

Jesus Teaches God's Love for Sinners

Luke 15

Much of the thinking of the religious Jews at the time of Jesus was contrary to God's heart and mind. In this incident, Jesus gently encourages the listening sinners and instructs the grumbling Pharisees and scribes with three parables. As 21st-century believers, we can be encouraged by God's great love for us and instructed to love and seek diligently the lost, following God's example.

I. The Setting

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and scribes murmured (Lit. - grumbled; continued to stir and complain), saying, This man receiveth (Lit. - welcomes) sinners, and eateth with them." Luke 15:1-2

Let's begin with a review of these two groups of people often found near Jesus.

"publicans and sinners" – "**publicans**" - tax collectors. They were Jewish men who would be viewed as selling themselves to the Roman occupying forces. They not only collected taxes for Rome, but Rome also sanctioned taking a "tip" from those they taxed. Basically, they stole money from their people. They had turned their backs on their nation and their religion for money. They were despised and disrespected by both their Jewish countrymen and the Romans. They became isolated because of their jobs, and we find their social group was other tax collectors.

"**sinners**" – this is not as broad a term as it first seems. Religious leaders called sinners anyone who did not know or adhere to the commandments of the Old Testament **and** the 600+ rules the Pharisees added over hundreds of years. Yes, this term could certainly include gross sinners – the murderers, harlots, bandits, but more often these were just ordinary people who were untaught or disillusioned by what the Jewish religion had become and refused to follow many of the laws. Their words found in John 7:49 show this perfectly: "But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed."

But I want you to notice something here in verse 1, the little, big word "**all**." We are told "**all** the publicans and sinners" had come near to Jesus "for to hear him!" **Isn't that beautiful!?** They didn't come for healing or any other reason, but to hear Jesus; to learn from Him!

One benefit of our chronological study of Jesus is being able to identify different aspects of His ministry and see the cause and effect of His words and works! So let's remind ourselves of the last incident we studied from Luke 14:25-35. Bible teachers see this as a smooth flow from one event to the next.

v. 25 – "great multitudes" were following Jesus, and we find Him dramatically turning around and addressing the crowd about their need to understand what it meant to be His disciple!

- Their **loyalty** must be to Him alone! – He spoke concerning their priority needing to be Him and not their family!
- Their **will** must be surrendered to Him alone! – Jesus used the vivid imagery of "bearing the cross," which pictured the total surrender of one's will.
- Their **all** must be abandoned for Him alone! – Without a full commitment, they would bring shame on Jesus' name and become useless disciples! Jesus said, "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out." Luke 14:34-35 Just like tasteless, impure salt, an uncommitted disciple is good for nothing! Wow!

We find in the last verse that Jesus told the great crowd to listen carefully, consider His words, and apply them! Now, in verse 1 of chapter 15, we see that the publicans and sinners had "ears to hear," and still followed Him! **Isn't that beautiful!?**

“Pharisees and scribes” – Here we have two sects of Religious Leaders that have been hounding Jesus from the very start.

“**Pharisees**” – teachers who taught and carefully observed the written law of the Old Testament and the oral traditions handed down from generation to generation. They saw themselves as very righteous and the protectors of righteousness!

“**Scribes**” - the scholars of the Law; therefore, they were sometimes called lawyers.

We find them near Jesus throughout His ministry. But most often, they were not there to learn from Him but to find fault in Him and, as in this event, stir up dissent with their murmuring and grumbling!

“This man” – Jesus – And then we find Jesus in this setting with the group of listening sinners and the group of religious grumblers! And what was the big complaint of the Religious Leadership toward Jesus? He received publicans and sinners! He let them come, hear Him, and even welcomed them! On top of that, He actually ate with them! Now, culturally, eating with someone was a sign of friendship, much like it is today. In fact, the tense they used of the word “eateth” suggests that Jesus continued to eat with publicans and sinners, habitually. Remember, He was known as a “friend of sinners.” This drove the self-righteous religionist crazy. Just a quick note on this. Jesus, the holy Son of God, was not condoning the sins of the publicans and sinners! Not at all! So why did Jesus invest so much time and effort in publicans and sinners? Here are His words: “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (Luke 5:32) The three parables that follow beautifully show God's heart for those lost to sin!

