

CHAPTER 15

GOD'S MISSION: Welcoming Home the Lost



Chapter Fifteen contains three unique parables of Jesus. They are woven together by a common theme: God has come to search, find and welcome home those who are lost. These parables proclaim the compassion and joy of God's hope for all His sons and daughters. They emphasize the true mission of those called to guide His people.

These parables are directed to the religious leaders of Jesus' day and to the Church of every generation. The pervasive message is that God is compassionate beyond all measure. His deepest joy is expressed when those considered lost are found and welcomed home. The religious leaders of Jesus' day do not have hearts of mercy. They consider themselves justified and proper. They feel that any sinner is contaminated and avoid any association with them. They do not see their own sinfulness. They do not acknowledge God's great desire to reach all. They do not share in God's joy. Jesus tells these three parables in response to the Pharisees question: "Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?"

PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP: Lk. 15: 1-7.

15:1 Now all the tax collectors ¹ and sinners were coming ² to hear him. **15:2** But ³ the Pharisees ⁴ and the experts in the law ⁵ were complaining, ⁶ "This man welcomes ⁷ sinners and eats with them." **15:3** So ⁸ Jesus ⁹ told them ¹⁰ this parable: ¹¹ **15:4** "Which one ¹² of you, if he has a hundred ¹³ sheep and loses one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture ¹⁴ and go look for ¹⁵ the one that is lost until he finds it? ¹⁶ **15:5** Then ¹⁷ when he has found it, he places it on his shoulders, rejoicing. **15:6** Returning ¹⁸ home, he calls together ¹⁹ his ²⁰ friends and neighbors, telling them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.' **15:7** I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner ²¹ who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people ²² who have no need to repent.

Day 1:

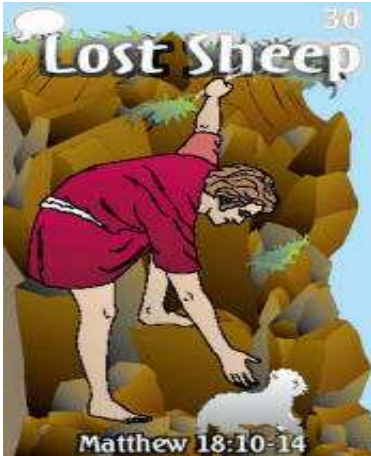
1. What is surprising or unique about this parable?

2. Have you ever been lost as a child? What was it like?

or Have you ever had a child under your care wander away? What did you do? What was it like?

3. What does this parable say about God?

God the Good Shepherd:



Throughout the Old Testament God is portrayed as a shepherd. One who will gather the scattered faithful and lead them to justice and peace. Jesus' parable emphasizes a new dimension of this theme. God whole-heartedly seeks out sinners (those who are lost and do not experience His love nor His way) and brings them home. Also, it reveals what gives God profound joy. Those who are found and return to God fill up His heart. The commitment of the shepherd to leave the 99 secured sheep to search out the one stray becomes the basis for the joyful celebration.

The message could not be clearer or more encouraging. Not only does God compassionately seek out sinners, the conversion of one brings great joy to God. Such is the Reign of God that Jesus calls all to. Such is the mission of all who experience God's mercy.

PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN: Lk 15: 8-10.

15:8 "Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins ²⁴ and loses ²⁵ one of them, ²⁶ does not light a lamp, sweep ²⁷ the house, and search thoroughly until she finds it? **15:9** Then ²⁸ when she has found it, she calls together her ²⁹ friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice ³⁰ with me, for I have found the coin ³¹ that I had lost.' **15:10** In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of God's angels ³² over one sinner who repents."

DAY 2:

1. Recall a moment in which you found something important to you that was lost. How did it feel? What did you do? Who did you tell?

