

As the new year begins, many people will spend their time reflecting on the past year and planning for 2017. Some of those plans may be new, others may be a repeat... another attempt at plans made at the beginning of 2016 (or maybe 2015, 2014, and 2013 as well!!).

However uncertain some of those things may be, one thing we can be sure of, is that God's intention for 2017 is to seek and save the lost. We know this, because by way of a parable, Jesus tells us so in Luke chapter 15vv1-10...

Lost people really matter to God

Looking to correct the wrong thinking of the Pharisees and scribes, who are upset at the company Jesus is keeping, Jesus tells a parable in three parts to show that he is right to seek out "lost" people, because that reflects the heart of God the Father.

Using the example of a lost sheep and a lost coin, Jesus emphasises two things: the great effort that goes into searching when something valuable is lost, and the great celebration that follows when the thing of value is found. But Jesus then applies this (v7, 10) to the sinner (ie "lost person") who repents, and highlights the joy in heaven that ensues.

C.S. Lewis summed it up beautifully when he said, "*Joy is the serious business of heaven.*"

Searching for lost people should really matter to Christians too

The application is obvious... Jesus pitches his questions directly at those who are grumbling (vv3-4) in order to help them see that the people that he is seeking out, are exactly the people they should be seeking out too.

By telling the story in this way, the hearer is brought into the story as the shepherd

*"If **you** were the shepherd who had lost a sheep - would **you** not search for that lost sheep?"*

Just as Jesus goes to great effort to search for the lost **and** rejoices at their recovery, along with the whole company of heaven... so his followers are to follow in his footsteps.

At the beginning of the new year, it is good to reflect on our own attitude towards lost people, and ask ourselves...

Do I believe lost people matter to God?

Do I care about lost people?

Do I with great effort, pray for, seek and take opportunities to help lost people return to God?

Do I reach out to lost people?

... And do I rejoice when they are found?