

SERIES: THE DAY OF MERCY  
PART 7: HOW MUCH YOU MATTER TO GOD

Good morning (afternoon), and welcome, family, to our 7<sup>th</sup> week of this marvelous series THE DAY OF MERCY. One of the purposes of THE DAY OF MERCY series is to help you better understand what God is really like. Most people have poor misconceptions of God. They don't understand fully, deeply the mercy of God. That God always acts in mercy toward us. Every good thing you have in your life, friends, is because of the mercy of God. Without God's mercy, we would have nothing.

The Bible says in Titus, chapter 3:5, **“Jesus saved us, not because of the good things we did, but BECAUSE OF HIS MERCY. He washed away our sins and gave us a new life through the Holy Spirit.”**

Mercy is such a leading aspect of God's character that when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, God came to earth in human form in what is called the incarnation. John 1:14 says, **“So the Word (Jesus) became human and made His home among us. He was full of unfailing love (grace) and faithfulness (truth).”** Jesus came on a mission of mercy. Jesus says it like this in Luke 19:10 **“I have come to SEEK and to SAVE those who are LOST.”** Loved friends, this is the ultimate expression of mercy. Jesus said, “The whole reason I came to earth,--why we have Christmas, why we celebrate Easter--the reason everything exists is because I came to seek and save those who are lost.” Mercy seeks, mercy takes the initiative, and mercy makes the first step. Mercy saves. This is why our CVCHURCH family exists. Our purpose is to join Jesus Christ on His mission to seek and invite every one we can into this rich and loving relationship with Jesus Christ. Please circle the words SEEK, SAVE, LOST.

In God's eyes, there are only two kinds of people: **Saved people and lost people.** These are the only two distinctions that really matter. There are saved people and lost people, and every one of us here today fit in one of these two

categories. You might be thinking, "I'm not in the saved category so I must be in the lost." If you are don't consider that to be a put down. It's not. In fact it's a compliment. Both of these categories, "saved" and "lost," imply someone loves you deeply. Both of these phrases imply that you have enormous value. They say you matter to God. God knows what condition you're in. You matter to Him. You're worth seeking out, if you are lost. You're worth saving. You're worth finding. They're expressions of love. Would you write in your notes where the fill in is **Lostness implies value**. Invaluable things are misplaced, but valuable things are lost. You don't lose a toothpick, a paperclip or a Kleenex, because they're invaluable. This wedding ring--if I lost this, it would be a real loss, because it represents over 39 years of love and commitment to the same woman, Kathe, the love of my life. She gave it to me. I wouldn't misplace my wedding ring; I would lose it. You only lose things that are extremely valuable. So when we talk about whether you're saved or whether you're lost spiritually, both of them imply enormous value. It's not a matter of one being more important more or more valuable than the other. They're not. They are both incredibly valuable.

My goal for our time together today is to look at three questions. First, what do I lose when I'm spiritually lost? Second, how does God's mercy respond to me when I am lost? Third, what can I do to experience God's mercy?

In Luke 15, this chapter gives us three stories about something or someone that was lost. This chapter has often times been called THE LOST AND FOUND chapter of the Bible because the words "lost" and "found" are used ten times in this one chapter. These three stories all say the same thing that **"You matter to God."** These three stories talk about a shepherd, a woman and a father. These three persons represent God and the sheep, coin and the sons represent you and me. The first story is about a shepherd who has 100 sheep and discovers one of his sheep is lost. As the shepherd, he would stand at the gate of the pen every night and count his sheep. He would keep them safe from predators. This night it hits 99 and asks, "Where is #100?" He counts his sheep, because like we say here at CVCHURCH, we count people because people count. Every life matters. Every number represents a name and every name has a story and every story is someone that Jesus Christ died for. The

shepherd leaves the 99 to search for the one that is lost. As long as there's one lost, he's going to keep reaching out. He doesn't say, "99 are good; forget the lost one." No. They all matter. As long as CVCHURCH has one who doesn't know Christ they all matter. We must keep our passion strong to keep reaching out to people who don't know Jesus Christ. So he goes and finds the lost sheep. He brings the lost one back and then throws a party, and everyone comes to the party.

