WITHIN REACH · WEEK 3

The Urgency of Love

August 30, 2026 · Luke 15:1–10 · Pastor Bart Denny

THE BIG IDEA

To God, one is never "just one": love notices who is missing, goes after them and celebrates when the lost is found.

This guide works two ways. On your own, take one section a day through the week, or use the daily readings near the end. In a group, plan on about an hour: read the passage aloud, talk through the background, then choose the questions that fit your group. Nobody has to answer every one.

Read **Luke 15:1–10** at least twice, once quietly and once aloud. If you have time, read the rest of the chapter, the story of the lost son (15:11–32), since Jesus tells all three stories to the same audience. This is the third week of Within Reach. First we identified our ONE. Last week we learned to see people with the compassion of Jesus and went home to pray for our ONE. This week asks what happens when that prayer starts shaping our hearts: Does this person matter to me the way they matter to God?

Where this passage sits

Luke 15 opens with two groups around Jesus. “Tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus” (15:1). Meanwhile the Pharisees and teachers of the law mutter, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (15:2).

Jesus answers with three stories about something lost: a sheep, a coin and a son. Each one ends with joy. The first two, which we look at here, are short and work as a pair: one about a man outdoors, one about a woman at home. The third, the prodigal son, adds an older brother who refuses to join the celebration. He sounds a lot like the people muttering in verse 2.

This theme runs all through Luke. Jesus eats with Levi and his friends and says, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (5:32). Later He goes to the house of Zacchaeus and sums up His whole mission: “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost” (19:10).

A few words worth a closer look

"Tax collectors and sinners" (15:1)

Tax collectors worked inside Rome's tax system and often enriched themselves at their neighbors' expense. "Sinners" was a broader label for people whose lives put them outside respectable religious society.

"Muttered" (15:2)

The same word describes Israel grumbling in the wilderness. It's a low, ongoing complaint.

"Welcomes" (15:2)

Jesus doesn't just tolerate these people at the edge of the crowd. He receives them and shares a table with them, and in that culture a shared meal said, "We're in fellowship."

"Open country" (15:4)

Wilderness pasture. The ninety-nine are left in a place sheep would normally graze while the shepherd searches.

"Ten silver coins" (15:8)

Each was a drachma, roughly a day's wage. Some scholars suggest the coins may have been part of a woman's dowry, something like a wedding ring today, valuable for more than its price.

"Light a lamp, sweep the house" (15:8)

Ordinary village homes had few small windows and dirt or stone floors. Finding a coin meant lighting a lamp even in daytime and sweeping carefully.

"Repents" (15:7, 10)

To turn: away from sin and toward God.

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1 Love notices who is missing

READ Luke 15:1–4, Genesis 3:8–9, Romans 5:6–8 and Luke 19:1–10

Pastor Bart confessed that he can be remarkably calm about losing something, as long as it isn't something he cares about. Lose a pen and he grabs another one. Lose his phone and now we have a situation: retracing steps, checking the car, digging in the couch cushions, asking everyone in the house, possibly while the phone is in his hand. The intensity of a search tells you something about the value of what's missing.

Look first at who's gathered around Jesus. Tax collectors were seen as sellouts. "Sinners" were people with messy lives and bad reputations. Jesus never pretends sin doesn't matter, and He never lowers God's standard so people will feel comfortable. Nobody takes sin, repentance and obedience more seriously than He does. And yet these people keep coming near. Apparently they can tell the difference between someone who tells them the truth and someone who has already decided they aren't worth much.

The Pharisees see these people too. Their problem isn't that they fail to notice sinners. They notice them well enough to label them. What they miss is how much those people matter to God.

So Jesus tells a story. A shepherd has a hundred sheep and loses one. If this were inventory, ninety-nine out of a hundred would be doing pretty well. But imagine taking thirty kids on a field trip and coming home with twenty-nine. Nobody says, "Ninety-seven percent made it back. That's still an A." You count again. You call a name. That child belongs to somebody. The presence of ninety-nine doesn't make the absence of one insignificant.

That concern goes back to the beginning. After Adam and Eve sin and hide, "the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:9). God hadn't lost track of Adam. The question exposed what sin had done: people made for fellowship with God were now hiding from Him. And God came looking. Notice when the sheep matters in Jesus'

story: not after it's found, but while it's lost. Its value is the reason for the search. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). The cross shows how serious sin is, and it also shows that our sin didn't make us disposable to God.

