run to you and throw his arms around you?

Prayer: *Lord God, sometimes I’m careless, sometimes I’m stubborn. Keep bringing me “to my senses”, making me willing to come home to you, again and again. Amen.*


Friday, January 30 – Read **Luke 15:25-32**. We may think Jesus’ story ended once the younger son was home, and the party began. But Jesus told the story to people who grumbled about him mixing with “tax collectors and sinners” in Luke 15:2. He added the older brother, who thought he was the “good” son, and was not at all pleased that his brother had returned. At story’s end, the father poignantly pleaded in verse 32 with the older brother to join the party: “We had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.”

 The servant in the story said, “Your brother has arrived.” When the father came out to him, the older son said, “This son of yours returned.” The father shifted the relationship back: “This brother of yours,” he said. In your imagination, argue the older brother’s case: why shouldn’t the younger one have been welcomed home? In what ways was that case, and the “good” brother’s reaction, out of harmony with the father’s wishes?

 As he did in a few other parables, Jesus left this story “unfinished.” He didn’t say what the older brother did. How was this approach effective in putting the responsibility with the Pharisees to decide how they would respond? With whatever “older brother” tendencies you find in yourself, how will you finish Jesus’ parable?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want to “enter in” to the joy of your kingdom and celebrate what you are doing in other’s lives. Move me from a “tit for tat” existence to an exuberant, abundant life. Amen.

Saturday, January 31 – Read **Ezekiel 34:11-16** and **John 10:7-15**. Ezekiel portrayed God as a good shepherd who would “seek out the lost, bring back the strays, bind up the wounded, and strengthen the weak.” John’s gospel completed the circle, saying that God came to earth in the person of Jesus, reached out to the lost and the strays, bound up our wounds and took special interest in the weak. He was the Good Shepherd, and in the end, he did indeed give up his life for the sheep—us.

 Think once more about the stories Jesus told—the shepherd seeking the lost sheep, the woman sweeping and searching for the lost coin, the father running to greet the lost son who had come home. In what ways can these stories deepen and enrich your understanding of how much God loves you? Had you ever pictured that, every time you move closer to God, joy breaks out in heaven—that you are that important to God? How can trusting that God loves you in this profound, relentless way give you a solid foundation for living “life to the fullest,” as Jesus promised in John 10:10?

Prayer: God, your love seems almost (but not quite) too good to be true! Thank you for giving your life for me. I open my heart to you—transform my inner life, broaden my horizons, and shine out of me as I enter into your joy. Amen.