

Loving One Another

My 12 People series

by Bill Aumack

Have you ever been lost? I mean, really lost, good and lost. Maybe as a child, you got separated from mom and dad in the store. And typically, if you get lost like that, it doesn't last too long. Usually you get found pretty quick. But it's a terrifying couple of minutes, if you're a small child. Or maybe you've gotten lost on a hike. You thought you were all Pathfindery, you know, and you went up to the mountains and couldn't find that path. Maybe you've gotten lost in the car. I'm not one that gets lost very much. I always seem to know where I am. Knock on wood. I probably get lost now coming up. But I've had people actually call me at home and say, "Where am I? Helped me find my way home. I'm lost."

Okay, maybe you haven't been lost. But you've lost something. Right? What gets lost at your house? Keys! What else? Wallet. The remote to the TV! The cell phone! The mask! Can't go anywhere without the mask. Where's that stupid thing? Right? We get lost. You get lost.

You know, we're on our last group of people that we've been talking about in our My 12 People series. We've talked about our family, our friends, our church friends. Today, we're concentrating on folks that we call the unchurched. Now, we some of us may be unfamiliar with that term. What does it mean to be unchurched? It's the term that we've usually said lost, right? Lost people. They're the unchurched, because that's a little friendlier, right? I mean, if you went up to somebody that was far from God, and you described them as lost, depending on the person, they may not take that all that well. I'm not lost. I know exactly where I am. You're the one that's lost. Right? But if you tell somebody they're unchurched, that's kind of hard to argue with. Yeah, I don't go to church. I'm unchurched. So that's a little friendlier. But it generally means the same, to be the lost or to be unchurched. And when you were doing your group, you might have tried to write down your names for those groups. You might have had some overlap. You might have had a family member that was unchurched. Which group do you put him in? I put mine in family or your best friend maybe unchurched, I put him under friends. You know, then and put some of the other folks under the lost, the unchurched people, maybe it's it is a friend, maybe it's a co worker, maybe it's a neighbor. Maybe it's the UPS guy. We've all made friends with UPS and Amazon guy right. "No, it's okay, you can leave my stuff on the porch, it'll be alright."

Okay. And so, um, you know, we talk about these people that are that are lost. And actually, there might be people sitting right here with us this morning that belong in the unchurched group. They only come to church because they have to, mom and dad makes them come. Or it's tradition. It's habit, whatever. It's what we do on Saturday morning. But they may not really be all that involved in the church, and all that hooked up with it. So we can have a lot of people that are in this group the lost

According to the data in the 1990s, about 30% of Americans identified themselves as having no religion. They were not Christians. They were not Muslims. They were not Jewish. They were just nothing. 30% of Americans. By the 2000s. The late 000's into the get into the 10s. It was 43%. That's a 13% rise and just a little over 10 years. Massive, massive change in our society. And we sometimes we call this group the Nones, not the Catholic nuns, but the Nones, the N-O-N-E. Nones, they don't have any religion. They're

not atheist. They're not agnostic. They're none. Very interesting group of people we have to deal with. And so we're going to be talking about that today. The lost, and Jesus has a couple parables that will help us for this, we're going to talk about them. And fact why don't you to open your Bibles with me to Luke chapter 15. We're going to be staying right there in Luke chapter 15, as we talk about these today, so you can just leave your Bible open right there. And I believe that the point of these two parables that God has for us is so that we know what to do with these folks. How do we address people that are far from God? How do we relate to what are we supposed to do with them? And that's, I think, why these are in here. Because sometimes we feel like you know, alright, maybe this is just me. Okay. But have you ever felt like you blew it for God? You had the opportunity. And boy, you whiffed big time, right? You know, we talked about my act of imagination. I can see God in heaven. Looking at me, going, Oh, hey, go get Gabe and Mike. You know, Gabriel, the Angel and Michael, the archangel. Go get Gabe and Mike, get them over here. Look, I've got Bill on an airplane for five hours. And he's sitting next to Chuck. Chuck's been looking for me, he's starting to search. He's primed and ready. I've been getting Bill ready for he's gonna be there for five hours. We're going to party tonight. Because what was lost is going to be found. And what happens? Oh, I talk about sports, old trucks, the weather. What do you do for a job? And we never get around to talking about God. And it's just a big whiff. Right. Ever felt like that? Maybe I blew it. I had the opportunity. And I blew it.

