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How To Love Lost People

- 1. Compassion for the Lost**
- 2. Persistence in locating the lost**
- 3. Patience in helping the lost**
- 4. Celebration that the lost are found**

³Jesus told this parable: ⁴"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

You can find many "how to" books to help you do just about anything. There is a book with the title *How To Do (Just About) Everything*. It includes 1001 "how to" helps, such as how to: Tie a Tie, Plant a Lawn, Carve a Turkey, Write a Business Plan, Unclog a Sink, Ask for a Raise, Tango, Change Your Motor Oil, Sew on a Button, Write a Love Letter, Wash Your Cat, Lose Weight, Prevent Jet Lag, Throw a Knuckleball.

There is another book that is called: *How To Fix (Just About) Everything* – It offers clever, simple fixes for an astounding variety of troubles you may encounter in life, from leaky pipes to lumpy gravy to problematic personal relationships.

Jesus gives us some "how to" help this morning. He shows us how to be better witnesses for him as we seek to share our faith with people who need to know about Jesus as their Savior. With a parable about a lost sheep, Jesus teaches us **How To Love Lost People**.

1. Compassion for the Lost

First, Jesus teaches us about the compassion we should have on those who are lost – those who are spiritually separated from God. He says in his little parable that the shepherd will turn his attention to the sheep that got lost. The shepherd doesn't hesitate. Jesus says, **"Does he not leave ... and go."** The shepherd will start searching because he has great compassion for that lost sheep. The shepherd is distressed at what dreadful situation the lost sheep is in. Jesus says that the shepherd leaves the 99 – compare that to a situation where you have several pets, and one wanders away. Wouldn't you just leave the ones that are at home, and go searching for the lost one. With this parable the love of the shepherd for the lost sheep is emphasized.

That's the kind of love that Jesus has: **"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."** (Matthew 9:36) Compassion means to suffer with others. Jesus' heart ached for these people because they were like shepherdless sheep. They were harassed. That word has the meaning of *flay*, like sheep that are cut and bleeding as they struggle to get through a thorn patch. While they tried and tried, the people's guilty consciences cut them deeply

with accusations of sin and the threat of God's punishment. They could never live good enough to be certain that God would love them. And so these people were like helpless sheep. How Jesus' heart went out to these suffering sheep! They were lost!

Having compassion for the lost is how Jesus shows us to love those around us who need him. We are to understand that we exist as believers and churches to love the lost. As Christians knowing the love of Jesus, we see people differently. "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view." (2 Cor. 5:16) We see people as needing the Jesus and the salvation that only he provides.

2. Persistence in locating the lost

The compassionate shepherd, Jesus relates, is one that goes "**after the lost sheep until he finds it.**" His is not just a half-hearted effort. He just doesn't make a token search to satisfy his conscience that he gave it a try. His compassion for the lost sheep and what it is going through and what might happen to it if he doesn't find it, drives him to search long and hard. It may take many days. He may have to walk a long ways and make many sacrifices himself. But he keeps looking, keeps calling, keeps praying that he will find the lost sheep. He is persistent in his effort to locate the lost sheep because he loves it and wants it back safely in his possession.

Jesus is that Good Shepherd who was persistent in finding you. He went to great lengths to rescue you. He came a long ways – all the way from heaven. He made a tremendous sacrifice: "humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! (Phil 2:8).

In the same way as Jesus was persistent in finding us and saving us from hell, so we will strive to keep sharing the good news of Jesus with others, especially those we know. It may take a great deal of effort and many days, but don't give up. The souls of people are too precious to leave them wandering away from God and wondering about Jesus as their Savior.

3. Patience in helping the lost

When the shepherd finally finds the lost sheep, notice how he treats it: **⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home.** It would be easy to take out his frustration on that stupid sheep that got itself lost. But the shepherd's focus is all on the sheep and the desire to help it and bring it home. His sacrifice for the sheep isn't over. He walked a long distance and spent a great amount of time and energy seeking the lost sheep. Now having found it, he gently picks up the weakened and trembling animal and gently carries it the whole distance home.

That's our Good Shepherd. When we are so foolish to wander off from the path of God, Jesus finds us. He assures us with his love, comforts us with his forgiveness and carries us with his promises. That's why we are so drawn to him and love and trust him.

In today's world, trust is a very important word. Many have become disillusioned about trusting anyone (and churches are not always high on the trust list). The best way to establish trust is through transparency, love, and honesty. Some persons may require months of patience, persistence, and prayer before they can move into deeper levels of spiritual discussion and faith-sharing. It's okay...just love them!

As we live around and witness to people in our lives, it is important to practice the kind of patience that Jesus has with us. Care for people and rejoice in them. This is the opposite of being self-possessed, interested only in ourselves. The time will come when they are curious about why you care. In the process of Christian love and care, you will have opportunities to express and demonstrate your faith and what Jesus has done for the world.

4. Celebration that the lost are found

For the people around us that need Jesus, our Savior teaches us how to have compassion, persistence and patience for them. It's also important to celebrate: **Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'** ⁷**I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.**

How glad we are for people, when God works saving faith in their hearts and they come to know and share the joy of salvation with us! That's worth celebrating. In fact, it is so wonderful that Jesus relays how there is celebrating in heaven when a sinner repents. Jesus statement about the persons who do not need to repent is an indictment against those who believe that they are OK by themselves before God and don't need Jesus as their Savior. There is no celebration in heaven over them because they refused the way to salvation.

The celebration for sinners who repent, who by God's grace and power turn from their sins and cling in faith to Jesus as their Savior and Lord, is not only something that the angels in heaven experience for people on earth now. It is something that all believers will share in when we get to heaven. The Apostle John was given this revelation (Revelation 7):

⁹After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. ¹⁰And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

¹¹All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, ¹²saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

¹³Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

¹⁴I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them.

¹⁶Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their

shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

That's the final outcome of all the evangelism work here on earth, and gives us good reason to listen and follow Jesus' instruction on how to love the lost: So who are the people you know who are spiritually lost? Here's how to love them: have compassion for them like Jesus has for you, be persistent in finding them like he did for you, be patient in helping them to learn about their gracious God, and celebrate with them when they turn to Jesus in faith. Amen.