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There are many different ways to be lost. A common way often happens to travelers when they find themselves in unfamiliar territory. Maybe the phone has died and you can't reach Google Maps, or the GPS has quit and you realized you forgot to pack a paper map as a backup.

Another experience of being lost can happen in a parking lot when you can't remember where you parked the car. Years ago when my daughter was around 12 years old, I took her to concert. The popularity of the actress and singer filled the auditorium—and the crowded parking lot. Most parking lots have signs on the light posts helping drivers remember where they parked, but not this lot. We exited the arena by the same door we entered, hoping to follow a familiar pattern to find the car. After a bit of searching we finally found our vehicle, but I was amazed to see the number of people wandering around the parking lot, looking aimlessly for their cars, circling past us several times as they searched.

In addition to physically being lost, one can become lost in other ways, such as losing one's

values. This might occur when someone desires more gifts than one has already received, as in the case of

a Jewish story [telling] of the good fortune of a hardworking farmer. The Lord appeared to this farmer and granted him three wishes, but with the condition that whatever the Lord did for the farmer would be given double to his neighbor. The farmer, scarcely believing his good fortune, wished for a hundred cattle. Immediately he received a hundred cattle, and he was overjoyed until he saw that his neighbor had two hundred.

So, he wished for a hundred acres of land, and again he was filled with joy until he saw that his neighbor had two hundred acres of land. Rather than celebrating God's goodness, the farmer could not escape feeling jealous and slighted because his neighbor had received more than he. Finally, he stated his third wish: that God would strike [his neighbor] blind in one eye. And God wept.¹

Tragic events in our nation can also stir feelings of loss. Who felt lost 21 years ago on this date, 9/11 as airplanes flew into the twin towers? I remember feeling confused as I listened to the news reports on the radio while driving to the office, at

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first wondering if the story was a fictional radio broadcast similar to *The War of the Worlds* broadcast that Orson Welles directed on Halloween on October 30, 1938. Although a fictitious story, many thought aliens really were invading the earth. Some listeners panicked at the news, and I imagine they felt lost at the idea of aliens attacking our planet.

When I turned on the TV 21 years ago and saw that the crash into the Twin Towers was real, I wondered how a pilot could get so lost as to hit a 110-story tower. When another airplane struck the second tower 18 minutes later, I realized it was no accident, and I suddenly felt lost, as though the ground had shifted and I was falling inside. As a nation, we felt vulnerable, lost, and afraid.

Feelings of loss may occur when losing track of someone. Has that ever happened to you? Maybe you or your friend has moved so many times that you no longer know how to contact the person. Many parents have experienced a fear of loss when their child wanders off in a store.

Many summers ago I served as a camp counselor at a church camp in Kentucky, down in the Land Between the Lakes. We took a field trip to a nearby state park, hiked the trails, exploring the paths through the forest. We had maps of the park, but they didn't seem to match the trails, and at several intersections we had a difficult time discerning which direction to head. Some of the youth got ahead of the group, and when we came to a fork in the trail we wondered which path they had taken.

When we arrived at the end of the trail, we realized that several youth were missing—the ones who had gotten ahead of the group. Instantly we knew what had happened—they had taken the other trail, the one not returning to safety, but taking them deeper into the forest. It was growing later in the day, and the director became concerned that our search for them would become difficult. We formed search teams, preparing to enter the trails and look. Suddenly, the missing campers appeared out of the woods, and you can imagine the rejoicing—much as the shepherd in Jesus' parable

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rejoiced when finding his lost sheep, and the woman rejoiced when finding her lost coin.

Jesus told these two parables, along with the longer parable about the lost son who wasted all his inheritance and returned home to the welcoming arms of his father. Jesus told these stories to tell us something about God. One sheep had wander off from the flock of 100, and the shepherd searched for that one sheep until finding it, coming home and rejoicing. The same pattern happens in the story of the woman searching for a lost coin. When she counted her ten coins, all she had was nine, so she swept the house until she found the missing coin.

Although each of us can identify with being lost or losing something, what message was Jesus trying to send us when telling these parables? The narrator gives us a hint with an introduction to the story: “All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering

around Jesus to listen to him. The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” Jesus ate with those considered outsiders, ones the experts would have considered lost people. As Jesus told the parable, he flipped the lost ones to an elevated status. The one sheep. The one coin. Seemingly insignificant things became celebrated. What others might consider as an outsider, lost and unimportant, Jesus considered valuable and worth the search.

What we may not even notice, God sees as valuable. On days you feel insignificant, God values you. When someone tries to exclude and label someone as an outcast, God welcomes them with open arms. When you feel as though you’ve lost your way, God joins you in the search until you are found. When you’re lost, God knows where you are and will always find you.

¹ R. Alan Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1995), 298.