

## The Parables In Luke's Gospel Volume 3

### Introduction

This is the third of our study booklets on the parables in Luke's Gospel. The first three parables are not so familiar, whereas the last three are probably the most well-known of all Jesus' parables. However, all six have valuable teaching for us to apply to our lives, whether we are already Christian believers or have not yet begun to follow Christ.

As you read these pages have your Bible with you so that you can follow the references that have been included. And, as you read, ask God that the Holy Spirit may help you to understand all that Jesus is teaching through his parables, and that he will give you grace to apply it to your own life.

I am reminded of the words of James in James 1:22: *“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”* James' advice is altogether challenging, practical and profitable.

It is my prayer that the Lord will meet with you and speak to you as you study his parables.

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## Chapter 1 Luke 14:1-14: The parable of the lowest seat at a feast

This parable is about the sin of human pride and the need for humility, linked with the need to care unselfishly for the needy, not seeking to be noticed or rewarded by men.

### 1) The Setting

It was the Jewish Sabbath, or holy day. Jesus was in the home of a chief Pharisee for a meal. But he was being carefully watched. Every detail was being noticed and each gesture, action, and word scrutinised in order to find fault. This was not a new experience for Jesus, nor the last occasion of it. Sadly, many were set on opposing him and were openly hostile.

One of the big issues which concerned his opponents was the use of the Sabbath. The religious leaders had made an enormous number of rules and regulations about what could and could not be done on the Sabbath day. However, in so doing, they completely altered the benefit and significance of the Sabbath day. It was God's gift to his people for worship, rest and doing good. With regard to the sick, the command to do no work (Exodus 20:8-11) was explained in this way: you were allowed to stop them getting worse, but could do nothing to help them get better! If you did, the religious leaders claimed you were guilty of great sin. Thankfully, Jesus saw through all their hypocrisy and lack of love and compassion, and refused to submit to them.

In the company was a man suffering from dropsy. That is a complaint that causes abnormal accumulation of fluid in the body, having serious effects on the chief organs such as the heart, liver and kidneys. Jesus was filled with compassion for this man, but was equally aware of the critical views of those watching him. Therefore, he faced the matter directly by asking two questions of these Pharisees and experts of the law. First, is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not? (Luke 14:3). With cold, stubborn indifference they remained silent, so Jesus healed the man. Then he asked them what they would do if their son or ox fell in a well on the Sabbath. Would they not immediately pull him out (Luke 14:5)? But again they refused to answer and kept silent. They could not answer (Luke 14:6)!! Obviously, they were convicted in their consciences for their hard indifference to the sick man's difficulty, but instead of repenting or saying sorry, they said nothing. They could not admit they were wrong. How hard their hearts were! We must examine our own hearts carefully to ensure we are not the same.

But then Jesus noticed how the guests picked the best seats at the table. They sat near to the host - still proudly full of their own importance! They wanted to be noticed. Seeing this, Jesus told this parable.

## 2) The Parable

Jesus said, *“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honour, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the*

*host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this man your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honoured in the presence of all your fellow guests. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

Notice again how Jesus included his audience in the parable so they became an integral part of the story. This gained their attention more fully and also made the application more direct. In this way they could not mistake what Jesus was teaching.

## 3) The Meaning of the Parable

Jesus was teaching men to be humble and not indulge their pride, because God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. (See Proverbs 3:34; Matthew 23:12; 1 Peter 5:5.) Jesus cited the example of a wedding feast at which there would be a specific order of seating according to relationship and importance. There was usually a ‘U’ shaped seating arrangement with the bottom of the ‘U’ being where the most important guests sat. But these proud religious leaders always thought they were better than others, so they chose the chief seats for themselves. Jesus spoke out against this attitude directly and told them to take the lowest place. Failure to do so might result in their taking a more important person's seat and then they would be asked to step down, with all the shame,

humiliation, embarrassment and disgrace that would bring - all would see it! However, by humbly taking the lowest place, the host would come and tell them to take a higher position and, as a result, they would be honoured in front of all!

Now, these Pharisees should have known this already because of the principle of Proverbs 25:6-7: *“Do not exalt yourself in the king’s presence, and do not claim a place among great men; it is better for him to say to you, ‘Come up here,’ than for him to humiliate you before noblemen.”*

In case the lesson was still not clear to them, Jesus made a specific statement in Luke 14:11: *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* This, in fact, is a principle or standard by which God judges all men, and punishes or rewards accordingly. God humbles the proud, but exalts the humble. This is found throughout the Bible. (See Luke 11:43; 18:14; 20:46; 2 Ch 7:14-15; Matthew 18:4; James 4:10.)

The human heart is all too prone to the sin of pride. It is in all of us, and must be put to death and humility cultivated. This can be done when we have right views of God and right views of ourselves. For example, remember that God is the creator and we are his creatures. God is great and we are but dust. God is spotlessly holy, and we are desperately sinful. God is worthy of all honour and praise, while we are unworthy of even the least of his benefits.

Pride spoils people and spoils relationships. Pride is like smoke in the eyes, it blinds a man from seeing his own faults. Pride is blatant wickedness, whereas humility exalts others, considers them better than self, and is to be like Christ (Philippians 2:1-11). The humble know they are unworthy, even after they have done all that is expected of them (Luke 17:10). Therefore, we must ensure we do not parade self. The humble will not do things in order to get noticed or rewarded.

#### **4) Application**

Jesus urged these self-righteous and self-centred men to invite to their feasts, not those who can repay them, but those who have no ability to return the favour. In fact, they were to invite the very ones they despised (Luke 14:12-14). Those who live like this will be rewarded by God in the resurrection of the righteous. Remember God’s requirement taught in Micah 6:8: *“And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God”*. God will reward those who live like this and bless them for ever.

