



## Introduction

When I was six years old, I got an unforgettable picture of God's heart. My dad was in the military, stationed in North Carolina. Across from our family's home lived a family also in the military. We had three boys. They had three girls. Each Friday in warm weather our moms drove the six kids an hour to the beach, where we spent the day building sand castles and wading in the waves. Then we would pile back into a big, ugly green station wagon and return home.

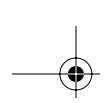
On one of our trips back home, with us in the middle of the fifteenth verse of the song about Noah's "arky, arky" and the animals that came in by "twosies, twosies," Allison, the youngest girl, asked where Chris was. Chris was my youngest brother, three years old. He was a trickster, so we thought he must be hiding somewhere in the car. We looked under the beach blankets. We looked in the tire well. We searched the back of the car. No Chris. He must still be at the beach.

"Mom, Chris isn't here," I reported.

"Wha-a-a-t?" her mother responded. At that moment I began the ride of my life! Cheryl's mother hit the brake with magnum force. She spun that big, ugly green station wagon in a 180-degree turn, tires screeching. Then she put the pedal to the metal. What had been a thirty-minute trip from the beach took us fifteen minutes going back. I think we hit a hundred miles per hour, and we only stayed that low because it was an old car and just couldn't go any faster.

At the beach we piled out and ran back through the archway and onto the sand. We ran from guard station to guard station. At the last one, my mother saw Chris and Chris saw my mother. They called out to each other. They ran toward each other. And then it was like a scene from a movie. My





mom caught Chris in her arms and twirled him, hugging him, laughing and crying all at the same time.

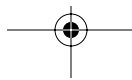
Chris was lost. My mother braved the curves of North Carolina roads and (it felt like) risked all our lives to find him. But that passionate mother-love for her lost child is only a glimmer of the passion of God for those who are lost and don't know Jesus. He wants to turn the big, ugly green station wagon (maybe an appropriate analogy for our church or ministry!) around and race to wherever these lost and hurting people can be found. But he's letting us drive. We are at the steering wheel of the green station wagon. If we are happy with who is already in the car and who is not, we can continue on home singing our fun travel songs.

God is looking for station wagon drivers who will collaborate with him to reach the lost and to fulfill the Great Commission. He 's looking for people who want to be like Jesus in Luke 15.

#### Getting Ready to Celebrate

In Luke 15, Jesus answers his critics by revealing his priorities. The religious people don't think he should be hanging out with all these "sinners," all these lost people. Jesus is a religious teacher, they say. He should hang out with religious people. All these broken, lost, sick, sinful people will corrupt him.

Jesus makes a captivating reply. He tells some great stories. He talks about normal stuff: a sheep, a coin, a son. Everyday life stuff. And he weaves several common themes through each story. Something or someone has been lost. A sheep. A coin. A son. What is lost is very valuable to the person who lost it. That person engages in an all-out search. The shepherd hikes the hills far and wide, searching everywhere for his lost sheep. The woman turns her house upside down searching for her lost coin. She creates a major cleanup job for herself, because her desire for order is minuscule in comparison to her longing for what has been lost. In the case of the son, who chose to go to the far country, the father knows a search will be futile until the son wants to return. But he engages in active, anxious, daily waiting and watching, so as not to miss the opportunity to respond to any change in heart. In all three stories, when what was lost gets found, there is an all-out, raucous, rowdy, over-the-top celebration. Party on! The lost has been found! The shepherd, the woman, the father cannot keep their joy to themselves. Everybody is invited to share in the party, in some cases whether they want to or not.





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Religious people tend to create programs and ministries that meet the needs of other religious people. Jesus knew that. He chose a different way. At the cost of his life, he chose to find the lost, to heal the sick, to cure the sinner. He wants his church to fulfill his ministry and embrace his priority.

Lost people matter to God. God is on an all-out search to find them. He wants partners. He wants partners in sacrifice. We sacrifice order. We sacrifice neatness. We sacrifice control. We sacrifice the comfort that comes with only meeting the needs of people like ourselves. We sacrifice the tranquility of those who close their eyes to the eternal needs of others.

But the payback far outweighs the pain. For the joy set before us, we endure the pain of sacrifice. We are invited to an everlasting party, where every little step we took to reach the lost, every little sacrifice we made, will pale in comparison to the weight of glory and the eternal jubilation that will mark the lives of all who helped even one sinner come home.

I believe that about God and his heart. If you're reading this book, I'll bet you believe that too.



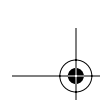
### How Can We Refuel?

So why is it a struggle to maintain our passion for people outside God's family? Why do we lose our commitment and energy and effectiveness in evangelism so easily? Maybe you can relate to the following story if you've ever been involved in a church or ministry that tried to sponsor an outreach event for you to invite your friends to.