A few chapters later, the lost sheep gets a name: Zacchaeus. The crowd mutters again, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner" (19:7), and Jesus says, "Today salvation has come to this house. . . . For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (19:9–10). Your ONE has a name too. We have to be careful not to reduce people to the easiest labels: the coworker with different values, the relative who wants nothing to do with church. Jesus never asks us to pretend sin isn't sin. But if "sinner" is the only thing we can see, we aren't yet seeing the way Jesus sees.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What's something you've lost and searched hard for? What did the search say about how much it mattered?

2. Why do you think tax collectors and sinners wanted to be near Jesus, even though He never lowered God's standard?

3. The Pharisees noticed sinners but missed how much they mattered to God. Where are you tempted to do the same?

4. Read Genesis 3:8–9. What does God's question "Where are you?" tell you about Him?

5. According to Romans 5:8, when does the lost one matter to God? Why is that important?

6. What labels might you be putting on your ONE? What do you know, and what don't you know, about their story?

2 Love goes after the one

READ Luke 15:4, 8, John 1:14, 1 John 3:16–18 and Luke 10:30–37

The shepherd "goes after the lost sheep until he finds it." The woman "lights a lamp, sweeps the house and searches carefully until she finds it." Different setting, same response. What was lost matters enough to do something about. She doesn't stand in the middle of the room hoping the coin rolls back into view.

That's what we mean by the urgency of love. Urgency doesn't mean panic. It doesn't mean pressuring people or forcing every conversation into an evangelistic presentation. It means what is lost matters enough that we won't stay indifferent. Love moves toward people.

That's exactly what God has done for us. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). God didn't stay at a safe distance and shout instructions. The Son of God came near, entered our suffering and went all the way to the cross. Then John turns that directly toward how we love others: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus

Christ laid down his life for us. . . . Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth" (1 John 3:16–18). Love can't stay only a feeling. Sooner or later it shows up on our calendar and in how we listen. Sometimes it inconveniences us.

Jesus gives another picture of that in Luke 10. A man lies beaten beside the road to Jericho. A priest passes by, and so does a Levite. Then comes a Samaritan, someone Jesus' audience looked down on. Jews and Samaritans had centuries of bitterness between them, and Samaritans accepted only the five books of Moses as Scripture. But when the Samaritan saw the man, "he took pity on him. He went to him" (10:33–34). His compassion moved him closer, and it cost him his route, his schedule and his money.

We also need to keep our motives straight. We don't mow somebody's lawn so they owe us a Sunday morning. We don't take someone to lunch waiting for the perfect moment to spring a gospel presentation. People can tell when they're getting a sales pitch. We love because Christ loved us. At the same time, there's no contradiction between loving someone right where they are and deeply wanting them to know Jesus. If we believe Jesus is who He says He is, it would be strange to say we love someone and feel nothing about whether they ever know Him.

So the question for your ONE may not be "How do I get this person to come to church?" A better question is "Jesus, what would it look like for me to love this person well?" If they're lonely, love may look like time. If they're carrying something heavy, it may look like listening. If the relationship has grown distant, it may begin with a phone call. And if God opens a door to talk about faith, love means being willing to speak honestly about Jesus.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What's the difference between urgency and panic? Between urgency and pressure?

2. Read John 1:14. What does it mean to you that God came near instead of staying at a distance?

3. According to 1 John 3:18, how do we know love is real? Where has someone loved you "with actions and in truth"?

4. What did it cost the Samaritan to move toward the injured man? What might it cost you to move toward your ONE?

5. How can we tell the difference between loving someone and running a sales pitch? How can they tell?

6. Ask yourself the question from this section: "Jesus, what would it look like for me to love my ONE well?" What comes to mind?

3 Love celebrates when the lost is found

READ Luke 15:5–10, Luke 5:29–32, Luke 24:46–47 and 2 Corinthians 5:17

Both stories end the same way. The shepherd "joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep'" (15:5–6). The woman does the same with her coin (15:9). Neither one says, "Well, that takes care of that." They want somebody to celebrate with them.

Jesus tells us exactly what He means: "There will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents" (15:7), and "there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (15:10). That word *repents* matters. Jesus isn't talking about someone who starts attending church or becomes a little more respectable. Repentance is turning away from sin and toward God, by His grace. Jesus welcomes sinners, but His welcome is never indifference toward sin. He welcomes them because He came to bring them home.