The second story is about a woman who had 10 coins and loses one. A Palestinian woman received 10 silver coins as a wedding gift. Beside their monetary value, these coins held sentimental value like that of a wedding ring, and to lose one would be extremely distressing. Jesus says she carefully searches until she finds it. Once found, she calls in her friends and neighbors and says, "Rejoice with me, because I have found my lost coin." Jesus says, because every human being is so precious and has such value and matters to Him, there is great joy in the presence of God's angels when one sinner repents.

The third story has to do with a father and his two sons. The youngest son, who would never initiate asking for his inheritance, does. The younger son would get 1/3, and the older would get 2/3. He doesn't want to live with his father and family anymore. So he takes his 1/3 and, vs. 13 in the NLT says, he wasted it on wild living, which meant alcohol and sexual promiscuity. He hits rock bottom when he starts living with the pigs, feeding the pigs and actually eating pig food. Not only was this the worst form of humiliation for this Jewish young man, he degraded himself beyond belief. Like many who are rebellious and immature, wanting to be free to live as he pleased, he had to hit bottom before he came to his senses. He chooses to go home to dad. But he was going to go back on his terms as his father's slave for the consequences of his betrayal to his father, family, faith, and community. His loving father would have nothing to do with his plan. He grabs him on his return and couldn't stop hugging him and kissing him and welcomes him home. He gives him the best robe and gives him the family ring, which is like a credit card, put the best shoes on him and finds the best head of beef and declares, "We're going to have a huge barbecue, because my son who was lost is now found. My son

who was dead is now alive.” There are two common denominators in these three stories. In each story, something or someone was lost that had great value to the person who lost it. Secondly, there was a party thrown when the thing or person that was lost was found. Lostness implies value. To be lost in God’s view means to be spiritually disconnected from God. If I’m not connected to God in a daily relationship, or don’t have a relationship with God, I am spiritually lost. In these three stories of the lost sheep, coin and son there are five things we lose.

## I. What do I lose when I’m spiritually lost?

### Like a lost sheep:

#### A. I lose my direction

Sheep don’t intend on getting lost, they just wander off doing their own thing, and they end up lost. They’re so busy eating, they lose track of where they are. It is our human nature to wander off and get lost. When our kids were young, and we were out, I always followed them intently. Because if I didn’t, they would just wander off and get lost. The Bible says in Isaiah 53:6, **“All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God’s paths to follow our own.”** We always get lost when we follow our own ways. If you are following your plan for your life right now rather than God’s plan, then, precious friend, you’re lost. And if you’re following your plan, you have lost your direction. Most people are not living their life on purpose and, even less, if you consider following God’s plans for their lives. This is why we believe in God’s purpose and plan for our lives. As a CVCHURCH family, we are people who are purpose driven. You can go fast and have no direction. It’s like the famous World War II pilot who radioed into control, and the homebase said “Where are you?” And he said, “I don’t know where I am, but I’m making record time.” We do this a lot in life. We think speed is direction and means that we have purpose. You can have a lot of speed in your life and absolutely have no idea where you’re headed. We wander off and lose direction.

#### B. I lose God’s protection

Sheep are defenseless and vulnerable animals. They don't have claws. Nor sharp teeth or fangs. They're not fast. As a sheep, you're in trouble if you don't have a shepherd. God says this is true of us in Zechariah 10:2c, **“My people are wandering like lost sheep; they are attacked because they have no shepherd.”** One of the most famous chapters in the Bible is Psalm 23, **“The Lord is my shepherd.”** Jesus is called the Good Shepherd. If you're not following the Shepherd, you're on your own. And you are defenseless in life. You lost your direction and you lose your protection if you're not following the Shepherd. This is one of the reasons why you worry, have fear and anxiety, because you're trying to do everything on your own. You are vulnerable in this world Spiritually, Emotionally, Relationally, Financially, Vocationally, Intellectually and Physically. When things go wrong, and you're not connected to your Shepherd, you lose your direction and protection. One of the greatest promises in the Bible is in Romans 8:28 **“And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them.”** This verse doesn't say that everything in this world is good, because it's not. There is a lot of evil and suffering. But this verse does say that God causes even the bad things to work for our good. This promise is only for those who have surrendered themselves to the Shepherd of their souls, Jesus. It's a promise for those who love God. But when I place myself as a sheep under the Shepherd's care, I get direction and His protection, and, when the evil things come at me, God can use them to turn out for my good.

