

Luke 15:31-32 NLT - 31 "His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. 32 We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!'"

If the tax collectors and sinners are represented by the prodigal son, who does the obedient son represent? Hopefully the scribes and Pharisees understood that God's love for the obedient isn't diminished by His love for the prodigals.

Ephesians 2:4-5 NLT - 4 But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, 5 that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!)

At one time all of us were dead in our sins until God gave us new life in Christ. Jesus had mercy on the lost, the weak, and the outcasts. Every one of them is a valuable child of God, no matter how far they have wandered. When we look around us, we see those lost ones in our communities and in places across the globe. We don't want to be like the Pharisees and the older brother who despised the lost one. We want to help shine the light and welcome home the repentant so that we can join in God's joy when the lost one is found.

WRAP-UP

Our world is filled with the lost ones. The parables that Jesus shared with the Scribes and Pharisees demonstrated God's heart for the lost and the joy He has when a lost one returns to Him. We are invited to share in that joy. But pride in our own righteousness can blind us to these truths. God has mercy and compassion for the lost and as we allow ourselves to be transformed into His image, our hearts will be changed to reflect that love of the lost as well.

MEMORY VERSE

We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!" - Luke 15:32 NLT

PRAYER (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life.

Challenge – Ask God if there is a prodigal or other lost one in your life who needs you to shine the light of love and hope in Jesus for them to see.

Parables of the Lost Ones- Lost and Found

Storyteller #3

INTRODUCTION

Some things are just too important to say once. In the Book of Luke, chapter 15 Jesus gives us three parables about the lost being found. Jesus' parables are about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. To understand these parables better, we should recognize who his audience was. Jesus was speaking to the scribes and Pharisees who were criticizing Him for associating with notorious sinners. It seems that these sinners often came to hear Jesus teach, and that Jesus had even been eating with them! These teachers of the religious law saw no value in tax collectors and sinners, but Jesus used these three parables to give them God's perspective on the lost ones.

Ice Breaker

Have you ever rediscovered something of value that you had given up on as lost? How did that feel?

Key Passage

Luke 15:7 NLT - 7 In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Lost Sheep

Most of us have heard this parable before. Essentially it says that if a man has 100 sheep and one is lost, he leaves the 99 to seek and save the lost one. Now remember the scribes and Pharisees are the audience. They knew from the scriptures who the sheep were.

Who is identified as the sheep in Isa 53:6 and Eze 34:31?

Isaiah 53:6 NLT - 6 All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all.

Ezekiel 34:31 NLT - 31 You are my flock, the sheep of my pasture. You are my people, and I am your God. I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken!"

So, in criticizing Jesus for spending His time with sinners, they revealed that the lost sheep (those notorious sinners and tax collectors) had no value to them. Jesus' parable made clear that a good shepherd goes after the lost one, and joyfully brings it home.

Luke 15:5 NLT - 5 And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders.

The scribes and Pharisees were also aware of how the religious leaders, aka the not-so-good shepherds, were portrayed in the scriptures.

Ezekiel 34:8 NLT - 8 As surely as I live, says the Sovereign LORD, you abandoned my flock and left them to be attacked by every wild animal. And though you were my shepherds, you didn't search for my sheep when they were lost. You took care of yourselves and left the sheep to starve.

The religious leaders prided themselves on strictly following the laws of God. How do you think they felt when Jesus explained the joy in Heaven when a lost sinner repents? Who in our culture might be viewed as notorious sinners? How difficult do you find it to view them as valuable?

Luke 15:7 NLT - 7 In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!

2. Lost Coin

Luke 15:8 NLT - 8 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won't she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it?"

Jesus continues with the parable of a lost silver coin or drachme. In this parable a woman loses a coin.

The drachme was a coin of precious metal stamped with the image of the ruler. How can this description be applied to a lost sinner? The coin seems

to be lost in the dark and dirty areas of the house. What does the woman do first to find her coin? What way do we do the same to find the lost? What kind of dirt needs to be swept away for our "coins" to be exposed to the light?

Luke 15:9-10 NLT - 9 And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents."

In what way is the result of this parable the same as the parable of the lost sheep?

3. Lost Son

Jesus' third example of the return of a lost one is in some ways different than the others. We usually hear it referred to as the prodigal son. If the first two parables focused on the efforts of the one who had lost something, this parable gives us the perspective of the lost one. In the context of his culture, this son did everything wrong. He disrespected his father, he ignored his brother's priority as first-born, he abandoned his homeland, and he engaged in ungodly behavior. It wasn't long before he experienced the reality of life separated from his father.

Luke 15:17-20 NLT - 17 "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will go home to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.'" 20 "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him"

As the sheep had wandered far away from the shepherd's care and the coin became lost in the dark and dirty corners of the house, this son had gone to a dark and dirty wilderness apart from the care of his loving father. The son came to his senses, and as he turned back, the father ran to meet him. Do you know someone you would call a prodigal? What things did they leave God to pursue? What does the father's response tell us about how God sees them? Repentance means turning and going a different direction. In this parable, like the first two, there is a great celebration when a lost one repents. But not everyone is happy to see the prodigal return.

²⁸ "The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, ²⁹ but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. ³⁰ Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!"