



Lost: Live Together or Die Alone

I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.
(Ezek. 34:16)

Introduction

Lost has been called (by the *London Times*) “the most maddening show on television” and (by *Time* magazine) “the future of television,” but however you think about the show, this big-budget, high-concept series has changed the way we experience television—and has also, perhaps, changed some of those who experienced it. When we watch television or go to the movies, often we are seeking the opportunity to escape into a story—to laugh, to be frightened, to have our feelings engaged in some powerful and diverting way. But because they come to us in the shape of stories, even the most enthralling of dramatic entertainments will often connect us to real-world moral issues, to realistic ethical dilemmas, and to new ways of understanding our beliefs, since story is often how we make sense of our experiences and those of others.

Great television shows are powerful in this respect, because in serial drama we gain ongoing opportunities to observe the lives of characters. Diane Winston notes how in a long-running television series, viewers interact with the characters over an extended period of time, and “the experience of watching, and responding to, TV characters’ moral dilemmas, crises of faith, bouts of depression, and fits of exhilaration gives expression—as well as insight and resolution—to viewers’ own spiritual odysseys and ethical predicaments.”¹ Thus, a show like *Lost*, which deals with both existential and topical issues, offers us a prime opportunity to begin a journey of exploration alongside its characters.

Lost, created by J. J. Abrams (*Alias*, *Star Trek*), Jeffrey Lieber, and Damon Lindelof is one of the most honored—and discussed—television shows of recent memory. Since its premiere on September 22, 2004, *Lost* has attracted a huge and devoted fan community who watch episodes, debate questions and hints, and seek out additional information and interaction online. The show has won Emmys, Golden Globes, and many other award, and been named by *Time* magazine as one of the 100 best shows in television history. *Time* media critic James Poniewozik has called the show “a moving, literate popcorn thriller that weaves dozens of characters’ lives into a story of interconnection, redemption, and grace,” and certainly this mixture of entertainment, a large and multicultural cast, and powerful themes has led to huge viewing audiences and to followers in new media such as online viewing, the iTunes store, and on DVD, where *Lost*’s first seasons were bestsellers.² *Lost*’s popularity has also been international; *Lost*-watching became a phenomenon in Britain after its introduction there, and in a recent worldwide study of television popularity in twenty countries, *Lost* was named the second most-watched television show around the world.³

Although *Lost* employs traditional narrative patterns (the stuck on a desert island motif, for example, has been used by shows as varied as *Gilligan’s Island*, *Lost in Space*, and *Survivor*), *Lost* goes well beyond the usual treatment in showing us the lives of people making a place and a community for themselves; it also suggests so many parallels with our everyday lives—and with the recent experiences of those of us in the post-9/11 world—that

it is both fantastic wish fulfillment and gritty chronicle of the world as it is.

Given the relevance of its topics, *Lost* can prompt powerful discussion about good and evil, conflict, faith, free will, and the importance—and difficulty—of doing the right thing. In this study we'll be introduced to the characters and concerns of the series, watch scenes from the series, and discuss questions closely related to them. In the process, we'll explore theological and ethical questions as well as social and political ones: What should be done to create a just and secure society? What is the nature of evil? What is the relationship between faith and free will? Can we ever be irretrievably lost? What does it mean to be righteous?

Lost is great entertainment, offering powerful performances from attractive and engaging actors, beautiful sets and production values, and mysteries to ponder. Still, to focus only on the entertainment and ignore the challenging questions would be to lose much of *Lost's* appeal; as with other great dramatic works that discuss issues of faith and conscience, our own faith—and our consciences—should be engaged as we consider this show and the issues it raises.

Characters in the Clips

Jack Shephard: A spinal surgeon who went to Australia to return the corpse of his estranged father, Jack battles internal demons and tries to lead the ragtag band of survivors off the island.

James “Sawyer” Ford: A consummate con man, Sawyer has spent his life trying to find and kill the man who destroyed his family.

Kate Austen: Kate was a fugitive being returned to American justice for killing her abusive father.

