



The Lost and Found Model

The Lost and Found Model believes that every human being is lost and that God seeks to find every lost person. When a lost person is found, bountiful celebrating ensues. Once a person has been found, that person becomes part of the search and rescue for others who are lost. Such people also join the celebrations. Each lost person has infinite value. Each found person has unique gifts to seek others who are lost as well as to celebrate when such people are found. The Lost and Found Model incorporates all of the community's gifts of faith to reach those who are lost.

Biblical Basis

Luke 15 contains the trilogy of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. These illustrate differing conditions for those who are lost. Some get lost and are aware of it but can't get out of their situation without intervention from others. Others aren't even aware they are lost and might even be "in the house" while they are lost. And still others choose to maximize their lostness to their own denigration and destruction.

We also can see different measures taken to find the lost. Sometimes this requires a departure from the safety of home to go to dangerous places in order to effect a rescue. At other times we need to look within our own household or church to rescue one who is lost. And sometimes we simply have to wait until others come to their senses and choose to head home before we can run, embrace, and start the party!

The Old Testament Passover event (Exodus 12) and subsequent celebrations of it (Leviticus 23:5-8) demonstrate the lost

condition of all and the gift and celebration of salvation (being found). The Red Sea deliverance and subsequent celebration offers another refrain on the same theme (Exodus 14-15). Paul presents an extensive New Testament explanation of this lost and found model in Romans 1-9 (note Romans 3:23-24 for a short version of it).

Jesus himself claimed that he came to seek and to save those who were lost (Luke 19:10). His followers do the same.

What It Looks Like

The Lost and Found model sometimes functions like a roller coaster. The lost element can be troublesome, burdensome, difficult and sad. On the other hand, the found element calls for celebration, joy, life and community. When these two happen simultaneously, it becomes incongruous. When the lost seem more prevalent than the found, it colors the outlook, and vice versa.

This model consistently sends individuals and groups on expeditions to seek the lost. It uses tried and true methods as well as new

ones—all for the purpose of seeking the lost. Each person utilizes whatever gifts God has given, including those outside of the traditionally expected gifts of bible study, music, medical service, public speaking, and education. Auto mechanics, artists, janitors, retailers, nerds, entrepreneurs, athletes, small business owners and others all see themselves in search of the lost.

This model also seems trigger-happy to start the party. Instead of comparing one party with another, the uniqueness of each celebration stands on its own and also reminds those celebrating of their past celebrations and expected future ones. Yet the anticipation of the final celebration with the return of Christ continues as the ultimate celebration of a new era, while motivating participants to continue to seek the lost as excitement builds towards that climax.

Personal relationships, church activities, daily living, events in life—all get interpreted through the lens of “lost and found.” Yet individuals continue to be treated as individuals and valued as individuals even when they are lost. At the same time, hope always pulls towards being found by God and playing any role necessary in the process.

Keys To Make It Work

In addition to the mind set and outlook of seeking the lost and celebrating each find, one key to make this work is finding the niche and purpose for each person in the bigger picture. Are you more of a seeker or a celebrator? Be ready to do both, but are you gifted more towards one than the other? When it comes to youth and young adult ministry, this model recognizes that some who grow up in the church are lost and need to be found, including some regularly attending and possibly participating.

Another key is to individualize each search and each celebration. No cookie cutter molds need to be put through the motions. No half-hearted attempts are acceptable. Always be going for it!

Never limit yourself to the church environment, yet don't neglect that either. Be transparent and authentic about the human condition and God's goodness and persistence. Love all; serve all. Seek the lost; celebrate whenever found. Never miss an opportunity to celebrate!

Obstacles

Some can feel overwhelmed by the lost. “Older brothers” are lost but deny it. They resist accepting those who are saved until an indefinitely long time of probation has been served. They also resist celebrating.

It's possible for an “us” and “them” orientation to creep into the atmosphere of us/found versus them/lost. Some ministries can become stale or redundant when the same emphasis gets run into the ground.

Those who seek spiritual growth through avenues outside of the lost and found model can distract from or dilute this model.

Opportunities

With all human beings starting in a lost position, and with those already found still capable of becoming lost, the target group seems huge. And with so many needs, the avenues to reach those who are lost are as limitless as the God in search of them.

Celebrating connects earth to heaven and vice versa. What a treat! The Holy Spirit's work in and through people provides multiple reasons for hope, success, and assurance.

You are needed and wanted, and you need God. These basic realities get repeated continuously.