

HELPING PEOPLE FIND THEIR WAY HOME

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Stand Out Series

Sermon Notes

Text: Luke 15:11-31

Intro: Okay let's have the gentlemen stand up, we want to see how many consider themselves influential with their words? If you're not you can sit down! Okay, for those of you standing, any of you that know killer pickup lines? If you have none, please sit! Okay, let's hear a couple of your best pickup lines that would convince any single lady if you are looking to date that you're a serious jamaa. Go!

(Sample 3 dudes with mic)

Here are a few:

- I want to live in your socks so I can be with you every step of the way.
- I bet you play soccer, because you're a keeper.
- If I were a stop light, I'd turn red every time you passed by, just so I could stare at you a bit longer..

We've been going through a series called 'Stand Out' because our conviction is that this year, God's desire is for His people to stand out; So far we've learnt that Jesus never intended his followers to be Christians (that word only occurs 3 times in the bible, and only as a derogatory term used by others). Instead he intended for them to be **disciples** – which really means someone who is 100% committed to living a life of **radical obedience to Him**. And we've learnt that two of the ways we are meant to stand out or be distinguished as followers of Jesus is

- a. By our radical love for one another
- b. By embracing accountability.

Today we want to get into a third trait by which Jesus, followers must stand out. This is such an important quality that when Jesus preached about it, he taught it not once, but three times, all in the same sermon! In fact it's the only recorded time when Jesus told three parables in a row, all about the same thing.

Lk15:11-31. And as you turn there, let me give you some context for what we're about to read...

Now Jesus was often surrounded by a group of people collectively referred to as '*sinners*': In other words people with major issues; the kind that you normally wouldn't find hanging around a respected teacher or a religious leader. But somehow, despite the fact that Jesus was seen as a highly respected teacher, these so called 'sinners' were attracted to him. They couldn't get enough of him! The religious establishment was scandalized that Jesus would hang out with such 'undeserving' people and they frowned on his practice. On one such occasion, Jesus told three stories in response to their disapproval, and all of them were about something **lost that was found**. The first story was a sheep, the second a coin and the last a son. We're about to read the last one... **READ Lk15:11-31**

To further illustrate the point, he told them this story: "A man had two sons. 12 When the younger told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die!' his

father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. 13 "A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and took a trip to a distant land, and there wasted all his money on parties and prostitutes.

v.11-13 In the close-knit, traditional families of the Middle East, this was a huge insult. The son was basically telling the father, 'I can't wait around till you're dead, give me what's mine'. In many of our African cultures, that would be seen as cursing your father. By demanding his inheritance, this guy was basically disrupting family unity, and threatening their means of production. He was forcing them to sell off valuable family assets. Then to add insult to injury, instead of at least investing it, he went away and had a wild party, recklessly spending what his father has built up over years on wine, women and wild parties and ended up broke.

14 About the time his money was gone a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. 15 He persuaded a local farmer to hire him to feed his pigs. 16 The boy became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the swine looked good to him. And no one gave him anything. 17 "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired men have food enough and to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger! 18 I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man."' 20 "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming, and was filled with loving pity and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 "His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and you, and am not worthy of being called your son—' 22 "But his father said to the slaves, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. And a jeweled ring for his finger; and shoes! 23 And kill the calf we have in the fattening pen. We must celebrate with a feast, 24 for this son of mine was dead and has returned to life. He was lost and is found.' So the party began.

v.14-24 (end of part one)

As I said earlier, this is the 3rd story about something lost.

1. The first story was about a sheep. Now in almost all cultures in the world, a sheep is not usually seen as a very clever animal. I doubt this sheep had hatched a deliberate scheme to escape. It was probably innocently moving from one patch of green grass to the next; completely distracted. Going further & further from safety until eventually it looked up and realized 'Oops! I'm lost!'

It had unconsciously drifted away from home.

Some here know what it is like to be like that sheep, drifting slowly away from God. You were once excited about God and your life revolved around Him. But over time your life became busy and cluttered with distractions; career, school, children, investments etc. You slowly drifted away from your first love and today when you're honest with yourself, you realize you are not as close to God as you used to be.