2. What does this parable say about God's attitude towards us?

3. What does this parable say about our mission with Jesus?

This second parable reinforces the first. In this parable the main actor is a woman. As in the parable of the lost sheep the woman expends much energy to find one lost silver coin. When she finds it she invites friends and neighbors to share her joy. One additional point is made. The great joy is not limited to earth. It reaches even to God's angels in heaven.



The two parables together proclaim that through Jesus' mission God's initiative and grace are extended without limits. They look beyond the defect of the sinner and offer compassion to reform. The sinner's conversion brings the fullness of joy to God and to oneself. Likewise, it brings joy to those who participate in God's compassionate mission.

If a shepherd and a housewife would exert such to recover property, how much more will God expend to recover one of us! This is Jesus' answer to the criticism of the scribes and Pharisees. This is why Jesus eats and drinks with sinners.

Jesus chose two models from everyday life that would have rattled the sensibilities of the scribes and Pharisees. Shepherds were considered insignificant. Because of their profession they rarely could have fulfilled the laws of purification and Temple worship. They were considered low life. Woman had no rights. They only had significance in relationship to their husband or father. They are awarded first class citizenship and highest regard in Jesus' eyes and teaching.

These first two parables emphasize God's action to seek out the sinner. The parable of the Lost Son/ Extravagant Father presents the sinners' response to God's compassionate grace.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON: Lk 15: 11-32.

15:11 Then ³³ Jesus ³⁴ said, "A man had two sons. **15:12** The ³⁵ younger of them said to his ³⁶ father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate ³⁷ that will belong ³⁸ to me.' So ³⁹ he divided his ⁴⁰ assets between them. ⁴¹ **15:13** After ⁴² a few days, ⁴³ the



younger son gathered together all he had and left on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered ⁴⁴ his wealth ⁴⁵ with a wild lifestyle. **15:14** Then ⁴⁶ after he had spent everything, a severe famine took place in that country, and he began to be in need. **15:15** So he went and worked for ⁴⁷ one of the citizens of that country, who ⁴⁸ sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ⁴⁹ **15:16** He ⁵⁰ was longing to eat ⁵¹ the carob pods ⁵² the pigs were eating, but ⁵³ no one gave him anything. **15:17** But when he came to his senses ⁵⁴ he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have food ⁵⁵ enough to spare, but here I am dying from hunger! **15:18** I will get up and go to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned ⁵⁶ against heaven ⁵⁷ and against ⁵⁸ you. **15:19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me ⁵⁹ like one of your hired workers.'" **15:20** So ⁶⁰

he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way from home ⁶¹ his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; ⁶² he ran and hugged ⁶³ his son ⁶⁴ and kissed him. **15:21** Then ⁶⁵ his son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven ⁶⁶ and against you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ⁶⁷ **15:22** But the father said to his slaves, ⁶⁸ 'Hurry! Bring the best robe, ⁶⁹ and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger ⁷⁰ and sandals ⁷¹ on his feet! **15:23** Bring ⁷² the fattened calf ⁷³ and kill it! Let us eat ⁷⁴ and celebrate, **15:24** because this son of mine was dead, and is alive again – he was lost and is found!' ⁷⁵ So ⁷⁶ they began to celebrate. **15:25** "Now his older son was in the field. As ⁷⁷ he came and approached the house, he heard music ⁷⁸ and dancing. **15:26** So ⁷⁹ he called one of the slaves ⁸⁰ and asked what was happening. **15:27** The slave replied, ⁸¹ 'Your brother has returned, and your father has killed the

fattened calf ⁸² because he got his son ⁸³ back safe and sound.’ **15:28** But the older son ⁸⁴ became angry ⁸⁵ and refused ⁸⁶ to go n. His father came out and appealed to him, **15:29** but he answered ⁸⁷ his father, ‘Look! These many years I have worked like a slave ⁸⁸ for you, and I never disobeyed your commands. Yet ⁸⁹ you never gave me even a goat ⁹⁰ so that I could celebrate with my friends! **15:30** But when this son of yours ⁹¹ came back, who has devoured ⁹² your assets with prostitutes, ⁹³ you killed the fattened calf ⁹⁴ for him!’ **15:31** Then ⁹⁵ the father ⁹⁶ said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and everything that belongs to me is yours. **15:32** It was appropriate ⁹⁷ to celebrate and be glad, for your brother ⁹⁸ was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found.’” ⁹⁹

