



A Message from the Quorum of Twelve Apostles

RECOVERING GOD’S LOST CHILDREN

To most people, family is a very important concept. If you’re a parent, it would surely be your desire that you would always have a close relationship with your children. However, there are times, for whatever reason, that families become divided. Grown children may go their own way and not desire a relationship with their parents. When this happens, it’s typically a cause of great sadness for the parents who live each day longing for a reconciliation and a return to a time when they enjoyed a close relationship with their children.

In this way, God is similar to earthly parents. Many of us His children grow up and have no desire for a relationship with Him. And, just as you or I would, He desires for each of them to return to Him and enjoy that close relationship – in this case, a relationship that will last for all eternity.

One category of God’s lost children is those who, at one point in their lives, took the steps of repentance and baptism, and began a relationship with God, only to find themselves later wandering astray and losing that close relationship with Him. Jesus addressed this situation in Matthew 18, encouraging His disciples to retrieve followers who have gone astray since “it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish” (Matthew 18:14).

However, there is another category of God’s lost children – people who don’t know the Lord and are thus classified as sinners. Jesus was very familiar with these types of people which was why He often spent time with people who were known to be sinners. On one such occasion, some Pharisees noticed this, and they were immediately critical of Him, saying, “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them” (Luke 15:2). Jesus responded to this criticism by relating three parables, which illustrate how God views sinners – as lost children with whom He would love to have a relationship.

Parable of the Lost Sheep

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when

he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.” (Luke 15:4-7)

How can a sinner coming to Christ be the same as a lost sheep returning to the flock? When was the sinner who doesn't know the Lord ever a part of the flock?

In order to answer that question, we must understand that every human child who is born anywhere in the world is born into the family of God. It doesn't matter who the parents are or what their beliefs are – every child is innocent and belongs to the Lord (see Moroni 8). If someone were to die as a child, they would immediately go to the paradise of God and dwell with God for eternity (just like any other member of the family of God).

When children reach the age of understanding (early teens for most), assuming that they don't give their lives to Christ at that time, they begin to sin and thereby become “lost sheep”. So, the process of bringing sinners to repentance can therefore be viewed as bringing lost sheep back to the fold, back to the family of God.

When we understand that God views the entire human family as His children and that everyone starts life as part of the family of God, then it makes sense why Jesus spent time sharing the gospel with the sinners (and why we should do the same). Every sinner who repents is a lost child of God returning to His family. That's why Jesus states at the end of the parable that “joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth”. God is reunited with one of His children!

Parable of the Lost Coin

“What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” (Luke 15:8-10)

This parable is similar to the previous one, with something lost and found, representing a sinner repenting and causing joy in heaven. There is one basic difference: **A silver coin cannot wander away on its own and get lost** (as a sheep can). The only way that a coin can get lost is if someone is careless in some way and causes the coin to be lost. So, a second message of this parable is how to move forward to recover a lost child of God when one or more of us (as church members) have contributed in some way to that person becoming lost from the church.

How can this situation arise? What kinds of things might we do (even unknowingly) that might cause someone to not be a part of the church? Here are a few examples:

Allowing Offenses to Remain Unresolved – Problems between people that are not resolved often result in one or both separating from the church. Right after Jesus shared the first version of the lost sheep parable in Matthew 18, He outlined the “Law of Offense” which provides a guideline for resolving offenses and keeping everybody together in the flock. See Matthew 18:15-17. Not following this can result in a lost coin.

Living Two Different Lives – People who are considering becoming part of the church are typically seeking to be part of a group of people who are doing their best to be sincere followers of Christ. If these seekers see church members acting one way in church and a totally different way (worldly) outside of church, that is a huge turnoff and will result in them moving on to seek sincere followers of Christ somewhere else. Another lost coin.

Being Unwilling to Spend Time with Sinners – This is, of course, the one that most applies to the situation that Jesus was in when He shared this parable. For us today – If a stranger walks into church who doesn’t know the Lord and who is obviously leading a sinful lifestyle, do we try to connect with that person or do we stay far away? While we all have a desire to fellowship with our brothers and sisters and loved ones in church, recognize that each person who comes and goes without connecting with the church represents another lost coin.