Three Parables for the Crowd

Who is in the Crowd? – You might feel I’m overstating this detail, but it is vital to understanding who Jesus gave these three parables to, to accurately understand the applications! Self-righteous Pharisees and scribes; publicans and sinners... and though they are not mentioned, we know His faithful followers, both the 12 disciples and others, would have heard this teaching.

Lessons for the Crowd – Let’s just take a quick overview of the lessons Jesus desired for His mixed audience. Please understand, these three parables don't repeat the exact principles the same way; instead, they look at the same principles with slightly different emphasis!

1. Man’s Condition – Lost, Separated from God, in Need of Repentance – The central fact Jesus reiterates is the lost condition of man. They are separated from Him and in need of restoration. Repentance is the connecting thread between all three parables. (v. 7, 10, 18, 21)

2. God’s Compassion – Value and Seek Man – The parables highlight the ownership, value, and affection God has for man. But we shouldn’t be surprised, because so many verses express this very truth! John 3:16; **Deut. 7:7-8; Eph. 2:4-5**; 1 John 3:1; **Rom. 5:8**; 8:38-39; **Jer. 31:3**; Gal. 2:20; **Ps. 86:15**

3. God’s Joy – Restoration of men to Him – Because of God’s great love for us, it only makes sense that when one returns to Him through repentance, God is joyful! This is also a connecting thread between all three parables. (v. 5-7; 9-10; 22-24; 32)

II. The Lost Sheep – Valuable Sheep

“And he spake this parable unto them, saying, ⁴What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? ⁵And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.” Luke 15:3-6

Cultural Setting – Caring for sheep was well understood in Jesus’ day. It would have been surprising if anyone, especially men, couldn't relate to almost every aspect of this story. The parable was told as if the shepherd owned the sheep; he doesn't seem to be a hired herdsman, and we are told that one of his sheep wandered off. Every commentary and study book I read agreed that he didn't leave his 99 sheep unattended in the wilderness to go after and track down the lost one; instead, he left his flock with a hired worker and went to find that one valuable sheep. Please realize, sheep can wander off, but they cannot wander back! They just keep moving in the wrong direction; they are not like many domestic animals that return to their place at night. Sheep just sit down and, if left alone, sit there until they die or get eaten!

As I thought about this, losing one sheep out of a hundred is only a 1% loss. Let's face it, that doesn't seem too bad. Now, I ran down a rabbit trail, or maybe today we should call it a sheep trail, about the acceptable loss ratio when raising animals for the meat market. Today, when raising chickens, a 3-5% loss is acceptable; for pigs, 4.5-5.5%; and for cattle, 1-2% loss is acceptable; the difference is the animal's hardiness. Chickens are more delicate than beef cattle! But sheep are very different. They are so susceptible to injury and illness. From birth to market, sheep are allowed a 10% loss rate, but large commercial farms allow much more, up to 15%. But as we see in Jesus' parable, the ancient shepherd had no acceptable loss ratio; every sheep in the flock had **great value**, and he understood that without his quick intervention, that sheep was lost and had no hope of survival! So he went after that sheep and would not return until he had recovered it!

“Rejoice with me; for I have found” – When the shepherd finally found it, he didn't drive it back; but instead picked it up and happily carried it himself. When he got home, he was still filled with joy and, I'm sure, relief, so much so that “he called his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost!”

Jesus then left the narrative of a parable and looked at the crowd, the whole crowd I would suspect, and said, Jesus' Application:

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.” Luke 15:7

“joy shall be in heaven” – Notice, what shall bring joy in heaven? **One sinner that repents!** What a wonderful thought this must have been to one of those many lonely publicans hearing Jesus that day, or a man caught in the grips of sin, or a woman with a long list of broken relationships brought on by lust, or even just a person just tired of trying to be righteous or hold to unattainable standards! They had great value to God, and their repentance would bring Him joy! What an amazing, comforting thought that must have been!

But please realize, the Pharisees taught the opposite. They said that God rejoiced when those who provoked Him perished! (Eder. p. 652) In their thinking, God hated sinners and withdrew from them! Therefore, they felt Jesus could not be of God! But this was not what the Old Testament scriptures taught! **Read Ezekiel 18:21-23; 31-32; 33:11; Isaiah 55:7.** By their teaching, the Religionist had polluted the character of God, leaving behind the truth because of their own self-righteousness!

