



## I AM ... LOST; JESUS IS ... THE WAY

John 14:6

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The Bible uses numerous metaphors and words to describe the nature of our disconnection from God: sinful, blemished, demonic, missing the mark, adulterous, wandering, estranged, broken, crooked, indebted, trespassing, drunken swerving, oppressive toil, impiety, lawless, and just plain evil. Some of these might be easier to relate to than others (and I won't ask for a show of hands) but this list is only a sampling and its sheer size not only shows the importance of a right relationship with God, but the complexities of the human spirit. It seems like overkill, but there are so many ways we can go wrong, we need enough words to cover the multitudinous ways we stray. ("Stray", there's another!) which leads us to one of Jesus' favorite terms found in Luke's gospel – "lost."

There are many ways that we feel lost in today's world, from our disconnection with nature to a lost sense of purpose. Millions of refugees have lost their homes (a common, Biblical theme).

These are some of the ways people have shared with me their sense of being lost:

- When, after parenting children at home for 30 years, you suddenly have three extra bedrooms and dozens of hours each week with lost purpose
- When, your spouse dies after 50 / 60 years of marriage and a simple thing like breakfast overwhelms
- When, after working 30 years in a career you worked so hard for, you suddenly find yourself asking "Why I am doing this?"
- When, everything is going right in your world, but there is still a deep feeling of emptiness within

Being lost can be frightening, unnerving, and leave us feeling disoriented and hopeless.

Anyone who was lost in the woods as a child knows what I am talking about. There is, if even for a moment, a feeling of complete and utter helplessness. Inevitably you spent a few moments frozen in place, unable to choose a path. All your latent fears come rushing at you wildly, a noise far off in the distance is certainly the boogey man come to get you and the rustling leaves must be a wolf, a bear, or some such creature stalking you. You are absolutely convinced you will never make it home safe and sound again. You are going to spend the rest of your life in the woods!

You're not even sure where you took a wrong turn. But one thing is certain...you are in strange and unfamiliar territory, a place you know you're not supposed to be.

When you are lost, there is a three-step process to finding yourself – which anyone who has been on that proverbial "car trip from hell" can attest to. For us it was in the summer of 1992, when Liz was two years old and I was serving an internship at a 30-member seasonal church in the very rural Adirondacks. We had many adventures - hiking, sailing, bear watching – but one occasion to the train museum, about an hour and a half away, was something more.

We asked a church member for directions and it sounded simple enough, so off we went. After about an hour, we went through a small town that had a detour, so we asked a local for new bearings. After another hour, we finally agreed we were completely lost. In the middle of nowhere, we pulled over and took out the map.

As we looked at the map, we discovered there were at least 5 railroad museums in the area. At the detour, the person mistakenly sent us to another one but we couldn't figure out which one, since we couldn't figure out where we were on the map.

Since we didn't know where we were on the map, we could not set a new course. We decided to drive until we could get some bearings. Twenty minutes later, or rather 3 hours after we set off for an hour and half trip, we finally hit a town and realized we were now two hours away from the museum! Further away than when we began!

This trip sums up everything about being lost. You are headed in the wrong direction, can't even figure out where you are, so you cannot even begin the journey.

Jesus fixes all three problems and he tells us as much in John 14:6. It is one of my favorite passages to read aloud in all of scripture. I can feel and hear the scope and power of Jesus' lordship in this three-part declaration, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me."

The truth is our current location. Where we are on the map right now. Sometimes we are lost, because we won't admit our own mixed motivations. Failure to see the truth about ourselves can destroy our relationships. Married couples find themselves in perpetual battle mode when each individual refuses to recognize their own shortcomings. Over time, the relationship can become completely lost and all that is left is bitterness and resentment.

Jesus' truth tells us that *all* of us our sinners. Every single one. We are all broken and we bring this to every encounter, knowingly or not. If you are lost in your relationships, don't listen to the voice of ego, pride, or the world's truth.

At the same time, don't listen to the haters. Because the truth, wherever you are on the map, however lost, is Jesus loves you.

Next, Jesus is the way. He is the road that takes us from our current state of lostness to our goal. In fact, finding the way paradoxically means losing yourself. Jesus declares, "Whoever finds their life will lose it and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."

Much of the feeling of lostness in this world is a result of misplaced priorities and values – the values of self-fulfillment, self-improvement, self-success. These are the people the world admires. But people can have all the success in the world but feel completely lost, because they aren't on the way, the daily path, Jesus calls us to walk. This is the tragedy of the childhood star who becomes lost in drugs. Having been given everything, they feel like they are nothing.

The earliest followers of Jesus were called "people of the way". Being a follower of Jesus was more a pattern of living than a set doctrine. "The Way" included servanthood not self, radical forgiveness (70 times 7), love, even loving your enemies (Who wants to do that?!). Whatever your destination, the path always includes these values. Walk them each day and, rather than being at a loss with who you are and what you are to do, you will be filled with purpose and direction.

Finally, Jesus declares, "I am the life." This is our goal, the destination, and the purpose for our existence... Life in Christ.

Sometimes people get lost because we think our goal is "The good life" – money, cars, women, a nice home. We believe our destination is happiness, but the goal is not perfect pleasure or even contentment.

Sometimes, even our vision of heaven is simply another version of this self-centered existence. Heaven is a place where I won't be sad, where I won't be hungry, where all my needs are met, where I will be perfectly happy.

But our destination is not achieving a state of being such as success, or happiness, or even a place like heaven.

Jesus is not so much our way to heaven. That is a coincidence. He is fundamentally the way to the Father.

Our destiny is a person. God the Father. Our goal is to be in perfect harmony, a perfect

relationship with God. That is what life is all about. Everything.

But here is the problem. We cannot reach this goal – No way – No how. This is the great tragedy of our existence. No matter how hard we try, we are lost. Because, since the garden of Eden, we have not had that supreme, glorious, majestic, and holy connection with God and, ever since then, we have been unable to find our way back.

We will always be lost because every road we try has a detour. The bridge is out, the fog has descended, and the way is not clear.

But there is good news! There is always good news! Being lost is not a permanent condition.

Because God is the best hide and seek player there is!

After declaring, “I am the way, the truth and the life...” Jesus adds, “No one gets to the Father but through me.” Traditionally, we see this as an exclusive statement – as if Jesus were the gatekeeper, keeping people out. But prepositions are hard to translate from one language to the next. I am convinced that what Jesus really meant was “No one comes to the Father but *by me, because of me.*”

Jesus gives us this very good news in three successive parables: The Lost Coin, The Lost Sheep, and The Lost Son. In “The Lost Sheep”, a man has lost one out of hundred sheep. He leaves the 99 in the wilderness and looks and looks until he finds that one sheep and, when he does, he rejoices. In case we didn't get the point immediately, Jesus tells an almost identical parable, but this time with coins instead of sheep. A woman with ten silver coins loses one and guess what she does. She looks for it in every nook and cranny of her house until she finds it and when she does, she invites all to rejoice. Not trusting our ability to get the point, Jesus tells yet one more story. The most famous of all parables. The prodigal son and, upon the son being found, the fatted calf is slaughtered, the best robe is brought out, and the fatted calf is killed! And a grand feast is enjoyed by all!

God wants nothing more than the lost to be found and, no matter how lost you are, God will never, ever, ever, never, ever give up!

On this side, it will never be perfect. There will always be a part of us that feels lost, that is afraid, that does not know which way to turn, that does not know where we are. When you have that feeling, turn to our Lord. Walk his path. Be open to his truth. And seek him with everything you've got. And remember, no matter how lost, eventually you will be found in those loving arms.

Forever.