What do we do when a coin is lost? What’s the recovery process? In this parable, the woman **immediately** began searching, even continuing into the night (with a candle lit) until she found the lost coin. She treated the situation with urgency and diligence, not giving up until the coin was found.

How can we apply this approach to the situations described above? When you know you’ve offended someone, immediate action is always the appropriate next step. If someone has left the church (or even has become discouraged) because of something you did, light the candle, go find the person, and do your best to get it resolved.

In other cases, where someone is perhaps considering the church and becomes a lost opportunity, there may not be the same opening to try to recover that particular person. If there is, act immediately before the opportunity is gone. But even if that person is not recoverable, use the episode as a learning experience. If you find yourself living two different lives, correct that immediately – live one life as a servant of God. If you’re not trying to connect with people who need the Lord, correct that immediately – you may be the person the Lord wants to use to bring someone to Christ.

Parable of the Prodigal Son

In the third parable told to the Pharisees (see Luke 15:11-32), a man has two sons living with him. The younger son takes his inheritance from his father, leaves home and proceeds to waste all the money until there is none left (thus, he is traditionally referred to as the “prodigal son”).

Now broke, the prodigal son gets a job feeding pigs and is so destitute that he wishes he could even eat what the pigs are eating. Having hit bottom, he remembers how much better it was in his father’s house where even the servants were better off than he is now. He decides to return to his father and just ask to be his servant. However, when the father sees his son returning, he runs out and hugs him, welcomes his son home, and throws a huge party to celebrate. When questioned by his older son about this greeting for the selfish, wasteful son, the father replies:

“It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:32)

The prodigal son in this parable is basically the same as the lost sheep and the lost coin from the previous two parables. However, since the prodigal son grew up in the father’s house and experienced what it was like to be part of that household, he would represent someone who has grown up in a godly home – perhaps part of a church family – and then has made the decision to go a different way.

We all know people who are currently in this situation, perhaps even in our own families. They’re familiar with the teachings of Jesus and the church – perhaps they grew up as part of the congregation. Perhaps they were baptized, perhaps not. They now are no longer associated with the Church and are presumably living a life of sin. Is it too late for them now or is there something we can do to try to draw these people back into the family of God?

Alma found himself in a similar situation – his son Alma was definitely a prodigal. Young Alma took everything he learned growing up in his father’s home and used it against the church, rather than applying it to himself. One day, everything changed when an angel appeared and spoke to young Alma with a voice of thunder, causing him to be converted to a great servant of God. Why did this angel appear to young Alma? The angel explained it to him:

“Behold, the Lord hath heard the prayers of his people, and also the prayers of his servant, Alma, who is thy father; for he has prayed with much faith concerning thee that thou mightest be brought to the knowledge of the truth; therefore, for this purpose have I come to convince thee of the power and authority of God, that the prayers of his servants might be answered according to their faith” (Mosiah 27:14)

According to what the angel said, God sent him to young Alma in order to answer the prayers of faith offered by his father Alma. This should be an example to us that praying with much faith is the primary approach to take to try to bring the prodigals back to the family of God. We can pray that these dear loved ones have their own conversion experience, as Alma did. Or that what they were taught as a child finally sinks in one day, as happened to Enos (see Enos verse 3). Or even that they hit bottom as a result of living in sin, as happened to the prodigal son, causing them to realize that life is better when living it with the Lord. Just continue to pray for them and trust the Lord to draw them back to His family in His own way.

He Knows Them All

Keep this 3-part message of Jesus in mind when considering the importance of outreach to sinners. God doesn't view sinners as terrible people – He sees them as His children who have gone astray. He wants them back in His family. That's why He set up a plan of salvation to rescue His lost children from eternal destruction.

As members of the family of God today, we have the unique opportunity to share the fullness of the gospel with God's lost children (whether they be lost sheep, lost coins or prodigal sons) and perhaps be instrumental in bringing some of them home. We must make it a personal priority (as Jesus did) to share the gospel with those who have not given their lives to Christ. **They may not know God, but He knows them** – they are His children who have gone astray. Let's make it a goal to trigger a series of celebrations in heaven by helping God's lost children to repent and find their way home to be reunited with their heavenly father.

In the love of God,

The Quorum of Twelve Apostles

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