

GROWTHguide

FOR THE WEEK OF JAN. 17, 2016

"All is Not Lost"



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Luke 15: 1-32, Deuteronomy 6:4-5, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, John 17:10-12, Ephesians 1:4

REFLECTION AND STUDY

DAY 1

Read the parables in Luke 15:1-32. The first two verses explain the context for why Jesus shares these parables. *"The tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"* In the Jewish culture of Jesus's time separatism and ritual purity took precedence over winning someone back to God's law through forgiveness and restoration. The principles that the Pharisees followed said, "Let not a man associate with the wicked, not even to bring him to the law" (Strack-Billerbeck, II, 208). With these parables, Jesus condemns the idea of separating ourselves from the "sinners" and makes it clear that the sinners and tax collectors are the ones God is seeking after. God has a tender, personal concern and a joyous love for individuals who are lost in sin and repent.

- Have you ever separated yourself from those who don't share your beliefs?
- Have you ever passed judgement on them?

Pray and ask God to help you to love those who are lost as God does.

DAY 2

The Apostle Paul, then called Saul, was a trained Pharisee who believed in the culture of separatism discussed on Day 1. If you didn't walk the straight and narrow, you were on God's bad list and not worthy of anything. When he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul was on his way to destroy the followers of Jesus. He believed these followers were lost, and in his mind, there was no room for redemption, only punishment. When he is confronted by the Lord, Paul discovers he was the one who was lost and his heart and entire life are changed. Imagine if Jesus has treated Paul like the religious leaders of the time, excluding or punishing him instead of reaching out to him. Because Jesus sought after the one who was lost, He gained a loyal disciple who spread His word to thousands of others. Think of all those who were converted and saved by Paul's ministry for Jesus.

- Do you remember a time when you were "lost"?
- Is there anyone "lost" that you have reached out to? What was the impact you had?

Pray and ask God to help you seek out those who are lost and help them find the truth of Christ.

DAY 3

Because of the personal experience he had with Jesus, Paul knew better than anyone the transformative power of Christ. He spent his entire ministry working to ensure others would learn the same. **Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.** When someone is "in Christ" the old self has indeed died with Christ and with Jesus Christ risen a new person, as new as if they were freshly created by the hands of God. Most of us want to be changed, to become more like Christ. But has everyone who claims to be a Christian truly experienced this transformation?

- How have you been changed by Christ?

DAY 4

In the first century, the laws of the faith relationship with God focused on dietary laws, circumcision, and keeping of the Sabbath. These surface laws were not really at the heart of a godly relationship. The true relationship with God was measured by the words of Deuteronomy 6:4-5, ***"Hear, O Israel: 'The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.'"*** But focusing on the highly visible, but superficial practices, allowed people to make judgements on who was "in" and who was "out" of the family of God. The insiders become proud and judgmental toward outsiders. They practiced what might be called a "boundary oriented approach" to spiritual life. This is ***"pseudo-transformation"***

In today's world, we experience the same thing. God's Word teaches us that our faith and spiritual commitment should make us different somehow. But if we are not marked by greater and greater amounts of love and joy, we will look for substitute ways of distinguishing ourselves from those who are not Christians.

- How important are the surface practices of faith to you?
- Do you ever place more importance on the superficial than on truly following in Christ's footsteps and acting as his hands and feet in the world?

Pray and ask God to help you to focus on Him and His ministry. Ask him to help you go beyond the superficial.

DAY 5

Jesus doesn't call us to separate ourselves or place ourselves above non-believers. He would consider the non-believer to be a not-yet believer. Maybe no one has reached out to that person to share the truth of a Jesus in a way that touches their heart. You never know when you might be the one voice that someone needs to hear to make things finally click and cause the scales to fall from their eyes like they did from Paul's. Jesus teaches us that everyone has the chance for redemption. Remember, we have all been "lost," but being lost is only the beginning of the story.

- Think about a time when you were "lost." What brought you to Christ?

Pray and thank God for his transformative power. Ask that He would help you reach others for Him.

DAY 6

In the parables we read on Day 1, notice that a relationship already exists between the seeker and the sought in each of these parables. The sheep already belongs to the shepherd, the coin already belongs to the woman, the son already belongs to the father. And you and I already belong to Jesus. Paul declares in Ephesians 1:4: ***"Before the world was made, God chose us in Christ."*** God stamped His name on us. As Jesus says when He prays for His disciples before His death, ***"I have kept watch over those You gave Me. Not one of them has been lost."*** (John 17:12)

- Do you know what it feels like to be found?
- Have you felt the arms of almighty God around you lifting you up?

Pray and thank God for finding you and covering you in his grace.

DAY 7

Today is your "Sabbath" and a time for reflection. How has God been speaking to you over the week? Use what the Lord has said to you to remold and reshape your life. If you are having trouble hearing God's voice, slow down or even stop what you are doing so that the busyness of life's demands do not squelch the whispers of God's language of love upon your heart.