
Lesson Overview

Biblical Passage Luke 15:11-32

Supporting Passage Luke 15:1-10

Table Talk Question Can a Christian Feel Lost?

Memory Verse Luke 19:10

Biblical Truth Jesus emphasized the extent to which God will go to seek the lost.

Context Jesus continued to receive criticism from the Jewish leaders. One of the main charges the Jewish leaders held against Jesus was spending time with sinners. In response, Jesus told a parable about a rebellious son and a father's forgiveness to stress God's great love for those who move away from Him.

Learning Goals

- Students will understand God's compassion for those who are far from Him.
- Students will determine ways to apply God's compassion toward those who are dealing with sin.

Prayer Suggestions

As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for those in your group:

- Pray that your students will come to know just how measureless the love of God is.
- Pray that your students will experience God's love and mercy.
- Pray that your students will value how much God loves others.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

The Pharisees and teachers of the Law chastised Jesus for spending time with sinners. They even said that Jesus “**welcomes** sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). Most likely, they were referring to the tax collectors, who were known for their dishonesty. Many people considered them traitors since they were Jews who worked for the Roman government.

In Luke 15, Jesus told three parables with the same theme. In all three, something of value was lost. A shepherd left his flock to find one lost lamb. A woman searched her whole house to find one lost coin. A father rushed to meet his wayward son. In these parables, Jesus taught the grumbling Pharisees and scribes that heaven rejoices over sinners who come to **Repentance** and are restored to their Heavenly Father. In each parable, something was lost, then it was found, and celebration followed. In Luke 15, verses 6, 9, and 24 include rejoicing over finding the lost.

This passage in Luke captures an incredible teaching moment during Jesus’ ministry in which He revealed the Father’s concern for outcasts and His joy over their repentance. The compelling message is that God does not view sinners with the vengeance of the Pharisees. Rather, He longs for their return. His desire is not judgment but redemption.

Importance

This passage of Scripture is important because it reveals that God values people. Because **People are God's Treasure**, His love is not based upon our worthiness. Rather, God’s love is available to everyone who turns to Him, regardless of past mistakes or rebellion. In the parable, although the younger son left home and greatly disrespected his father, his father still received him with joy when he returned home. If learners do not understand **grace** as God’s unmerited favor, they will be caught in a works-based salvation. Even though the son forsook the family, the father treasured him and lavished him with love.

This passage also deals with **Salvation is by Faith Alone** and **The Church is God's Plan**.

Interpretation

Luke 15:11-12 Some have called this parable the Parable of the Prodigal Son; it is also called the Parable of the Lost Son. It follows the same theme as the parables about a lost sheep and a lost coin.

In the parable, a father had two sons. The younger son requested his **inheritance** early. As the younger son, he received one-third of the total value of his father’s estate. Once he received it, he left home and squandered the

inheritance. For a son to ask for his inheritance before his father's death would be as if he were wishing that his father were dead. Perhaps Jesus used these shocking actions to emphasize the son's willful sin.

Luke 15:13 The younger son left for a distant country, probably outside of the Jewish territory. When the son left his father's household, he was free to do as he pleased. So he took his inheritance and spent it "in wild living." Because the son moved to a distant, non-Jewish country, he would have faced many customs and life choices outside of his faith. When tempted, he succumbed to the temptations.

Luke 15:14-16 Then a famine hit. Through his indulgent lifestyle, the son had spent all of his money. Penniless and hungry, the son "hired himself out to a citizen of that country." The only job the son could find was feeding pigs. The job was considered degrading by most people. However, since the Jews considered pigs to be unclean animals, this was an especially degrading job for this young man.

The son's job was to feed pods, also known as John's Bread, to the pigs. The pods were fruit from a carob tree, looked like a locust, and was included as part of John the Baptist's diet. Pods were used to fatten pigs and to feed the very poor. Starving, the son realized that the pigs received better food and care than he did.

Luke 15:17-20 Hunger drove the son to take stock in his predicament. When he "came to his senses," he wanted to return to his father. Since he had already received his inheritance as a son, he never expected to obtain his former place among his father's household. He was only hoping to become a servant in his father's house, believing that to be a servant there would be better than where he was at the moment.