The big event had finally arrived. A world-class evangelistic speaker was coming in for several days. We had booked a couple of hot Christian bands. We had gotten all the campus Christian groups behind us and had also recruited a number of churches to work with us. We were prepared, prayed up and poised for a great evangelistic victory on a large Midwestern campus.

The evening of our first outreach meeting finally arrived. As we looked out over the great hall we had booked, we couldn't help feeling a wave of disappointment. Out of the forty thousand students on this campus, only about 550 had shown up. And most of these were already Christians. The band did well, but the world-class evangelistic speaker, though full of energy and enthusiasm, used some Christian lingo and a preaching style that did not win over the crowd. His style was authoritarian. He had the answer; non-Christians didn't. They needed Jesus. Though this fine preacher expressed the truths of the gospel, his language, style and





approach were off-putting for many students.

Each of the following three nights the crowds grew a little, reaching about eleven hundred the last night. But still the overwhelming majority were Christian. About fifty people registered decisions for Christ that week. Many of these people had actually been reached mainly through Bible studies and other outreach events in dorms. We had spent nearly sixty thousand dollars and had logged thousands of hours of preparation and prayer. We had hoped to see a major breakthrough for the gospel on that campus. The outcome wasn't anything close to what we had hoped for and prayed for.

I felt like a failure. Many of us did. Had we heard God wrong? Why weren't people more interested in Jesus? Why had the speaker been so poorly received?

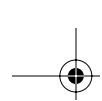
Initially I decided to give up on large event evangelism. I still had great passion to reach people outside God's family, but I was discouraged. I didn't think it was possible to do it. And so my passion and vision gradually diminished, and I began to turn my heart and attention to other things.

Has your church or ministry ever sponsored a seeker event but seen very few pre-Christians attend? In your personal conversations or invitations have you struggled with people's apparent lack of interest in Jesus? Have you gotten fired up about reaching people outside God's family but then seen your enthusiasm gradually dissipate, with little real impact?

Many of us feel that way. Our friends just don't seem that interested. The outreach events sponsored by our church or ministry don't seem to draw many seekers. Over time, as we see so little fruitfulness in our witness, we get discouraged. We give up. We would never say that we've given up, but that is what has happened in our hearts. We might read books. We might try new strategies here and there. But we're just not that excited about evangelism anymore.

This book assumes that you want to reach those outside God's family but may not be seeing as much progress as you might hope. If you knew what to do, you would do it. But nothing seems to work very well, and when you see very little progress you just can't seem to maintain your passion. If you really saw some approach that would bear fruit among your friends and that you felt able to do with God's help, you would go for it in a moment.





### Breaking Open the Box

A few years ago I began to experience a revolution in the way I viewed and did evangelism. This revolution helped me identify the boxes I had put God in and the boxes I had put around evangelism. This revolution is built on understanding people today and the ways they think about life and spiritual issues. This revolution is based on hearing and understanding their questions more deeply, learning how people today come to know and love Jesus. I began to see more fruit in my life, and I began to visit and learn from other ministries that were seeing a lot of people come home to God.

I have gotten so excited about evangelism. I am optimistic and hopeful, and my vision and passion don't leak away as they used to. But it is not evangelism the way I used to do it. It is not the same evangelism that I practiced for that big event that went so poorly. It is evangelism outside the box. It is evangelism that helps people *experience* the good news in new ways. It is evangelism in the power of God's Spirit, in the context of community, that is effective at speaking to people's questions *today!*

Are you interested in learning more and in viewing and doing evangelism in new ways? Do you feel a need to get out of your own boxes and see God do some new things in reaching people outside the family through you? Then I invite you to come along on the adventure of understanding people better, of hearing some powerful and exciting ways God is at work in our day, and of letting God lead you outside of your boxes in order to reach many more people than you have ever been able to reach before!

At the end of the book is a list of sources cited, which serves as a good reading list as well. You'll come across references to these works throughout the book. I give you the author's name and any appropriate page numbers in the text; you'll find the rest of the information you'll need at the end of the book.

As you work through this book and discuss it with others, my hope is that you grow in urgency, expectancy and excitement and that you see a steadily growing stream of people being spiritually reborn through your life and outreach. Do you want that? Then let's jump in!

### Discussion Questions

1. Look at Luke 15. What do you notice about Jesus' heart and priorities? What do you notice about the value of the things lost, the urgency of the search and the response when what was lost is found? How does that





encourage and challenge you?

2. How would you rank your heart for reaching people outside the family of God? Is your passion high? Why or why not? What might help you grow in sharing God's heart for those outside his family?

3. Have you ever helped plan an outreach event that didn't go well? What happened? How did it affect you?

4. What do you hope you get out of reading this book? Take a moment to pray and ask God to use this book in your life.

