

The Lost Son

Luke 15:11-32

PPT Title

The Lost Son

Main Point: God longs to bring everyone into His kingdom.

Key Verse: *"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 fattest calf and kill it. Let's have a big dinner and celebrate. This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.'"* – Luke 15:22-24

Props: A plate of delicious, healthy food (ripe fruits and veggies, fat slices of bread, etc.). A plate of unappetizing, inedible food (overripe/blackened banana, torn crusts of bread, watermelon rind, corn cob with no kernels on it, etc.).

BACKGROUND



Say: Today we're going to look at a parable about being lost and found. This story is the last in a series of three lost-and-found parables that Jesus told. Does anyone remember what the lost items were in the other two parables? *A sheep. A coin.* That's right. In the first parable, a shepherd leaves 99 other sheep to look for one that has wandered away. In the second parable, a woman searches her house from top to bottom to find a lost coin. And in both parables, there is a celebration when what was lost is found again. At the end of each of these stories, Jesus said, "I tell you, it is the same in heaven. There is joy in heaven over one sinner who turns away from sin." Jesus said this to explain to the Pharisees why He hung out with tax collectors and other people that the rule makers considered to be sinners. Just as there were celebrations when the sheep and the coin in the parables were found, there is a celebration in heaven when even one sinner leaves his sinful life behind and turns toward Jesus.



Today's parable, the Parable of the Lost Son, shows how even people get lost sometimes by living a rebellious and sinful life. But we are never so lost that God cannot find us. And when someone who is lost because of sin turns away from that sin, there will be a great celebration to welcome him home again!

Let's read the Parable of the Lost Son together in Luke 15:11-32.

Teacher Note: It is so interesting to see the progression of these three parables and to imagine how the Pharisees might have responded to each. The rule-makers, so disapproving of Jesus' associations with tax collectors and "sinners," would likely have understood the importance of searching for valuable possessions that had become lost. Sheep were a prized asset, and it would almost make sense to leave the 99 to rescue a lost member of the flock. Similarly, money was near and dear to the Pharisee's hearts, so the idea of searching high and low for a lost coin might have seemed logical; the coin in question, though not worth much on its own, was actually 10% of the woman's wealth.

But in the Parable of the Lost Son, the lost item is an individual not unlike the people

the Pharisees loved to hate—a sinner, a rebel, a thoroughly disgraced and ostracized member of the Jewish community. In all three parables, there is a celebration when the lost becomes found. And in all three, Jesus pointedly communicates to the judgmental Pharisees that God Himself seeks out the lost and the sinful and rejoices when they repent and return to abundant kingdom life. After hearing all three parables, did the Pharisees understand the celebration of a repentant sinner as completely as they understood the celebration of a recovered treasure? Sadly, they never seemed able to view sinners as the prize rather than the enemy.

A SON REBELS

Say: *Jesus continued, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger son spoke to his father. He said, 'Father, give me my share of the family property.' So the father divided his property between his two sons.*

"Not long after that, the younger son packed up all he had. Then he left for a country far away. There he wasted his money on wild living. He spent everything he had.

"Then the whole country ran low on food. So the son didn't have what he needed. He went to work for someone who lived in that country, who sent him to the fields to feed the pigs. The son wanted to fill his stomach with the food the pigs were eating. But no one gave him anything. – Luke 15:11-16

Teacher Note: There is no attempt whatsoever in the Parable of the Lost Son to minimize or disregard the seriousness of the son's sin. Jesus received sinners and ate with them, but He never minimized their sin. And in this parable, He taught that great sin requires great repentance. The lost son began the long repentance journey home when he suffered the painful consequences of his rebellion and foolishness.



Say: At first, this seems like a story about a pretty typical family, doesn't it? There is a father and two sons living together and working the land. But nearly right away we see that one of the sons was not typical at all. The younger son wanted to be free from all his father's control. But to do that, he needed something from his father. What was it? *Money. His share of the inheritance. A gift.* Right. The younger son wanted to receive his inheritance before his father even died. Since an inheritance is a gift you receive after someone's death, this was a pretty unusual request that showed he did not respect his father. The Bible says that when we respect our parents, things will go well in our lives (Ephesians 6:1-3).