“just persons, which need no repentance” – Remember literature class in about Jr. High and learning about different kinds of literary devices. Irony was one you definitely heard about. It’s when a speaker or writer says the opposite of what is actually understood. Did you know Jesus used irony in His teaching? Here’s one. “ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.” You see, there are not ninety-nine righteous, sinless people who have nothing to repent of. It’s just not possible. For all “are gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” Why? Because, “the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked:” “for there is no man that sinneth not” “there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” Really, “all we like sheep have gone astray.” Absolutely all are as “an unclean thing, and all” their “righteousnesses are” just like “filthy rags.” (1 Kings 8:46; Ps. 14:3; 64:6; Ecc. 7:20; Is. 53:6; Jer. 17:9) Everyone hearing Jesus that day knew all men were unrighteous! Maybe they didn’t believe it in their heart, but they knew it in their head! How did they know this? Because it was plainly written in the Old Testament! Every verse I just quoted came from the Old Testament. Every Pharisee and Scribe knew these words but refused to apply them to their lives.

III. The Lost Coin - Searching Woman The parable of the lost sheep was geared for the men in the crowd that day and emphasized the **value of one lost sheep**, but I love that Jesus now gives a parable that every woman in the crowd would deeply understand, and here emphasizes the **earnest search for the one lost coin!**

“Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? ⁹And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors (Gk – feminine – her lady friends and neighbors) together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.” Luke 15:8-9

Cultural Setting – The ten coins talked of in this parable were given to a bride by the groom. They became the public symbol of their marital status, much like a wedding ring in our culture! Though these silver coins were not worth much monetarily, they were precious to the woman and held great sentimental value. In Jesus’ parable, the lady lost one in the house...it seems she was doing her daily work; one minute she had ten coins dangling and jingling, and the next minute, maybe after one got caught or pulled somehow, there were suddenly nine!! I know exactly that pit-in-the-stomach ache she felt! Has something like this happened to you? Maybe a stone in your wedding ring? Yep, mine was the middle stone in a three-diamond design. Oh, I searched with tears, but never found it. It saddened me not to wear my precious wedding ring; I had a simple band, but it felt so incomplete. Jesus tells us that this dear girl gets right to work; she lights a candle because their homes had very few windows letting in natural light, and she grabs a broom and begins to sweep. Her **search was diligent**, and I can imagine how systematic she was as she went through every inch of her home... she would not stop until she found it! And she did!!

And Jesus told of the same joyful, celebratory reaction the shepherd had when he found his lost sheep! “Rejoice with me; for I have found” – The woman called together her lady friends and neighbors with these words: “Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.” Again, most of us can probably relate to the joy of finding or restoring something we had previously lost! The desire to tell and show everyone how our lost item is now back in its rightful place. Quite a few years ago, John and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary with a lovely dinner at a local restaurant. It was a milestone we knew was coming, but because our household was so full and busy, we had neither time nor money for a big trip or celebration. So, a nice evening out seemed perfect! When I went to wash my hands for dinner after ordering, I came back to my seat to a smiling John and a small black box on my plate. I really didn’t know what was inside; I never suspected anything! And to my great surprise, it was a reconstructed, redesigned, restored wedding ring! It was beautiful; it was a sacrifice, and I rejoiced. For probably the next year, all my friends, neighbors, relatives, acquaintances,

and maybe even people I didn't know heard about my new reset wedding ring and how my wonderful husband gave it to me. Yes, I rejoiced, probably like the lady in Jesus' parable, and He went on to say...

Jesus' Application:

“Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.” Luke 15:10

“joy in the presence of the angels of God” – Again, Jesus repeats it! Heaven rejoices when just one sinner repents! In the presence of both the publicans and sinners AND the Pharisees and scribes, Jesus tells this wonderful truth again! God desires sinners to repent and be restored to Him, and He is joyful when they come! What a comfort to the sinner; what a rebuke to the self-righteous! And these words are still a comfort to sinners but also a stinging rebuke to those who despise or overlook those who are in need of God's saving power!