2. The 2nd story is about a coin; a silver coin was worth a whole day's wages. The coin is harder to find than a sheep because it is lifeless; it can't move, it can't bleat for help. In fact, it doesn't even realize it's lost!

Some here have been like that coin. That's really tough because when you're there, you may sense deep down that something isn't quite right but you don't even know what it is! You pursue wealth, career, education, relationships and success but they don't deliver satisfaction. The bible tells us that without a relationship with God, we are spiritually lifeless. We have a God-shaped vacuum within, and

as long as we continue to try to fill it with other things, we'll never live out what we were created for. Because we can only begin to find our purpose when we're in a living relationship with our Creator, our purpose giver...

3. But the 3rd story is about a son, and the son is the hardest of the three to find, because his lostness was a consciously chosen state. He knew the way home but chose not to take it. I don't know what caused him to leave home. Perhaps he was fed up of being told what to do and wanted freedom to do his own thing. Maybe he just wanted to experience life out there. Or maybe he got hurt by something his father or brother did. Or maybe he didn't trust his father to look after his best interests. Whatever the reason, this younger son is very hard to find, because **it's impossible to find him before he's ready to be found.**

There are those here who like the younger son know what it means to choose to be lost. For whatever reason, you once had a relationship with God, but you consciously walked away from it.

Interesting thing I notice about the father. Unlike the shepherd who left the 99 sheep to look for the one or the woman who turned her house upside down to find her coin, he didn't run after his son. He didn't try and force the son to stay. And he didn't even send a relative to convince him to return. Why is this?

I think that the father knew that humans are not like sheep or coins; they cannot be forced to stay around willingly unless they want to. That's where the younger son represents all of us. And so as much as it must have hurt him, the father waited. He knew he couldn't force his son to return home. Now imagine you are the one who insulted your family, squandered ½ their savings, and then decided to come back home... what kind of reception would you have gotten if it was your family? Many here would have been met with **open hostility**, 'It's true you don't deserve to be in this family. Go back where you came from!' Some of you may have been met with **conditional admission**, 'Okay, just come in... but go sleep in the boy quarters until you earn back that money that you lost!' Some of you luckier ones would have been met with **resigned acceptance**, 'I don't approve of what you've done; you've hurt me a lot: But you're still our child'.

But none of this was the case in our story. V.20 says '*while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him*'. The original version says, 'he was moved to his bowels!' He shed all dignity. He sprinted the whole distance and threw his arms around his boy. The son was surprised by this reaction; he knew he didn't deserve it. So he began the speech he had been prepared for some time, but his father would hear none of it. His son was finally home. *That's what mattered!*

Think about it, while the son was far from home,

His ring was being shined, His robe was being knit, his shoes were being stitched, and a calf was being fattened. All waiting for his Return!

Jesus' lesson is clear, lost people matter to God!

But that's not all, something else was going on...

25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working; when he returned home, he heard dance music coming from the house, 26 and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 27 "Your brother is back," he was told, "and your father has killed the calf we were fattening and has

prepared a great feast to celebrate his coming home again unharmed.’ 28 “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, 29 but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve worked hard for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to; and in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. 30 Yet when this son of yours comes back after spending your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the finest calf we have on the place.’ 31 “‘Look, dear son,’ his father said to him, ‘you and I are very close, and everything I have is yours.

v.25-31 Older brother felt deeply wronged. You see - he had been the model son. He had done everything his father asked of him. He had always been there when his father needed him. Then along comes this good-for-nothing sibling who's blown half the family fortune; who has brought great shame & dishonor to the family. And what does his father do? He throws a huge party in his honor! How unfair can life get!