But the father loved his son and agreed to give him his share of the inheritance. What a contrast! The father was generous, trusting, wanting his son to enjoy the abundance of a lifetime of hard work. But the younger son was selfish. He wanted the freedom that money would bring, and he believed that being free from his father's presence would make him truly happy. So, of course, once he got the money he moved out. Let's look again at what Luke 15:13 says: *"Not long after that, the younger son packed up all he had. Then he left for a country far away."*

Not only did the younger son move out, but he moved as far away from his father as he could! Can you believe it? His father gave him a huge gift, and the son couldn't wait to get away and enjoy all his newfound wealth.

Application: The younger son made a couple of really bad decisions. First, he decided to try and meet his own needs instead of depending on his father. He thought that if he had enough money, he could live exactly as he wished to live. But the Bible tells us that we should *Trust in the Lord with all your heart. Do not depend on your own understanding.* — Proverbs 3:5





The second mistake he made was taking his father’s gift—a gift beyond measure when you consider how rare it was—and moving as far as possible from the one who gave the gift. Plus, he took everything else with him when he went. Have you ever heard someone say, “He really burned all his bridges”? When someone says you’ve burned your bridges, it means you have made it impossible to go back to the way things were before. In this parable, the younger son “burned his bridges” by taking his father’s gift and all of his other belongings and moving very far away. No one would make the mistake of thinking he was just on vacation! They knew he intended to be gone forever.



The younger son resembled God’s description of the Israelites in Jeremiah 5:23...*“But you people have stubborn hearts. You refuse to obey me. You have turned away from me. You have gone down the wrong path.”*

In the case of the younger son, the wrong path was the one that led him away from his father. I don’t want to go down the wrong path, do you? Going the wrong way is how you get lost! But Psalm 23:3 says that God *“guides me in the right paths for the honor of His name.”* So if we trust God to show us the right way to live our lives, we will never get lost.

Say: Now let’s pick up where we left off in the middle of verse 13 and read through verse 16.

“There he wasted his money on wild living. He spent everything he had.

“Then the whole country ran low on food. So the son didn’t have what he needed. He went to work for someone who lived in that country, who sent him to the fields to feed the pigs. The son wanted to fill his stomach with the food the pigs were eating. But no one gave him anything.” — Luke 15:13b-16

Uh oh. The son thought he had it made in the shade with all that money he got from his father. But he made the terrible decision to exchange the love and warmth of his family for the temporary pleasures of sin. He didn’t want to work in the fields anymore. All he wanted to do was to spend his dad’s hard-earned money. He wasted his father’s money on all kinds of things he didn’t need and things that were not even good for him.

Now, what happened next to the son is very sad. There was a famine in the country where he was living. Does anyone know what a famine is? *A food shortage. A time when everyone is hungry. A time where there is no rain and the crops die.* It sounds like the son was living like the rebellious people in Psalm 68:6b, which says, *...those who refuse to obey Him live in a land that is baked by the sun.*



When there is a famine, the food that is available becomes very, very expensive. But the son had spent all of his money and he couldn’t afford the high priced food. He had to get a job! He ended up working as a pig feeder.

Now, there are two things you need to know about pigs to understand this parable. First, they are very dirty, very smelly, and very hungry. Second, the food they eat is disgusting.



Take out the plate of disgusting food. Hold up each item and describe how bad it looks and smells. Describe how bad it would probably taste if you actually ate it. Say: Day and night, this was the kind of food the son had to feed the pigs. It might be good food for pigs, but it is definitely NOT good food for people. But the son was hungry enough to eat it. At this point, the son’s life was as bad as it could possibly get. Once his money ran out, his friends left too, and there was no one to give him any good food. He was actually hungry and desperate enough to eat THIS. **Hold up one of the more disgusting pieces of food.**

Application: Everyone lives for something. The younger son decided to live for himself and his own pleasure. But as we can see from his example, that didn't really work out very well. His life was filled with suffering. But John 10:10b says that living for Jesus gives us the best possible life. It says, *I have come so they can have life. I want them to have it in the fullest possible way.*

Let's read further in the parable. Look at verses 17-20.