One of the story's most moving moments is found in verse 20. Upon the son's return, the father recognized him from a distance and ran out to meet him. In Jesus' culture, a Middle Eastern man would never run to a lesser person to show such affection, especially to a disloyal and disobedient son. Yet here the father welcomed his son back with a physical display of emotion.

Luke 15:21-24 The son had obviously thought through what he wanted to say to his father. He began by acknowledging his sin and asking for forgiveness. However, without letting the son finish his prepared speech, the father began to restore him. The father sent for a robe to demonstrate that the son was the guest of honor, a ring to demonstrate that the son was given the father's authority, and sandals to show that the son was a free man. The father restored to his son everything he had lost and accepted him back as an honored member of the family.

The father, just like the shepherd and the woman, rejoiced over his son's restoration. Like the shepherd and the woman, he celebrated with a party. People during the first century did not eat meat regularly. Therefore, a calf that was being "fattened" had been set aside for some future celebration. For this spontaneous celebration, the father told the servants to use the calf that had already been set aside for another event for this one. What had been lost was found! The celebration seems to have begun immediately.

Luke 15:25-32 The twist to this story occurred after this pinnacle of joy. The older brother, faithful to the father all these years, returned from the fields to the full-blown celebration. When he realized that his brother had returned and been accepted back into the family, he became bitter and refused to enter the house.

In contrast to the father's rejoicing, the older brother was angry at his brother's acceptance back into the family. In fact, he described his brother as having "squandered [the father's] property with prostitutes." (These details were not provided elsewhere in the story.)

Do not miss the significance of the older brother's refusal to share in the banquet. The boundaries of kinship were protected as people shared meals. The older brother's refusal to eat with his brother was symbolic. The

father had willingly shamed himself by running toward his younger son. He shamed himself again by leaving the party to plead with the older son (v. 28). The father was more concerned with the restoration of his family than with his own reputation.

Jesus left His parable's conclusion open and unresolved. Did the older son join the party and celebrate the restoration of his brother? Or did he distance himself even further, proving he was never really a part of the family? With this parable, Jesus was calling the scribes and Pharisees to rejoice at the salvation of the tax collectors and sinners. He was saying that it is necessary for all believers to celebrate the restoration of the lost.

Implications

Each of us has been like the younger son. Because of our own selfishness, we have willfully walked away from God to spend all He has given us on selfish indulgences. Then, beyond all hope, we have felt His embrace as we returned to Him. Can you remember the feeling of welcome you received from God? How can you make that welcome real to your students?

Like the older brother, we have felt the twinge of envy when our faithful service is overlooked. Sometimes another believer may be acknowledged—even promoted before us—by the Church. We might even secretly resent our lives of faithfulness when we could have been living indulgently ourselves. The Pharisees were called to rejoice at the sinners' return but felt no rush of pleasure. In what ways do you struggle with the older brother's resentment?

We never get to be the father in the story. But like the father, we do get to search for the lost. We get to remind those lost in lives of despair and shame where their true home is. And we may get to be there when the Father runs to embrace them. Are you searching for the lost? Do you have the same longing in your heart as your Father in heaven does? How can you inspire your students to feel that longing?

Teaching Plan

Connect

Review Questions

(5–8 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.

Print one copy of the “Review Questions” activity sheet for your use.

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide context for today’s lesson.

Master Teacher Option: Finding Things

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will locate a “lost” coin by the applause of their team.

Provide a penny and watch or timer.

Divide students into two teams. Direct each team to select a member to represent them. Say: **When the representatives leave, I will hide a penny somewhere in the classroom. The object of the game is for each team to help their representative find the penny by applauding louder as the representative gets closer.** Take both representatives out of the room and hide a penny. Tell each team they are not allowed to speak or give signals. Bring back both representatives, one at a time, and instruct them to find the penny. Use the timer to determine how long each representative took to find the penny. The team whose representative finds the coin in the shortest time wins.

Ask: **How did you celebrate when your representative found the penny?** Explain that today we will be discussing a story about a father who lost a son and celebrated when he was found.

