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Dr. Matthew Webster

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Chapter 1: Common Misconceptions: Who are you in this Parable?

“Every single one of us was the prodigal son at one point in our lives.”

I find it fascinating that one of my favorite stories told by Jesus is unique to the Gospel of Luke. "There is no chapter of the New Testament so well-known and so dearly loved as the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel. It has been called "the Gospel in the Gospel," as if it contained the very distilled essence of the good news which Jesus came to tell."¹

Even though Luke is the only one to record the parable of the lost son this doesn't diminish its significance when compared to other well-known parables like the Good Samaritan, the Mustard Seed, the Talents, the Lost Sheep, the Wedding Feast, the Rich Fool, or any others.

Throughout this book, I will be referring to the parable of the prodigal son or the parable of the lost son interchangeably. It is also important that I define what a parable is in case that term is unfamiliar to you. A parable is a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels.²

Why might Luke have been the only one to carry such a wonderful parable in his Gospel? This parable fits best within his strong emphasis on repentance, forgiveness, and God's compassion for the lost and marginalized. In Luke's Gospel the emphasis on God's love for all, regardless of

¹Barclay's Daily Study Bible. www.studylight.org/commentary/luke/15-18.html

²Oxford Languages Dictionary.

their past mistakes is illustrated beautifully through Jesus' teaching parable of the lost son.

Each of the Gospel writers included a selection of parables that were most relevant to their intended audience and the theological messages they wanted to convey. I sometimes wonder how many wonderful parables were taught that only the audience that day was privy to hear.

"Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (John 21:25).

Before we dive deep into the parable, I request that you take a few minutes to immerse yourself in the story Jesus was teaching to the Pharisees and the tax collectors.

The Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)

"Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² “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. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

What questions come to your mind after you read the parable? What new insights did you gain? Hopefully, throughout the pages of this book, any questions you may have will be answered. Some new questions might emerge, but through the aid of the Holy Spirit, may we all continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ through this marvelous parable.

Before we draw upon the meaning of this powerful teaching of Jesus we must dispel a popular misconception about what this story means for believers.

When we read the words that Jesus spoke in the parable of the lost son, we immediately should identify our old lives apart from Christ with the life of the wayward son. Every single one of us was the prodigal son at one point in our lives. However, in our new life in Christ, restored in relationship with our heavenly Father, our identity is as sons and daughters of God. We are never again to identify ourselves as a “wayward one”, our old life is dead, and Christ lives in us (Galatians 2:20).

With this foundation in mind, let’s dive into the three characters in the parable and discover who each represents in the world today.

Wayward son

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned— To be sure, sin was in the world before

the Law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no Law" (Romans 5:12).

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned.

We are also told in Romans 3:23: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Before we received the grace of God, we were wayward ones. "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live" (Ephesians 2:1a). This truth gives us humility and compassion toward those who are lost because we remember we were once lost and had it not been for God's grace we still would be lost.

All of humanity is represented by the wayward son. The problem is that many do not know that they have a sin problem (see the elder son in this parable) or believe that their sin problem is too big for God's grace. This is why this parable reaches everyone.

The wayward son is meant to connect to the tax collectors who were listening to Jesus teach (Luke 15:1). Tax collectors knew they were sinners and this parable would provide a revelation of how amazing God's grace is that no one is too far away to be restored by God's grace. Matthew (formerly Levi) a well-known

former tax collector was one of Jesus' twelve disciples and would most likely have been with Him as He taught this parable. Jesus' action in including Matthew as one of the twelve disciples showcased the truth of the parable He taught to the tax collectors. Matthew's transformed life led to him reaching out and introducing many tax collectors to Jesus (Matthew 9).

One of the potential dangers for Christians is to think that because of sin they have become the wayward son again. Your sin does not cause you to lose your sonship. Once you became a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), "The old has gone, the new is here"! Your old life was crucified on the cross (Galatians 2:20). You have been born from above (John 3:3) and it is not possible to become unborn once you are born.

Though the option to sin and live hypocritical to who you have become remains, the admonition is clear: "Do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. Instead, be holy in all you do, just as He who called you is holy" (1 Peter 1:14b-15). Embrace your true identity in Christ, living authentically as the holy and beloved individual you've become (Colossians 3:12).

The point of this parable is so the tax collectors and the Pharisees (Luke 15:1) will come to their senses and see their need for God's grace. While the narrative directly addresses tax collectors

and Pharisees, its relevance extends to everyone in the crowd that day, as well as to us.

Through Jesus, there is an opportunity to be reconciled with God, for the lost to find their way home. As a part of God's family, we get the blessing of celebrating with all of Heaven when a wayward child is restored.

Our journey began as the wayward son, with sin separating us from a holy and perfect God. The good news is that "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8b). That's grace.

"Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost, but now am found
Was blind, but now I see"³

The description of the life lived by the wayward son might tempt some to live life similarly to the elder brother. Compared to the majority of humanity, I am living a righteous life. I am a good person. I give to others. I am a member of a church. I don't need grace because I am doing just fine in life. Isaiah 64:6b reminds us that apart from Christ "our righteousness are as filthy rags". Any life lived apart from the grace of God available in Christ is wild (destructive) living. "For wide is the gate and broad is the

³John Newton. Amazing Grace. 1779.

road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it" (Matthew 7:13b).