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### **Chapter 2 Luke 14:15-24: The parable of the great banquet**

#### **1) The Setting**

This parable and the previous one about taking the chief seats at a feast, were told at the same Pharisee’s home. Jesus had just referred to the resurrection (Luke 14:14) and the guests were in place around the meal table when one of

those present made this statement to Jesus in Luke 14:15, *“Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.”*

As this man heard about the resurrection, his mind immediately went to what God had promised would follow that event for all God’s children. God had revealed in his word, the Bible, that there would be unending future blessedness for all who belonged to his kingdom. It will be characterised by perfect joy and the complete absence of sorrow. The Bible frequently uses the picture of a great banquet to illustrate the blessings of God’s salvation. This picture is used because a feast on earth is a time of joy and happiness and to be a guest is a special privilege. Jesus himself had already spoken of it in this way in Luke 13:29: *“People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places in the feast in the kingdom of God.”* It is spoken of in this way in the Old Testament in Isaiah 25:6: *“On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples...”* (See also Matthew 8:11, 25:1-13; Revelation 19:9; and David’s description of the blessings of knowing the Lord’s salvation in Psalm 23:5.)

The man who spoke to Jesus had realised how favoured those people will be who will share in this feast and the everlasting joy of the kingdom of God. To be a guest at this feast would be very special indeed.

Though his statement was correct, the Lord’s concern was that a far more important issue needed to be faced first. Had the man, and indeed all those present, accepted God’s invitation through Jesus to be at that feast in the kingdom of God? And did their lives give evidence of that? To be in God’s eternal kingdom we must respond correctly to his invitation to come to Jesus now, in this life! Failure to do so will mean being shut out of the future kingdom forever.

## 2) The Parable

Jesus said, *“A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is now ready.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, ‘I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out, so I can’t come.’ Still another said, ‘I have just got married, so I can’t come.’ The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and lame.’ ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”*

## 3) The Meaning

It was the custom in the Middle East to send two invitations to the guests at a banquet. Replies to the first would tell the host how many to cater for, and having accepted the invitation guests were duty bound to come. The second would be sent when the meal was ready. Often a servant would come and escort them to the meal. So all the guests were aware of things well in advance. They would have ample time to make arrangements for the appointed time. Further, to receive such an invitation was a great honour and an indication of the generosity and regard of the host. But at this feast something went dreadfully wrong, for all of those invited (Luke 14:18a) refused to come.

This showed blatant disregard to the host. It was in the very least, bad manners, and at worst the highest insult you could give. It was like throwing the invitation back in his face. The matter is made worse by their feeble excuses.

**(a) I've bought a field and must go and see it (Luke 4:18)**

In the Middle East no one would buy land without having seen it already and examined it carefully. All the details had to be included in the contract of sale. So this man would have seen the field already. Further, the field would still be there after the banquet, so he could go and look at it then!

**(b) I've bought five yoke of oxen and must try them out (Luke 14:19)**

Again, no one would buy such animals without first ensuring they were fit for the job. Unequal yokes would be unable to plough straight or pull a cart well! It would be total folly not to examine the animals before agreeing to purchase them. Also, they would still be there after the banquet.

**(c) I've just got married (Luke 14:20)**

But surely a generous host would be glad for the wife to come as well. Further, the man and his wife would have their whole lives together! He did not even ask to be excused, just rudely stated he could not come.

So all these excuses were invalid.

It is the same with those who hear God's call to come to him by humbly repenting of their sins and trusting in Jesus and becoming his followers, but who then excuse themselves for not accepting. That is precisely how many people have responded to God's gracious invitation to forsake their sin and turn to him for mercy. They have simply said "*No!*", preferring other things, rather than belonging to God. For example, 'I'm too busy, too young, too old; I'm good enough or I do not need Jesus'.

In particular this applied to Israel, and the Pharisees especially, who had received God's invitation over centuries, and then had Jesus with them who called them to follow him. BUT they refused to do so! They received more than one gracious invitation from God, yet still they

rejected it. We read about Jesus in John 1:11: *“He (i.e. Jesus) came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.”*

The owner of the house was justly angry with those people (Luke 14:21), but his banquet would still be held. Instead, others would be invited. The invitation would be sent to other people who would not normally expect to be invited. These were very needy - poor, crippled, blind, lame - the outcasts of the village. Then more would be invited (Luke 14:22-23), until the banquet was full.

Such is the grace of God that, in Jesus, he now invites needy sinners from every nation in the world to come to him and share the joys of belonging to his kingdom, and to experience its eternal joys in the life to come. But, solemnly, those who persist in rejecting the invitation will not even get a taste of the joys of salvation, and will be turned away and shut out of the eternal kingdom.

#### **4) Application**

God’s kingdom is everlasting, and when Jesus returns, its fullness of joy will be enjoyed by all who follow him. Therefore, believer, rejoice in the glorious future God has prepared for you.

Rejecting God’s invitation to follow Jesus now, will have everlasting consequences - judgment for ever. If you have never done so, seek the Lord today. Do not delay. Do not make any feeble excuses. If you do, it may be too late.

And if God is angry with you, you will have no valid excuse to present to him whose invitation you have abused!  
**Luke 14:28-35: Parables of the Tower, Going to War, and the Salt**

#### **1) The Setting**

Throughout his ministry Jesus was repeatedly surrounded by crowds (Luke 14:25-27). In this incident the crowds were travelling with Jesus. But the danger with a crowd is that it is easy to be carried along with the rest, without really being in full agreement with their views. There is an English expression which says, “A crowd gathers a crowd”.

People are inquisitive, and they will ask questions such as, “What’s that crowd doing? What’s going on? What or who are they watching?” When this is applied to Jesus it can result in a light-hearted or careless approach to following him. One thing that Jesus will not accept is a superficial interest in him. Shallow thinking is not a part of true discipleship. He demands total dedication from those who would follow him. And that dedication **MUST** be real, genuine, and from each believer’s heart.

#### **(a) It means putting Jesus before all other people (Luke 14:26)**

Jesus said, *“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple”.*

Jesus is to be at the centre of our lives. He is to be more important to us than any other person we have ever known, or will ever know in the future. And this must be genuine, because he sees through all pretence and hypocrisy. Therefore, Jesus told the crowd that if anyone really did want to be his disciple then even their nearest and dearest - parents, wife, children, brothers and sisters - were to be 'hated', and without such devotion they could not be his disciple (Luke 14:26).

