

## Parables Of Luke 15 (Part Three)

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The purpose of the three illustrations in Luke 15 is to justify Christ's conduct in receiving sinners and to show that to rejoice over their return is good and proper. In the first, that of the lost sheep, the lost one is viewed from man's perspective—as one who suffers and therefore needs salvation. In the second, that of the lost coin, the lost one is viewed from God's perspective—as one whom He is eager to find. In the third, the prodigal son is viewed from both man's and God's perspective—as one who "came to himself" (verse 17).

The son becomes lost because he deliberately, willfully, and consciously strays. Guilty of inexcusable defiance and overconfident in his own capabilities, the prodigal son nevertheless eventually reconciles with his father, bringing him great joy. In the self-righteous, coldhearted elder brother, Jesus exposes the utter lack of love and compassion in the Pharisaical attitude toward those whose sin is conspicuous, and who, therefore, need gentle guidance and forgiveness rather than harsh judgment.

### 1. What is the younger son's core problem? Luke 15:11-16.

**Comment:** The younger son shows a lack of respect for authority and deference to his elders. His central problem is pride, just as it was the root of Satan's failure (Isaiah 14:13). He finds out that shame and destruction follow pride (Proverbs 11:2; 16:18). In his disrespect for authority, he thinks primarily of himself, totally disregarding how it affects others. His request for his inheritance is not to benefit others but to pursue pleasure—especially entertainment (Proverbs 21:17). As a result, his unwise actions bring him to the point of despair and a re-evaluation of his life.

By demanding his share of his inheritance before his parents' deaths, he shows that he looks upon God's gifts as debts rightfully owed to him. Impatiently, he demands his share immediately. People today constantly, selfishly, and arrogantly press their rights rather than fulfill responsibilities. Many will not wait until marriage for sex but seek it now. They do not want to work for wealth but gamble to get it immediately. Sadly, they will also wait a long time before taking care of their spiritual needs—and then only when brought to despair (II Corinthians 6:2; Ecclesiastes 7:8).

### 2. What enticement alienates the prodigal son from his father? What does the far country represent? Luke 15:13.

**Comment:** The far country symbolizes forgetfulness of God (Deuteronomy 8:11, 14, 19), the condition Paul describes as "alienated from the life of God" (Ephesians 4:17-19). All the dissatisfied young man wants to do is to satisfy his senses and desires. After disillusionment, destitution, and degradation, the prodigal, feeling no longer worthy to be called a son, decides to ask his father to make him one of his servants.

The far country is the place people go to remove themselves as far from God the Father as possible. It represents the world, the place where evil flourishes, where it is the norm,

popular, and acceptable. In it, the perversions of society—lying, adultery, abortion, homosexuality, and many others—are tolerated and even celebrated (I John 2:15-17).

The far country signifies the abode of the ungodly, those with whom the prodigal son feels most comfortable. The righteous cause him discomfort because he cannot over-drink, smoke, cuss, or tell dirty jokes when he is with them. The godly stifle him because he feels pressured to produce the fruit of self-control. The far country is the state of mind that is enmity toward God (Romans 8:7).

3. What results when the prodigal son "came to himself"? Luke 15:17-24.

**Comment:** Scripture pictures sinfulness as a path of folly and madness, and repentance as restoration to sound-mindedness. "When he came to himself" is commonly applied to a person who recovers from being deranged. Jesus indicates that the folly of the younger son is a type of insanity, as it is with all sinners: A kind of madness is in their hearts (Ecclesiastes 9:3). They are at odds with God, indulging in evil obsessions, contrary to their better judgment. Vincent's *Word Studies* explains, "This striking expression—came to himself—puts the state of rebellion against God as a kind of madness. It is a wonderful stroke of art, to represent the beginning of repentance as the return of a sound consciousness." Misery and desperation may stimulate reason in a sinner when he comes to himself. Once the younger son comes to realize his distorted and unrealistic view of himself and humbly repents, he can be restored to sonship (II Corinthians 7:10-12).

4. What is the older son's central problem? Luke 15:25-31.

**Comment:** The older brother represents the Pharisaical attitude that resents God's interest in sinners—the same attitude in the early church that looked suspiciously at the inclusion of Gentiles. His self-righteousness manifests itself in jealousy and envy. Today, the elder son is like those who, in self-righteousness, shun brethren who do not live up to their standard of righteousness (Proverbs 20:6; Galatians 6:3; Titus 3:5). Such people do not realize that their self-righteousness is as the filthy rags of the prodigal son (Isaiah 64:6).

5. What is the important message of the parables of Luke 15?

**Comment:** The word "lost" in Luke 15 is not related as much to the condition of what is lost as to the agonizing effect upon the one who lost it. In the first illustration, the shepherd, who seeks his lost sheep as if it is the only one he possesses, suffers more than the straying sheep. The woman deeply feels the loss of her coin, which, of course, is without life and feeling. Her poverty requires that she find it, so she searches diligently for it.

Finally, the father feels a depth of agony neither of his sons can share; he is heartbroken over the loss of his younger son. Though he still has another son who has no desire to leave home, his father's heart goes out to the missing son in spite of his willful wickedness. God has like compassion for those who are lost in sin.

The three parables are linked in the recovery of the lost. In the first, Christ, as the good Shepherd, lays down His life to save lost sheep. In the second, He works through His

church to call sinners to repentance. And in the third, the Father receives His children back after they have gone astray (Ephesians 2:1-8). Our merciful, loving God desires that all be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.