Older son

The older son is important in the story and is easily the most overlooked character of all. The elder son represents a person who tries to earn salvation through good works. A person who has a law-based approach to righteousness will constantly compare themselves to others often accompanied by a judgmental attitude towards them.

The parable challenges Pharisees to discern their likeness to the older brother. It aims to unveil the spiritual blindness that leads them to believe they are exempt from needing God's grace. Jesus through His teaching allows them to see the reality of their spiritual condition, they are dead in their sin.

"Woe to you, teachers of the Law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead and everything unclean." (Matthew 23:27).

In another parable, the Wedding Feast (Matthew chapter twenty-two) there was a guest who tried to attend the feast without wearing the proper attire. The only way to get into Heaven is to be clothed in Jesus' righteousness (Galatians 3:27). So, it is not surprising that the older son is on

the outside looking in when there is a party thrown for the restored son.

Individuals who are represented by the older son will often be steeped in religion. The more religious they are, the more righteous they feel. Religion comes from the Latin verb “religare,” meaning “to bind fast”.⁴ The elder son represents a character bound by a sense of religious duty and an adherence to rules, rather than a genuine understanding of love and grace. His actions and attitudes reflect a legalistic approach to his relationship with his father. The elder son expresses frustration that he has diligently served his father, yet he feels overlooked. His mindset suggests a belief that his actions should earn him favor and approval. This is a characteristic of a legalistic approach where one seeks to gain righteousness through works rather than understanding the grace and unconditional love the father has. The elder son judges his brother harshly based on his actions. His emphasis on his brother’s moral failures reflects a self-righteous attitude, where adherence to religious rules becomes a source of pride and a basis for looking down on others.

The elder brother was bound by religion, whereas the wayward son came home to be restored in the relationship with his father

⁴www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/20557/Re-ligare-To-bind-fast.htm

through grace. Christianity at its core, emphasizes a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The focus is on knowing God intimately, experiencing His love and living in communion with Him.

For those who are bound by religion, the condemning voice of the enemy is always there to tell them they need to do more and when they do, it still is never enough.

They have no way to combat the accusations of the enemy because no condemnation is found for those in Christ (Romans 8:1) who have received His finished work on their behalf. Those who come to Jesus find their rest (Matthew 11:28). Grace declares, "It is finished, the work is done," and faith responds, "Thank you, Jesus!"⁵

The biggest wake-up call for any who try to earn their salvation comes from Jesus in Matthew 7:21-23:

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name drive out demons and in Your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them

⁵Paul Ellis. The Grace Commentary. www.theadventist.org/hegracecommentary.com/matthew-11/#matthew11v28

plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers.'

It's not about what you will do or won't do that grants you citizenship in the Kingdom but what Jesus has done for you and if you have received that grace by faith.

Scripture is clear that nothing impure will ever enter into Heaven (Revelation 21:27) and if we fail one time in keeping the Law we have violated all of it (James 2:10). The self-righteous older brother needed the love and grace of his father the same way the wayward son did too.

The wayward son who "came to his senses" and became the restored son

Believers are individuals who, at some point, awakened to the reality of their need for salvation, graciously provided through Jesus Christ. This awakening might have been triggered by life circumstances, often characterized by wayward living, wherein God skillfully orchestrated events to lead us to a profound self-awareness and acknowledgment of our desperate need for redemption.

Perhaps we were living like the older son and a personal failure or a life crisis became a pivotal moment revealing the truth of our need for salvation. Maybe a family member or friend experienced salvation and witnessing the transformative power of God's grace in their life

gave us an opportunity to respond to God's grace and embrace it through faith. The paths we took to grasp the Gospel are diverse and unique to each individual, yet the common thread is the recognition that we fell short of God's glory and that Jesus Christ is the pathway to reconciliation with our Heavenly Father.

In the life of the wayward son, it wasn't until the money ran out and the famine came that the wayward son recognized his need for external help. When life is comfortable and secure, there might be a tendency to attribute success solely to personal abilities, hard work, or favorable circumstances. Adversity often prompts people to seek spiritual answers and solutions.

This revelation of a need for God's grace is a work of the Holy Spirit to open our blind spiritual eyes to see and receive the grace available through Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the one who aided the younger son to come to his senses.

Ephesians 2:8: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."

John 16:8: And when He (the Holy Spirit) comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment." This verse highlights the Holy Spirit's work in convicting or convincing people of their need for salvation, their need for Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit's role changes in the life of a believer when we are convicted or convinced of the righteousness we have in Christ. The Holy Spirit is your Helper (John 14:16) who will teach you all truth (John 14:26).

As you will discover later in the book it is of utmost importance that we all learn to tap into the inheritance we have been given in Christ, to live the abundant life Christ died to give us, and to celebrate what it means to be given a victorious life in Him.

The restored son is a completely new person. His old life is gone. His new life is full of the super-abounding provisions of his father.

Since many struggle with believing that sin can cause them to become a lost wayward son or daughter again I want to spend the last part of the chapter revealing why your salvation is secure in Jesus Christ.

If the parable of the lost son suggested that one could be part of God's family one moment and then expelled upon sinning, it would make the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross worthless. Trying to earn God's favor through works nullifies grace but receiving grace produces fruit out of our attachment to Jesus (John 15:5).

Let's examine some Scriptural passages that are argued both in favor and against whether it is possible to lose your salvation because if

salvation can be lost then the parable of the lost son would need to be interpreted differently.