You know, what happens when my friend asked me What am I doing on Saturday? I don't mention that I'm going to church. Where they ask, Hey, man, I'm really having this crisis in my life, you know, this, this heavy things going on? I need to talk to you. Like, okay, I'll talk to you. But you never mentioned God. Or your relative comes up to you and goes, you know, you're different since you started getting all religious and stuff, what's going on? And you kind of brushed it under the carpet and say, Yeah, it's cool. And we miss the opportunities. Right? Now. I'm sure you guys do better at this. And this is just me. Okay. But sometimes I feel like I miss these opportunities. All right.

And so that's kind of what we're talking about today. When we're praying for these people on our list these 12 people, we're not praying for God to sit in heaven and wave his magic wand and make Chuck get saved over there because Chuck need saving, you know. We're asking God to get us involved. So that I can look for the opportunity to share my faith and impact Chuck's life. Right. And so we're not just praying for Chuck, we're praying for me. Sorry for anybody here named Chuck, you know, tried to pick a name I thought maybe we'd be safe with. Okay.

The religious leaders of Jesus day had opportunities that they missed. The people were there, they wanted to hear about God. But the religious leaders looked at them as outcast and worthless sinners. Didn't do anything with them until Jesus comes along, and things are a little bit different. Okay.

So the first thing we need, we're on all in Luke 15. The first thing we need for reaching the unchurched is compassion. We need compassion. And let's look at what Luke 15 verses one and two say. It says, Now the tax collectors and sinners, this is great. The tax collectors are so bad, they get their own group. You know, we got sinners, tax collectors. Right. So that tax collectors in the sinners. Were all gathered around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law murmured, this man welcome centers and each with them. Now, why were the tax collectors and the sinners coming to Jesus. What does it say in the verse? Yeah, but why were they coming? What was the purpose? wanted to hear from him. Right? What's it say? They were all gathered around to hear him. They weren't there because he was given free food or free cell phones. They weren't there because he was doing miracles. In fact, in this

part of Luke miracles are hardly mentioned at all. They were there because they wanted to hear what this guy had to say. Now, why did the tax collectors, those really evil people? And the sinners, the not quite so evil people want to hang around with a rabbi? Because I don't see that happening a lot these days. Right? I don't see the sinners flocking to hang around the popular pastors that are on TV. So how come these people wanted to hang around them? What's it say in the verse? This man what welcomes them! That word welcomes in the original Greek meant to receive as a friend. He welcomed them and received them as a friend.

What does that mean? How do you do that? How does Jesus receive people that are sinners, and welcome them as a friend? That's pretty hard. Right? Because, you know, a lot of times if we look at some church, that's real popular, they got 1000s and 1000s of members. Sometimes you'll hear people say, Well, yeah, but they, you know, they watered down the gospel. They don't, they're not preaching the hard stuff like we are who, you know, it's that's easy gospel over there. That's why so many people go. And I'll be honest with you, every time I've heard that, I've investigated that, and I have not found that to be true. Now, I imagined somewhere in the world, that's happening, right. But I've heard that about churches when I went out and listen to what they were preaching what they were talking about, man, their preacher stand there, opened the Bible, reading from it just like ours does. They're not preaching a watered down gospel. Why do people come? Because they are welcomed and received like a friend. Not because we said, hey, do anything you want to do? It's okay. I can't believe Jesus said that. Jesus didn't tell all the people hey, you sinner and tax collectors, Come hang out with me. It's okay. Keep on sinning. I got grace. We're good. I don't hear that anywhere. In fact, Jesus said Go and sin no more.