John Locke: Locke is a man of faith, confined to a wheelchair before arriving on the island, but convinced that he is destined for greatness.

Sayid Jarrah: Sayid is a former Iraqi Republican Guard who has employed torture and violence, but seeks love and redemption.

Jin Kwon: Husband to Sun and employed by her father, Jin too has had to employ violence and intimidation in service of his work.

Sun Kwon: Wife to Jin, she has been estranged from her husband and had an affair before boarding Flight 815 with him.

Hugo “Hurley” Reyes: Winner of the lottery but seemingly cursed by bad luck, Hurley is a hero in the guise of a slob.

Charlie Pace: Charlie is part of a has-been rock band and a heroin addict who proves himself something more than a joke through his actions on the island.

Boone Carlyle: Boone has come to Australia to again rescue his stepsister Shannon, with whom he is in love.

Scriptures Related to the Show

As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice.

Ezekiel 34: 12-16

But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.

Hebrews 10:39

The Series in Brief

A jet airliner flying from Australia to Los Angeles crashes on a desert island. The survivors of its center section band together and discover that the island is strange and possessed of mystical powers (they are, for example, attacked by a polar bear and a mysterious smoke monster; John Locke, who has been crippled, regains the ability to walk; characters are shifted in time and place; and the island itself disappears from view). The major characters (although the cast is large and diverse, the major characters of the show are probably Jack, Sawyer,

Locke, Kate, and later, Ben) explore the island, discover mysterious hatches and histories, escape the island, and manage to return to it, convinced that they are part of some larger design.

At the heart of all these adventures is the spiritual quest for redemption. *Lost* executive producer Carlton Cuse notes that *Lost* “is about people who are metaphorically lost in their lives who get on an airplane and crash on an island and become physically lost on the planet Earth, and once they are able to metaphorically find themselves in their lives again they will be able to physically find themselves in the world again.”⁴

Lost is a show in which physical drama—Will they survive?—and spiritual drama—Will they be redeemed?—go hand in hand. While viewers watched as Jack, Sawyer, Locke, Kate, and the other castaways explored the mysteries of the island, they also wondered what the show might have to say about purpose, fate, faith, free will, and the world we live in. Is violence necessary to protect oneself and those who belonged to one’s tribe? Can you ever outrun the past? These and other questions have been explored dramatically over the course of *Lost*’s six-season run.

Engaging the Series

Clip 1: “Lost on the Island”

Jack Shephard (Matthew Fox) regains consciousness in the middle of a tropical forest; something momentous has just happened, but what? He runs through the forest to a pristine white beach—then hears the sounds of suffering and chaos, as he discovers the crashed section of the flight he’d been on from Sydney to Los Angeles. There, he goes into action to try and save those in danger and comfort those who are afflicted, calling on those around him to help.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does this scene capture the strangeness of sudden disaster? Is Jack’s reaction—to launch himself into action once he realizes where he is and what has happened—believable? What do you imagine that you would do if you found yourself in similar circumstances?
2. The Gospels present Jesus as a shepherd—someone who seeks after the lost lambs, as someone who pro-

TECTS his flock. Is Jack’s name appropriate, given his actions in this scene? What are the responsibilities of a shepherd? Is he or she empowered to do whatever is necessary to protect the flock?

3. What is the vision of community that is created in this opening scene? How might this scene give a vision of the role of the church?
4. Once the dust has settled, this community will have to find a way to live together and to survive under daunting circumstances. Given the clearly multicultural nature of this community of survivors, what challenges will they face? Once they discover that there are Others on the island, how should they protect themselves? Is their survival the most important thing to be considered? Are there lengths to which they should not go to protect themselves?

Clip 2: “Survive Together or Die Alone”

After he has treated wounded passengers and helped as many people as he can, Jack, near collapse, finally takes the time to deal with his own injury. Boone (Ian Somerholder) returns from an errand Jack had sent him on to keep him out of the way. Jack rifles through bags to find what he needs, then goes deep into the jungle to get out of sight so that he can work on himself without anyone knowing he has been badly hurt. He discovers, however, that he cannot treat himself, as his injury is out of his reach. At that moment, Kate (Evangeline Lilly) passes nearby, and Jack prevails upon her to sew up his wound.