Jesus said, "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). There is one qualification for eternal life. The only qualification for salvation is to believe in Jesus Christ. This completely dismantles the approach to living exemplified by the older son.

"What if I believe in Jesus one minute but don't believe in Him the next?" The moment you put your trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, you have eternal life (John 6:47). The word for "has" in John 6:47 is "echo" which means you have and hold or you possess eternal life.⁶

The moment you put your faith in Christ you cross over from death to life (John 5:24). Whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life and shall not perish (John 3:16).

Even with faithless moments, the New Covenant is not upheld by our perfection or lack thereof. The New Covenant is upheld by the finished work of Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9:15). 2 Timothy 2:13: "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot disown Himself." Since you are one with the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:17) He cannot disown Himself. No one can snatch you from His hand (John 10:28).

⁶www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2192/kjv/tr/0-1/

We also understand that our salvation is secure in Jesus through Paul's use of adoption in both Romans 8 and Ephesians 1.

Paul is the only New Testament writer who uses the term adoption, just as Luke is the only one who records the parable of the lost son, however once again this does not make the concept any less profound. The likely explanation for Paul's unique focus on the correlation between Roman adoption practices and our experience in Christ may stem from his possession of Roman citizenship, a distinction not shared by other New Testament writers. It is plausible that Paul's exclusive perspective, shaped by his Roman citizenship, enabled him to effectively incorporate this concept of adoption into his Gospel message, making him the sole individual capable of reaching the Roman world in this distinctive way.

What did Paul know about adoption? Adopted by a Roman meant that you became an equal son or daughter. Your name forever changed to take on your newly adopted family name and everything that they owned, you were a joint heir. Romans took adoption very seriously.

As unbelieving sinners, we were utterly alienated from God. But once adopted into the family of God by faith in Jesus Christ, it means we forever belong. Paul reminds us that our membership in God's family is secure. Once

adopted into a family you could not ever be unadopted.

The incredible truth is that “God decided in advance to adopt us into His own family by bringing us to Himself through Jesus Christ. This is what He wanted to do, and it gave Him great pleasure” (Ephesians 1:5).

Now there is something breathtaking about adoption that goes even further than what Paul writes about here and that is the love that John has in view when he writes 1 John 3:1. “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

This love of God is not the love that merely takes care of paperwork and adopts. That would be amazing beyond words to simply be adopted into God’s family. God does not only adopt you. He moves in, by His Spirit, and imparts something of Himself to us, so that we take on a family resemblance (1 John 3:9). If you are a child of God Paul is right, you are so by adoption, but more than adoption, by new birth (1 John 5:1). Once adopted you have eternal life and are a part of the family of God forever! Understanding how adoption worked in Roman society helps us to see that our salvation is secure in Jesus.

A few more Scripture verses that are clear about the forgiveness that you have in Jesus. "He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). "And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins" (Hebrews 8:12). "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Forgave is in the past tense, it is a done deal in Christ.

Here are the top two verses used to argue that you can lose your salvation. Let's dismantle each argument one by one so that as we return to the story of the prodigal son you have a settled mind to know that God will never disown you because of your mistakes.

Popular verses used to incorrectly teach that it is possible to lose your salvation

#1: (Hebrews 6:4-6)

"It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the coming age and who have fallen away, to be brought back to repentance (underline emphasis is mine). To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace."

Let's start with two important phrases: "Once been enlightened" and "have fallen away". Who are those who have once been enlightened and have fallen away? If the writer of Hebrews is speaking to believers then we have a major problem here because there would be the potential to become the lost son all over again. However, if the writer of Hebrews is addressing someone other than believers then what he writes would not apply to us. Who is the writer of Hebrews talking to in Hebrews chapter six? We are answered directly by the Greek word that is used for "enlightened".

Enlightened (phōtizō): imbued with saving knowledge.⁷ This simply means the writer of Hebrews is addressing a group of people who have heard (been imbued with) the Gospel of Jesus Christ but they have rejected it.

For a fuller picture of who the writer of Hebrews is talking about when he writes they have "once been enlightened," we discover this from the previous chapter.

The author is talking about people who are slow to learn and dull of hearing (Hebrews 5:11). They need someone to teach them "the elementary truths of God's Word all over again" (Hebrews 5:12, 6:1) as they are "not acquainted

⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5461/kjv/tr/0-1/

with the teaching about righteousness”
(Hebrews 5:13).

“Have tasted of the heavenly gift... and have tasted the good Word of God.”

“The Word of God and the heavenly gift refer to Jesus. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

These individuals tasted the good things of God but have spat them out. They have seen the light but preferred the darkness. They may have heard the Gospel but the seed never took root and grew (Luke 8:13). They have tasted but did not consume the Bread of Life.”⁸

“Been made partakers of the Holy Spirit.” The first-century Jews had seen Jesus and the apostles ministering with supernatural signs and wonders. Many had experienced healing and deliverance, and some had even seen the risen Lord. They had a front-row seat to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is what it means to have “been made partakers of the Holy Spirit”. They saw the work of the Holy Spirit being done in their midst.