Today, where are you – comforted by God's love and desire for you to repent and come to Him for salvation? If so, come to Him today, start that heavenly rejoicing!

Or do you feel rebuked because of a cold or callous attitude toward the sinners you see around you? Repent of your attitude and seek to reflect the heart of God by seeking the lost and bringing them to Him!

Let's finish by reading **Psalm 103:8-22**.

IV. The Lost Sons - Loving Father The emphasis of this parable is the beauty and gracious love of the father. Watch for it!! But don't forget who was listening, both publicans and sinners along with the Pharisees and scribes!

Scene 1: The Unrighteous son

“And he said, A certain man had two sons: ¹²And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living (livelihood; all assets; his life's work). ¹³And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted (Lit. - threw away; scattered) his substance with riotous living.” Luke 15:11-13

Cultural Setting – Jewish law gave the eldest son a double portion of the father's estate. (Deut. 21:17 “But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the first-born is his.”) So, because there were only two sons, the father's wealth, which included all assets, would be divided three ways: two parts to the older son and one part to the younger. A son could ask for his inheritance early, but often he did so to establish his own livelihood, for example, to buy property. By asking for the inheritance early, a son would be morally obligated to use it in a way that would please his father and bring him honor. But we will see this will not be the younger son's desire! The only person he wanted to please was himself!

Verse 13 tells us it didn't take long and the son “gathered all together,” meaning he liquidated everything he received for cash. He had received a third of the land, cattle, goats, and everything else the father had, and he sold it for a big bag of money! He wasted no time getting himself set up to enjoy life and get out from under his father's authority. Then we are told he left for a “far country.” I read that those listening might associate a “far country” with one of the wild cities in the Roman Empire, perhaps Antioch, Corinth, or even Rome itself. In our culture, what would we consider a wild city? Las Vegas, New Orleans, or maybe New York City. We find out very quickly what this young man's purpose was for his big relocation: “and there wasted (threw away; squandered) his substance with riotous living.” The word “wasted” in the Greek is very colorful. It has the idea

of throwing money to the wind without any thought. The young man was literally wasting his money with no consideration of the future. Or we could put it this way: “He was spending money like there was no tomorrow!” Maybe this is where that old saying comes from!

And what was the object of all this wasted money? “riotous living.” I went to Bible Gateway and looked through many different English translations of this phrase; this is what I found: reckless living; immoral living; loose living; foolish; extravagant; wild; reckless; debauched living; on parties and prostitutes. I don’t think anyone was surprised at this. We will find that the elder brother knew exactly the intent of his brother, for later he will say, “this thy son...hath devoured thy living with harlots.” What a waste!

Before we leave Scene 1, I would like to do a character sketch and dive into this younger son's attitude. Let’s consider what these few verses tell us about him. But keep in mind that in this parable Jesus is portraying the heart of the sinful man! He was: **(ask the class to participate with answers)**

Foolish; inexperienced; self-willed; rebellious; sensual; selfish; dissatisfied; burned all bridges; heartless; unthankful; “greener-pastures syndrome”

His character then was revealed in his attitude:

1. Tired of his father’s home - order, discipline, work, schedule, structure → felt trapped; couldn’t live as he pleased
2. Tired of his father’s oversight – accountability, responsibilities, expectations → felt trapped; couldn’t live as he pleased
3. Tired of the father’s life – land, business → felt trapped; couldn’t live as he pleased

Once the young man received his inheritance, we have a formula for disaster. I think this little equation is a good portrayal of what we saw in this young man:

*lack of self-control + money + time + opportunity + no morals = **Sensual Living***

Scene 2:

“And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. ¹⁵And he went and joined (Lit. - glued; strong word; attached himself) himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶And he would fain (Lit. – gladly) have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. ¹⁷And when he came to himself (Lit. - Jewish statement of repentance), he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! ¹⁸I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, ¹⁹And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” Luke 15:14-19

Cultural Setting – Let’s put verses 14-16 into a quick timeline:

all assets were exhausted → localized famine → fell behind financially → attached himself to pig farmer for support (everyone one in the crowd, publican and Pharisee, would have winced at the thought of a Jewish young man feeding pigs for a Gentile farmer – that is as low as it gets!) → all lines of credit exhausted (no one would give or lend him any more money or food) → Even the pig food looked good (husks – carob – pronounced “care awb”, much like locust tree pods; still used as animal food) → BUT no one gave him anything (eventually, the pig farmer put more value on his pig herd than on his pig herdsman!)

