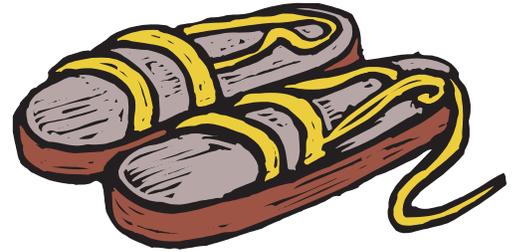




The Lost Son

Luke 15:11-32

In Luke 15:11-32, Jesus tells the parable of the lost son. Many people refer to this story as the story of the "prodigal son." Prodigal means wasteful, extravagant, or giving in abundance. People say the son was prodigal because of his wasteful spending. The truth might be better stated that the father was the prodigal one - lavishing his forgiveness and blessings on his undeserving son. Pray each day to talk to God about what you are learning.



Day #1: change of Heart

Have you ever saved up to buy a gift for someone? How did you feel when you gave them the gift? It is a great feeling to surprise someone you care about with a gift. What if that person came and *demand*ed that you give them a gift? Their lack of gratitude would certainly take all the joy out of the gift giving. We want to give out of love, not out of obligation. The younger son in this week's parable demanded his inheritance while his father was still living. This was almost never done. The son's attitude was certainly heart breaking for his father.

The younger son took all that his father gave him and set off for a country far away. His father was a wealthy man, with a good deal of property and many servants. Any such man would be well known in his community, and his children would be well known too. More than likely, the son went to a far away land so that no one would know him or his family. No one would be watching to see how he behaved, and no one could report to his father.

We don't know how long it took to waste all that his father had given him, but eventually it was all used up on "wild living." There was a severe famine, or lack of food, in the land. Because everyone in the land was suffering, it was difficult to find a job. The son finally found work feeding pigs. In the Jewish custom, pigs were unclean animals, and feeding them was almost unthinkable. This once-wealthy young man had reached the lowest point of his life.

Then something miraculous happened. Luke 15:17 says, "*He came to his senses.*" In an instant, this wayward son realized he was a sinner. He knew what he had done was sinful. It was sinful to be disrespectful to his father, it was sinful to be greedy, and it was wrong to waste his father's money on sinful things. He thought he knew best how to live his life, which is the sin of pride. *His way* led to ruin.

The realization that he was a sinner was the turning point in his life. The Bible hero, Paul, came to the same realization on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-18). God transformed Paul from a murderer of Christians to one of the greatest preachers of God's Word that the world has ever known. Each of us must come to this realization in our own life.

Has it ever occurred to you that you are a sinner? It only takes ONE sin to make you a sinner - one bad thought or deed, one disobedient act. But the awesome news is our Father is

Day #1 continued:

eagerly waiting for us to turn toward Him! He welcomes all who "come to their senses," and turn in trust and belief to Him.

Day #2: True confession

Have you ever had to confess something to someone? Maybe you did something at home you weren't supposed to do, or maybe even at school. Did you dread having to confess it? You might have even rehearsed what you wanted to say. Sometimes we rehearse so that we can explain something in a way that doesn't sound quite so bad. We think if we say it with just the right wording, the other person might get the impression that we aren't such a bad person. For instance, instead of saying, "I took your pencil because I thought it was cool." We might say, "Your pencil was right next to mine. They are close to the same color, and I picked yours up instead." Hmm... not *exactly* a lie, but not the truth either. That is not a confession. That is a cover-up.

God is not interested in a cover-up. He is interested in true repentance. Only true repentance leads to salvation. Look at the son's repentance.



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." - Luke 15:18-19 (NIV)

He was not trying to sugar-coat what he had done. He was not trying to look good in his father's eyes. He had blown it, and he was ready to admit it. It was not easy. In fact, he rehearsed what to say. But his father didn't need to hear him beg. The broken son was only half way through his prepared statement when his father interrupted. He called out for the servants to prepare the celebration feast.

Imagine the relief the son felt at that moment. He knew he was not even worthy to be called a "son" anymore. True, he did not *deserve* sonship. But the loving father, in his grace and mercy, welcomed him with open arms and showered his repentant son blessings. So it is with our heavenly Father when we come to Him in true repentance.

