LUKE 15:11-32

11 And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to[a] one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. 17 “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. 25 “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ 31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”
COMMENTARY
FROM THE HCSB STUDY BIBLE

15:11-12 Although this well-known parable (vv. 11-32) is usually called the parable of the prodigal son, the other son and the father are also important characters. It was unusual, but not unheard of, for a father to settle his estate before his death. Since the older son got a double portion of his father’s estate, the younger son’s share (share...I have coming to me) would have been one-third of the estate.

15:13-15 The younger son had no intention of returning to his family. It is impossible to know whether his foolish living included “prostitutes” (v. 30), or if that was just an angry accusation made by the older brother. The irony of the penniless younger son’s new job was that pigs were unclean animals to Jews (Lv 11:7). He was at rock bottom in his new life.

15:17-19 It took extreme poverty and hunger to prompt the younger son to come to his senses and realize that, in spite of all he had done, the correct course of action was to return and become one of his father’s hired hands. To do so, however, it would be necessary to confess that he had sinned greatly and was not worthy to be called his son. This is a vivid picture of a person “hitting bottom” and finally realizing the magnitude of his sin.

15:20-23 That the father saw his son coming from a long way off indicates that he habitually looked for his return. Perhaps the normal parental reaction to the younger son’s return would be anger or at least deep disappointment, but this father’s response displayed: (1) compassion, (2) love (threw his arms around his neck and kissed him), (3) celebration (a feast), and (4) joyful restoration of status for his son (a robe of distinction, signet ring of family authority, sandals worn by a son, in contrast to barefoot slaves).

15:24 This is the point at which the parable ties in to the two previous stories about God’s joy in saving the lost. The father’s celebratory attitude depicts the way in which God the Father receives repentant sinners. This contrasts with the contempt the Pharisees and scribes displayed for sinners who came to Jesus (v. 2).

15:25-30 Instead of the story ending on a note of joy and celebration, as might be expected, the spotlight shifts to the older brother. Unlike the father’s positive attitude, the older brother (1) was surprised at the return of his sinning brother, (2) was offended and jealous at the father’s celebration, (3) became angry at the father’s forgiving love, (4) declared his own self-righteousness, and (5) focused on his brother’s sinfulness rather than his newfound repentance. Jesus’ representation of the religious leaders in the character of the older brother was a scathing rebuke of their self-righteousness.
15:31-32 The rebuke of the religious leaders continues. They did not understand (1) the opportunity for a close relationship with God, (2) the generosity of His grace, (3) His joy at the salvation of sinners, or (4) the profound transformation of conversion. Perhaps most crucial of all, however, is the reminder of kinship to the sinners intended in the phrase this brother of yours. The religious leaders refused to accept their Jewish brethren, the “sinners,” as the older brother in this story.

FROM THE HOLMAN NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

15:11-12. Jesus turned to the family setting for his concluding parable to illustrate why he associated with sinners. The story was told succinctly with only the points Jesus wanted to make elaborated. A younger son demanded his share of the estate and got it. There is no indication of why he wanted it or why the father so quickly gave it to him. Later we will see the older brother’s attitude and surmise sibling rivalry here, as in the Old Testament stories of Jacob and Esau and of Joseph and his brothers. The younger brother’s portion was only a third of the estate if the entire estate were divided. By law, the older brother got a double portion (Deut. 21:17).

15:13-14. The younger son wanted to be on his own. He distanced himself as far as possible from the family. He also took up a new lifestyle. Untrained and inexperienced in money matters, he quickly had many expenses and no income. The result came quickly: no assets. Then a famine hit the land. No one had food or work.

15:15-16. He was fortunate. He found a job, but what a job for a Jew! He fed pigs in a pigpen. Destitute of other resources, he longed to eat what he fed the pigs. How repulsive for a law-abiding Jew. But he had not authority to eat pig food. So he fattened pigs and starved himself.

15:17-19. Finally, his mind went to work again. Humans have the capacity to change. We do not have to remain in the pigpen. We do not have to continue to live as sinners. We can become responsible for our lives. We can quit our riotous living. We can come home.

The younger brother came to his senses: The day laborers on his dad’s farm had enough to eat. “And I am about to die from hunger,” he said. “I will go back to Daddy and tell him I have sinned against him and against heaven.” Note how this ties the story back to the beginning of the chapter and the theme of sinners. No longer are we using animals or objects to talk about the lost. Now we have gotten down to basic facts. People are lost. People need to realize their lost condition and admit it. The younger son’s first step is saying, “I am a sinner.”

What is a sinner? An unworthy person. One who deserves nothing. Yet a sinner wants something. So the sinner searches for someone who loves the unworthy, who is willing to help the undeserving. The sinful younger brother had forfeited his position as son. He had no more claims on his father, so he applied for a new job—day laborer.
15:20. Focus shifts from son to father. Son is on the move. Father is standing still, waiting to see his son. Here is the poignant portrait of a busy man who has lost one of his chief helpers, taking himself away from his work to wait for a son who may never appear. It is certainly no given that a sinner will repent.