That word 'hated' needs explaining. At first it appears to contradict the teaching of the Old Testament where we are told to honour our parents and to love our neighbour (Exodus 20:12; Leviticus 19:18). Also, it seems to go against Jesus' own teaching on honouring our parents and loving all including our enemies. (See Mark 7:9ff; Matthew 5:43.) The solution is to understand 'hate' as 'love less'. Compare the parallel passage in Matthew 10:37: "*Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me...*" We see that 'hate' in Luke 14:26 parallels with 'love ... more than me' in Matthew 10:37. All other loyalties and ties are to be subordinate to Christ. If necessary, we must be willing to give up all, and put Jesus first. If loyalty to loved ones clashes with loyalty to Christ, then he must be first. They must not be allowed to come in the way. We must not love them more than him.

This does not mean we are to be cruel and unkind to our relatives, instead it is a matter of priorities. Indeed, if we put Christ in his right place in our lives, we shall care for our loved ones far better.

**(b) It means putting Jesus before our own lives (Luke 14:27 - cf. Luke 9:23)**

*"Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* The true disciple is to be willing to accept the pain, distress, shame, ridicule, and persecution that will come if he truly follows Christ. (See John 16:33; 2 Timothy 3:12.) We are to be willing to face the hostility of those who oppose Christ, his gospel, and his people. Following Jesus is the way of the cross, and we must be willing to carry our own cross - which can mean actually being willing to die for Jesus' sake.

This is linked with '*follow me*'. Jesus used a tense which means we must do so continually, not going back or even looking back to our old sinful ways, but keeping on trusting him, and keeping on obeying him out of gratitude for the salvation he has given us. To be a disciple we must submit to his discipline.

That is the cost of true discipleship - without this we **CANNOT** be disciples, or followers, of Jesus.

**2) The Parables**

Jesus said, "*Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he*

*has enough to complete it? For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure heap; it is thrown out. He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

### **3) The Meaning of these Parables**

#### **a) Parable 1 - Building a tower (Luke 14:28-30)**

Towers were built for various reasons. Here are some examples - as a watchtower in a vineyard, a storage tower for the harvest, even a tower to live in. Any sensible builder will first of all work out the cost before starting to build a tower, so that the work can be completed. The cost of land, materials, and labour all have to be considered. Only a foolish builder would act rashly and start to build without counting the cost first. Such a person will have to stop working when his money runs out and his tower will be left unfinished for all to see (you cannot hide a tower). The result will be ridicule.

**Lesson:** If you are going to follow Christ truly, count the cost first, for to be a true Christian is not a life of ease.

Someone has said that the joining fee for being a Christian is nothing, for salvation is freely given to all who trust in Jesus, but the annual subscription from then on is everything, for our all is to be given and used for Christ.

True believers are never lost, and true believers are given the gracious help of the Holy Spirit so they can indeed live for Christ all through their lives. **BUT** many have at first appeared to be true Christians, like this crowd, but after a while have forsaken Christ and proved themselves not to be genuine. (Think about these: the parable of the Sower; Demas; Judas Iscariot.)

#### **b) Parable 2 - The King Preparing For War (Luke 14:31-33)**

Army intelligence is vital for war preparations. This king learned that his enemy had twice as many soldiers as he had and, therefore, needed to consider carefully if he really could defeat the enemy who was coming to attack him. Any sensible and wise king, seeing that he could not possibly win, will surrender peacefully to his opponent, thus saving many lives. This king could not stay neutral, he had to act - fight and lose life, or surrender and save life.

So the lost sinner needs to seek reconciliation with God (Luke 14:32). Failure is to lose life, surrender is to save life. Therefore, be sure you seek God by following Jesus - failure will be disastrous for you. But to be his true follower, Jesus demands whole-hearted loyalty to him;

total self-denial; total surrender of our lives, time, talents, resources - to be entirely at the disposal of Jesus. Without this no one can be Christ's disciple.

### **c) Parable 3 - The Tasteless Salt (Luke 14:34-35)**

Salt is useful in a number of ways, one of which is to flavour food and so it is very useful in cooking. But flavourless salt is useless, worth less than things fit for the manure heap!

A true disciple of Jesus, therefore, will be genuine and not merely outwardly formal like one of an uncommitted crowd. Jesus looks for the salt of sincerity, truthfulness, honesty, depth, and substance in their desire and determination in following him. The salt of true allegiance to Jesus marks out the true Christian believer from those who are not genuine, even though they may claim to be! A true Christian believer will put Jesus first and follow him whatever the cost.

### **4) Application**

These three parables challenge us with the question, 'Are we like that?' The lesson taught is that the cost of discipleship is our all. Our undivided devotion is to be given to Christ. All our plans are to be submitted to his will. All our resources are to be at his disposal. He is to be pre-eminent over all others, even our families. Therefore, we must consider the cost of following him.

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### **Chapter 4 Luke 15:1-7: The Parable of the Lost Sheep**

### **1) The Setting**

The setting for this parable is the same as for the lost coin and the lost sons also in same chapter. Jesus was teaching the people at a meal (Luke 15:1-2), and the scene had two parts to it.

The first is a delightful aspect. The tax collectors and sinners were all around him. These were the despised people. Tax collectors were hated as traitors because they worked for the Romans, the army of occupation. Also, many of them cheated and became very wealthy through over-charging the tax levies and keeping the extra for themselves. The sinners were the rest of the people who were despised by the religious leaders, especially by the Pharisees. They included the immoral, criminals, prostitutes and ordinary people who did not follow the interpretation of God's law given by these religious leaders.

Eating with them had particular significance in the Middle East. To invite someone to a meal was to honour them. Therefore, for Jesus to eat with such people meant he was welcoming them and pardoning them. Note that it was Jesus who welcomed sinners to this meal, not them welcoming him! What grace! Jesus came to call sinners to repentance. Therefore, this was a delightful scene indeed, full of hope and mercy.

