

Session 43

THE PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15

Memory Verse

*Because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!
So they began to celebrate.*

– LUKE 15:24, CSB



The Prodigal Son

THEOLOGICAL THEME: God is the perfect Father who demonstrates His love for us by offering forgiveness, mercy, and grace. He searches for us when we are lost and delights when we are restored to Him.

CALL TO ACTION: In the parable of the prodigal son, the passage also focuses on the older son, his conviction, and what he had to deal with to forgive his lost brother and welcome him back into the father's house. Are we actively praying, seeking, and welcoming the lost and conflicted into the Father's house?

Introduction

Have you ever been lost with no idea how to get where you needed to be? It is a terrible feeling to realize you're not on the right path and have no clue how to reach your destination. Although most people today have GPS available in various forms, it is still possible to find yourself taking a wrong turn or exit or on a path in the woods that leads the wrong way.

Anyone who has been lost can testify to the feeling of relief that comes with being found. Any parent who has lost sight of a child in a store or on a playground can testify to the driving need to find that child as soon as possible. Today, we are considering what we can learn for our lives from a well-known parable about lostness.

 When have you experienced being lost? How do you typically respond in these moments?



How do you respond when someone else is lost and you are the one searching for him or her?

Session Summary

Each of the three parables in Luke 15 are focused on a lost thing being found and the joy that accompanies that restoration. Whether a lost sheep, lost coin, or a son who lost his way, the common truth is that God the Father searches for what is precious to Him.


He looks for us when we are spiritually lost, and we are never so far away that He won't welcome us back. We also see that we are never out of His sight or so far away that He stops looking for us. Realizing the depth of the Father's love for His people and the great value He places on our lives should encourage us.

1. Two Sons (Luke 15:11-13)


Luke 15 records three different parables around a common theme Jesus told to teach a valuable lesson. Each was about something lost. From a lost sheep to a lost coin to a lost son, Jesus described who God is and challenged the religious leaders' attitudes. These three stories give insight into and help paint a picture of God as Father and God as the great Shepherd.

Those listening to Jesus would have connected with the images He used. Those with hearts to receive and ears to hear would also have received the spiritual teaching in each. The same is true of those who read the Bible today. When your heart is open to what God says through His Word, then you can receive the spiritual principles and application of the Bible.


While the first two parables focused on a lost item or animal, the third described a beloved son who chose to leave. The main characters in the story were a father and two sons. While the father in the parable represents God, the sons can be any of us. Some people refer to this story as the prodigal son while others use a different description.

 What are some ways that you have heard this parable titled? How does that shape the way we understand it?

The different labels for the same parable have much to do with the perspective you use when looking at the story or the character you are focusing on. At first glance, we might consider the older brother the “good son” while the younger earns the title, “prodigal.” But as we dig deeper, we will realize both sons were separated from the father.

 What about the younger son makes it clear that he is separated from his father?

Although a father in this time could bestow inheritances at any time, this was usually given after the father died. The younger son, motivated by foolishness and greed, asked for a special exemption from waiting for his father to pass away and sought to receive his share of the family resources early. The son valued the father’s things over the father. This father likely realized that his younger son was not ready for what he asked, but he still granted the request. At times, God may grant your requests even if they are not in your best interests or if He knows the result will be painful for you in the long run. But He will always use these instances for His purposes.


 Application: Where are you valuing the things God has over God Himself?

2. The Journey Away (Luke 15:14-19)

The younger son could be described as wasteful. This son left home with his inheritance and, according to these verses, wasted it on reckless living. You may have experienced something similar. The younger son gave in to the desire to live according to his own wishes regardless of what his father wanted or expected for him. Although he had a strong family and a place in the world, he was not content with that, and he chose to chase after things of the world.


In what ways are we naturally like the younger son?

Things didn't go well for the younger son. There was a clear point in which the son realized what his choices had cost him. He was serving in the vilest of places for a Jewish person and was still not getting what he needed. He hit rock bottom and ran out of viable options. He learned his lesson the hard way, but it was effective. We often learn the most from the toughest times in our lives, especially when those times reveal the truth about our need for God.