Right. So why are these people coming. Have you ever been driving along and come across an accident on the freeway or maybe a road? Right? Anybody here? That's few people seen an accident? Yeah. There's generally three groups of people at an accident. Number one is the uninvolved the looky Loos, the Rubberneckers the people that you want to strangle. They're uninvolved. They're not doing anything. They're just looking. Sometimes there's not even anything to see. I sat through traffic for 45 minutes to get up here so we could all rubberneck and watch some guy changes tire You know, hate that. The second group of people that are in an accident scene are the police. And they arrived to control the scene, redirect traffic, the look at what happened, interview witnesses and do what? Write tickets. Your fault, you're to blame. We're kind of glad the police are there, but nobody likes getting a ticket. The third group of people that are there are the EMTs, the firemen, the paramedics, and they're the group that everybody's happy to see. Because they show up with the jaws of life and start ripping the car apart and pulling you out rendering aid. They aren't lecturing you that you're driving too fast. if you hadn't been driving too fast, this wouldn't happen. Don't want to hear it, want to get to the doctor, get my legs set, because it's broken. That's what I want. Right? And so we have these, these groups of people.

And sometimes the church can be a little bit like these groups of people. We have the uninvolved. Well, I put \$1 in the offering plate. Now Pastor Chris can go reach all the lost people. They're uninvolved. We have the people that are assigning blame. Well, you know, if you hadn't been a drug addict, and whatever, whatever whatever, this wouldn't have happened to you. It's your fault. And to be honest, a lot of times the church in general, has fallen into that category. Right? We're quick to assign blame. Well, if you hadn't done that, you wouldn't be in this mess. Now... Did your parents used to tell you that? I used to get that speech a lot. If you hadn't done that you wouldn't be here now. But hopefully we're like that last group, the EMTs. And we show up full of compassion, and with the jaws of life, to rip

them out of a mess and render some aid. That's the group I want to be in Amen. That's the group I want to be in. Because the lost have never flocked to hear people that condemn them. Most of the time, they know they're sinning. They know what they're doing is wrong. There's no meth addicts out there that think this is a great life. They know. They know, maybe we need a little compassion

And it's going to be tough. There's going to be tough days to try and figure out how are we compassionate about things we disagree with. When you look out in the world, there's a lot of things that we disagree with. There's a lot of agendas out there that we think maybe that's not for us. And how do you show compassion to those folks and love them and render aid, but not say what you're doing is okay. That's a challenge. That's a challenge. But I think that's what Jesus did. And that's what we're called to do. Alright, I've spent way too long on number one, so we're gonna fly through number two and three.

Number two. The second thing we need for reaching the unchurched is effort. It's going to take effort. Okay, back to Luke 15. Look at verses four through seven with me. Suppose one of you had 100 sheep, and loses one of them? Does he not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it. And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. And he calls his friends and neighbors together to say, rejoice with me, I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the 99 righteous for people who do not need to repent.

We've talked about this before sheep are stupid. They when God was giving out brains, the sheep weren't around. I don't know. They're not very bright creatures. They're cute. They have wool. Most of the time, they're pretty friendly. They are not so bright. They will eat it. They will eat the food. They'll eat the grass. They'll dig out the roots and eat the roots and then there's nothing else to grow. So the Shepherd has to keep moving to make sure they don't kill the food supply. They'll only drink certain water. They can't be lead him anywhere, you always got to herd them. So it's a full time job watching these. And so the shepherd gets home at night and counts the sheep and there's one missing. Stupid sheep. I told you to stay with the group. Right? Where's the sheep at in the hills of Judea and you go looking for them? 99 are safe, but you have to go looking for them.