The second aspect, however, was very distressing. The Pharisees and teachers of the law, the so-called spiritual

leaders of the people, muttered. They grumbled and complained that Jesus was spending time with such disreputable and undeserving people. They thought they were far more deserving of his attention, and were filled with pride and jealousy. To eat with such people was unheard of in their circles! In their thinking it would not have been quite so bad if these tax collectors and sinners had welcomed Jesus, but for him to welcome them went against all their social and spiritual customs. Therefore, they despised Jesus, when really they should have rejoiced that he had come to help such needy people.

Jesus is the Saviour of sinners, and he changes lives ruined by sin, bringing repentance and pardon, and making men and women new - just what these people needed. The Pharisees and teachers of the law were also sinners, for all have sinned (Romans 3:23). Their very pride and contempt and refusal to help this group turn back to God and begin living in the right way was itself a serious sin! But they were too proud to admit it.

But Jesus knew how these men were thinking, and addresses the problem directly with three parables - the lost sheep, the lost silver, and the lost sons. These three parables are a defence of his whole mission and, therefore, a defence of the gospel itself. In this chapter we shall look at the first of these.

## 2) The Parable (Luke 15:4-6)

Jesus said, *“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”*

## 3) The Meaning

Jesus began in his familiar way of including his very critics in this parable, *“Suppose one of you...”* (Luke 15:4a). This was designed to gain their attention, for he was talking about something familiar to them as well as talking about them. He also did this to gain their agreement to what he was about to say, and this in turn made the point he was making all the more forceful.

We need, at this point, to understand the way a typical shepherd went about his business. In some countries today sheep are kept in fields with hedges or walls around them and a strong gate to keep them from wandering. But this was not so in the Middle East. There the shepherd wandered around the open countryside with the sheep, herding them to fresh pasture each day, and often bringing them home at night.

Interestingly, although the shepherd is honoured in the Old Testament, where even God is described as our Shepherd

(Psalm 23:1, Isaiah 40:11, Ezekiel 34:15-16), in New Testament times the teachers of the Old Testament law considered shepherds as unclean or sinful! So when Jesus addressed these Pharisees as shepherds, "*one of you*" (Luke 15:4a), it would not only have shocked them, but was a direct attack on their harsh critical attitude to those in certain professions and whom they considered "*sinner*s"! By doing this, Jesus was coming to the main point of the parable. But we must first return to the activities of the Middle Eastern shepherd.

Very often a flock of sheep was owned by the extended family, with one of them being the shepherd. Therefore, his loss would also be their loss, making the situation one of great concern. Interestingly again, Jesus puts the blame for the lost sheep on the shepherd - "*one of you ... loses*". The shepherd had been negligent. What Jesus is doing is blaming these very Pharisees for their failure to care for the spiritual needs of these people! Jesus, however, stands in sharp contrast to them, because he is the Good Shepherd. He laid down his life for his sheep (John 10:11), and sought out, and continues to seek the lost in order to save them.

An eastern shepherd has commented that a lost sheep would eventually lie down and bleat, refusing to move. That is why the shepherd is forced to carry it, often over very long distances (Luke 15:5). After the sheep has been found, it must be restored and carried back home. And that burden of restoration can be quite heavy. The eastern

shepherd even brings back a dead sheep, or its remains, to prove he had not sold it! In the parable, the shepherd rejoices (Luke 15:5) even though he knows he has a long burdensome journey home.

Normally, each flock would be under the care of at least two people, the shepherd and his helper or helpers. Therefore, the rest would be left in safety and not abandoned in the open country. They would be brought home and the family and village would be told that the other man had gone on alone to look for the lost sheep. This would put him in considerable danger of attack from wild animals and, therefore, the whole community would be concerned for him. So his safe return would be a cause of double joy - first for his own safety, and then that the sheep had been found. Although we know this to have been the normal practice, it must be stated that the parable tells us nothing about the ninety-nine sheep, except that they were left in open country. The reader is left to assume the rest.

However, the restored sheep was an occasion of joy for all the neighbours. In a similar way, the sinner is lost from the people of God, who are often called the 'redeemed'. Therefore, it is right that they share in the joy when a sinner is restored, and not criticise like these Pharisees were doing!

Jesus went even further in Luke 15:7, by revealing that there is rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents! In other words, God is glad!

#### 4) Application

We see the gracious love of the Lord Jesus Christ wonderfully illustrated in this parable. He seeks out sinners in order to save them, and does not wait for them to find their own way back, which they are unable to do, and often refuse to do! Our gracious God wants sinners back and, therefore, takes all the steps necessary to achieve this. His love seeks the sinner before he repents. Jesus gladly took the burden of restoring lost men and women. He gladly bore our sins in his body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). Amazing!

We also see the great need for sinners to repent (Luke 15:7). All men need to repent for all men are sinners. Isaiah tells us in Isaiah 53:6: *“We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all”*. These Pharisees and teachers of the law thought themselves above the need for repentance, but they were not. There really are no ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent (Luke 15:7). There is profound irony in Jesus’ words aimed at these self-righteous men. For Jesus, all are like lost sheep and all need to repent. Indeed, this repentance is the result of Christ’s love seeking them out. These Pharisees should have been glad that Jesus was restoring sinners, and shared in the work themselves, for this work is dear to the heart of God. Sadly, they did the opposite.

This parable is full of hope for sinful men, and also very challenging for the people of God.

- i. For sinful men, how comforting to know that Jesus is both able and willing to save those who are lost. The response that shows he has sought someone out and saved them is that they repent of their sins. Dear reader, have you turned to him in repentance yet?
- ii. And if you have, and are now one of the people of God, do you rejoice when you discover that someone has become a follower of Jesus? And what do you do to tell the lost about him? It is all too easy to do nothing, and even be critical of someone who tells you they have become a Christian believer. If this is the case, then we are just like the Pharisees and teachers of the law!