This young man had hit bottom. He was at the end of himself! The green pastures he sought dried up; the freedom he longed for became bondage; the friends he wanted deserted him; the success he desired became failure; the life he wanted was leading him to a slow, painful death! These words of Jesus are found in John 8:34, “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.” This is a display of those words!

Then we are told, “he came to himself,” a Jewish phrase for repentance! All this loss, abandonment, and failure brought him back to reality. And what was that? The truly good and right place for him was with his father at home! Let’s look at the progressive statements of the young man’s repentance:

Remembered the hired servants at home → Compared their plenty with his plight Please realize that he was sitting in the pig pen, surrounded by the grunts and snorts of the smelly pigs. He wasn’t dreaming of his warm, luxurious bed back home or the extravagant banquets he used to enjoy. What haunted his mind was his father’s lowly hired farm workers, who had plenty to eat, sufficient shelter, and financial security! Reason and reality broke through his mind darkened by sin! → Resolved to go to his father and say Notice the word “will” in verse 18. We see this young man use this word twice! He resolved to go home, back where he belonged. Yes, it was a place of food, shelter, and security, but also a place of love. And then he says, I “will say,” → “I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.” These are words of truth! He had offended both God and his father! How beautiful are words of confession! And with his confession comes a humble proposition → I “am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.” He realized that with his sin came consequences. He had no claim on his father’s estate; he had thrown it all away; he had no claim on his father’s house; he had walked away from it; he had no claim on the father’s love; he had despised it when he wasted his inheritance! The younger son went from “give me” my inheritance to “make me” a servant. That’s true humility, and humility is always a true sign of repentance. And with this humble request, the son resolved to beg for mercy!

Scene 3:

“And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion (Lit – pity), and ran, and fell on his neck (Lit. – embraced, threw his arms around, hugged), and kissed (Gk – Verb tense of continued action – kept kissing him) him. ²¹And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. ²²But the father said to his servants, Bring forth (Lit – “Be quick and bring...”) the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: ²³And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: ²⁴For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.” Luke 15:20-24

Cultural Setting –

Father’s Reaction – In Jesus’ parable, He said that when the son was still a long way from the home, the father actually saw him coming. What does that say to you? **He was watching for his son!** Hoping for him, praying for him, desiring him, missing him! And when he saw him, he ran to him, full of love and joy; he ran. He threw off all dignity and reserve and went as fast as he possibly could to be reunited with his boy! We are told he threw his arms around him, kissing and holding him! What a beautiful picture of pure joy!

Son’s Repentance – At this point, the son began his rehearsed speech of repentance, but what happens? **The father cuts him off!** Yes, the son confessed his sin: “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” But before he could humbly ask to be placed as a hired servant, his father interrupted him!

Servant’s Responsibilities – It seems that some of the servants had seen the commotion and gathered around the rejoicing father and repentant son, for the father addressed them, giving orders! What were they to do?

- “bring forth the best robe” – everything I read about this phrase emphasized that this was not about covering up the son’s torn, filthy, pigpen clothes, but instead it was a “robe of status.” A robe of a son!

- “put a ring on his hand” – again, this wasn’t about making his work-worn hands look better; it was a “ring of status.” A ring of a son!
- “[put] shoes on his feet” – we see again that this wasn’t for comfort, though I’m sure they felt much better than bare feet; all of this was about restoration to sonship!
- and lastly, the servants were to “bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it” – Forgiveness was given, and the celebration was to begin!

Everyone Rejoices – Why celebrate?

- Notice the words of the father, “For this my son was as good as dead to me and is alive again; he was a long time lost to me, and is found!” Of course, the father celebrated!
- Notice everything the young man had wanted in the far country he actually found at home! Fine clothes, jewelry, position, friends, celebration, love and a future! What was the difference? His attitude about his father changed! He realized the father’s love!