But God is faithful and fair. If we admit that we have sinned, he will forgive us our sins. He will forgive every wrong thing we have done. He will make us pure. - 1 John 1:9

Day #3: father's joy

Let's look at the young man's father. He was a man of considerable wealth. Jesus said he had an "estate." We know he had enough property that he needed hired-men to take care of it, and he had many servants. It is clear that he loved his son, but he allowed his child to decide his own future. The father gave his son a free choice. When his son demanded his share of the family inheritance, the father gave it to him. And he did not stop the son when he wanted to leave home.

What are some ways this father symbolizes our heavenly Father? Our Father is the owner of all things (Psalm 50:12), and He blesses His people (Psalm 33:12). He loves us, but we are free to make our own decisions. In His design of us, He gave us free choice. He will not stop us when we decide to go our own way (Isaiah 56:6).

The younger son sinned against his father, just as we choose to sin against our heavenly Father. In fact, the son continued to sin for a very long time, possibly for years. In Jesus' words, what was the father's response?

While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him. He was filled with tender love for his son. He ran to him. He threw his arms around him and kissed him. - Luke 15:20

Notice what Jesus said about the father. He saw the son while he was still a long way off. The loving father was actively looking for his rebellious son. Imagine, day after day he would look out into the distance, hoping one day to see his son returning. When the father finally saw him, he could not contain his excitement. He ran out to greet the son, lavishing him with affection. It is the same with our heavenly Father.

The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. - Psalm 14:2 (NIV)

The father was so overwhelmed with joy that he threw a huge party to celebrate his son's return. It was not just a matter of his son's *location*, as if he had returned from a long trip. The father's joy came from the change in his son's heart. He proclaimed, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again."

I tell you, it will be the same in heaven. There will be great joy when one sinner turns away from sin. - Luke 15:7a

Remember this is a parable - a story with a higher meaning. It is straight from Jesus' mouth! He lived in heaven. He KNOWS the Father! He has **SEEN** God searching for sinners! And Jesus celebrates with God and the angels each time a sinner turns away from his sin.

Day #4: Judge Not

Have your parents ever said the words, "Stop whining"? The Pharisees and religious teachers were whining about Jesus. Jesus was gaining popularity and the religious leaders were taking notice of Him. As people crowded around to hear what Jesus had to say, the Pharisees and teachers watched critically. They were trying to catch Him doing something wrong so they could discredit His teaching.

Day #4 continued:

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear Him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." - Luke 15:1-2 (NIV)

It is ironic that the religious leaders would call any group of people "sinners" as if they, themselves, were not sinners. 1 Kings 8:46 tells us, "There is no one who does not sin." There is no one who can keep God's perfect law at all times. Of course the Pharisees were sinners. And one sin that is obvious here is their judgment of others. They are just like the older brother in the parable. He did not recognize sin in his own life either.

From the way these leaders sneered and looked down their noses when they saw Jesus spending time with sinners, it is obvious that they never did. How sad it must have been for a regular person - complete with sin - to need compassion from those entrusted to do God's work, but to receive judgment instead. And how welcome and refreshing the words of Jesus were. He brought them good news, not judgment.

For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. - John 12:47b

Pray and ask God to remind you of this verse any time you might look at someone with judgment. Instead of judging, be the one who brings others the good news of God's forgiveness.

Day #5: Lost coin

Jesus told a similar parable to the Pharisees and religious leaders in Luke 15:8-10:

Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. She will light a lamp and sweep the house. She will search carefully until she finds the coin. And when she finds it, she will call her friends and neighbors together. She will say, "Be joyful with me. I have found my lost coin."

I tell you, it is the same in heaven. There is joy in heaven over one sinner who turns away from sin.

What is the most valuable thing you have ever lost? Maybe it was a stuffed animal you couldn't sleep without, a video game, or even money. Think of how you felt while you were looking for it. If it was truly important, you may have felt all knotted up inside when you thought you might have to live without it. Often the entire family will be in on the search. It may take days or weeks to find it. How did it feel to find the item? You felt great relief and joy. You probably ran to tell everyone that your treasured possession was finally found.

This parable compares the joy of finding that lost item to God's joy when one sinner repents of their sin and seeks God's forgiveness. Our Creator is overjoyed to have His children back at home with Him - where they belong.

Pray and ask God to help you view lost people the way He does. Valuable, dearly loved, and worth searching for! He wants all lost people to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4). Ask God to help you lead others to Him.