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### Chapter 5 Luke 15:8-10: The parable of the lost coin

#### 1) The Setting

Luke 15:8 begins with the words *“or suppose”*, linking it with the previous parable of the lost sheep. Jesus had been teaching the tax collectors and sinners. These were despised by the religious leaders of the day, who really should have been busy helping them to turn from their sinful ways. But we read in Luke 15:2 that these leaders were very unhappy and critical of Jesus’ activities, *“But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This*

*man welcomes sinners, and eats with them.’”* Their harsh, unloving attitude brought a quick response from Jesus in the form of three parables, the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost sons. These parables teach us about the great love that the Lord Jesus has for men and women who have failed God and done many wrong things. He came into the world to save sinners, and, therefore, spent his energies on rescuing such people from their sad spiritual state. These parables are a description of and a defence of his mission.

## **2) The Parable**

Jesus said, *“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

The description of this woman’s house was typical of so many in the time Jesus was on earth. Many houses had no windows at all, and those that did had only very small ones. So the inside of a house was very dark even in the daytime. Also, the floors had no covering, simply the dry earth, which would be hard packed and also have a fine dust from being walked on. Therefore, if something was dropped on the floor, not only would it be hard to see because of the lack of light, but it could easily be covered by the dusty earth. So this woman lit her lamp - probably a clay vessel with a wick and some olive oil for fuel - and

got her broom and began to sweep the floor and to look carefully for her lost silver coin.

## **3) The Meaning of the Parable**

To get the full force of Jesus’ teaching we need to understand something of the significance of the silver coin lost by this woman. In the peasant community where a village was self-supporting by making its own cloth and growing its own food, money was very scarce. For normal daily life in the village money was not required, because people would share or barter for things needed. For example, someone who wove a piece of cloth might exchange it for food of a similar value. Now, the loss of money at any time is a sad event, but when money is scarce, its loss is felt considerably more. Added to this, coins were often part of a woman’s jewellery or dowry. Even today in the Middle East, Bedouin women wear their dowry in the form of coins hanging on their veils. Village women wear them on necklaces. Therefore, the value of this coin was much more than its monetary worth. It was something very precious.

The lesson we learn from this is that people, even sinful people, are very valuable and precious to the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not despise them, but considered them of great worth.

Another thing to keep in mind is that village women were very restricted in their movements. For most of the time they were confined to the home. So this woman knew the

coin was somewhere in the house, and could be found with diligent searching. Therefore, she searches carefully.

As an aside, Jesus' mention of a woman in such a story was something quite new for the Pharisees who considered women as inferior! Jesus gives women their proper role and value. The gospel of Christ elevates women, not the reverse.

In the same way that the woman searched for what was lost, so Jesus came to where lost men and women were. What grace! He took, and still takes, the initiative.

The lost silver coin was somewhere in the dirt on the floor. This is a perfect illustration of the way sin spoils men and women. It drags us down into the dirt and mire of wickedness. Here are some examples from the Bible itself. It brought Cain down to murder his brother Abel (Genesis 4). It brought King David down into adultery (2 Samuel 11 & 12). It brought King Ahab down to steal Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21). It brought Peter down to lie about his relationship with Jesus (Luke 22:54f). And sin is still bringing men and women down. Lost sinners are dirty inside, stained, marred and ruined by sin.

Further, the lost coin had absolutely no power or ability to rescue itself. It was lifeless and powerless! Its discovery and rescue depended entirely on the person searching for it - in this case the woman. This is a graphic picture of the effects of sin on the human heart. Sin is so devastating that it leaves us spiritually lifeless and powerless to rescue

ourselves from it at all! (See Ephesians 2:1 and Colossians 2:13.) This challenges the arrogance of man's pride, for man thinks he can do anything himself, but he cannot. This is why we need someone to come and save us. This is why we need the Lord Jesus Christ to rescue us from our sin. We cannot rescue ourselves. But, mercifully, this was why Jesus spent time teaching the way of salvation to the tax collectors and sinners. He showed them their need to turn from their sinful ways in repentance and to follow him.

The effect of the woman's diligent searching was that the lost silver was found, and her joy was so great that she had to share it with others (Luke 15:9). The effect of Jesus' seeking lost sinners is the same. They are found by him and they repent. They actually turn from their sins and turn to God. And the great result of this is that there is rejoicing in heaven (Luke 15:10). Note carefully Jesus' words, *"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"*. The angels are the servants of God who surround his throne and do his bidding. But notice, it is not just the angels who rejoice, but that joy is shared by the one in whose presence they live - God himself is glad! Through Christ, God receives sinful men. He welcomes all who truly repent.

#### **4) Application**

- i. The great mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ is displayed in this parable. He comes to the unworthy, the helpless

and hopeless, and saves them from their sin - its guilt, its power and its penalty.

- ii. The great sins of these Pharisees and teachers of the law are exposed by this passage. They despised those whose lives had been ruined by sin and did absolutely nothing to help them turn back to God. Then added to that, they criticised Jesus, and by so doing they were criticising God, and were seen to oppose him. We must ensure we never become like these men.
- iii. The great hope that the gospel of Christ crucified brings to needy sinners is also revealed. Others may despise them and pass them by, but not Jesus. Therefore, if you are a lost sinner then turn to him in repentance, and live.

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## **Chapter 6 Luke 15:11-32: The parable of a father and his lost sons**

### **1) Introduction**

Jesus was continuing the theme taken up in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost silver, God's great love for lost sinners. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost by bringing them to repentance. He was teaching the tax collectors and sinners with the purpose of restoring them to God, and for this he had been harshly criticised by the religious leaders, the Pharisees and teachers of the law. These men should have done all they could to bring the people back from their life of disobedience and sin against God. They should have helped them to see how they had

grieved God, and were in danger of his judgment and, therefore, in need of repenting of their own sinful way of living before it was too late. Tragically, they did nothing to improve the situation, but Jesus did, hence their criticism of him (Luke 15:1-2).

This is now the third parable on this theme of the restoration of sinful men to God. This threefold emphasis indicates how important this matter is, that the Lord Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). These three parables magnify the grace of God. Indeed, unless sinners turn to God in repentance and put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, they can never experience God's forgiveness and will perish. Therefore, there is a great need for Christian believers today to engage in the great work of helping sinful men to become followers of Jesus.