Day 3:

1. Imagine yourself as the younger son. When in your life have you thought, felt or acted like him?

2. How does the younger son show his lack of love for his father?

3. What brings the son to repentance?



This parable is considered the crown jewel of Jesus preaching. In literature it has been proclaimed the greatest short story to be written. It has been artistically portrayed by great painters, including Durer, Rembrandt, Bassam and Van Honthorst. It has been presented by renowned dramatists, choreographers, musicians, philosophers, theologians and writers. Many themes can be drawn from this masterpiece. Yet the core message of this parable is clear: **the abundant forgiveness of God that is extended to the sinner.**

“There was a man who had two sons.”

The parable presents three main players: The **father**, the **youngest son** and the **eldest son**. The father is the central figure from beginning to end of this story. His interaction with his two sons portrays his extravagant love, compassion and commitment. Both of the sons are self centered and self absorbed. The father unconditionally loves both his sons. It is the father’s love that calls them to something nobler and greater. The youngest son is identified with the tax collectors and other sinners. The eldest son is identified with the Pharisees and scribes. The father in the story is identified with God the Father.

The youngest son and the father:

“Father, give me my portion of the property which is coming to me.”

The youngest son is selfish and greedy. His demand reeks of his smallness and self-centeredness. At this point there is not much to like about him. His actions show his utter disregard for his father. A father’s property was normally given to a son upon his death . The younger son’s request shows that he would prefer that his father were already in the grave. Likewise, land was normally given to the eldest son to ensure that the property was not divided into small portions. Upon receiving his portion of the inheritance the son made a clear separation from his father. The father would have no further legal obligation to his younger son. The younger son’s actions represent the sinners who publicly break away from God.

”The youngest son sets off to a distant land and squanders his inheritance.”

The son has spent and wasted his entire fortune in a pagan land. To survive he takes the most despicable work available. He feeds pigs. It is more than it is a nasty job. Pigs are unclean animals to the Jews and Moslems. They are a forbidden source of food. Even touching them is repulsive. The son’s situation is so desperate that he was at the point of eating the pig’s despicable food. The situation depicts the total degradation that he has placed himself in. He has hit bottom.

“Coming to his sense.”

The youngest son has one options; REPENTANCE. Because he no longer has any legal or familiar claims he must agree to his father’s terms, not as a son but as a hire worker. Not only does he not have any legal rights to his father’s household but also by his own lifestyle he has become emotionally, economically and spiritually bankrupt. He goes home in complete humiliation.

THE FATHER’S RESPONSE: Lk. 15:20-24

15:20 So ⁶⁰ he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way from home ⁶¹ his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; ⁶² he ran and hugged ⁶³ his son ⁶⁴ and kissed him. **15:21** Then ⁶⁵ his son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven ⁶⁶ and against you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ⁶⁷ **15:22** But the father said to his slaves, ⁶⁸ ‘Hurry! Bring the best robe, ⁶⁹ and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger ⁷⁰ and sandals ⁷¹ on his feet! **15:23** Bring ⁷² the fattened calf ⁷³ and kill it! Let us eat ⁷⁴ and celebrate, **15:24** because this son of mine was dead, and is alive again – he was lost and is found!’ ⁷⁵ So ⁷⁶ they began to celebrate

Day 4:

1. Why could this parable more appropriately be entitled the extravagant father?

2. What does the father’s reaction to the prodigal son tell you about God?

3. Have you been reconciled with someone who hurt you? How did it make you feel?



“The father ran to his son, embrace his and kissed him.”