“Have fallen away” (parapiptō): to deviate from the right path.⁹ The path of righteousness was before them but they deviated from it and chose

⁸Paul Ellis. The Grace Commentary.

www.thegracecommentary.com/hebrews-6/#hebrews6v4

⁹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3895/kjv/tr/0-1/

a path other than the path of life. So, this is not talking about believers who stumble in sin, but those who fall short of grace (Hebrews 12:15). They failed to receive Jesus.

"It is impossible to renew them again to repentance." Those who have never heard the good news of God's grace may yet receive it. But those who have heard and hardened their hearts to the Gospel, are truly lost for repentance is found in no other place than Jesus.

In context, this is talking about the Jews who had witnessed the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit but had turned their back to pursue the old ways of the temple system as a means of righteousness. They had more faith in dead works than a risen Savior.

"They again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame" (Hebrews 6:6). Rejecting the finished work of the cross by pursuing dead works is like saying, "Jesus, you need to die again, once was not enough." This is why the author of Hebrews insists that Jesus' sacrifice was the once and final solution for sin (Hebrews 10:12).

#2: (2 Peter 2:20)

"If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and

are overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning.”

If you take this verse alone without any context as to who Peter is talking about, and what he says around this verse, it is very easy to conclude that what he is saying is that those who know our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ can become entangled with sin again, and lose their salvation as a result. Is this what Peter is saying?

We already know from multiple other Scripture passages that salvation is not through our works. It is not about how well you have navigated the entanglement of sin to determine if you are saved and will continue to be saved. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast” (Ephesians 2:8-9). Salvation is a gift from God, a grace to be received by faith. The more that you understand how covenants work—the more peace you will have that your salvation is secure in Christ. The book of Hebrews lays out how the New Covenant we live in is a Covenant made between God the Father and Jesus the Son. This is great news! Since the New Covenant wasn’t made between us and God (like the Old Covenant was), our actions do not break the Covenant.

“For this reason He (speaking of Jesus) is the Mediator and Negotiator of a New Covenant [that is, an entirely new agreement uniting God

and man], so that those who have been called [by God] may receive [the fulfillment of] the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has taken place [as the payment] which redeems them from the sins committed under the obsolete First Covenant" (Hebrews 9:15).

The Old Covenant is obsolete and it is important to note that the other Covenants are not obsolete. The Abrahamic Covenant and the promise that a great nation will come out of Abraham and all the nations will be blessed through Christ is still in effect. The Noahic Covenant, that God will not destroy the Earth with a flood, is also still in effect today. The Davidic Covenant and the everlasting Kingship of Christ stand forever. The Covenant that became obsolete is the Old Covenant Mosaic Law.

"For where there is a will and testament involved, the death of the one who made it must be established" (Hebrews 9:16). Without the death of Jesus, the New Covenant would not be established. Jesus needed to fulfill the Law on our behalf. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17).

If Peter is not talking about believers in 2 Peter 2:20, who is he referencing? The reason people think that Peter is talking about believers is because he says, "knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." The NIV has contributed to

people's misinterpretation of 2 Peter 2:20. The NIV incorrectly translates 2 Peter 2:20 as "If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

The Greek word in the original manuscript is not "knowing Jesus" because to know Jesus is to know God and to know life.

"Now this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

Peter did not say they "know Jesus", he wrote (epignōsis) "knowledge" precise and correct knowledge.¹⁰ This is a big difference between knowledge of Jesus and knowing Jesus.

Remember the self-righteous are told by Jesus "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23), while it is clear that they had knowledge of Jesus, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name drive out demons and in Your name perform many miracles" (Matthew 7:22b).

In 2 Peter 2:20, Peter conveys that, at a certain juncture, someone imparted the Gospel to the individuals he is addressing. These individuals heard correct and precise knowledge about Jesus. But the message they heard did not profit them, because it was not combined with faith (Hebrews 4:2). Knowledge of Jesus alone doesn't save anyone. Even demons have

¹⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1922/kjv/tr/0-1/

knowledge of Jesus. In Mark 1:23-24, a man possessed by an unclean spirit cries out, "What have You to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!"

In Luke 4:41, after Jesus had cast out many demons, they cried out, "You are the Son of God!" But He rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that He was the Christ.

In Acts 19:15, some Jewish exorcists tried to cast out a demon by saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?"

Some know and believe the love that God has for us (1 John 4:16) and others have knowledge (heard the Gospel) but don't believe. These false teachers heard about the love of God but they never repented (meaning change their minds) about their need for His salvation.

How do I know Peter isn't saying we could believe in Jesus one minute and then lose our salvation the next? There are several other clues in the text as well.

"But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them—bringing swift destruction on themselves" (2 Peter 2:1).

What does Peter mean when he writes- “For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of Jesus”?

These false teachers briefly “escaped” the defilements of the world when they heard the good news. For a moment they saw the open door and the way to freedom. Like the unbelieving Israelites who escaped the defilements of Egypt but fell in the wilderness, they did not enter the Promised Land through Christ. They have heard the path to salvation and they rejected it, which is worse than not yet hearing the Gospel.

“But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish” (2 Peter 2:12).

“They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for “people are slaves to whatever has mastered them” (2 Peter 2:19).

“They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness” (2 Peter 2:15). These people follow the way of Balaam not the way of Christ. The way of Balaam led to a generation of Israelites dying in the wilderness instead of entering into the Promised Land. These false teachers are leading people away

from entering into the Promised Land through faith in Christ by teaching a counterfeit gospel.

