

## **God's Call Through a Lost Cell Phone**

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Last school year, I had a faith-building experience like none other. It is so neat to have a God who cares so much about us that He watches out for even the little things in our lives.

It all began on a Wednesday afternoon when I decided to take my class of 25 students (grades 5 & 6) out for a hike on the trails outside our school for PE class. We headed down our big hill, across the field, through the trees, and up to the CUC gym. We continued around the gym, crossed the street, through another field, and into the woods toward the lake. We followed the trail beside the lake up toward Casey's Cabin, and then it was about time to turn around to get back for our last class of the day. As I was about to turn, some of my students came running to notify me that another student, Jamie, just got stung by a wasp on her elbow. I quickly ran over to check and see if Jamie had ever been stung before and if she has an allergy to bee stings. She had been stung before and she was doing okay.

At this point the students pleaded with me to keep going and promised that they would be really good if we did science tomorrow instead of this afternoon. Being the callous teacher that I am, I was easily convinced to keep on going. I checked with Jamie and she wanted to keep on going, so off we went.

We continued on the trail and eventually headed left up through the trees and out into a big grassy field next to Rosedale Valley. This field had thick, waist-deep grass which is important for you to take note of as we'll be coming back to this place later on in the story.

Due to the fact that I was wearing shorts walking through this tall grass, I, along with my students, began to jump and frolic down the hill in this field. We got onto another trail that led us back into the woods. At this point a group of my students wanted to race back to the school. They all knew the way back, so I buddied them up and let them run back to the school. I would travel at the tail end and make sure everyone reached the school safely. With most of my class running and jogging, I began the quick pace back with a few of my students who didn't want to run. A moment later, I heard a loud squeal coming from another one of my students. It was Emily. I ran up to her and I found the stinger that was still in her arm. I grabbed the stinger and threw it away with all of my might. "How dare these wasps attack my students like this!" Before I even took another step, another one of my students shrieked because she was stung on the back of the leg. I couldn't believe how things were turning out. I'd never had such bad luck on a hike before.

At this point I was really slowed down trying to keep Mikayla, the girl who was stung on the leg, moving. Most of my class was probably almost at the school by now and we hadn't even gotten out of the woods yet. I thought I'd better call up to the school for reinforcements and get someone to pick up my wounded soldiers. This is when I felt for

my cell phone only to find my cell phone case empty. Somewhere on this 5 km hike, my phone had fallen out.

We got out of the woods and caught up with yet another student who was injured. It was Meagan. Somehow she had turned or twisted while running backward and had pulled a muscle in her leg. So there I was, three students with wasp bites, one with a pulled muscle, and no cell phone. I finally got back to the school to find my classroom chores done, agenda books out, homework written on the board, and the rest of the class who were responsible for doing all of this. I dismissed the class and then had to cancel my tee time that I had scheduled for after school as I now needed to go out and search for my cell phone. Not exactly how I had planned on ending my day.

Fortunately for me, there were seven students who had talked with their parents and had permission to go out and search for my lost cell phone with me. Now, where to begin the search? Out of all of the places it could have fallen it must have been where we were frolicking like deer through the waist deep grass. This, of course, would be the worst place to lose it. The rest of the hike was a dirt trail or mowed grass where we would have much better luck. We drove up to the hill, said a prayer and began our search. Combing through this grass just made my frustration and disappointment even worse. "There is no way," I thought, "that we are going to find my phone." Just like I predicted, we didn't find it. We eventually headed through the entire path that we had taken earlier that afternoon. After retracing my steps through the 5 km hike, I needed to take my volunteers back to their homes for supper.

By the time I got home, I was feeling pretty discouraged. My day just ended the wrong way. Three of my students had to endure wasp stings, one hurt her leg, I lost my cell phone, and I spent the last few hours being unsuccessful and frustrated instead of enjoying a round of golf.

For some reason, after supper I decided to clean out my outside garbage bin. Occasionally there are some things that get thrown into the garbage bin when there wasn't a bag and I hadn't reached down into this bin to empty the bottom contents in a while. I reached down into the bin and pulled out the garbage at the bottom and to my complete surprise, out dropped my trailer keys that I had lost a couple of months before.

I don't normally lose very many things but I was quite annoyed this past summer when I had misplaced my trailer keys, considering this was our very first camping season with our new RV. Somehow my trailer keys had dropped into the black canvas that I had torn off the bottom of my boys' new playground as we were setting up their sandbox. I had then grabbed up this canvas and taken it to my garbage bin. Fortunately the garbage bin didn't have a garbage bag in it at the time and I just threw it, along with my keys, into the bin. We had been using our garbage bin for the rest of the summer, but only now had I stopped to clean it out. How odd to have these keys show up the same day I lost my cell phone.

It was like God was speaking to me directly. I couldn't believe I had just found my trailer keys! We had already cut new keys because I had considered them gone. Now, the day I lost my cell phone, these keys showed up. I began thinking about the concept of "lost" and then some parables and texts came to mind. I went inside and began searching the scriptures to find these texts about this concept of being "lost." I was strongly impressed to plan a Bible lesson for tomorrow's class about how God will never stop looking for us if we are lost. He will always be there, ready for us to repent and accept his grace so we can be "found."