A SON REPENTS

Say: *"Then he began to think clearly again. He said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food! But here I am dying from hunger! I will get up and go back to my father. I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven. And I have sinned against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers.'"* So he got up and went to his father. — Luke 15:17-20a



Take out the plate of good foods. Hold them up one by one as you are talking. Say: At his lowest point, something happened to the son's heart. He began remembering how GOOD things were back home. He remembered how everyone always had the best foods to eat. Even the workers ate delicious food. He began remembering the good times around the dinner table. He remembered his father's hugs. He remembered how safe and loved and secure he felt in his home. He became homesick! And he began to plan a way to return to his father.

REPENTANCE

"change your mind"
"turn away from sin"

The son decided to go back, confess his sins to his father, and ask for mercy. This is called repentance. When you repent, you "change your mind" and "turn away from sin."

Say: As he got closer to home, the son wasn't sure what would happen. He didn't expect his father to treat him like a son after what he did, but he hoped that he might be allowed to be a hired worker. He hoped his father wouldn't send him back to the pigs and their terrible food.

Application: Acts 3:19 says something really amazing. It says, *...turn away from your sins. Turn to God. Then your sins will be wiped away. The time will come when the Lord will make everything new.* What an incredible promise! When we repent, God says He will wipe our sins away and make us new. How is this possible? Well, it's only possible because Jesus died on the cross so that our sins could not only be forgiven, but also be completely wiped away. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, God can give us a fresh start and a straight path into His kingdom, even when we think our sins have burned all our bridges behind us. Because Jesus died to pay the price for our sins, we can always find our way back home.



So. What do you think will happen when the son returns home? Let's finish reading and see!

A FATHER CELEBRATES, A BROTHER GRUMBLES



Say: *"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.*

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer fit 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 fattest calf and kill it. Let's have a big dinner and celebrate. This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.'

"So they began to celebrate.

"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. He asked him what was going on.

" 'Your brother has come home,' the servant replied. 'Your father has killed the fattest calf. He has done this because your brother is back safe and sound.'

"The older brother became angry. He refused to go in. So his father went out and begged him.

"But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've worked like a slave for you. I have always obeyed your orders. You never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But this son of yours wasted your money with some prostitutes. Now he comes home. And for him you kill the fattest calf!'

" 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me. Everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad. This brother of yours was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.' " — Luke 14:20b-32

Say: The son was hoping his father would make him a slave. Instead, his father saw him while he was still far away and ran to meet him! He was so happy to see his son again after such a long time away. He never stopped loving his son, even when the son stopped loving him for a while. And he never stopped hoping that his son would return home.

When the son confessed his sins to his father, the father didn't punish him or lecture him or turn his back on him. The father threw a party to celebrate!

Application: This is how it is with God when we repent and turn away from our sins. When we set out to return to Him, He is already running to meet us. He is already celebrating, because more than anything else, God wants everyone to be part of His kingdom. Sometimes we turn our backs on our true home—God's kingdom—but He will always celebrate when we humble ourselves and return to Him.

Say: This parable lesson wouldn't be complete without mentioning the lost son's older brother. His brother always worked very hard to please his father. He kept all the rules and never ran away with half the money like his younger sibling did. He was jealous and angry that his brother got a party when he returned. He thought that all of his hard work made him the better son. He thought that if anyone deserved a party it was him!

It is interesting that the older brother said that he "always obeyed" his father. Really? Can anyone honestly say that? No. The older brother only wanted to see the younger brother's sin, not his own. In this way, the older brother was a lot like the Pharisees who loved to grumble about the sinners Jesus welcomed and ate with. They thought they were perfect and more deserving of His company than a bunch of tax collectors. But the Bible says, *Everyone has sinned. No one measures up to God's glory.* — Romans 3:23

Application: Sometimes we are like the rebellious lost son, thinking that our way is better than God's way, but then repenting when we finally see how wrong we are. Other times we're like the older brother, thinking that we're not "as bad" as some people and refusing to repent for the sin we won't even admit to having.

But no matter who we resemble more, we have a Heavenly Father who wants us to live forever in His kingdom. Our Father never gives up searching for us when we're

lost in sin, and He always forgives when we repent. He wants to run to meet us when we are still a long way off, and He wants to celebrate when we're at home in His kingdom where we belong.

PPT Key Verse

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PPT Main Point

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