It is the father who humiliates himself because of the profound joy of seeing his son returned. The head of a family was deemed important by the entire village. Normally, a father of such a family would have lived in the center of the village, rather than on the edge. Therefore, such a father could have seen his son a long way off only if he was intentionally watching for him from the roof of the house or at the village gate. It was considered extremely undignified and humiliating for a man to run, especially to greet someone. It would be unheard of for a man to run and greet a son who publicly insulted him. A man signified his own importance by waiting or at most walks to receive

someone. The father throws off all etiquette and customs. He takes the initiative and runs to meet his renegade son.

Not only does the father run to welcome his son he treats him like a highly honored guest. The gifts bestowed on the young man reveal a new sonship greater than the natural sonship. They show what God bestows upon the repentant sinner.

- **Robe:** Dignity - the quality of his robe showed a person’s status. The best robe went to the most honored.
- **Ring:** Authority – the ring identified the son as a member of the family with full rights and authority.
- **Sandals:** Freedom – servants and slave went barefoot.
- **Fatted calf:** Meat was rarely eaten. A fatted calf was reserved for the most important of events.
- **Feast with music and dancing:** This was on par to a wedding banquet. It was a once in a lifetime celebration of joy and thanksgiving.

THE ELDEST SON: Lk 15: 25-32

15:25 “Now his older son was in the field. As ⁷⁷ he came and approached the house, he heard music ⁷⁸ and dancing. **15:26** So ⁷⁹ he called one of the slaves ⁸⁰ and asked what was happening. **15:27** The slave replied, ⁸¹ ‘Your brother has returned, and your father has killed the fattened calf ⁸² because he got his son ⁸³ back safe and sound.’ **15:28** But the older son ⁸⁴ became angry ⁸⁵ and refused ⁸⁶ to go in. His father came out and appealed to him, **15:29** but he answered ⁸⁷ his father, ‘Look! These many years I have worked like a slave ⁸⁸ for you, and I never disobeyed your commands. Yet ⁸⁹ you never gave me even a goat ⁹⁰ so that I could celebrate with my friends! **15:30** But when this son of yours ⁹¹ came back, who has devoured ⁹² your assets with prostitutes, ⁹³ you killed the fattened calf ⁹⁴ for him!’ **15:31** Then ⁹⁵ the father ⁹⁶ said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and everything that belongs to me is yours. **15:32** It was appropriate ⁹⁷ to celebrate and be glad, for your brother ⁹⁸ was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found.’” ⁹⁹

Day 5:

1. How does the older son feel about his father's response to his brother? Why does he feel that way?

2. What son do you identify with more?

3. What does this parable ask from you?

“His father came out and pleaded with him.”

The father goes out to this son, also and tries to persuade him to welcome his lost brother. He begs him to share in the great joy of his family. The elder brother makes himself a stranger in his father's house.

The parable was directed to men who felt like the older brother. They were offended by God's compassion to all, especially sinners. The elder son represents the pious and religious ones who remain in the father's house but do not feel the father's joy and compassion. Jesus' parable proclaims the boundless love of God. It is God's great love not our own merits that justifies us before God and embraces sinners.

“But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come back to life again, he was lost and now is found.”

The final response of the father to the eldest son sums up what is in God's heart for those respond to his love.

In this parable Jesus lays the foundation of salvation: God loves the sinner while he is still a sinner, before he repents; and it is God's love and initiative that makes the sinner's repentance possible. God is filled with deepest joy by our response to his love. Likewise, He calls us to compassion and forgiveness of one another.

This parable is considered the greatest of Jesus' parables. It is the crown jewel of his preaching and teaching. In literature it has been proclaimed the greatest short story to be written. Great painters, including Durer, Rembrandt, Bassam and Van Honthorst, have artistically portrayed it. Renowned dramatists, choreographers, musicians, philosophers, theologians and writers, have presented it. Many themes can be drawn from this masterpiece. Yet the core message of this parable is clear: the abundant forgiveness of God that is extended to the sinner.