What does Peter say right after the verse that is often misconstrued in 2 Peter 2:20?

“It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them” (2 Peter 2:21).

What is the holy or sacred command?

We discover the holy commandment of God is the command to believe in His Son Jesus Christ (1 John 3:23). These false teachers did not heed this command but turned away from it. They responded to the good news by turning their backs to Jesus.

So, is Peter telling us that we can lose our salvation? No. He is addressing the people who have not believed in Jesus the Son of God.

I needed to underscore the certainty of our salvation in Jesus. This emphasis serves to steer believers clear of viewing themselves as the wayward son in this parable, ensuring they fully embrace the unwavering love of their heavenly Father as redeemed children of God.

Additionally, for those who have not yet received Jesus as their Lord and Savior, this narrative illustrates that no prior actions disqualify them from receiving the grace of God.

Acts 16:31a (AMP), "Believe in the Lord Jesus [as your personal Savior and entrust yourself to Him], and you will be saved."

If you've chosen to embrace God's grace by believing in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have become a redeemed child of God and the journey through this parable promises elation as you explore the riches the Father lavishes upon you in Christ (Ephesians 1:7b-8).

Chapter 1
Common Misconceptions:
Who are you in this Parable?

1. What makes the Parable of the Prodigal Son unique compared to other parables told by Jesus?

2. Take a few moments to read and reflect on the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32). What stands out to you in this story?

3. The text suggests that every person can identify with the wayward son at some point in their life. In your journey of faith, how did you come to your senses and receive God's grace?

4. How can Christians sometimes struggle with identifying themselves with their old lives before receiving God's grace? What does it mean to be a "new creation in Christ"?

5. In the parable, why do you think Jesus tells this story to tax collectors and Pharisees? What message is He trying to convey to them?

6. Between the wayward son and the older son which do you think has the bigger struggle to “come to their senses” and receive God’s grace?

Chapter 2: The Wayward Journey

Luke 15:11-16

"Reckless living refers to any life lived apart from Christ."

The lead-up to the parable of the lost son includes two other parables about lost items. Reading all three parables together provides a more comprehensive understanding of the teaching that Jesus imparts on this particular day.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:4-7)

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

In the parable of the lost sheep, the Good Shepherd's deep love for each of His sheep is evident. He willingly leaves the 99 to search for the one that went astray (Luke 15:4). This beautifully sets the stage for Jesus to later illustrate the Father's unconditional love for us through the forthcoming parable of the lost son. The point is that Jesus was willing to die for you. This shows the personal love of the Good Shepherd for every one of His sheep. The Bible says that He calls His sheep by name (John 10:3, 14), His love for you is personal.

The Parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10)

“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Since Jesus was addressing tax collectors among his audience (as mentioned in Luke 15:1), the parable of the lost coin would have likely struck a chord with them. Tax collectors, known for their meticulous accounting of every coin probably encountered similar situations when collecting taxes from the Jewish people. They would have known firsthand the worth people placed on a lost silver coin and would connect the value Jesus is placing on every life.

Consider the value of a silver coin: She has ten of them and has lost 10% of her entire wealth. This highlights one of the central themes across the three parables of the lost: the inherent worth of what is lost. The coin in this parable, just like the lost sheep and the prodigal son holds significant value.

The diligent search for the lost coin, including lighting a lamp, sweeping the house, and searching carefully, can be seen as a metaphor for the church's effective role today. The candle symbolizes the illuminating power of the Gospel, which acts as the light of Christ, the means through which lost individuals can be found and saved. The use of the silver coin (the drachma) is worth an entire day's wages.¹¹ So her response to finding it is to say, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin."

The coin has on it the image and superscription of a king, we are represented by that coin (Genesis 1:27). We are God's drachma. Just as the coin carries the king's image, we, as God's creation, bear the image of our Creator. In Christ, we find our true identity, and as Colossians 3:10 reminds us, we "have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:10).

The Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Bible translators have chosen to call the third parable, the "parable of the lost son."

¹¹www.classic.net.bible.org/search.php?search=drachmas&in=notes#:~:text=A%20drachma%20also%20equals%20a%20denarius%2C%20or%20a,working%20days%20because%20of%20the%20Jewish%20cultural%20context%29.

However, I hold the view that this may not be the most fitting title. The rationale behind this perspective is that the narrative doesn't solely focus on one son but rather involves two sons. While both sons play significant roles in the story, they are overshadowed by the central character—the Father. This father symbolizes God, providing us with insight into God's nature and His relationship with us as redeemed children through His Son, Jesus Christ.

Part 1: "Give me"

"Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them" (Luke 15:11-12).

Why might the younger son want to leave his father's house?

The parable does not provide explicit details about what caused the son to leave, but it can be inferred from the context that the son's decision to leave was influenced by a combination of factors:

The younger son, by making his request and taking specific actions, demonstrated a longing for independence from his father. He likely bought into the false belief that he could thrive on his own, disregarding the loving care provided by his father.

The son's decision to ask for his share of the inheritance before his father's passing indicates impatience. The parable reveals that the son was enticed by material possessions and worldly pleasures. He wanted to use his inheritance to pursue a lifestyle that was contrary to his Jewish family upbringing. We can infer the family in the parable was Jewish based on Jesus' nationality and who Jesus' audience was that He was teaching to.

Other external pressures would have existed perhaps from peers, friends, or society that led him to believe that leaving home and pursuing a more self-indulgent lifestyle was desirable.