Explore

Master Teacher Key Study: The Parable of Lost Things

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will study Luke 15:11–32 to explore the characteristics of both brothers in The Parable of the Lost Things.

Print one copy of the Master Teacher Key Study for your use. Provide a copy of the Student Worksheet

and a pen for each student.

Learning Goal: Students will understand God's compassion for those who are far from Him.

Pass out pens and copies of the Mast Teacher Student Worksheet. Then, use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Luke 15:11-32.

Transform

Deeper Discussion

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will examine their spiritual relationship with the Heavenly Father.

Provide pencils and paper for each student.

Learning Goal: Students will determine ways to apply God's compassion toward those who are dealing with sin.

Lead students to see that the two brothers represent two different viewpoints. Say: **The younger brother was broken; he knew he was lost. He turned away from life with his father. But he came back with a humble spirit, never expecting the father's grace. The older brother had been faithful, serving his father dutifully and living by the father's rules. But he became jealous when the younger son was taken in after having gone away. He was frustrated that his faithful service appeared to have gone unnoticed.**

Once you explain this to your students, ask them to consider their spiritual lives honestly. Ask:

- **Who do you identify with more, the older brother or the younger brother? How do you identify with the brother you chose?**
- **Who do you think was harder for the father to reach with his love, the older son or the younger? How does that compare to how God reaches us?**
- **How have you experienced your Heavenly Father's forgiveness and compassion?**

Give students pencils and paper. Ask them to write a prayer expressing which brother they chose and asking God to offer them forgiveness. After several minutes, encourage them to fold their prayers and put them in their Bibles.

Master Teacher Option: Creative Prayer

(5-10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will form prayers based on a single word.

Learning Goal: Students will determine ways to apply God's compassion toward those who are dealing

with sin.

Have students stand, holding the hand of the person next to them. Tell them that you are going to call out some words, one at a time. As you do, instruct students to take that word and form a prayer around it. (This may be a prayer of thanksgiving, or a prayer asking God to help them apply the action of the word.) Instruct them to pray silently to themselves. Use such words as: forgiveness, love, acceptance, treasure, repentance, return, run, and receive. (Example: You call out: "Forgiveness." A student might say: "Father, thank you for forgiving me of my sin against you.") After you have called out all of the words, close in prayer for your students.

Take Home Activity

Family Devotion

(10-15 minutes at home, easy set-up)

Distribute copies of the Family Devotion to students and encourage them to share the devotion with their family.

A copy of the Family Devotion will be included in your lesson PDF download.

REVIEW QUESTIONS

(5-8 minutes, easy set-up)

*Use these questions to review the content from Lesson 29: "The Parable of the Wedding Banquet"
The correct answer for each question is printed in bold, italic font.*

1. In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, the king was preparing the banquet for whom?
 - a. ***His son***
 - b. His daughter
 - c. His friend
 - d. His servant

2. In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, what happened when the king sent for his invited guests?
 - a. They came quickly.
 - b. They were afraid to come for fear of the king.
 - c. ***They simply did not come.***
 - d. They brought uninvited guests.

3. In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, what became of some of the servants who told the invited guests to come to the banquet?
 - a. They ran away.
 - b. They were offered new jobs.
 - c. They were mistreated and killed by the invited guests.
 - d. ***They were mistreated and killed by the invited guests.***

4. In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, whom did the king tell the servants to invite after his invited guests refused to attend?
 - a. People from foreign countries
 - b. ***People in the streets, both good and bad***
 - c. Field hands
 - d. Nobility from surrounding kingdoms

5. In Jesus' Parable of the Wedding Banquet, what became of the guest who dressed inappropriately?
 - a. He was asked to leave quietly.
 - b. He was given wedding clothes to wear.
 - c. He decided to leave of his own volition.
 - d. ***He was to be bound hand and foot and thrown out into the darkness.***

THE PARABLE OF LOST THINGS

(15-20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

Use this outline and the Biblical Commentary to prepare to share the truths of this passage with students. Download the Master Teacher Worksheet. Print a copy for each student. Encourage students to take notes on their worksheets as you teach. The underlined words in the Master Teacher Key Study correspond to the blanks on the worksheet.