So we come to the longest of the parables in Luke's gospel, the parable of a father and his lost sons. This is often called the parable of 'The Prodigal Son'. 'Prodigal' is an old English word meaning wasteful, and was used to describe someone who squandered their money. However, this title only focuses on one of the three characters in the parable, so we have chosen to call it the parable of 'A father and his lost sons'.

### **2) The Parable**

Jesus said, *“There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.*

*“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

*“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ So he got up and went to his father.*

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

*But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.*

*“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come home,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’*

*“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’*

*“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”*

### **3) The Meaning**

This parable has a wealth of teaching on the whole matter of how God welcomes repentant sinners, therefore, we shall consider it in three sections, looking at each of the main characters in turn.

### [A] The Wasteful Son

#### a. His sinful rebellion (Luke 15:11-13)

The parable begins with a typical family scene in Luke 15:11: *“There was a man who had two sons”*. This description could lead us to think of a normal happy family, but all was not well in this home, as the parable reveals.

The younger of the two sons was restless, dissatisfied with life at home, with the result that he rebelliously kicked against it. He selfishly wanted to go his own way, regardless of the pain this would cause to the rest of the family, his father in particular. In his thinking, real freedom and happiness was to be found outside of the family fold and away from his father’s influence and directions. He had concluded proudly that his own way was much better.

This became evident in his request to his father (Luke 15:12): *“Father, give me my share of the estate.”* This request not only indicated his selfishness and greed, but also his total disregard for and rejection of his father! In the Middle East no one would make such a request. It was unheard of, because it really indicated the younger son wished his father was dead! No one would dare ask a

living parent for his share of the inheritance. Should anyone venture to do so he would risk the wrath not only of his father, but also of the community? Yet that was how far this son had fallen and how severe his sinful rebellion was! On occasions, when a father knew he was dying, it was not unusual for him to declare his will concerning his property and how it was to be distributed among his children once he had died, but his children could not sell that property until their father’s death. But this son’s rebellion was so great; he ignored all of that in order to take his money and leave. It was behaviour of the worst kind.

He also did not care about the difficulties this would cause to the family business if part of the land was sold, nor did he consider the heartache he would cause his father by rejecting him in this way. He was a proud, conceited, arrogant and rebellious young man, and took all he had and went as far away as he could (Luke 15:13). He emigrated to another country!

This man is a sad yet accurate illustration of any sinner’s heart. A sinner is someone who rebels against God, who refuses to live under his conditions of love and who kicks against doing things God’s way, even though it is best. The lost proudly and blatantly disregard God completely, yet selfishly still want the best of all that God can give. Whenever we sin it is to treat God with the greatest disrespect, and the sinful man really wants to live as far away from God as possible.

Before looking at the consequences of his behaviour two other things need to be considered that are quite remarkable. First is the fact that his father did not get angry and discipline this ungrateful son harshly and deprive him of any inheritance at all. Instead, he allowed him the freedom to reject his father, and that was an amazing demonstration of the father's love! He loved his son enough to let him go, even though the cost to him personally was very high. Then, secondly, the man's other son also received his share of the inheritance (v12c), even though he did not ask for it. The custom of the day would have expected him to refuse to accept it until his father had died. Also he should have remonstrated with his brother and sought to reconcile him to his father. However, he did neither! He remained silent and, in effect, was just as guilty as his younger brother for condoning what had taken place. Equally, he was not in a right relationship with his father nor his brother (the very opposite to Psalm 133:1!). This will be revealed more clearly as we go through the parable.

### **b) His sad decline (Luke 15:13-16)**

Sin always has a destructive effect on us, though at first it might not seem to be so. The younger son left home, and in another country, far away from the restraints of home, he began to live wildly. He seemed to be having a marvellous time. He did just as he liked, and how free he seemed to be! How enjoyable his sin appeared. Indeed, the Bible speaks of sin in these very terms, when referring to godly

Moses. We read in Hebrews 11:25: "*He chose rather to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy **the pleasures of sin** for a short time.*"

Sin can be very enjoyable at times, but that pleasure does not last long. Sin has a sting in its tail! We are told he squandered his money, and soon it ran out. He wasted everything, losing it all and leaving himself destitute (Luke 15:14a). Then a famine struck the land where he had gone, and he began to be in need. Any friends he may have made in his sinful pleasure were now absent. No one wanted to give him a helping hand. He discovered painfully that life in the distant country away from his father had absolutely nothing to offer him. How misguided he had been! Penniless, hungry, and in desperation he was driven to look after pigs. He was so hungry he was ready to eat their food, but no one gave him any. How low he had sunk! For a Jew this was the depths of humiliation and abhorrence, because pigs were considered unclean (Leviticus 11:7) and to be avoided at all costs. What ruin this young man's folly and rebellion had brought him! He reaped what he sowed (see Galatians 6:7-10). He was in worse bondage now than ever before at home. What misery had come to him! One Christian writer has aptly written, "*There is a high cost in low living*".

This is where sin always leads - downwards. Sooner or later it catches up with us, and when it does the consequences are awful.

**c) His repentance (Luke 15:17-20)**

It was when he was in misery and despair that we read in Luke 15:17, “*He came to his senses*”. In a way it was sad that this had to happen before he considered his sinfulness and folly. Sin has the nasty habit of distorting our view of the truth and deceiving our already deceitful hearts into thinking all is well with us when the opposite is the truth. But, thankfully, he did come to his senses before it was too late.

He began to think about all he had done. He realised how foolish he had been, and that he had only himself to blame for his sorrowful situation. He realised the servants at home were far better off than he was, when he had once thought that he had suffered as a son! He knew how wrong he had been, and worse, that he had sinned. This he now honestly and sorrowfully confesses; he had sinned against heaven and his father (Luke 15:18). He had done this, the guilt was all his, he could blame no one else. He had first broken God’s law, and had despised his father. He was the wretch who had lived so wrongly. He was completely humbled, and refused to go back as the same proud, arrogant and stubborn son who had left home. He knew himself to be so unworthy that he felt utterly unfit to be called a son any more (Luke 15:19). He considered it would be a great mercy if he was employed as a servant.