### **C. I lose my potential**

#### **Like a lost coin**

To be spiritually lost means I'm disconnected from God. When I'm disconnected from God, I lose my potential to fulfill His purposes and plans for my life. My potential to do great and good things that make a true difference for God's Kingdom is dramatically limited. I'm holding an American quarter in my hand. This coin during its lifetime will pass through thousands, if not millions, of hands. Scientists tell us that the dirtiest thing you own is your

money, because you don't know who has handled it and where it has been. They've even done tests and sometimes find drug powder on coins that have been used in drug sales and things like that. This coin has great potential for good. Coins put together can do a lot good. With enough of them you could feed a family. You could build a business with these coins. You could save a life. You could create beauty. You could leave a legacy. But I can't do any of those good things if it's lost. If I lose this coin, it isn't worthless--it's just wasted. Can you see the difference? It's still worth a quarter. It hasn't lost any of its value. But it has lost its potential to do good. It has lost its ability to make a difference. God made you to do great things, far greater than you could ever possibly imagine. If God showed you what He could imagine--only your Creator knows fully what you're capable of. Ephesians 2:10 says, **"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago."** When you give your life to Jesus, you become God's masterpiece, and He has planned for you to be involved in a lot of good things. You lose that potential when you don't give your life to Jesus. You can miss out by not listening to the Holy Spirit and obeying His leading in your life. When I am spiritually lost, I lose my direction, protection and potential.

#### **D. I lose my happiness**

##### **Like a lost son or daughter**

The younger son is rebellious. He leaves home after demanding his 1/3 of the inheritance. I refuse to love my dad and wait for my inheritance. I'm impatient. The Bible says he went out ,and he wasted his inheritance and his life, and he lost all that God wanted to do in his life, and he lost his happiness. Luke 15:14 says, **"His money ran out, and a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve."** He wasn't just unhappy, he was desperate, and his life, for all practical purposes, was over. Listen to me, loved ones. Nothing destroys your happiness and well-being faster than conflict in relationships. He had a conflict with his father. When you're out of relationship with your Heavenly Father you're going to be out of relationship with other people. When you're in harmony with God, it gives you the peace to be in harmony with other people.

You cannot be in a thriving relationship with other people and be out of relationship with Jesus. You weren't designed to live in conflict with God. You were designed and wired to be at peace with God. When you thumb your nose at God saying, "I will be my own God; I'm going to do my own things; I will go my own way," this creates conflict, and you will not have a sense of wellbeing, joy, value, and happiness. I lose my happiness when I am lost.

### **E. I lose my home in heaven**

When I'm spiritually lost, I lose my home in heaven. God allows people to rebel and to disobey Him on earth. He gives us the free choice. God gives you the freedom to say, "I don't want to worship You. I don't want to love You. I don't want to live for You, God." He gives you the choice to live for yourself. The problem is that our greatest blessing is also our greatest curse. Because we make bad choices all the time. We choose to love ourselves instead of God. We choose to go our way instead of God's way. But, one day, you're going to die, and you're going to stand before God, and He's going to say, "You can have it your way now for eternity. You clearly didn't want Me in your life on earth. Why in the world would you want Me in your life in eternity? You clearly wanted to live separated from Me on earth, so I will let you live separated from Me for the rest of eternity." So I can lose all of these things, but the one thing all three stories point out is this--please write this down in your notes:

### **F. But, I don't lose my value**

John 3:16 says, "**But God so loved the world He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.**" Because God is so rich in mercy He sent Jesus to seek and save all of us who are lost.