Why did the father bestow the inheritance to both of his sons if only one requested it? The father's decision to give the inheritance to both sons may be seen as an expression of his love and generosity. The father's act of granting his younger son his share of the inheritance isn't an endorsement of wild living. Instead, it serves as a manifestation of the father's love, honoring his son's autonomy and free will. The father permits the son the freedom to make choices, even unwise ones, and to bear the consequences of those choices.

Why would God, portrayed as the father in this parable, give his sons resources that could be used for reckless living? If Jesus asserts that our Father only bestows good gifts (Matthew 7:11), wouldn't giving him the inheritance be a misguided choice?

This is a sincere question, albeit one based on incorrectly making the connection between the goodness of the gift based on the outcome of how the gift was then used. John tells us that God is love (1 John 4:16). God, as the loving Father, has given human beings free will. We are given the freedom to make choices, even if they are unwise or destructive. The parable illustrates that God doesn't force us to make certain decisions but allows us to exercise our

free will as He has from the very beginning (Genesis 2:17).

The father was not constrained to have to give his son his inheritance but giving the gift to his son who wished he were dead only further illustrates the father's unconditional love.

Each of us is given common grace (the theological idea that God extends His goodness, mercy, and blessings to all people) but what we do with that grace is up to us. The air we breathe, the beauty of creation, is a gift from God, an example of common grace. Every day that we are alive we experience God's grace and yet many choose to live apart from God.

Common grace also includes the blessings of physical life, natural talents, intellect, common morality, and the providential care of the world.

Every good thing we enjoy in our lives is a gift of His grace (James 1:17), but that doesn't mean that we won't use what we have been given in ways that are destructive to ourselves and others. Our choices of what we do with the grace we have been given will not determine the goodness of the gift.

The Father offers to all of humanity common grace but what we have been given through Jesus Christ is special grace also known as saving grace which the wayward son will experience later in the story.

What would the younger son's share of the estate have been? Jewish law did not require the father to honor the request to give the inheritance before his death but he still did and according to Mosaic Law, we know exactly what the younger son would have received.

According to Deuteronomy 21:17, the firstborn son was to inherit twice as much as any other heir. No wonder why Jacob was so anxious to get the birthright from his brother Esau (Genesis 25:29-34)! So the younger son received one-third of the estate and the older brother two-thirds, after the custom of the times, the father simplified things by giving to both sons their inheritance."¹²

The father knew from the request for his inheritance before his death that the younger son was asking to be released from his connection to him. If the younger son had only received his father's love for him, he never would have desired to leave. The good news is the Father's love for the son persists. In Christ, you can be assured of your Father's love too. "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 9:38-39).

¹²Coffman's Commentary on the Bible.
www.studylight.org/commentary/luke/15-12.html

John MacArthur said, "The truth of the matter is for a son to say that in the sensibilities of the ancient Middle East and village life would be tantamount to saying, 'Dad I wish you were dead. You are in the way of my plans. I want my freedom and I want out of this family now. I have other plans that don't involve you. They don't involve this family. They don't involve this village. I want nothing to do with any of you.'"¹³

"Kenneth Bailey, a New Testament scholar who has spent over 15 years in the Middle East, has asked all sorts of people in that part of the world what it meant for a son to request his inheritance while the father was still alive and well. The answer was always the same: the son wanted his father dead."¹⁴

"A father may, indeed, decide to write up a will and assign his property to his heirs while he still had his wits about him. This would keep the heirs from fighting over the property after the father's death. But that was something a father could do by his own free choice. He could not be coerced by his heirs. Therefore it was extremely offensive for the prodigal son to ask for his inheritance."¹⁵

Revisiting the inquiry into why the father

¹³John F. MacArthur. *The Prodigal Son: An Astonishing Study of the Parable Jesus Told to Unveil God's Grace For You*. Harper Christian Resources.

¹⁴Jirair S. Tashjian. *Inheritance Practices in the First Century Era*. www.crivoice.org/inheritance.html

¹⁵*ibid*.

willingly granted the younger son his share of the inheritance, even when not obligated to do so, one might posit that the father could have foreseen its potential misuse. The father would have recognized that it would still take an illegal act, and even a departure to a foreign land to even allow for his wild living.

The Jewish Mishna says, “Even if a father decided to divide up his property among his heirs, neither the father nor the heirs could dispose of the property while the father was still alive” (*Baba Bathra* viii.7). By selling his inheritance, the younger son’s actions revealed his father was dead to him.

Part 2: "Wild Living"

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living" (Luke 15:13).

Luke 15:13 confirms that the actions of the younger son were illegal. "He probably hastened his departure for fear of the fine which he must have paid, and the reproach to which he must have been subjected, had the matter come before the civil magistrate."¹⁶

What kind of life did the son set out to live?

"Wild living" (asótōs): riotous living.

The son squandered his inheritance, which would involve extravagant and reckless spending. He may have wasted the wealth on lavish parties, entertainment, and any form of indulgent living that was available to him. Wild living involved excessive eating and drinking, and all forms of immoral behavior such as engaging in sexual promiscuity and other forms of debauchery. We know from the elder son that the younger son did entertain prostitutes (Luke 15:30). The Greek word that is used (pórne) is very clear: a woman who sells her body for sexual uses.¹⁷

¹⁶Clarke's Commentary. www.studylight.org/commentary/luke/15-13.html.

