



Good News **for all people.**

The Gospel of Luke

Week 14 **LEADER** Discussion Questions

Week of 1/8/23

Text: Luke 15

Icebreaker: Have you ever lost something of great value, but later found it? What happened?

1. The setup for this chapter is described in verses 1-2, but look back at verses 25-35 of the previous chapter to note the significance of what's happening. Why are the religious authorities grumbling?

The Pharisees and scribes are upset that Jesus is showing such acceptance of tax collectors and "sinners." A few things are noteworthy. First, tax collectors were despised because they were Jews who had "sold out" to the Romans to collect money from their own people on Rome's behalf and were generally made rich in the process. "Sinners" is a label that applied to people whose lifestyles were immoral or at least incompatible with the Law. Second, eating a meal with others was considered a sign of acceptance and social approval. In terms of the context of chapter 14, Jesus has just described the challenge of discipleship and the result is that these unlikely followers come to him anyway. They are willing to pay the price to follow.

Application: Do you think a similar attitude can exist today among us where we might want to keep our distance from "sinners?" Explain.

2. What common elements or themes can you see in the two parables described in verses 3-7 and 8-10? What do these two indicate about the character of God?

We could point out how they both include the loss of something valuable, the reasonable response of persistent searching for what was lost, the public celebration of what was found, and the affirmation that the angels (or "heaven") rejoice over the sinner who has been found.¹

Application: When you think of God's attitude toward you, does it clash with these parables or is it consistent with them? Describe what you mean.

3. Verses 11-32 flow naturally from the previous two parables, yet they stand out as some of the most well-known of Jesus's words, period! How would you summarize the

¹ On a side note, there is a popular misconception that the act of leaving the "ninety-nine" sheep is somehow unusual or even "reckless" on the part of the shepherd. The parable itself, though, describes it as a perfectly normal and expected response that any shepherd would take: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave..." It's unnecessary—and a stretch of the parable's intent—for us to assume that the ninety-nine are somehow left vulnerable or endangered while the one is being pursued.

message of the parable, and how do you think this parable is meant to address the people and the situation described back in verses 1-2?

The basic message of the parable is consistent with that of the previous two: God celebrates over the spiritually lost being found. This fits well with the situation of vv. 1-2 where the religious leaders are severely undervaluing the lost. In contrast, God's great desire is to see them come to faith.

Application: Why do you think this parable is "famous"? What does it communicate that we find so compelling or intriguing?

4. How would you describe the actions or attitudes of the three major characters (i.e., the father, the younger son, the older son)?

The younger brother could be described as selfish, foolish, and rebellious. He's apparently pleasure-seeking and doesn't want to be bothered by the restrictions of wisdom. The older brother is "Pharisaical" in that he is interested in keeping the rules, keeping score, and is blind to his own violations of the rules...or at least selective in which rules matters most (i.e., the ones that are most outwardly visible). The father is loving, gracious, forgiving, merciful, etc., etc.

Application: Describe how well you can relate to the three characters, but especially to the two brothers. Does one feel particularly "natural" for you?

Most of us can likely identify traits of all three in us, but most clearly, of the two brothers since the father is the flawless character in the parable! In fact, whatever semblance we might see of the father in our lives is due to the grace of God at work in us. We generally don't have to exert effort to emulate the worst traits of the brothers.

5. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." How do these words and the father's other words and actions in verses 22-24 help depict the gospel message?

It has been pointed out by others that this parable doesn't tell us everything about the gospel. For example, there's no cross or atonement for sin. In that case, we don't see everything about the gospel, but we do see a lot of the gospel! We see how undeserving the younger brother is of being received back. We see how foolish and self-serving the younger brother was. We see the value of confession and returning (repentance). We see the loving and merciful response of the father, which goes completely against the grain of salvation-by-merit. In fact, the "older-brother-inside-of-us" might protest alongside the older brother in the parable that the father is acting unfairly...and therein lies the point.

Application: Does this parable clarify, reshape, or otherwise influence how you understand God's work of grace in your own life? Explain.

6. Celebration happens at the end of each of this chapter's three parables. Why do you think Jesus includes celebration after each "finding," and what does this say about the value of lost people (a.k.a., unbelievers) to God? What does it say about how we too should think about lost people?

On one hand, Jesus includes celebration simply because it's really what happens when the lost are found! It's repeated in these three parables, though, in such a way that we can't help but see that God really does value the lost, the undeserving, and the wayward. It might challenge us if we are inclined to see the lost as our opposition or as an obstacle to be overcome in our life of faith.

Application: Who do you know who's currently "lost" spiritually who you pray for that they would be found and celebrated over in both heaven and on earth?