The father did not stay still long. There he was—the son had returned. What joy! What love! What tender compassion filled the father’s heart. The old legs started churning. Arms stretched out. Lips reached for a kiss. The family feud was over and forgotten. A son was home.

15:21. Even the joyful welcome did not deter the son from his determined course. He repeated the plea he had rehearsed. Somehow the last line never came out; the job application as a day laborer was never made.

15:22-23. The father never heard his lost son. He had business to attend to. Party time! The son must be properly dressed for the party. Servants dashed off as they were commissioned to get the best robe, a ring, sandals—things all lost long before the pigpen. Other servants ran to the kitchen to prepare the menu the father ordered. Nothing but the best for the son.

15:24. How could the father act like this? Did he not know what the son had done? Of course, but the son had been given up for dead. This was resurrection time. He was lost. We found the precious treasure for which we have hunted. The lost sheep is back. Certainly a lost and found son is worth much more than a coin or a sheep. Celebrate!

What a picture of the Father in heaven. How he does celebrate when the lost are found, when sinners repent. What compassion and love he shows. Why does Jesus associate with sinners? Because heaven loves them and waits patiently for them to return and repent so the celebration can begin. Heaven’s citizens are repentant sinners.

15:25-27. The silent family member appeared. This man had two sons (v. 11). Here is son number one appearing as the last on the scene. Dutifully working for his watching father, the older son heard music and dancing, an unusual event around his home. What in the world was happening?

No one had informed him of his brother’s return. He had to ask one of the hired hands. “Did you not know?” they asked. “Your brother’s back home. Your father has killed the best calf in the lot to celebrate because he has your brother back safe and sound. Are not you coming to the celebration?”

15:28. Sullen anger set in. The older brother stood his ground and refused to budge. No party for him tonight. Even his dad’s pleading would not win him over. The older brother was staying by himself tonight.
“This is not fair,” he told his father. “Look what I have done for you all these years. Worked like a slave. Always obeyed. Never disobeyed. What did I get for it? Not even one small goat for a party with my friends. No. No parties around here, until now when this ingrate shows up again. He went out partying, had a wild time, spent all your money. Now here he is again, and what do you do? Party! Not a goat for junior. No, the best calf on the lot—one we have been feeding and grooming these months. And he gets it!”

“Listen a minute, my beloved son,” his father replied. “You are with me forever. I can count on you. Everything I now have will go to you. You will never have to worry about having a fatted calf to party with. If you want one, it is yours. Take it. But a celebration was in order. After all, look what happened. Your younger brother was dead, but now he is alive right here with us. He was lost. Now I have found him. Resurrecting the dead. Finding the lost. That is party time! Come celebrate with heaven.”

The elder brother does not respond. We are left to our imaginations to determine his final response. We are also left to determine how we would respond. Are we the younger brother, needing to repent and seek reconciliation and forgiveness? Are we the father, who was sinned against and who must have been tempted to respond in hatred and alienation? Are we the elder brother, the self-righteous Pharisee refusing to have anything to do with the sinful younger brother? Are you lost? Do you share God’s mercy and compassion for the lost? Are you part of Jesus’ mission, coming to seek and to save that which is lost?

For the Teacher

1. **TEACHING GOAL**

   God’s love restores sinners to right relationship with Him. We don’t work to earn favor before God. We trust God and love Him because of our relationship with Him.

2. **SUMMARY OF TEXT**

   In the parable of the prodigal son, God shows his love for sinners. While not all of us run off to a foreign country to squander our inheritance, all of us have rebelled against God by going our “own way.” The parable demonstrates God’s love and mercy, as well as His desire for sinners to come home.

3. **TEACHING OUTLINE**

   2. The Older Son (Luke 15:25-32)
Getting Started

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going. (5-10 minutes)

Share about a time when you deliberately disobeyed your parents, or when one of your kids intentionally disobeyed you.

How did your parents respond when they caught you? Or how did you respond when you caught your child? Did anything surprise you about their (or your) response?

Over the last few weeks, we have been learning about what it means to be treasured by God. The parables in Luke 15 are a response by Jesus to the Scribes and Pharisees, who misunderstood what matters to God. The Pharisees viewed themselves as the ones who defended the law of God, but they were actually the worst offenders of the law of God, since His law is love—something they lacked. As we continue through the parable of the prodigal son this week, we see a great picture of the love and compassion God has for His children.

Historical Context

Help your group understand the context and setting of the text we will be studying. (1 min.)


