



2025 LOST AND FOUND

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Lost and Found - Introduction to Education Sunday 2025

by Rev Vivienne Royal

When I began teacher training, the focus was mostly on delivering “outstanding” lessons. But I soon realised teaching is more than delivering content, and pupils are more than recipients of knowledge. Luke 15:1–10, the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, helped me see a deeper calling. Now, as an executive headteacher of two alternative provision schools, I understand our mission is to seek out those who feel lost in the system and offer them new hope.

We work with vulnerable young people facing complex challenges. Many have undiagnosed SEND needs or struggle with emotionally based school avoidance. Others have faced repeated exclusion and disengagement. National data shows that 20% of young people need mental health support. Persistent absence is at 22%, and students with SEND are more likely to be excluded. Many of our students have also experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences. Add to this the lingering impact of COVID-19, and it's clear: many young people feel lost.

In the gospel story, the shepherd leaves the 99 to search for the one lost sheep, and the woman turns her house upside down to find the lost coin. These parables show that what's lost matters deeply. The lost sheep may have wandered off, and the coin didn't lose itself, but the point is, someone cared enough to search until they were found.

That's what we try to do in alternative provision. Our work is about being relentless in the search: finding the young person who's become disconnected, rebuilding trust, and unlocking the door to learning again. We focus on the individual, and one-to-one pastoral support is key. Like the shepherd and the woman, we search and we keep searching.

And like them, we celebrate when the lost are found. We've seen anxious, school-refusing students become our most committed attenders. We've seen young people who were written off go on to gain qualifications. We've seen students learn to regulate their emotions and gain confidence. These aren't just academic wins, but they're signs of hope being restored.

That hope spreads. It touches families, staff, and the wider community. And, as Luke tells us, it causes rejoicing in heaven. We're not just hitting targets; we're part of something redemptive. When we help a young person regain their dignity, agency, and future, we are living out the gospel of restoration.

As educators, school leaders, church members, or supporters, we are all invited into this mission. It demands time, intention, emotional resilience—and the grace of God. But when even one young life turns around, we see the kingdom of God at work in our schools.

This Education Sunday, may our efforts reflect the heart of the gospel: no one is beyond hope; every life has value; and every recovery brings joy in heaven and on earth.

Rev Vivienne Royal is the Executive Headteacher of Aspire AP School and Aspire 2, leading two alternative provision schools in the West Midlands that support vulnerable young people. She has served as a teacher for nearly 30 years, with a passion for education that transforms lives and helps students overcome barriers to learning. Alongside her educational leadership, she is a minister with the Apostolic Pastoral Congress, working with churches nationally and internationally.

Her work combines a deep commitment to education, pastoral care, and community transformation.

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