Questions for Reflection

1. Why doesn’t Jack initially ask anyone for help? Why doesn’t he let them know about his injury? Could this be a reference to Jesus’ ironic use of the familiar saying, “Doctor, cure yourself” (Luke 4:23)?
2. Jack has enlisted others to help him treat those survivors in need—clearly he recognizes that he needs help in helping others. But either he does not recognize this about himself or something in his makeup does not allow him to ask for help on his own behalf. What in Jack’s psychology or upbringing might account for this? Why might a doctor prefer not to be seen as weak or injured?

3. In a later episode, Jack will address the survivors of Flight 815 and tell them that “if we can’t live together, we’re going to die alone.” How does this scene illustrate Jack’s later words? In what ways does this call to community square with Christian understandings?
4. In the Gospel of John (15:13), Jesus teaches that the greatest love a person can have is to sacrifice his or her life for another person. In what ways do you see sacrifice taking place in this scene? How does Jack sacrifice? How does Kate?

Series Summary

At this point, you’ll either watch or listen to a short summary of the major events, characters, and themes of *Lost*.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does *Lost* seem to deal with questions of faith? Is there meaning to the things the survivors endure? Do they seem to be part of a larger plan?
2. Locke (Terry O’Quinn) is presented as a man of faith in opposition somehow to Jack’s man of science. Does either seem to learn from the other? Is Locke’s belief that the island is special and that they have been brought there for a reason appealing?
3. In their attempts to defend themselves from the Others and the rest of the island’s threats, many of the survivors—particularly Sayid (Naveen Andrews) and Locke will attempt to attain security through violence. Is this different in any way from the methods of their adversaries? Do you detect topical references to violence, torture, and other post-9/11 concerns?

What’s Next?

To dig deeper into the spiritual elements of *Lost*, you might want to read Chris Seay’s *The Gospel according to Lost*, which examines the series’ spiritual themes character by character. You may also want to read the author

of this lesson’s books *The Gospel according to Hollywood* and *Holy Superheroes* to consider theological themes and the importance of violence in American culture. To investigate issues of violence in our culture, particularly in the wake of 9/11, read Rowan Williams’s *Writing in the Dust: After September 11* or Susan Faludi’s *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America*.

To initiate a practical response to these issues, consider researching and supporting the National Religious Campaign against Torture (<http://www.nrcat.org/>). Also consider consulting denominational resources such as the Episcopal Peace Fellowship (<http://www.epfnational.org>), the United Methodist Church’s General Board of Church and Society (<http://www.umc-gbcs.org>), the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship (<http://www.presbypeacefellowship.org/>), or your own denomination’s sources for resources in your own faith tradition.

About the Writer

Greg Garrett is Professor of English at Baylor University and author of *The Gospel according to Hollywood*, *Holy Superheroes*, *The Gospel Reloaded (with Chris Seay)*, *We Get to Carry Each Other: The Gospel according to U2*, and many other works. He is at work on a book on post-9/11 popular culture which will discuss *Lost*. A frequent speaker and media guest on popular culture, narrative, religion, and politics, Greg is a licensed lay preacher in the Episcopal Church and writer in residence at the Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, Texas.

Endnotes

1. Diane Winston, “Introduction,” in *Small Screen, Big Picture: Television and Lived Religion*, ed. Diane Winston (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 6.
2. James Poniewozik, “Why the Future of Television Is Lost,” *Time*, Sept. 24, 2006. Accessed at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1538635-2,00.html>.
3. “CSI Show ‘Most Popular in World,’” BBC News, July 31, 2006. Accessed at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/5231334.stm>.
4. Maureen Ryan, “‘Lost’ Producers Talk about Setting an End Date and Much More,” *Chicago Tribune*, January 14, 2007. Accessed at http://featuresblogs.chicagotribune.com/entertainment_tv/2007/01/lost_producers_.html.