Scene 4: The Self-righteous son - I can almost imagine Jesus now fixing His eyes on the sneering, scoffing Pharisees and scribes. More than any other part of these three parables, this elder son hits at them directly!

“Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶And he called one of the (Lit. - young) servants, and asked (Lit - eagerly and repeatedly) what these things meant. ²⁷And he said unto him, Thy brother is come ; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. ²⁸And he was angry , and would not go in : therefore came his father out , and intreated (Lit. - repeatedly begged) him. ²⁹And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve (Lit. - same word as slave/slave for) thee, neither transgressed (Lit. – disobeyed) I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid (Lit. – a young goat; smaller than a calf; not worth as much), that I might make merry with my friends: ³⁰But as soon as this thy son (purposely did not acknowledge his brother) was come, which hath devoured (Lit. – eaten up) thy living (Lit. – they livelihood) with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. ³¹And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. ³²It was meet (Lit. - right/our duty) that we should make merry, and be glad : for this thy brother was dead , and is alive again; and was lost , and is found .” Luke 15:25-32

Cultural Setting –

Elder Son’s Reaction – Wow! Let’s do another character sketch, but this time of this elder son. Let’s consider what these few verses tell us about him. But keep in mind we are seeing the heart of the Religious Leaders! He was: (ask class to participate with answers)

Exemplary in morals and conduct; respected in society, industrious, “saintly,” did what was expected, saw work as a mundane duty and servitude without joy; had **no relationship with his father**, he saw himself as a slave, not a son, sarcastic with exaggerations, suffered from “it’s not-fair syndrome,” resentful toward his father and brother; jealous

His character is then revealed in his attitude, just like the Religionist!

1. **Self-righteousness** – The elder son couldn’t see his own sin, only the sin of his brother!
2. **Prideful** – How he boasted, “neither transgressed at **any time** thy commandment.” Self-centered pride! Which leads us to...
3. **Selfishness** - There was no joy with his father, or concern for his brother. He only looked at himself!

4. **Fierce Anger** – He flashed his hot temper at both his father and his brother! He disrespected his father and railed at his brother!

Here is a very important point of this parable! Please catch this, **obedience and diligence** are not the only tests of character! When done out of duty, or just outwardly, it is not obedience at all but self-righteous works! Jesus said this of the Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 23:27, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.” And we see this with the elder son. Looked good and obedient on the outside but full of bitterness!

Father’s Reaction – Notice now the actions of love, patience, calm, graciousness, and tenderness toward the elder son! Same father, same love, just a different son!

- The father “came...out” – the son would not join the celebration, so the father came to him
- The father “intreated” – this word means begged! He begged the elder son to come and celebrate the return of his brother.
- The father dealt with him patiently – he had to listen to the whining, sarcastic complaints and disrespect, but yet answered him calmly with truth...
 - “Son, (Lit. – my child) thou art ever with me” – you are dear to me and beside me
 - “all that I have is thine” – Wow, this was powerful. This father's every earthly thing would be inherited by this elder son! He could have thrown his own party!
 - “It was meet (Lit. – the right thing; duty) that we should make merry” – this is a soft but direct rebuke to the elder son’s attitude! Why, celebrate? The father repeats what he had previously said to his servants, but changes it slightly for the elder son's benefit!
 - “For this thy brother was as good as dead and is alive again; he was a long time lost, and is found!”

Missing Resolution – And almost abruptly, the parable ended. No application, no resolution, no call to repentance, change, no nothing...but really nothing more was needed. The parable, all three parables, was very plain....

Believers’ Application:

1. **Man’s Condition** – Lost, Separated from God, in Need of Repentance – Within all three, Jesus connects the lost condition of man with the need for repentance. One can’t come to Christ for salvation until they understand their separation from God because of sin. Then comes confession. This truth appears throughout the Bible. We find words of confession after Saul sinned, David, and the nation of Israel. Whole chapters of Psalms are given over to confession and humbly coming to God. The Publicans and scribes would have known all of them! Probably one of the most well-known is Psalm 51. Let’s walk through David's words. **Read verses 1-4; 10-12; 16-17.**

Then, in the Gospels, Jesus preached repentance throughout His ministry: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.” Mark 1:15 “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Matthew 4:17; “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.” Luke 13:3; the disciples preached it in the book of Acts, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...” Acts 2:38; and again in Acts 3:19, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” The writers of the epistles highlighted repentance in their letters. Here are a few: Rom. 2:4 “...the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” 2 Cor. 7:10 “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation...” 2 Peter 3:9 “The Lord is....long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” 1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to

forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Yes, repentance is a thread that runs through Scripture. Man is lost and separated from God, and only man’s repentance can restore fellowship with God!