 Consider a time when you realized the consequences of poor decisions in your own life. Share with the group as is appropriate and you feel comfortable.

When we try to live on our own terms and ignore God, we reap the consequences at some point. Sometimes we must experience the depths of our own depravity and sin to understand and appreciate love and obedience toward God.

A famine heaped even more misery on this son. In his quest to be independent from his father and family, the younger son put himself in a terrible position. Although he likely enjoyed spending his inheritance, it only lasted a short time. Imagine the feelings and emotions that accompanied his realization that there was no more money to fund his escapades. Just like for this son, sin never fulfills us.

 Application: What are some ways we are tempted to believe living according to our own wisdom will satisfy? Why is this never ultimately the case?

3. The Return Home (Luke 15:20-32)

Finally, with nowhere to turn, the younger son came to his senses and realized how badly he messed up. He didn't blame anyone else, and he didn't try to rationalize his mistakes. He owned his choices. This is evidence of true contrition over his rebellion. We cannot be restored to the Father and others we have harmed if we refuse to take responsibility for our wrongs.

? What are some ways we might be sorry for the consequences of our sin but not for our sin itself? Why is important that we reach a place of true sorrow over sin?

Not only did the son recognize his responsibility for the situation, but he also began to practice what he would say to his father when he made it home. The person who gave him the freedom to choose his own path was the same person he wanted to humble himself before. Our heavenly Father offers us freedom to make decisions for ourselves, but He is always the One we ultimately need.

If we turn to Him fully, God is waiting to show us love and compassion, no matter what we have squandered or the depths to which we have fallen. The father in the parable stands as a picture of God, waiting for those who have rejected Him to return home. The shock of the story is the father doesn't meet the son with returned rejection or disdain, but with love and joy over his return. A beautiful restoration took place when the younger son turned back to his father.

? How have all who are in Christ received restoration like that of the younger son in this parable?

But the story isn't over. There is much to be learned from the older son also. The older brother was also separated from the father, believing he had earned the father's love through his loyal service. If we aren't careful, we will also turn this way, believing God owes us favor because of what we've done for Him. When we do this, we cannot receive others in the same way the Father does. Instead of condemning others for their choices and turning them away

to live in misery, we need to be like the father who ran to receive his son back into the fold. Because we have been forgiven for much, we also are to forgive much and welcome others who come to the Father.

But notice the father was not only compassionate to the younger son but also to the older. Jesus wanted the religious leaders of the day to repent of their rejection of God so that they might be received and restored. The parable is left open ended—a challenge to the Pharisees whose response to Jesus was not yet complete.

? **Application:** In what way are you prone to respond to others like the older son in this story? What did both the older and younger son need to realize about the father?

Conclusion

In each parable in Luke 15, joy comes when a lost thing is found. Although it takes time and effort, finding the lost thing or person is worth the wait and work. Joy also comes in being found. Think about how loved you have felt when you have been received back into the fold in some way. Just as you experienced the miracle of salvation and being forgiven for your sins, others are to be received in the same way.

We are to trust the Father and not insist in our own way or timing. When we do make foolish choices, we can turn back to the Lord knowing He is waiting to receive us with love. We don't need to continue chasing things of the world until we hit rock bottom. We can be assured that the Lord is waiting and watching for us to turn back, and He will receive us with love and acceptance. But we must also consider ways we believe God owes us for our loyalty to Him. Both the younger and older sons were loved deeply by the father and lavished with grace. How much more is this true of our Father in heaven?

? **What relationship of yours needs restoration? How will you seek that restoration?**

? Evaluate where in your life you have been like either of the brothers. Confess this before the Father and seek restoration with Him.

? How does this story affect the way you see God as your Father? Who can you tell about God's love for those who have rejected Him?

Memorize

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– LUKE 15:24, CSB

References

1. A. Boyd Luter, "Luke," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1638–1639.