As the only Gentile author of the Gospels, Luke aimed to communicate that the Gospel is for all people. Luke addressed Jesus as Savior, Christ, Lord, and Prophet. He emphasized the themes of promise and fulfillment and showed a special concern for outsiders including sinners, the poor, and Samaritans. Also, Luke placed a special emphasis on women and their needs and concerns. Notably, Luke included references to Jesus’ prayer life and His teaching on prayer and the importance of Jerusalem and Jesus’ extended journey there.
Bible Study  
*Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic. (30-35 minutes)*

1. THE YOUNGER SON (LUKE 15:11-24)


What is your first impression of the father in this parable? What words would you use to describe him?

The father in this parable represents God. How does it impact you to know that God is not ashamed of you, no matter how you have behaved in the past?

In the first century, society was governed by deep family connections. To have honor not only meant all things we typically associate with honor, but also to have a deep and profound respect for one’s elders, especially parents. In this culture, shame was to be avoided at all costs. Many of the things in our culture that we might label as “regrettable” or a “bad decision” would have brought a deep sense of embarrassment to a family in the first century. For the youngest son to ask for his inheritance was nearly the same thing as asking to no longer be a part of the family. In essence, the son cared more about his father’s things than he did about his father. He simply wanted to be left alone to do as he wished.

Do you think it was wise for the father to give him his share of the estate? Why or why not?

Glance back at verse 13. What happened to the prodigal after he was granted what he asked for? What do you think he felt like when he came to his senses?

In the first century, it would’ve been unthinkable for the father to grant the son an early inheritance. But the father didn’t force honor and affection from his son. He understood it was a matter of the heart. In most families, the father would’ve written the young man off and considered him dead. But the father in this parable defied societal expectations. It would’ve been considered shameful for the father to wait for his son to return, it was shameful for the father to pick up his robe and run to meet the son, and it was shameful for the father to give his son gifts and a party upon his return. Clearly, the return of his son trumped any concern the father had about societal expectations or honor.
Glance back at verse 20. What do we see in the father’s response to the son? What does this teach us about God our Father?

How would you describe the compassion of God? What does it mean to you that God is compassionate, and how have you experienced His compassion? Read Micah 7:18. How does this passage relate to the parable?

One of the primary ways God shows compassion is by being long-suffering toward us. What is one way you recognize God has been long-suffering toward you?

The father required nothing upon his son’s return home. Societal expectations did not require anything of the father and would’ve even supported his rejection of his son. Instead, out of the father’s love and grace for his son, he welcomed him back with open arms. He restored him to his position in the family and celebrated his return. Forgiveness was absolute and immediate, and the son’s repentance came in the midst of a strong show of compassion. The father ignored the stench of his son and embraced him with joy. This is how God treats all of us when we are lost. It’s God’s joy to welcome us home. And he does so with love, mercy, and compassion. The father in this parable reminds us of how gracious God has been to all forgiven sinners. Regardless of the depth of sin, every Christian is a testament to amazing grace.

2. THE OLDER SON (LUKE 15:25-32)


Why was the older son upset with his father? Why did he refer to himself as a slave? What does this tell us about him and his view of his relationship with his father?

How did the father offer grace to the older son as well? What does this teach us about God?

Why didn’t the older son receive the same restoration as the younger?

The second half of the parable spotlights the older son. He was out of the spotlight while the younger brother was being restored. Coming in from the fields, he heard the celebration and asked for an explanation. The news of his brother’s return and the ongoing party made the older son angry. He expressed his anger by refusing to be part of the celebration; he didn’t want to go or even speak to his brother.
The older son was jealous of the younger. The older son had been faithful to their father while his brother ran off, but his brother was the one being honored. The older son wanted the gifts of the father as well, and felt he deserved them. Grace, though, isn’t about deserving—it’s impossible to “earn” grace. In fact, it is a very dangerous thing to ask God to give us what we deserve. Grace is about trusting and receiving. The older brother didn’t receive the restoration that was offered to him because he didn’t think he needed it.

Self-righteousness is a dangerous sin. If allowed to run its course, it convinces us that we don’t need God. The elder brother is the poster child for self-righteousness. In this way, the older brother reflected the attitudes of the Pharisees. We need to constantly examine our attitudes, for an elder brother attitude can develop in each of us. Fighting against self-righteousness is a constant struggle.

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Apply & Obey

*Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.
*(5-10 minutes)*

With whom do you identify in the story of the lost son and rejecting brother? Why?

What is your response to God’s saving grace in your life? How does it impact your relationship with Him?

Why should we celebrate spiritual change in our lives and in the lives of others?

As a church family, how can we help each other seek the lost and celebrate when the Lord saves those whom He has sought?

Does your attitude toward the lost match God’s attitude for the lost? What must happen in our lives for us to grasp how deeply God cares for the lost?
PRAYER

Close your group in prayer focused on applying what you have studied to their lives. (5 min.)

Give thanks and praise to God for loving you enough to look for you when you were lost. Spend a few moments worshipping God and praising Him for the love that He shows to the lost. Ask that He would give you His heart for the lost.

REFERENCES