But here’s the thing; elder brother had spent all those years next to his father but had never understood his father’s heart. While his father constantly walked up the driveway to see if the younger son would return, life went on for older brother; he was in the fields, getting the job done. Serving faithfully. Like the religious people who questioned Jesus for hanging out with undeserving sinners, he was so preoccupied with the work of being a son that he missed out on the privilege of sharing the father’s heart. And so in a sense – he too was a prodigal son. He needed to realize that the father’s love for him was not based on his performance or his goodness, but was freely given. You see, **there is nothing you can do that is good enough for God to love you more than He already does!** And because you have received God’s love without strings or conditions, you need to extend it to others in the same way. Jesus’ expectation of us is that we will treat others the way we ourselves have been treated. Jesus’ expectation is that we will **Stand out! Help others find God!**

This is risky business! What if people see us with *them* and think that we are condoning their bad behavior? What if we hang out with *them* and end up lowering our own standards? What if *they* take our acceptance as a sign that they can stay as they are? Why don’t they show they are serious about change first, before we accept them? You see it’s so much easier to want people to change and deal with their issues before we can accept them. But none of us came to God in that way. He accepted us freely - despite our issues! It’s so easy to want to look for churches where we can be fed, our needs can be met. But the greatest sign that we truly know God is not the bible studies or prayer meetings we attend, the number of days we fast, or how many demons flee from the room when we walk in. The greatest sign that we truly know God is our involvement in spreading His love to those around us who don't know him.

At Mavuno, we want to always be a church that is primarily concerned with helping people find their way back to God. It’s not always an easy thing to do! **It means we structure our services to meet their needs, not ours.** It means accepting people as they are, rather than expecting them to become like us before they belong. It means we recognize that it’s not our job to save; our job is to love people enough that they can experience the love of God. God is the one who does the saving! It means being ready for criticism by other Christians who will not understand what we’re doing, and who will think we’ve compromised the faith, or are just not serious. It means communicating to our friends and family members, ‘You don’t need to shape up your life or change your behavior to come to Mavuno. Just come as you are’. When they encounter God’s love, no one will have to force them to change. They’ll do

it themselves! It means none of us sits back and lets the rest do the work of loving others ~ we all pay the cost for this together. **'Stand out! Help others find God'**

As we will be going through Simama in March, one of our prayers is that God will allow all us an opportunity to help members of our family find a relationship with God. You may not be able to do it on your own but my prayer is that as you pray for them with others in your family, you will witness a rebirth in your family, as different ones connect to God and begin to live the lives of purpose that they were created for.

Let me end by asking you a question... Which of the two prodigal sons do you identify with?

- a. **Some of us are where the younger brother was.** You know that you are in a far country, far away from God. You're doing your own thing, living your own life. Or maybe you are just coming to your senses and beginning to be homesick & to seek for God. Perhaps that's even why you're here.
- b. **Others here identify with the older son.** You have a relationship with God but you don't share his passion for others around you who have not had that privilege. You are preoccupied about other things. You are too busy to stand out at the gate and look out for people seeking the way home.

Whichever son you are, I believe God is saying 'this is your time to stand out'. And he is waiting patiently for you, with arms outstretched, ready to accept you as you are, ready to add meaning to your life, ready to connect you with why you were created, ready to say to you... welcome home!

Imagine with me a church where people who have been far from God walk in and feel they belong. It's not just the music and the sermons, but the acceptance and the love they feel from others. Imagine people in Nairobi, even people who don't know God, telling their friends who have issues 'I hear there's a church for people like us'. Imagine a church where people don't form cliques, where they don't act 'holier-than-thou', where newcomers don't feel sidelined or self-conscious but like members of the family. Imagine at the end of this year standing up to testify that your family members have not only come back to God but are living significant lives of purpose. Mavuno – that is our calling! **'Stand out! Help others find God'**

Ministry

(This little light of mine)

- a. **Confession:** Older sons/daughters – Forgive me for being so engrossed in the responsibility of being a son that I've missed out on the privilege of sharing your heart
- b. **Salvation:** Younger sons/daughters – 'I've been a prodigal. Drifted away, walked away intentionally or simply didn't even realize because I was too busy chasing my own definition of success. I'm ready to not only come home but with your help to help others find you!'