Having sorted all this out in his heart and mind, he put it into practice (Luke 15:20). He actually forsook all his sinful past and went back home. The lesson is simply this:

repentance means more than recognising our sin and being sorry for it. It also means forsaking it and turning to God. 2 Corinthians 7:10: “*Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*” (Contrast the different responses to sin by Peter and Judas Iscariot.) Unless we forsake our sin, we have not repented. It is never easy to own up to being wrong, yet it is essential if we are to experience God’s forgiveness.

Thankfully this man did, and he got up and went back home (Luke 15:20).

**[B] The Response of the Father (Luke 15:11-31)**

We have already seen something of this father’s love for his foolish son by his willingness to let him leave home, as painful as that was for him. He could so easily have burst out with justifiable anger and disinherited his son! We now begin to see the full extent of this father’s love, and also the main point that Jesus is making in this parable.

**a) The welcome he gave his son (Luke 15:20)**

We read in Luke 15:20, “*So he (the wasteful son) got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to kiss his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*”

No doubt all sorts of questions must have been in the young man’s mind. Will my father listen to me? Will he

accept what I say? Will he throw me out? For after all, his father would have been fully justified in doing so, considering his son's appalling behaviour. Remember, it was the father who had been wronged, injured, ill treated and despised. It was the father's money that he had misused and wasted. But the response of his father was not like that at all. When he was a long way off, his father saw him.

We can picture the scene: the younger son trudging back slowly, weak from hunger, head bowed, utterly ashamed of his past, fearing the worst. And the father looking anxiously and spotting his son long before the son sees him. So moved was the man by the sight of his son his heart is filled with compassion (Luke 15:20). NOTE THAT - compassion! Not criticism, not condemnation, but great concern and love. His son was not rebuked, nor turned away. Instead, the father did something that was absolutely unheard of. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him! The picture of someone running might not seem significant to us at first, but in the Middle East it was considered most humiliating for an older man to run in public. Indeed, village elders have been dismissed because they walked too quickly! But this father ignored what people may say or think, and ran out to meet his son - and he did this in the open for all to see. How intensely he loved his son, more than anything he deserved. Already it was evident that in his heart he had forgiven his erring son.

### **b) His willingness to hear his son's confession (Luke 15:21)**

Carefully, his son begins to confess his sins, and how true his words were, "*I have sinned against heaven and against you*". How that one sentence sums up all his wicked, rebellious and wasteful behaviour. He also acknowledged to his father his total unworthiness, "*I am no longer worthy to be called your son*". He knew he deserved nothing and felt himself unfit to be a son any more. And his father graciously waits and listens. He does not castigate his son because he had no need to, as his son had clearly repented.

This is just like God when we return to him (1 John 1:9). He graciously waits and hears our confession of sin.

### **c) The restoration he made (Luke 15:22-24)**

Before the son was able to utter the request to make him one of the hired servants, his father interrupted. Such was his father's joy, and so complete was his forgiveness, that orders were given to restore his son to his honoured place in the family. He was not a slave but a son.

The best robe would have been his father's robe which was worn when he welcomed guests to a feast. The ring meant he was trusted in a remarkable way, and the shoes indicated he was a free man of the house, not a slave. Using these items Jesus is illustrating the complete acceptance and restoration of the son, which in turn indicates the enormity of the father's love for him. Love

beyond anything anyone would have expected. Truly remarkable love.

The killing of the fatted calf and the feast that followed, would have this son as the most honoured guest! And such a feast would have been shared by the whole community, as about a hundred people would be needed to eat such a calf.

The cause for such joy and celebration was stated by the father. Luke 15:24: *“For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”*

All of this is exactly how God receives and rejoices over repentant sinners. He is far more ready to forgive than we are to be forgiven. The misery we bring on ourselves because of our sin, only serves to draw forth his compassion. As we confess our sin to him and forsake it, he completely forgives us. He does not reproach and punish us, though we deserve it. Neither does he make us slaves. Rather he accepts us fully in Christ as his beloved children (Gal 4:4-7), and lavishes his blessings on us. When God forgives, all our sin is forgiven and no longer held against us. Such is the overwhelming love of God, which is displayed supremely for us in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus himself.

This is illustrative of the amazing and lovely words of Isaiah 55:7: *“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and he will*

*have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”*

### **[C] The Other Son (Luke 15:11-12 & 25-32)**

We have already seen something of the other son’s wrong relationship with both his father and his brother from verses 11 and 12. He accepted his share of the inheritance, when really proper love and respect for his father would have demanded that he refused this until his father had actually died. Also he did nothing to try and reconcile his brother to his father. But what we have seen as implicitly wrong with his attitude to his father and brother by his silence, now becomes crystal clear in Luke 15:25f. In addition, we see also his self-righteousness and pride as he responds to his father’s incredible display of forgiving and restoring love.

#### **a) His inquiry (Luke 15:25-27)**

He had been working in the field, as he seems to have done each day. His curiosity was roused, however, when he neared the house and heard the music and dancing at the celebration feast for his brother. He inquired what this was all about without entering the home. Already this was an indication all was not well with this son, for if he was in a happy relationship within the family he would have entered into the rejoicing, but instead he was suspicious.

Calling one of the servants he discovered what was going on. He was then told the good news about his brother’s

return and his father's response. It was now that his true state of heart became evident.

**b) His angry self-righteousness (Luke 15:28-30)**

His immediate response was not thankfulness and eagerness to welcome his brother home, but anger. Not only that, but he also refused to join the celebration, and would not even enter the house! Normally, the eldest son at such a celebration would act as a semi-host and have a position of importance. He was acting like a spoilt child, and worse, was full of hatred. And as we shall see, that hatred was directed at both his father and his brother!

By staying outside he wanted to humiliate his father by insulting him at the banquet. This was unheard of disrespect! His initial response brought his father out to him (Luke 15:28). This was a most gracious act on behalf of his father, indicating he was not preferring the younger son over his brother. Further, the father pleaded with him, rather than rebuking him. The word used is from the same root as that used to describe the ministry of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter or Counsellor, and means one called alongside to help. The father got alongside his eldest son to plead, urge and encourage him to come and join the celebrations.