You know, sometimes we talk about sharing our faith. And we say I don't have that spiritual gift. And you're absolutely right, you don't because sharing your faith is not a spiritual gift. Sharing your faith is something we're all supposed to do. It's not there's. Nothing thing listed there about sharing your faith in the spiritual gift list. Because we are all expected to share our faith. Jesus gives us the command, go and make disciples. Second Timothy says preach in season and out. David in Psalm says, Bless it are the feet who bring good news. We're expected to do this. It's not a spiritual gift. Because we're all supposed to do that. And how do you do that?

One way is you may have to follow them into some pretty rugged terrain. The late 1990s, maybe early 2000s There was a pastor Barry McCurtie I hope I'm saying that right pastored a 5000 member church here in California. And something was happening that caught his attention. The porno convention was coming to town. And they decided they wanted to reach out to the people that were working in the porn industry. And so they started a church called the XXXchurch, triple X church with the express purpose of reaching young women that were working in the porn industry. Now that's some rugged terrain. They bought a booth at the porn convention. They got a couple of women, they don't let any men go, a couple of women dressed up, went work the booth and ministered to young women that

were working in the porn industry and tried to shine a little bit of light into the darkness where they were. They got a million hits on their website. And that ministry is still going on although now they reach both men and women working in the porn industry. That's rugged terrain. That's hard work. That takes effort. Not everybody can do that ministry either. For some of us, that's just too much temptation.

The other thing that we have to do is meet them at their spirit, their level of spiritual interest. You can't start you know, at the end. If we related that to math. You don't start with calculus, right? Maybe some addition, some subtraction, a little bit of multiplication, algebra, geometry, trig. Now we'll talk about calculus. And you guys are like, no, please don't.

There was a pastor, a youth pastor, in St. Louis. There was a place downtown in St. Louis called Mississippi knights. Big club. They played a lot of heavy death metal bands that were anti-God, anti-Christian. And the youth group decided they wanted to reach out to these people. You know what they did? Got their pickup trucks. They rolled up to the concert, about the time it was getting out. They set up a big tailgate party with their pickup trucks and they served burritos to the kids coming out of the concert who might be hungry and tried to show a little love and compassion to people who were lost. Why are you out here sharing burritos because we thought you'd be hungry man. Does that have an impact on somebody's life? Absolutely. booths and burritos. good ways to reach people, according to God's command.

It was December 7 1988, in Armenia. It was called the earthquake of 1989. But it actually happened in 1988. It was a 6.8 on the Richter scales, with massive liquification of the ground, and it was rated the highest it could be rated for destructive capabilities. And in four minutes 50,000 people died. 130,000 were injured, and massive areas lay wasted. Businesses were Rubble, dream homes were piles of splinters. parks were covered in rubble and debris. The father of 10 year old Armand could not get to the school where Armand was because the roads are completely closed and blocked from all the rubble. And so he walked and eventually he got there. He couldn't recognize anything as everything was a pile of rubble. So he climbed up on one of them and tried to figure out where the school grounds were where a son's classroom would be, and begin to dig with his hands. Moving roofing material, and rocks, wood, a desk, and he dug. People told him too late, man, don't worry about it. It's over. And he dug for 10 hours. 12 hours, his hands were a bloody mess. 24 hours, people pleaded with him to stop 36 hours he dug. Finally at the 38 hour, he heard a little voice. Papa, papa. You found me. You came, I told them, you would come. He did not give up.

The third thing we need if we're going to reach the church is persistence. Persistence, that's going to take a while. Let's go back to Luke 15, verses eight through 10. It says suppose a woman has 10 silver coins and loses one does she not light a lamp sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it. And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says Rejoice with me. I have found my last coin. In the same way I tell you there is rejoicing in the presence of angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Armand's father did what these two parables tell us to do keep searching until the item of value is found. It was not easy to find one lost sheep in the hills of Judea in the dark. You know didn't have one of those cool LED flashlights that you know lights everything up. It was not easy to find a coin on a dirt floor in a dimly lit 1st century house. But these things had value and the people kept looking until they found it. Sometimes with this kind of stuff, we you know, we think Hey, I told my friend about Jesus and he didn't repent immediately and get baptized. I'm so done with this. I'm no good at it.

