



Welcome Home!

Luke 15:11-32

Jesus' "Bad Company"

- ❑ Jesus often spent time with “tax collectors¹ and sinners.”² The Pharisees³ and the teachers of the law complained about this (*Luke 5:29-30*). On one occasion, they muttered, “This man (Jesus) welcomes sinners and eats with them” (*15:2b*). In response, Jesus told three parables.

Parables of the Lost Sheep & the Lost Coin (*Luke 15:3-10*)

- ❑ The first two parables are very similar. Both involve a search for something lost (one sheep out of 100; one silver coin out of 10). When the one sheep is found, and the one coin is found, there is great joy and celebration.
 - 📖 “In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”⁴ (*Luke 15:10, NIV*)



Parable of the Gracious Father & His Two Sons⁵ (*Luke 15:11-32*)

- ❑ After the first two parables, Jesus continued with a third parable. Read *Luke 15:11-32*.

Younger Son's Sin & Separation

1. What are your impressions of the younger son at the beginning of this story? What motivates his actions?⁶ (*15:12-13*)

- ❑ The son's request was selfish and dishonoring to his father. Yet his father granted his request. He allowed the son to go his own way, as God the Father allows the sinner to go *his* own way.

Younger Son's Repentance & Return

2. What factors influence the son's change in attitude?⁷ In what specific ways does his attitude change? How does his attitude change toward himself and toward his father? (*15:14-20a*)

Reflection

- How does this story illustrate human attitudes relative to God?⁸



Sad Pods

¹ ‘tax collectors’ were disliked because they were agents of the oppressive Roman government, and often dishonest.

² In general, a ‘sinner’ is ‘one who sins’ (that is, one whose attitudes and actions are opposed to God’s moral will). In this sense, everyone is a sinner. However, the Bible usually uses ‘sinner’ to refer to one who is separated from, or willingly opposed to, God (that is, the nonbeliever). In *Luke 15:2*, the ‘sinners’ are viewed from the perspective of the self-righteous Pharisees and teachers of the law. However, they fail to see that they also may be ‘sinners.’

³ ‘Pharisees’ – a party within Judaism known for strict observance of the law of Moses and its unwritten interpretations. The ‘teachers of the law’ (most of whom were Pharisees) studied and interpreted the law.

⁴ ‘repent’ – to change one’s mind and life direction; to turn from self-centeredness and sin toward God and faith.

⁵ Traditionally, this parable has been called the ‘parable of the prodigal (wasteful) son’ or ‘parable of the lost son.’ Like the first two parables, it presents joy and celebration when something (or someone) lost is found. But this parable goes further and contrasts two attitudes concerning the lost and found. Not everyone shares in the joy of finding.

⁶ He desires to gain his freedom and independence. He wants to go his own way. He no longer wants to live under his father’s authority. Instead, he is willing to give up any future inheritance to pursue his selfish desires.

⁷ He found himself in great need. For a Jew, feeding pigs (which were ‘unclean’) was about as low as it could get. Not only did he feed pigs, he was so hungry, he desired to eat their food! ‘...but no one gave him anything’ (*15:16*).

Father's Attitude

3. What is evident about the father's character in these verses?⁹ What is his attitude toward his son's return?¹⁰ (15:20b-24)
4. What is the result of the son's return, especially with regard to the relationship between the father and son?¹¹



📖 “For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” (15:24)

📖 “Yet to all who did receive [Jesus Christ], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.” (John 1:12, NIV).

Reflection

- How does this story illustrate the relationship between us and God?¹²

Older Son's Attitude

5. How does the older son respond? What are his reasons for responding this way?¹³ (vv.25-32)

- ❑ Like the Pharisees (15:2), the older son's attitude is unloving & unforgiving. He does not rejoice in the “sinner's” return.¹⁴ The parable ends without telling us the older son's final response. Will he go inside, or remain outside? Will he join in his father's love, forgiveness, and joy; or not?

Reflection & Application

- Are you more like the older son or the younger son? Are you seeking fulfillment independent of the Father (God)? God is the only true Source of life and blessing. God graciously invites you to repent and come to Him through Christ. If you do, no matter what you have done in the past, God will welcome you into His family (John 1:9-13).
- As a Christian, are you sharing God's love and forgiveness? Are you joining with God in His pursuit of, and invitation to, “sinners?”¹⁵ In what specific ways can you be more involved in these activities of God? Do you truly share in the “rejoicing in heaven” when a sinner (even a “terrible one!”) repents and comes to God?

⁸ This parable can be applied broadly to the human race. We as human beings (in our natural state) have gone our own way, and our relationship with God (the heavenly Father) has been broken. But many of us, at some point, realize that life apart from God is not so good. We realize that we need to repent and go to God.

⁹ Since the father saw his son ‘still a long way off,’ it seems that the father was looking for him. It is significant that the father ‘ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.’ ‘No Middle Eastern father would greet or respond to his wayward son in this way.’ (Darrell Bock, *Luke* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996], 1313)

¹⁰ Compare verses 23-24 in this parable to verses 5-6 and 9 in the previous parables.

¹¹ Because of the father's love and forgiveness, and the son's willingness to repent, their relationship is restored.

¹² Apart from God, the Bible describes human beings as lost and ‘dead.’ But God is gracious, loving and forgiving. He made a way for us to come to Him, through Jesus Christ, who died on a cross for our sins. When we trust in Christ, repent and go to Him, he forgives us and welcomes us into the family. Our relationship with God is restored

¹³ He doesn't appreciate this warm reception. He has been righteous. He has been obedient; followed the rules. Yet his father is welcoming this ‘sinner’ with great joy and celebration. He is thinking of himself, his sense of justice, not understanding his father's attitude of love and graciousness.

¹⁴ This parable has been called a “parable of reversal... the son who was lost and outside is now inside, while the ‘inside’ elder brother complains from ‘outside.’” (Bock, 1317).

¹⁵ We must remember that all have sinned (*Romans 3:23*), even those who are relatively ‘good,’ including religious people. But anyone who truly trusts in Christ, repents and goes to God is forgiven and is welcomed into God's family.