



The Lost Sheep

Luke 15:4-7

"Ugh, my pack is so heavy!" Lewis grunted, as he heaved the blue canvas backpack off his shoulders and onto the ground. He let out a sigh as he sat down on the log next to Michael.

"Scoot over!" Amanda demanded as she pushed in between her friends. "You should always make room for a girl!" Michael rolled his eyes and was trying to decide how he should reply when Ranger Reggie stepped in front of the group of campers.

Lewis' eyes opened wide with excitement as he leaned over and whispered, "Look! It's Ranger Reggie! He's famous! He hosts a TV show from camp every week!"

"Good morning, campers! Welcome to your first day at Camp Venture!" Reggie announced with a wide grin that showed all his teeth. "I'm the forest ranger here at Critter National Forest. Are you ready for a great summer at camp?"

"Yeah!" the campers shouted together.

"Great! Let's get started! Every week at Camp Venture, we will introduce you to a new and interesting animal. Some of you may have seen the Creature Feature segment on our TV show, Critter Kingdom. Today, I think if we take a hike in the woods, we should be able to discover our creature of the week. Let's go!" Ranger Reggie pulled his ranger hat down even tighter over his head and waved for the campers to follow him. "Be sure to stay close behind me! I don't want to lose any of you because you stopped following me and wandered down the wrong path."

Michael and Amanda jumped up and raced to follow the ranger. Lewis just grunted again as he struggled to pull his backpack up over his shoulders and follow the others. Ranger Reggie was already pointing out special features of the forest.

"Over by that patch of grass, you can see our old friend, Fluffy." Ranger Reggie smiled and pointed to the large, white, wooly sheep. Fluffy was so focused on each nibble of grass that he didn't even notice the campers as they marched passed him.

"And this is Perry; he is a peregrine falcon," Ranger Reggie said as a large bird swooped down from the sky and landed on a nearby tree branch. "Falcons have very good eyesight," he continued. "In fact, in medieval times, falcons were used for hunting or to find things that were lost."

Fluffy looked up and bleated nervously. "Hey, that reminds me of a Bible story," Ranger Reggie said as he paused on the trail. He pulled a small, black leather Bible from his back

pocket and leaned against the tree next to Perry's branch. "It's the story of the lost sheep! This is one of the parables Jesus told to His followers!"

The campers dropped their packs and settled down around the small forest clearing; ready to hear Jesus' story. Ranger Reggie read, "Then Jesus told them this parable: 'Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them...'"

"I don't get it! What kind of shepherd is that? He's supposed to be taking care of the sheep and he loses one!" Amanda interrupted.

"Hang on, Amanda! Let me finish the story!" Ranger Reggie replied.

"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?"

Amanda leaned over and whispered loudly in Natalie's ear, "Are you hearing what I'm hearing? That shepherd left ninety-nine sheep unattended! Now, that's just bad shepherding!"

Ranger Reggie chuckled, "It's OK, Amanda. It's not a real shepherd. It's just one of the parables..."

"A pair of bulls!" Amanda blurted out, "He left ninety-nine sheep and a pair of bulls sitting out there, too?"

Michael elbowed Lewis and giggled, "They better call the game warden!"

Ranger Reggie shook his head. "Not a pair of bulls, a parable! Parables are stories. Jesus told them to teach us what the kingdom of God is like."

Natalie chimed in, "That's what the kingdom of God is like...shepherds abandoning poor defenseless sheep?"

"Hold on campers, let me get to the good part!" Ranger Reggie found his place in the Bible and continued reading:

"And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'"

Lewis spoke up, "Rejoice? You mean the shepherd was celebrating about one little sheep?"

Ranger Reggie nodded. "Absolutely! Jesus tells us this story to show us that, in His kingdom, every single one of us is very special to Him. Can you imagine how you would feel if you were that one lost sheep?"

"Well, I...I guess if I wandered away, I'd be excited the shepherd found me and brought me safely back to the flock," Gus said thoughtfully. At that moment, Fluffy bleated loudly and the campers all laughed.

Ranger Reggie looked at the campers. "We're all like the sheep—sometimes we wander away from God. Jesus is like that shepherd! When we are wandering far from Jesus, He

finds us and brings us back close to Him! In fact, the Bible says there is more rejoicing in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and comes back to God than over ninety-nine people who don't need to repent!"

Lewis raised his hand. "Repent? What's a repent?" he asked.

"Great question!" Ranger Reggie replied. "To repent means to turn away from doing things we know are wrong in God's eyes. We call those wrong things 'sins.' When we repent, we choose to stop sinning and start doing things God's way. That shows God we love Him."

"Oh! I see!" Amanda exclaimed. "The shepherd is Jesus and He helps us to love God with all our heart. Hey, that's part of our Camper's Code here at Camp Venture!"

"You're right, Amanda!" Reggie agreed. "Every good ranger ought to know the Camper's Code. Why don't you campers all stand up and I'll make you official Camp Rangers! Raise your right hand and recite our Camper's Code with me!"

The campers scrambled to their feet and repeated the code together:

**"I will love God with all my heart.
I will love my neighbor as myself.
I will be a light wherever I go!"**

"Good work, Camp Rangers!" Reggie congratulated them. Looking up at the sun to note the time of day, he announced, "Well, it looks like it's time to head back to the campfire and see what our camp cook is stirring up!" He and the campers waved goodbye to Perry and Fluffy and marched back down the forest path towards their camp.

"I'm so glad I have Jesus as my shepherd!" Lewis whispered to his friends as they quickened their step to keep up with Ranger Reggie. Without a sound, Perry spread his wings and soared into the sky to lead the hikers back to camp.