¹⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4204/niv/mgnt/0-1/

The parable also mentions that the son went to a “distant country.” This implies that he left behind the cultural and religious norms of his Jewish upbringing and embraced a lifestyle that was considered foreign and sinful by Jewish standards, possibly even worshipping false foreign gods.

Wild living also suggests a lack of restraint and poor decision-making, which could lead to other forms of destructive behavior, such as gambling, criminal activities, or associating with disreputable companions.

Before his inheritance was squandered, the younger son would have enjoyed the pleasures of partaking in wild living. The Bible reflects on Moses’ life and says, “choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25). The story of the prodigal son showcases how the pleasures of sin last only for a short time and lead down a destructive path. “There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death” (Proverbs 14:12). Sin entices one to opt for a self-indulged path through life seduced by the transient allure of sinful pleasures, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 John 2:16).

While wild living would include all of what was listed above, I would like to suggest that the life of the older son also would have been “reckless living” as we will discover in-depth later in the story. He might not have sold his inheritance

and gone off to a distant land but his attitude and actions reveal that he too was living life on a path headed for destruction. The true measure of poverty isn't the absence of wealth (both sons had it), but rather the one who lives apart from God's love. In this realm, we encounter both the prodigal son and the elder son, dwelling in a state of spiritual destitution.

"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Reckless living refers to any life lived apart from Christ. "Without God what am I but a guide to my own destruction."¹⁸

¹⁸St. Augustine of Hippo. Confessions Book IV

Part 3: "From Feast to Famine"

"And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need" (Luke 15:14).

The parable introduces a famine, which adds to the son's hardships. This famine can also serve as a metaphor for the spiritual and emotional emptiness that can result from a life of worldly pursuits and self-indulgence. While sin at first appears as a feast, it stealthily consumes the soul like a famine, leaving behind an emptiness that hungers for redemption. Sin will steal your joy, peace, and rest, whereas Jesus gives unto us joy, peace, and rest (John 15:11, John 14:27, Matthew 11:28-30).

Had there not been a famine the younger son may have never been brought to the place of "coming to his senses". In both the story of Jonah and the Midianite oppression of Israel, we see the purpose of being brought low to receive salvation.

Jonah defiantly fled from the Lord's calling, making his way to Tarshish. He descended to Joppa, securing passage on a ship bound for that destination, determined to escape the divine directive. Disobeying God, he veered away from Nineveh, and it's a poignant reminder that when one disregards God's guidance, the trajectory is inevitably downward. Any deviation from God's leading is a descent, a path that

leads toward destruction, as sin has a destructive nature.

"But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down (underline emphasis mine) to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD" (Jonah 1:3).

In Jonah's case, his downward spiral continued as he found himself swallowed by a massive fish, a consequence of his unwillingness to heed God's call. This descent served as a crucial juncture for Jonah to reevaluate his life's mission. The narrative underscores that embracing God's purpose often requires surrendering one's will.

In the story of Gideon, sin had robbed God's people of the abundant harvest that was rightfully theirs (Judges 6:1). "Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the LORD for help" (Judges 6:6).

The word for "impoverished" in Judges 6:6 is "daw-lal" which means to be brought low.¹⁹ Whether oppression from the enemy, a famine (barrenness in any area of our life), or any other calamity we might face, may it lead us to receive an abundant harvest of grace from our heavenly Father.

¹⁹www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/dalal.html

“Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Hebrews 4:16).

Truly this is a beautiful illustration of what it may look like as God works all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). Every single calamity you face is an opportunity God can use to bless you. Our trials become the opportunity for our testimony to tell of the goodness of God as our deliverer, our provider, our comforter, our healer, and our source of strength and guidance.

The son, who had once enjoyed plenty, is now in need. Where can he go to find salvation?

The Psalmist wrote: “I lift up my eyes to the mountains— where does my help come from” (Psalm 121:1)?

Part 4: "Hunger for Home"

"So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything" (Luke 15:15-16).

The younger son first looked to himself to try and overcome his lack and need during the famine. "So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country" (Luke 15:15a).

To survive, the son takes a degrading job feeding pigs. It was probably the only job available. In a Jewish context, pigs were considered unclean animals (Leviticus 11:7, Deuteronomy 14:8), and working with them was prohibited and would have been considered particularly shameful. This illustrates how the young man's Jewish identity became so overshadowed by his reckless lifestyle that he would entertain the idea of accepting such a position.

"There is probably no animal as disgusting to Jewish sensitivities as the pig. It's not just because it may not be eaten: there are plenty of other animals that aren't kosher either, but none of them arouse as much disgust as the pig. Colloquially, the pig is the ultimate symbol of loathing; when you say that someone "acted like

a chazir [pig],” it suggests that he or she did something unusually abominable.”²⁰

Pigs were so despised they often were not even referred to by name.²¹ The pig was also a sign of hypocrisy pretending to be kosher. As it sleeps the pig sticks out its hooves as if to say “I am kosher.”²²

As recently as 1961 a law was passed forbidding the raising of pigs in Israel. The law has since been amended to allow pigs to be raised in certain Christian areas of Israel.²³

The younger son, who had turned away from his family and squandered his inheritance on a life of sin, was now reduced to working with pigs, which was not only a degrading job but also a symbol of his impurity and waywardness. He had gone from a life of privilege to a life of moral and ritual impurity, and his current situation was a stark contrast to the values and beliefs of his Jewish upbringing. Jesus illustrates through this parable that a life of sin led to the lowest of low, to a pig pen, a pit. Pigs are known to be natural diggers and will often create pits in

²⁰Mendy Kaminker. Pigs and Judaism: Deep Revulsion, but a Promising Future. www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2376474/jewish/Pigs-Judaism.htm

²¹Talmud, Shabbat 129b, Pesachim 3b, et al.