Also, all three parables teach us...

2. God’s Compassion – Value and Seek Man – Jesus attracted sinners, not because He catered to them or compromised His message, but because He cared for them. He understood their needs and desired to help. All the while, the Pharisees criticized and despised them. The religious leaders knew the law and desired personal purity, but they had no love for lost souls! In Jesus’ parable of the lost sons, don’t miss the beauty of these facts that portray our loving heavenly Father. Keep in mind we are seeing the heart of God the Father!

- **The father was watching and waiting!** Though the younger son had his own will, he eventually “came to himself” and returned to his father to repent of his sin. But look closely: the whole while, the loving father had been waiting for him! Oh, how the words of Psalm 103:10-13 must have burned within the minds of those Religionists that day, “He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. ¹¹ For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. ¹² As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. ¹³ Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.” or Jeremiah 3:12, “Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever.” God is watching and waiting for man to come to Him!
 - **The father ran, embraced, and kissed the son before the words of repentance!** The son was not met with rebuke, reproach, or scorn, but with compassion and lavish love! Jesus portrayed this father as His Father in Heaven, who loves and has compassion on sinful men! Remember, God demonstrated His love for us “in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:8)
 - **The father gave restoration; it was not earned!** Just as the son did not deserve to be reinstated to sonship, so man is not deserving of a place in heaven and adoption as a son of God! For all of us, regardless of our age at salvation, we “were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another, but after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared.” We must remember, it is “by grace” we are “saved through faith: and that not of” ourselves “it is the gift of God; not of works.” Titus 2:3-4; Eph 2:8-9. Restoration to God is not earned; it is His gift to us.
3. God’s Joy – Restoration of men to Him – Jesus came to reveal the Father’s heart to us – God’s love, desire to restore man back into fellowship with Himself, and the great joy it brings! In the parable, the son’s confession of sin was all the father needed to give full restoration, and this is the same with our heavenly Father. This restoration is why Jesus came: to pay the debt of sin we could not pay! This was God’s will for Jesus; God’s plan! You see, He sought and provided the way to restore sinners back to Himself. Man’s part is to receive, repent, and return! And the key to all of this is **God’s love!** The very essence of God is love, as 1 John 4:16 tells us, “And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love;”

So what should our response be:

Our Response –

1. Come to God for repentance if you haven’t! He loves you, values you, and has made a way for you to be restored to Him! You might look good on the outside like the Pharisees and scribes that day, but remember God always knows the heart of man!
2. God wants servants who understand His heart and seek to restore sinners! The Gospel is for the lost! So seek them like a diligent shepherd or a woman who searches for something valuable when it is lost, and remember the words of Jesus, “joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth!”

Ladies Studying Jesus

Homework Vol. 7#6

Read Luke 15. You will find three parables about the love of God for sinners. Enjoy the beauty of Jesus' words...AND be ready for our first quiz of the year next week!! 😊

1. and 2. According to verse one, what two groups of people “drew near unto” Jesus “for to hear him.”
Publicans & Sinners
 3. and 4. According to verse two, what two groups of people “murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” **Pharisees & Scribes**
 5. In the parable of the lost sheep, how many sheep were in the shepherd's flock? **100**
 6. In the parable of the lost coin, how many coins did the woman have altogether? **10**
 7. and 8. In the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, what two groups of people were told, “Rejoice with me; for I have found.” **Friends & Neighbors**
 9. In the parable of the lost sons, what job did the younger son do during the famine? **Feed pigs**
 10. In the parable of the lost sons, what was the reaction of the elder son to the party the father gave to celebrate his younger son's return? **angry**
- BONUS: What was on the menu at the party the father gave to celebrate his younger son's return? **Fatted calf**