

1

(Doug begins searching) I know it has to be around here somewhere. I had it here last Sunday, but now I'm not sure where I left it. I hope you don't mind if I take a few more moments to keep looking for... Now, let's see. What was I looking for?

Have you ever had that happen? You begin looking for something, and then you can't remember what you're looking for? In addition to losing stuff, sometimes I wonder if I've lost my mind.

Actually, it feels as though I've lost an entire year, for about this time last year we began hearing about a virus, though none of us expected it to impact our lives very much. In March we stayed home for several weeks, hoping that would prevent the spread. Soon we learned how to wear masks, sanitize our hands over and over again, and stand 6 feet apart from everyone. We gave up handshakes and hugs, and through the year many of us have felt more and more isolated, even feeling a bit lost. We've lost our ability to come and go as we please without worry. We've lost a few holidays of hugs with families. We've lost many Sundays of being together for worship.

No matter how hard we try to find a way out of this mess, we seem to walk deeper into the wilderness. The wilderness is not necessarily a bad place. Even Moses experienced the wilderness after escaping the slavery of the Pharaoh. He guided the people and wandered around for 40 years, using that time learning how to trust God in caring for the people.

Jesus also wandered in the wilderness after his baptism. For forty days he experienced temptations and struggles just like the rest of us. Being lost just might help us find our way to God, for in the solitude of the wilderness, something mysterious happens. Even though we may feel lost and uncertain what to do, God finds us, for God has never been very far away. Even if we lose track of God, God always knows where to find us.

Jesus told a lot of stories about being lost and found, like the shepherd who lost a sheep and searched for it until he found it. Upon the sheep's discovery, the shepherd had a party, suggesting that there is joy in heaven when one who has wandered away is found.

A woman who lost a coin swept the entire house until she found it. Jesus suggests that she's like God, who rejoices when one who has messed up life finally makes changes and lives a better life.

2

Even Jesus' closest followers sometimes got a bit lost, like Peter when he denied knowing Jesus three times after Jesus was captured. Jesus later invited Peter three times to help feed his sheep, reminding Peter how much he loved him.

Jesus told one particular lost story about two sons—and the response of their father. The story seems to suggest that both sons were lost, one was found, and the other remains in limbo. I could tell you that story, but I think hearing it from them in a modern context might be even better...

(Younger brother) You probably wonder why I'm sitting here. It's a long story. Before I got to this point, I thought my plan was such a good idea at the time. I mean, why wait until my father is dead to enjoy the wealth that would eventually come to me anyway? My older brother was the responsible one, so he could stay on the farm and keep it going, but it's not the life I wanted to live. I longed to see the world. Try new experiences. Live it up while I could. What good would an inheritance do if I were too old to enjoy it?

Dad didn't put up much resistance, but I could see the look of anger in my brother's eyes when I

Lost
February 7, 2021

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told him what I was planning. Hey, I couldn't help it if I first came up with the idea of leaving. And besides, he's always enjoyed working on the farm. My absence would just give him more to enjoy!

I moved to the city, a place filled with lots of entertainment and loads of friends. My first night I bought everyone a round of drinks, and I was amazed at how many friends I suddenly seemed to have. Flashing all that cash seemed to draw a crowd. I invited them over to my place afterwards, and the fun kept going. This was the life I had been waiting for; glad to leave behind the drudgery of working long hours in the fields.

I bought my girlfriend expensive jewelry, and she seemed thrilled to be with me. All was going great, but then I realized my funds were running low. I tried to find work, but a famine shut down a lot of business. No one was hiring. When I told a farmer that I had experienced working the land, he sent me to feed the pigs. And here I sit, so hungry that I've been tempted to eat the pig's slop. I feel so lost. Why work for pig food when I could do the same work and eat with my family? Hey, that's a great idea!

Luke 15:11-32

3

(Older brother) I saw someone coming down the road, and my father was running out to greet him. It couldn't be! But it was! My younger brother was returning home. He looked a mess, and I could just imagine what had happened. He never was a particularly good manager of money, and I assume he had run out. Boy, would I like to hear what my father has to say to him, but since I had chores to get done, I went out to the fields. I didn't really want to watch my dad get all upset, so I thought I would do the responsible thing and get to work. At least he could be pleased with me, and maybe that would help calm him down.

While I was out working in the fields, I thought I smelled something cooking, and soon I heard laughter and celebration. I wandered down to the house, assuming my father was throwing me a party for to show my brother what one gets for being loyal and hard working.

I asked someone what was going on, and he explained, "Your brother has come home, and your dad has dressed him up in his finest robe and planning a BBQ to celebrate."

I confronted my dad with his obvious mistake: "What's with all this? I've been here the whole time, but I never got a party with my friends."

Dad said, "Your brother said he wasn't worthy to be my son, and he offered to work for food. I offered him compassion, for he's still family. You've always been here, and all I have is yours, but your brother, my son, was once lost, but now he's found. Isn't that a good enough reason to celebrate? Come and join us."

I'm not sure what to do. Join the party and celebrate what my irresponsible brother has done? Or boycott the event to show my disapproval? I feel so lost. What would you do?

(Doug's conclusion) A lost sheep is found. A lost coin is found. Two lost sons. One was found, and the father celebrated, like what God does when helping one of us find our way. The other son, we're not sure. When you're feeling lost, God hasn't lost track of you. Are you ready to follow the way and be found?