I was very excited about this "teachable moment" with my students and it would be great to leave them with this message that God does not want to "lose" any of them. He wants every one of us to be "found" and live with Him in heaven.

After finishing the details on my lesson I became a little worried about going through with it. If I told them all about how God spoke to me through finding my trailer keys, then they would want to go out and find my cell phone. But worse yet, they'd probably have the faith and expect to find it. Only I knew that the chances of finding my phone would be insurmountably small and that there was no way we'd find it. I was just not sure how to answer my students when we failed.

I decided to give my friend Tracy a call. She taught Religious Studies at PAA last school year, and I was impressed to ask if she would be willing to bring her students out the next day to join my class as we looked one more time for my cell phone. She was excited about the idea and got permission from her principal for this service project to head out to a grassy field to look for my cell phone. When describing to her how I had lost my phone and that the most likely place for it to be would be where I was "frolicking like a deer" she had to laugh. "Steve," she said, "grown men are not supposed to frolic!"

We worked out our details for the next day and I was to pick up her students with the bus and we'd spend the entire 80 minute period with her grade 11 class looking for my phone. Tracy even arranged for us the use of a metal detector. I then called to check on the bus schedule to see if it was available the next day and, while talking with Troy, he recommended that we try looking for it at night. I had forgotten that the display on the phone lights up when you call it. When I had lost my phone I had it on vibration mode because it was during school hours. That's why we couldn't just call and listen for it in the grass. But now I had new hope. I might actually have a chance in finding it now that it was pitch black outside.

Somehow I convinced Brian Leavitt, my father-in-law, to come out with me at 10:00 o'clock at night to go out in the woods and grassy field to search for my phone. We spent an hour and a half calling my phone and looking around in the dark trying to see it illuminate the grass or forest around us. I really had a strong hope that we'd find it and after reaching the end of the entire loop empty handed, I was really discouraged. The problem was I had made plans to send out a rescue party of students the next day and there was no way we would be successful.

The next morning I went ahead with my plans. After arriving at school I realized that I couldn't do the Bible lesson for my class before we had to leave. It was Thursday and we had assembly that morning. I then decided to ask Pastor Steve, who normally has the assembly presentation, if I could tell the story for assembly. He was happy to let me take over and I told the story of losing my cell phone and finding my trailer keys to the entire school. I had such a great opportunity as I had this teachable moment to talk about how God will never stop searching for us and that He doesn't want any of us to be lost. I realized at that moment that it was worth losing my cell phone just to have this moment with the school and to tell them this important message.

I then explained that I had solicited the help of the grade 11 class from PAA, along with the use of a metal detector, and if my grade 5 & 6 class was still willing to go back out and face the wasps we would have an army of students to go and find my cell phone. They roared with enthusiasm. I know some excitement probably came with the idea that they would be missing class that morning, but I could tell that they genuinely cared for me and wanted to help find my cell phone.

We piled into the bus and picked up the grade 11 class. We drove out to the field and walked through the grass and organized at the top of the hill. I thought it would be best to use our numbers at first in this grassy hill and then split up to look down the path towards the school. We paired up the big kids with the little kids, had a prayer and started looking. I kept having the feeling that there was no way we were going to find my phone.



It just so happened that on our first trip down this hill that one of the grade 11 students felt something odd under his foot. Reaching under the layer of packed, flattened grass was my phone. It was found! We weren't even ten minutes into our search and my phone was found! What little faith I had. I couldn't believe it. We all hugged and piled on the student who had found it and we all rejoiced together. Never before have I had such an

experience where God directly worked in this way.

We all piled back onto the bus and since we still had more than half of the 80 minute period left we decided to go celebrate at Tim Hortons. So Tracy and I, along with our 42 students, piled into Tim Hortons and rejoiced again over the victory God gave us in finding my lost cell phone.

Thinking back, I realized a couple of things. There was a reason why I lost my trailer keys two months ago. There was also a reason why I decided to frolic down that grassy hill with my students. If I hadn't lost my cell phone and then found my trailer keys on the same day, I wouldn't have had this faith-building opportunity with my students. I would have given up, especially after being unsuccessful looking for my phone at night. I would have just used the \$150 credit Telus was willing to give me towards a new phone. I wouldn't have spent the time searching the scriptures for God's message about being "lost" and "found." I wouldn't have shared that story and message with the entire school the next day.

God is so good. We just need to have faith that He is working things out. I'm looking forward to asking my angel in Heaven if he was responsible for knocking my trailer keys out of my pocket only to keep them safe in the bottom of my garbage bin so that I would find them when I really needed to.

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who lost his cell phone. Does he not call it at night to search for its light (because it's on vibration mode), sweep the waist deep grass with a metal detector using the help of 42 students until he finds it? And when he finds it, he calls his friends, neighbours, and students together and says, 'Rejoice with me at Tim Hortons; I have found my lost cell phone.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." - Luke 15:8-10 (Paraphrased by Steven Gabrys)