Introduction: In the movie *National Treasure*, the main character was consumed with finding a treasure he believed had been hidden for generations. In his search, he had to overcome numerous obstacles that ranged from being stranded in the Arctic to stealing the original copy of the Constitution. The character went to such great lengths because the treasure held great value to him.

To show the great value God places on lost souls, Jesus told three parables in a row dealing with lost things. The final parable, which we will study today, clearly shows our Heavenly Father's great concern for the return of His earthly sons and daughters.

1. The younger son was lost (Luke 15:11-16).

- The younger son's share of the estate would have been about one third.
- To ask for the estate prior to the father's death would have been similar to wishing the father were already dead.
- He hit rock bottom. Bankrupt, he had to hire himself out to a Gentile and work with pigs. In Jewish culture, this was as low as he could go.
- The lost son was not even allowed to eat the food he was giving the pigs. What a contrast: the son had feasted at his father's table, but now he was willing to eat slop.

Description: The younger son came to be identified as the lost son because he wanted nothing to do with his father. He demanded what he thought was owed to him, then used his own wisdom to decide where to go and what to do with it. His determination to live on his own soon left him poor, hungry, and homeless.

Illustration: The famous Christian author and apologist C.S. Lewis once said, "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing."

Interaction: Prompt students to call out some of the consequences that result from rebelling against parents or other authority figures.

Application: While it is right to think of people as saved or lost when it comes to salvation in Christ, it is more accurate to characterize them as spiritually alive or spiritually dead. To be a nonbeliever in Christ is to be spiritually dead because the person is basically an enemy of the ways of the Author of Life and the Redeemer of all.

2. The younger son was found (Luke 15:17-24).

- Realizing his mistake, the younger son decided to take responsibility for his actions. He would admit to his father he had sinned.
- His desire was not to return as a son but to work as a servant for his father.
- For the father to have noticed the son from a great distance, he had to have scanned the horizon in hopes his son would appear.
- It was definitely not customary for Jewish fathers to run and embrace a disobedient son. The act

of running would have required the father to tuck his robe into his belt, which meant he did not care what anyone else thought about his actions.

- The father graciously restored his son by placing the robe, ring, and sandals on him.
- The father was so overjoyed that he arranged a celebration.

Description: The lost son finally wised up. He recognized the despair of the life he had chosen for himself, compared it to what his father had to offer, and went home. His father had been waiting for him all along and greeted him with such forgiveness and love as though his son had never turned his back on him. The party that followed was not like a “Welcome Home” affair so much as it was the celebration of something way more spectacular: a resurrection.

Illustration: In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the third book that was published as part of C.S. Lewis’ fantasy series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, young Eustace Scrubbs is magically transformed into a dragon because of his greed for a dragon’s treasure. It is only after he repents of his foul nature that Eustace meets the great lion Aslan, who returns the boy to his human form, making it possible for him to rejoin his cousins and resume his life as he was meant to live it.

Interaction: Prompt students to share any “Welcome Home” stories that they have, such as when a relative returned from serving in the military or a friend returned from a long trip.

Application: People become spiritually alive when they choose to receive God’s forgiveness and love by acknowledging Christ as both Savior and Lord. Coming to life in the spiritual sense includes no longer being considered God’s enemy, but rather His friend. It no longer means being separated from God, but rather gaining the privileges of His child—including the gift of a home with the Him.

3. The older son was pouting (Luke 15:25-32).

- The older brother was where he was supposed to be, doing what he was supposed to do: working in the field.
- The father sought to show the older brother he was significant as well. Everything the father had belonged to the older brother, so he would be rewarded.
- The underlying issue was Jesus’ attempt to get the scribes and Pharisees to rejoice at the salvation of sinners.

Description: The older son, who had remained at home and maintained a close relationship with his father throughout his younger brother’s absence, became resentful at all the fuss being made over his return. He removed himself from the party, then yelled at his father that it all seemed unfair. The father calmly responded that the older son’s inheritance was still intact and that his proper response should be to rejoice in the return of his lost sibling.

