

w e e k 13 : *the one with the lost boys*

Scripture to Read: Luke 15

1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

3 So he told them this parable: 4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? 5 And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. 6 And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' 7 Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? 9 And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' 10 Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" 20 And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him

and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23 And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

25 "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" "

Summary of Luke 15

Jesus tells four stories (yes, I said *four*) about lost things and declares that heaven is having a great, noisy party every time a sinner repents. Knowing and meditating on this story is both cure and defense against self-righteousness.

Scripture for Memorization and Meditation

"Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." [Luke 15:10]

Questions for Personal Study and/or Group Discussion

- Why do you think that ritually and morally unclean people found Jesus so appealing?
- Have you ever lost something valuable? How did you feel when you were looking for it? What was it like when you found it?

- Why were the Pharisees offended by Jesus' habit of eating with "tax collectors and sinners"? Do you have or have you ever had a similar attitude toward others? What is wrong with it?
- How does the younger son's unloving attitude toward his father depict sinful humanity's attitude in rebellion against God? How does his experience typify our experience in sin?
 - The parable vividly illustrates repentance. What steps of repentance does the younger son take? How does this encourage us when we have to face the difficult path of repentance?
- Tim Keller suggests that this parable shows us two forms of self-salvation: one by breaking all the moral laws and setting your own course, and the other by keeping all the moral laws and being very, very good. However, the parable shows that one of these is more likely to keep us away from the feast than the other. Which one do you think is more dangerous? Why?
- Is our church more appealing to "younger brother" types or to "older-brother" types? What do you think this says about us? What would need to change in order for us to be a place where more of the other type of lost people find their way to the party?
- What does the homecoming feast in the parable depict? Read Revelation 21-22 and consider/discuss the feast and celebration that is coming at the end of history. What will it be like?
- Tim Keller writes that this parable shows us that salvation is (1) experiential, (2) material, (3) individual and (4) communal. Discuss.
- There is a lot of joy and celebration in these stories. What does this tell us about the kind of God he is and the kind of place his kingdom is? Why do we often fail to exhibit and experience that kind of joy?

Notes and thoughts...

An old man running: "In most cultures, and certainly in the Middle East, it is a disgrace for a man of stature to be seen running. Men of dignity do not run; they stroll. Realize, then, that this is Lord Jesus depicting God the father in his indecorous love for you. Forgetting his dignity, as it were, overwhelmed by a great compassion, he runs to meet us on the way. Understand, if you are contemplating the

difficult path of repentance, that God will not wait indifferently for you to perform every humble act of contrition. Seeing you from afar, reading the brokenness of your heart, he will run to meet you long before you have performed all the painful repentance you have planned." [Richard D. Phillips, *Turning Your World Upside Down: Kingdom Priorities in the Parables of Jesus* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003], 119.

Where are you in the story? "Self-righteousness in large part consists in a denial of our lostness...and spawns a multitude of sins. It is difficult to recognize it as sin because we picked it up in such a respectable place, in the company of Christians sitting in a church pew, singing hymns and reading the Bible, working 'in Jesus' name.' The reality, exposed by Jesus' earthquake story, is that Jesus is out looking for us. We are as lost as any wandering sheep, as any dropped coin, as any prodigal son.

"For as long as we hold on to any pretense of having it all together we are prevented from deepening and maturing in the Christian faith. For as long we avoid recognition of our lostness we are prevented from experiencing the elegant profundities of foundness. For as long we insist on maintaining safe moral grids in which we always know where we stand (and where everyone else stands!), these poses of self-sufficiency, we disenfranchise ourselves from the company of the found sheep, the found coin, the two found brothers, and the celebrating angels." [Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell It Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 97-98]

Tips for Parents with Young Children

The church meeting at your supper table. The following steps are "field-tested" ideas to help direct theological discussions between parents and their children while also building the children's theological vocabularies so that they are increasingly familiar with biblical concepts. Remember: a brief, God-focused time together is better than a long, task-oriented time in which everyone is miserable.

The discussion questions and tips are offered to help you and your children grow in relationship with each another and with Christ. They are meant to be supportive and not constraining. Therefore, do not feel bound by any questions or pressured to follow the steps too rigidly. Follow the Spirit's leading and don't be a religious parent who is rigidly inflexible and who makes this time together drudgery rather than delight.

If you miss a night, or if conversation gets off track, or if your family occasionally just wants to talk about something else, don't stress—it's inevitable. For your children, the point is to learn what they are thinking about God, to help them know and love Jesus as God and Savior, and to teach them how to articulate and explain their Christian faith. For parents, the point is to instruct children and each other, thereby creating a family culture in which every member freely and naturally talks about God and prays to him together. In short, the goal is that your family would open the Bible and grow in love for Jesus, one another, your church, and the world.

Finally, remember that family Bible study requires a sense of humor, so make sure to have some fun, enjoy some laughs, and build some memories.

Monday: Read Luke 15:1-7. Find some pictures of sheep and talk about them. Why do sheep become lost? [They mindlessly follow their appetites and aren't smart enough to check how far they've wandered from the shepherd.] Can a sheep defend himself against predators? How are we sometimes like sheep in how we deal with sin and our Savior? The Bible says, *All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord has laid on [Jesus] the iniquity of us all* [Isaiah 53:6]. Talk about what that means for us.

Tuesday: Read Luke 15:8-10. Ask your child to remember a time when they lost something that was valuable to them. How did he/she feel while looking for it? How did he/she feel when it was found? Explain that the joy you feel when you find something that was lost is like the joy going on in heaven when people repent and come to Jesus.

Wednesday: Our regular **Wednesday Night Connection** schedule resumes tonight. Supper is at 5:30 pm. Electives for adults and teaching for youth and children begin at 6:15 pm and end at 7:15 pm. Make this a part of your family's routine in 2010.

Thursday: Read Luke 15:11-32. How are we like the younger son in the story? Why was the father so glad to see him come back? How can we go back to our heavenly Father? How should we feel when we see others becoming Christians and changing?

Friday: Talk through the Prodigal Son passage again (15:11-32). Point out how the older son was angry and selfish. Also point out how generous the father is to this son. Our heavenly Father loves us and is as generous to us, even when we are angry and selfish. Jesus stops the story there. Talk about how you might imagine the story continuing from there.

Saturday: Quiz your children on Catechism questions or Bible memory verses they are learning. Pray that Phillip would have boldness in preaching the Word of God tomorrow. Also, pray for the Sunday School teachers and for the musicians and choir members who serve us each Sunday.

Sunday: Before you leave for church, explain to your children that their ministry at church is to welcome new children, help their Sunday School teacher, serve others, and worship God in the service. After church, discuss with your children what they learned and what you learned.