And it takes years sometimes for this stuff to happen. You can't always expect it to happen overnight. We've heard stories and hear of people who prayed for years and years for other folks. Okay.

There was a Pastor Mike Breau from South Christian Church in Lexington, Kentucky. I think he's moved another church now. But at the time he was at this church in Kentucky. And it was a big church I think was 8,500 members. This church was so large that they broadcast their service on TV. Okay, so there they are on TV broadcasting their service. But Pastor Mike, every night he went over to the sports bar and ate supper right there in a sports bar. How do you think it would go over if we found out the Pastor Chris goes into the sports bar every night eating supper. Some of you be going when's the game on? I think the Rams are playing tonight. Right? And he's he ate there night after night after night after night, he began to hear that the bartender was watching him on his church services on Sunday morning. And the people he ate with are watching him on Sunday morning. And one day after Mike had finished his dinner and he was leaving, somebody yelled out, Hey, Mike! He goes What? Thanks for eating with us sinners. Mike said, shoot, man, I'm the worst, and walked out. See, it takes persistence. And it's going to cost you something. I think Mike's reputation might have taken a hit. Pastors and big churches don't go eat at the sports bar every night. But Mike wasn't concerned about his reputation. He was concerned about people who are far from God.

It's going to cost you something, it's going to cost you some effort, it's going to cost you some time. It's going to cost you some money. It's going to cost you maybe your reputation. Are the unchurched people in your life valuable enough to be worth it?

There's a couple of messages here that are to be found. One, if you're in the group of people that are found, if you're saved, you know, and you're headed to heaven, glory, hallelujah, I'm happy for you. Thankful. And there's a message for you. Be compassionate, be persistent, put forth the effort and be willing to pay the cost. If you're in the group that maybe is not so sure. Don't give up. Jesus hasn't given up yet. And we haven't given up yet. Amen!

You know, you've never locked eyes with somebody who doesn't matter to God. Amen. But would you still think that if you were coming into church next week, you know, "hey, Gustavo, Hey Tomas! Hey, Evelyn! Hey, who's sitting in my seat?" Or would you say hallelujah, somebody is here? What if we showed up in the parking lot was full, there was no place to park. You had to park out on the street and walk in? Maybe we'd have to get the golf cart like we did when we're working on the parking lot. Remember that? The golf cart? Yeah, golf cart was fun. Well, like the golf cart. Pastor, we want another golf cart. Wouldn't that be great?

Would that be worth it? Would you be willing to give up that much? To give up your favorite pew? To give up sermons that were directed to you? Maybe they'd be directed to somebody else who needed to hear something. Maybe it wouldn't be all about feeding you but feeding somebody else. What if the people in the neighborhood mattered so much that we had to change our worship style and sing other kinds of songs? Maybe kind of music you don't like that much? Right? I tell you if someone could come here and convince me that if we sang some kind of music maybe that I wasn't that happy with.... opera. You know, opera means death by singing right? You guys knew that. That's the Italian meaning for opera death by singing. If we could sing opera music here and it would bring lost people in. We're getting a fat lady next week to sing. I joke, right. But I'm serious. What are you willing to do? How much are you willing to give up to reach people that are far from God? How much are they worth to you? Because God gave up the glory of heaven and His crown for a stable and across.

So what will you give up?

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you so much, that we have the opportunity to make a difference in people's lives, Lord, that we can be involved in this process. Sometimes it makes us uncomfortable and sometimes we don't like it. The Lord, thank you for that opportunity. Thank you for the privilege that we have of being involved. Lord, we ask that you give us the courage, to be bold, to look for opportunities, where we can say something about to make a difference in somebody's life. Give us the courage this week, Lord, in Jesus name, Amen.