

REJOICING OVER ONE

By Becky Reeder

SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:7

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

OBSERVATION

Tax collectors and sinners gathered around Jesus to hear Him teach. The religious leaders and teachers of the day stood by and criticized Him for welcoming their kind and for eating with them. While lawgivers were busy muttering disdain under their breath, Jesus was dishing out mercy and love to a crowd of degenerates.

The most abandoned of sinners were rejected by religion. Jesus steps in, teaching the parable of the lost sheep so that they would understand He came to offer them salvation. But His story doesn't end there. Jesus expresses great joy in finding just one—one lost sheep, one lost sinner. Standing in the crowd that day were people defeated, with no hope, until Jesus came along and took a chance on being persecuted and hard-pressed so they could experience the kind of love that saves, the kind of love where there is more rejoicing in heaven for one changed soul than for ninety-nine with no need of repentance.

You see, when found, the lost sheep doesn't return to the flock. The shepherd puts him on His shoulders and takes him home and rejoices. Christ's love for the sinner is so great, His salvation so life-changing, that there is no going back.

OBEDIENCE

On April 9, 2020, Patrick Lyons with the *New York Times* wrote, "But in the face of an exploding pandemic with a frightening death toll, people are desperate for a bit of hope, a chance to believe there is something to help." If we are going to follow Jesus' example, we have to give people a chance to believe there is more than a bit of hope. It takes grace to sit with sinners and share the gospel, but that's exactly what Jesus extended to tax collectors and sinners who were in His presence.

Because of grace, we experience joy in relationship with Christ and we can rejoice with heaven when we share the gospel and see *one* life changed. We often measure success in numbers, but our key verse reminds us that we are to celebrate “over *one* sinner who repents.”

It can be more difficult to share the gospel with one than a group. Life is messy. Life is even more messy when you really get to know someone. Yet God desires that all would come to know Him (1 Timothy 2:4). Remember, the conversion of the lost is not dependent on you but building relationships with people who need the Lord is. While there is no one-size-fits-all process for embracing the lost, we can find comfort in guidance from the scriptures on how we should approach relationships with believers and unbelievers alike.

- **1 John 3:18** - *Dear children, let us not merely say that we love each other, let us show it by our actions.* When the lost see us loving each other and loving them, they are moved by grace. Think of how you can show love to a world in search of hope.
- **Colossians 3:12** - *Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.* We must live as Christ’s representatives for the lost to know His love.
- **Ephesians 2:8-10** - *God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.* This passage is a humble reminder that our salvation is not by our doing but by the grace of God.

We were once held captive by sin, just like the tax collector and sinners who stood before Christ and just like the lost in our presence today. When we build relationships on love instead of judgment, our life is a testimony of God’s saving grace and when we celebrate the one, the heavens rejoice.

PRAYER

Dear God, in this time of turmoil in our world, we praise You for your hope-giving presence. Create in us an awareness of people who need Your love and need to know Your saving grace. Equip us with mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience for the lost, no matter what their condition may be. Help us to remember it is not by our works but by Your grace that we may join the heavens in rejoicing over one lost soul. Amen.