Illustration: An anonymous quote reads, “Strength of character means the ability to overcome resentment against others, to hide hurt feelings, and to forgive quickly.”

Interaction: Prompt students to share stories about when they were jealous over the fuss being made over someone else.

Application: Those who have been Christians for a longer period of time should rejoice over new additions to the family of God rather than resenting the attention and encouragement being given to them. Older Christians would be far more joyful over new Christians if they only remembered that they were once a newly returned prodigal son or daughter themselves.

Students: Christ

Lesson 30, Master Teacher Key Study

Conclusion: Sometimes we are like the younger brother. Because of our selfishness, we walk away from God to indulge our desires. If you have done this before and experienced His welcoming arms, maybe you need to say “thank you” and ask for the strength to walk continually in obedience. Maybe today you are still on another path, but want to return home. The Father’s arms are open.

Sometimes we are like the older brother. We get jealous over what God gives others. We sometimes resent it when others receive things we feel we earned by our faithfulness. Maybe today you need to let God remove some bitterness from your journey. Trust that one day you’ll be rewarded for faithful service.

The one person in the story we are never like is the father. God is the hero of all three parables Jesus told about finding the lost. Jesus is letting us know of the great lengths and the great resources God has expended in His search and recovery of each of us. Express your thankfulness to Him.

LESSON 30

THE PARABLE OF LOST THINGS

Biblical Passage: Luke 15:11–32

Memory Verse: Luke 19:10

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”

1. The _____ son was _____ (Luke 15:11–16).
2. The _____ son was _____ (Luke 15:17–24).
3. The _____ son was _____ (Luke 15:25–32).

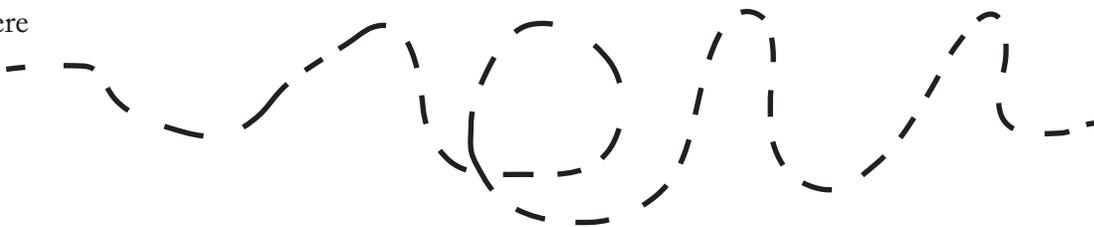
SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can you identify with the younger brother?
- How can you identify with the older brother?
- How have you experienced your Father’s forgiveness and compassion?

PRAYER MAP

You are here

X



At home
with the
Father

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT . . .

“You can’t always sit in your corner of the forest and wait for people to come to you . . . you have to go to them sometimes.”—*Winnie the Pooh*

LESSON 30

THE PARABLE OF LOST THINGS

CHRISTOS
STUDENT EDITION

Biblical Passage: Luke 15:11-32

Kids let their parents down. It's a part of growing up. Your children have let you down before. They will let you down again. And regardless of what you might think, you let your parents down, too. (It's a shock . . . take a second to collect yourself.) But there is a wonderful redemptive message we can teach our children through disappointment. Jesus taught this very lesson in the Parable of the Lost Son.

Read Luke 15:11-32. Jesus had already shared the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin. Now, it seemed He was relaying just how far-reaching God's grace and mercy was, something contrary to the thinking of the religious leaders of that day.

God has set up the family as an active illustration of His love and mercy. When we love our children, we are willing to sacrifice. When they do wrong, and hurt our very hearts, we're willing to forgive. When they turn from our values, and us, we're willing to take them back after they have experienced the consequences. In all of these things, God is the supreme example of the Father who loves us so much that He will not walk to meet us when He sees us coming from far away, but will run.

CONNECTION QUESTIONS:

- How hurt would you be if you were the father in this story, having your child ask for the inheritance before your death?
- What do you think was displayed in the character of the lost son?
- How do you think the father's love for his son in the story compares to God's love for us?
- How important is it to know the extent of God's love?
- How can we display such love to other people?