Now remember how the chapter began. The Pharisees are muttering. Heaven is rejoicing. That contrast is the heart of Jesus' challenge. The religious leaders haven't simply misunderstood sinners. They've misunderstood the heart of God.

This runs all through Luke's Gospel, from "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (5:32) to the risen Jesus' words that "repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations" (24:47). Coming to Christ isn't adding religion to an otherwise unchanged life. Sin is forgiven, a person is reconciled to God, and "if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). That's why people matter eternally. There are plenty of good things for a church to be glad about, but if every seat were full and nobody was coming to know Jesus, we'd have missed something fundamental. A full room isn't the same thing as a found sheep.

Some of us remember the rescue of the Chilean miners in October 2010. Thirty-three men were trapped deep underground for sixty-nine days. When rescuers finally drilled a shaft, they brought the miners up one at a time in a narrow capsule. Every time it reached the surface and another man stepped out, there were cheers and tears and hugs, and then the capsule went back down for the next one. Nobody had to tell the families to look excited. The celebration showed how much each man mattered. Jesus says heaven responds that way over one sinner who repents. Not a stadium full. One.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why do you think both stories end with a party instead of quietly putting things back where they belong?

2. What's the difference between someone starting to attend church and someone repenting?

3. Read Luke 15:2 and 15:7 side by side. Where do you see "muttering" in churches today? Where do you see it in yourself?

4. "A full room isn't the same thing as a found sheep." What does that mean for Pathway?

5. Imagine your ONE coming to know Jesus. How would you feel? Whom would you want to tell?

Love your ONE

READ Luke 15:1–10 and Colossians 4:5–6

If God answers the prayers we've been praying, some people who come through Pathway's doors won't know the songs or the Bible very well. They may ask questions that make us uncomfortable or say things about Christians that sting. They may still carry habits and parts of their story God has only begun working on. That shouldn't surprise us. Lost sheep don't come back looking like sheep that have been safely in the flock for twenty years. People need grace. So did we. Pastor Bart's hope is that we won't be standing off to the side muttering, but making room: learning names, listening before assuming, being patient with questions and remembering that growth is usually a journey, not an instant cleanup.

The assignment for this week: love your ONE. You've identified them. You've been praying for them. Now ask God to show you one intentional way to love them this week. It doesn't have to be dramatic. Call. Ask them to lunch. Sit down over coffee and really listen. Help with something they're dealing with. Remember something they told you weeks ago and ask how it turned out. Keep praying while you do it, and ask Jesus to help you notice what this person actually needs from you, not what you've already decided to do for them. If God opens a door to talk about faith, walk through it. You don't need a speech or all the answers; tell the truth about what Jesus means to you. But don't force the moment. Love doesn't have to manipulate.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What would it look like for our church to make room for people who are still at the beginning of their journey?
2. What's one intentional way you could love your ONE this week?
3. How can your group encourage one another as you each try to love your ONE well?

Through the week

☐	**Monday**	Luke 15:1–7. Thank God that He came looking for you. Pray for your ONE by name.
☐	**Tuesday**	Genesis 3:8–9 and Romans 5:6–8. Thank God that you mattered to Him while you were still lost.
☐	**Wednesday**	Luke 15:8–10 and John 1:14. Ask God what it would look like to move toward your ONE in love.
☐	**Thursday**	Luke 10:25–37 and 1 John 3:16–18. Look for one practical way to love someone this week, and do it.
☐	**Friday**	Luke 15:11–32. Notice the father's joy and the older brother's response. Ask God to give you a heart that celebrates.

Try this

Pick one specific, ordinary way to love your ONE this week and put it on your calendar, whether it's a phone call, a cup of coffee or a note. Then, the next time you pray for them, thank God for the joy heaven will have if they come home, and ask Him to let you share in it.

Close in prayer

Father, thank You that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Thank You that You didn't stay far away, but came near in Jesus. Give us Your heart for the people You've placed around us. We bring our ONE before You again. You know their story, their questions and their hurts. Keep working in their life, and show us how to love them well. Give us wisdom so we aren't pushy, courage so we aren't silent when You open a door, and grace to trust You with the outcome. And may the day come when the person we've been praying for turns toward Jesus and we get to celebrate with heaven, because one is never "just one" to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Notes

Watch the sermon online

Scan the code or visit **pathwaywes.com/sermons/the-urgency-of-love** for the video and this guide.

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