## **II. How does God's mercy save me?**

### **A. Rescues me from myself**

What is salvation? The Bible uses words like forgiveness, fulfillment, pardon,

redemption, peace, and power. In these three stories we find three additional words. The first one is rescue. Salvation in Jesus rescues me from myself. My biggest problem and your biggest problem is yourself. I talked to a guy the other day, and he told me he had been through 14-15 relational failures. He said, "I don't understand what has happened." I said, "What do you think is the common denominator in all of those relational failures?" He said, "I don't know." I said, "I do. It's you, and you can go into another 30 relationships and they won't work out any better until the very core of who you are changes. You are your own biggest problem. And you always will be your biggest problem. Your own fears, anxieties, misconceptions, and the things you believe about God, yourself, life, and others." 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 2:5-6a says, **"For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity--the man Christ Jesus. 6 He gave His life to purchase freedom for everyone."** You might think you don't need to be saved from anything, but, loved one, the ticking time bomb in every one of us is our sinful nature and the fact that we are estranged from God. He has come to save us from the insidious power of our own selfishness and sinfulness. Jesus has come to set you free from the things that chain you and enslave you. From your own sense of insecurity, powerlessness, helplessness, loss of purpose, and passion. So, like the shepherd in the first story going after the sheep who takes the initiative, saves and rescues me from myself.

## **B. Recovers my potential**

When you are saved, you move from being lost to being saved, and you now have access to your fullest potential--that God-given potential that was being wasted like the coin that was lost that can't do any good while it's lost. In Matthew 11:28-29, Jesus says, **"Come to Me all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you. Let Me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls."** Question? What have you lost that you'd like to recover? Like the woman who lost a coin, you say, "I've lost my identity. I've lost my purpose. My meaning. My value. My strength. I've lost my joy. I've lost my dream. My innocence. My reputation. My confidence." I could go on with hundreds of examples. Here is the Good News, my dear friends. Jesus came

not only to rescue us but to recover what we've lost. He has come to recover our potential that we lost because of our sin. What is God's amazing grace? It is His mercy.

### **C. Reconnects me to God**

The loving father is a representative of God our Father. Salvation reconnects me to God. The biblical word for this is "**Reconciliation.**" When two nations end their conflict, that's called reconciling to one another. When a husband and wife end their conflict, that's called reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 says, "**This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! 18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to Himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to Him.**" This is why Jesus came, and this is the purpose of His church. We get the privilege of befriending those who are lost and develop a relationship with them for the purpose of loving them with the love of Jesus, so that they will choose to become a part of God's family and be reconciled to Him. What did it take for Jesus to do that? His coming to earth, dying on the cross, going through all that torture, all of that pain to demonstrate just how much you matter to God. How valuable you are to Him. That's the kind of love that God has for you. That His wounds on the cross would pay for your rescue, recovery and your reconnection to God.

### **III. How do I connect with God's mercy?**

#### **A. Get fed up with my life**

This is the starting point. You've got to get fed up with your life. Nothing happens until you become discontent with the way things are right now. At some point, you've got to go, "Okay! I'm not going to put up with this anymore. I don't like the way I've been living. There must be a better way to live than living with all this pressure, this stress, this failure, this drifting. God, You've got to help me. I'm tired of the pressure, pain, stress, disappointments and of the busyness. I'm fed up with pretending. I'm tired of faking it. I'm tired of my

failures and frustrations.” Until something like that happens in your life you’re not going to be saved. You must get fed up with being disconnected from God. I am fed up with being distant from my Heavenly Father who loves me, created me and has given me every good thing in my life. You must get hungry. You’ve got to get thirsty. You must be desperate for a change. Sometimes, like this son, you have to end up in the pigsty of life and say, “I’m going home.” Luke 15:16-17 says, **“The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. 17 When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger.’”** Notice the phrase in vs. 17, “He finally came to his senses.” He had hit his bottom. Basically he looked at the pigs that were fighting him for their food. He smelled the pigsty. He was covered with mud and finally says, “I’m fed up.” He came to his senses. Loved ones, this is where transformation starts. Jeremiah 29:13 (MSG), God says this, **“You’ll find Me when you get serious about finding Me and want it more than anything else.”** Do you know why God let’s bad things happen in your life? One of the reasons is to help you come to your senses. Are you at your bottom this morning (afternoon)? If you are, welcome to your own coming to your senses time. Unfortunately, some of us have to hit rock bottom before we will turn to Jesus. Maybe you’re not at your rock bottom, but you’re smart enough to say you know, “My life is good, but I know I don’t have God’s direction or protection or happiness, or, I am not tapping my potential, and if I am, I am only really serving my own purposes and not God’s. I’m fed up. I am ready to turn to God.”