It was at this point that the elder brother revealed the true condition of his own heart, and his own relationship to his father and brother (Luke 15:29). He spoke to his father in a most disrespectful way. *“Look! All these years I’ve been*

*slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.”* Note that no title was used for his father, just a rude “you”. This was a great insult in the Middle East, and still is in many cultures across the world today. Further, he obviously had not been motivated by love for his father during those years, but instead, considered his father as an austere slave driver! He had worked begrudgingly, with a heart full of loathing, despising his father intensely. Now this all emerges in this angry outburst! He no longer considered himself a son in the family but a slave, just like his younger brother thought at the beginning of the parable! He had been as much estranged from his father while living at home, as his younger brother had been in the distant country. The only difference was that it was obvious how the younger son felt. However, this older brother hadn't declared his feelings, but covered them up till now. He was as lost as his younger brother.

In addition he was self-righteous, for he claimed to have obeyed his father perfectly! He failed to realise that more than mere outward obedience is expected of a son. His disrespect at this very time was a case of disobedience (Exodus 20:12). Added to that, he also complained bitterly that he had not been given a goat (an inferior animal to a fatted calf) to celebrate with his friends. This little phrase indicates his friends were not his father, his brother and the guests, but others outside of the family and community circle. He accused his father of being biased and miserly, and not having any care and concern for him at all! How wrong he was! Already his father had given him his share

of the estate, which in Jewish law meant, as the older son, he had received twice the amount given to his brother (Deuteronomy 21:17). In effect, though he did not say these words, he wished his father was dead so that he could do what he wanted with the estate! So he was no different at all to his younger brother!

He then turned his hostility on his brother (Luke 15:30). In fact, he did not call him his brother, but *“this son of yours”*. He completely disassociated himself from his brother. He despised him, and considered him totally unworthy of any kindness at all.

Then he turned on his father again with the words *“... you killed the fattened calf for him!”* He was really saying that his father was at fault! Again, he was also showing his self-righteousness. He thought he was much better than his brother and, therefore, deserved more. How little this older son understood true love and the sinfulness of his own heart!

### c) His father’s response (Luke 15:31-32)

His father replied, *“My son ... you are always with me, and everything I have is yours”*. This was quite remarkable, because the father would have been fully justified in making a public disgrace of his elder son for the way he had spoken to him, but he did not. There was no rebuke, no criticism and no rejection! He loved both of his sons. He was not biased towards the younger at all. This elder son had failed to grasp that his father loved him as well. It

was not a case that one or the other would be loved, but both. The father longed for both his sons to be glad and joyful.

Then he firmly, but graciously, pressed the point home that any response other than the one he had shown when his younger son had returned would have been wrong. The change that had taken place in his younger son’s heart could only ever be a source for rejoicing. Luke 15:32: *“But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”* The father in no way condoned his younger son’s sinful life, but he had to rejoice at his repentance. The younger son was a changed man, changed inwardly, and that was good. This was the source of this joy, not the meal and feasting, which the older son seemed to think was the only cause for joy with his friends. The older son had completely failed to understand the momentous thing that had taken place in his brother’s heart. In effect, this older son was also dead. The father was giving a cry from his heart for his older son to understand the nature of grace, and to be reconciled as his younger son had been. And by saying to him, *“this brother of yours”*, he was reminding his eldest son that the younger son was still his brother and should be treated as such.

### 4) Application

i. So it is with God. He delights to see sinful men repent and turn from their sinful ways to follow him. He welcomes them with open arms. What hope this brings to

the lost today, whose lives have been ruined by sinful rebellion against God. God in his grace delights to welcome such needy sinners who repent. What God has done and how we should respond to it has been helpfully described in this hymn by Emmanuel T. Sibomana who lived in Burundi, Africa.

*“O how the grace of God  
amazes me!  
It loosed me from my bonds  
and set me free!  
What made it happen so?  
'Twas His love, this much I know  
set me, as now I show,  
at liberty.*

*My God has chosen me,  
though one of nought,  
to sit beside my King  
in heaven's court.  
Hear what my Lord has done;  
O the love that made Him run  
to meet His erring son!  
This has God wrought.*

*Not for my righteousness,  
for I have none,  
but for His mercy's sake,  
Jesus, God's Son,  
suffered on Calvary's tree –*

*crucified with thieves was He -  
great was His grace to me,  
his wayward one!*

*And when I think of how, at Calvary,  
he bore sin's penalty instead of me,  
amazed, I wonder why he,  
the sinless One, should die  
for one so vile as I:  
my Saviour he.*

*Now all my heart's desire  
is to abide  
in Him, my Saviour dear,  
in Him to hide.  
My shield and buckler He,  
cov'ring and protecting me;  
from Satan's darts I'll be  
safe at His side.*

*Lord Jesus, hear my prayer,  
thy grace impart;  
when evil thoughts arise  
through Satan's art,  
Oh, drive them all away  
and do thou, from day to day,  
keep me beneath thy sway,  
King of my heart.*

*Come now the whole of me,*

*eyes, ears and voice,  
join me, Creation all,  
with joyful noise:  
praise him who broke the chain  
holding me in sin's domain,  
and set me free again!  
Sing and rejoice!"*

If God welcomes sinners like this, we should never despise or reject any one who truly repents, whatever they may have done beforehand. Instead they should be welcomed, just as God welcomes them.

ii. This was a direct rebuke by Jesus of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They needed forgiveness as much as the people they were criticising Jesus for eating with! Yet at the same time, this was an appeal to them to respond to the grace of God, just as the tax collectors and sinners had done.

But we would be wrong to restrict it only to them. It applies to anyone who, in pride, is full of self-righteousness, and who despises others, refusing to help them repent, and refusing to welcome and rejoice over them when they do. All such rejection is terribly wrong and sinful! Indeed, it indicates the need for that very person to repent themselves and receive the mercy of Christ.

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