## **B. Own up to my own sin**

This is where I simply admit it—“God, I have made a mess of my life. I’ve blown it. I’ve sinned. I’ve done what I wanted to do, not what You wanted me to do. I’ve followed my way, not Your way.” You get honest about your feelings. You have the courage to face the truth about you. That’s scary. Jesus said, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” But first it might make you miserable. So you admit the truth and then the freedom comes out of that. I own up to my sin. The Bible says in Luke 15:18, the lost son says, “I

**will go home to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you.'**" Dr. Bock writes, **"The son's confession pictures his repentance, coming to the father bearing nothing but his need. He plans to turn and come home, openly confessing his failure. His attempt to live carelessly and independent of any constraints is a failure."** Friends, you and I will never be saved until you have that moment of clarity where you first get fed up, and then second, you own up. God, I confess my need of You and Your love, acceptance, forgiveness and mercy.

### **C. Offer up myself to God**

Notice the change of this young son's attitude--which is what repentance is all about--before he left, and he demanded his inheritance, and when he returned home. In vs.12 he says to his father, **"I want my share of your estate now before you die."** In Jesus' day, no son in his right mind would ever say that to his father. Then in vs. 19, after he had his attitude adjusted by his severe destitution, **"I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."** Wow. What some pain and desperation will do. These three stories are all about just how much you matter to God. Jesus says you are valuable to the Father. How do you figure out the worth of something? How much the person is willing to give for the desired object or person? Jesus loved you so much that He took your place on your cross so that you could experience the Father's love, acceptance and mercy. Today, if you have not accepted Jesus' love and sacrifice for you, He says to you, "Welcome home." Feel His embrace this morning (afternoon). Today is the day of Salvation. I want to pray a prayer that everyone in this room can participate in. But I am especially speaking to those of you that you might say, "I have gone to church all of my life," or you might say, "This is my first time in a service like this one." You may be religious, or you may say, "I have no religion." It doesn't really matter who you are or what you've done or what your background is. The fact is you matter to God. And God says there are only two kinds of people in life. Those who have been saved by His mercy and those who have not yet been saved by His mercy who are still lost. Just like the lost sheep, coin and son. We lost our direction, our protection, our potential, our happiness, and our home in heaven when we're not saved. But you never lose your value.

Because of that, Jesus Christ came to earth for you. Today, I invite you to accept God's mercy through Jesus Christ and confess your need for Jesus to take the leadership of your life.

Please pray this prayer with me. "Father God, I accept You today. I need You to rescue me from myself. There are things in my life that I don't like, and I can't change them myself. I need You to recover my potential. You've promise to give back what I've lost in the years that sin has taken from me. Lord, I need You to recover the things that I've lost. And Jesus Christ, I need You to reconnect me to God. I don't want to be at war with You. I don't want to be in conflict with You. I want to be at peace with You. So today I'm saying I'm fed up with my life. You've said that when I get serious about finding You, I will find You. I want You more than anything else. I want to be in a right relationship with You. I'm fed up with my life and I want to own up to my sin. I've gone my way and not Yours. I've pretended that I was God and done things that violated my conscience, much less Your character and integrity. Today, I offer up myself to You. I switch from saying give me, give me to make and mold me into the image of Jesus. I want to be Your son, Your daughter and serve and love You with all of my life. Thank You that like that father in the parable, You're filled with compassion, and You run out and You throw Your arms around me and You love me. I humbly ask You to accept me into Your family. It is in Your name I pray, Jesus.