²²Mendy Kaminker. Pigs and Judaism: Deep Revulsion, but a Promising Future. www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2376474/jewish/Pigs-Judaism.htm

²³Sheldon Kirshner. Praise the Lard: Pig farming in Israel. www.blogs.timesofisrael.com/praise-the-lard-pig-farming-in-israel/

their pens. They use the pits they create for cooling off, rooting, and playing.²⁴

Before we received Christ sin left us in the pit.

The Psalmist wrote: "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; He set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand" (Psalm 40:2).

Could Jesus have had Psalm 40:2 in His mind as He told this part of the parable of the prodigal son? I believe so.

The fact, that the lost son was feeding pigs reinforces the fact that he is in a distant land, a place where pigs would have been raised, distinctly different from his homeland. Luke 15:15b: "Who sent him to his fields to feed pigs." This doesn't imply that he tended to pigs in open fields. Allowing pigs to roam freely in open fields would result in extensive rooting, causing damage to crops and landscapes. Pigs have a strong instinct to root and dig in the soil. Since pigs are natural foragers, if they were in open fields, they wouldn't require additional feeding.

Domestic pigs would also not be kept in an open field as they would escape. The Greek word for "fields" (agros) can be translated as lands or

²⁴Northern Homesteading. How to Build a Pig Pen (Simple and Cheap). www.northernhomesteading.com/index.php/2023/08/10/how-to-build-a-pig-pen-simple-and-cheap/

farms.²⁵ A better rendering of Luke 15:15 is this: "Who sent him to his farms or (property/lands) to feed pigs."

"And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything" (Luke 15:16).

The younger son's situation deteriorates to the point where he is so hungry that he desires to eat the food meant for the pigs. This is a powerful image in the story, symbolizing the depths of his desperation and his complete downfall. He realizes that the pigs he's caring for have better food than he does.

Now we might infer that the pigs were eating slop which would include leftovers from human meals, such as vegetable peelings, fruit scraps, and other kitchen waste. However, this is not the case in this instance as we are told exactly what he was feeding the pigs.

"Longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate". The Greek word for "pods" is *kerátion*: the name of the fruit of the Carob tree. This fruit is shaped like a horn and has a sweet taste; it was (and is) used not only in fattening swine but as an article of food by the lower classes.²⁶ This underscores the significantly better conditions of the pigs currently enjoying sweet carob tree pods in comparison to his situation.

²⁵www.biblehub.com/greek/agrous_68.htm

²⁶www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2769/niv/mgnt/0-1/

Carob tree pods are pictured below:



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This moment when the son longs to eat the pig's food is pivotal for him. It signifies the depths of his desperation and catalyzes his realization that he needs to return to his father. It's a moment of self-reflection and a change of mind about the way he is living, moving from a position of pride and self-sufficiency to one of humility, repentance, and the recognition of his need for his father's help.

When he was at his lowest point no one helped him. The reason no one helped him could be attributed to several factors. The younger son had already squandered his inheritance and had been living a life of sin. His

²⁷www.manyeats.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/carob-pod-beans.jpg

departure from his family, friends, and country had left him alienated from his community.

Those who might have associated with him during his extravagant lifestyle had nothing to gain from his current poverty. Recognizing the futility of seeking help from them, he chose to take on the most degrading job. Those with wealth can glean valuable insights into distinguishing authentic friendships from those merely seeking to gain from their association with them.

“Wealth attracts many friends,
but even the closest friend of the poor person
deserts them” (Proverbs 19:4).

How true the Proverb is that once he was in poverty there was not a single person who would offer any help.

The parable also mentions that there was a severe famine in the land, which most likely would have affected the entire region, making it difficult for people to help one another. Strangers who might have been inclined to help him in times of plenty, during a famine probably would have lacked the ability to do so.

What about those who hired him to feed the pigs? The younger son held a position as a hired hand, and from a moral and social standpoint, there would not have been an obligation to extend assistance beyond that role. During a

famine, when numerous individuals were in search of employment, the role of feeding pigs, a task not requiring a specialized skillset, served to underscore that hiring the younger son over other candidates was already an act of generosity.

If someone would have helped him, would he have ever realized his need for God's grace? "If they had a social gospel in the days of the prodigal son, somebody would have given him a bed and a sandwich and he never would have gone home."²⁸ While addressing social issues is important and an opportunity to introduce people to Jesus, solely focusing on them can neglect the central message of the Gospel, God's love and grace manifested in Jesus Christ, His sacrificial death, Resurrection, and the offer of salvation to all who believe in Him. The miracles of Jesus and how He met people's needs always provided an opportunity for spiritual salvation.

We are called to help the poor as James illustrates in James 2:15-16: "Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" By actively tending to people's material needs, we embody the compassionate life of Christ.

²⁸Vance Havner. www.wazquotes.com/quotes/topics/prodigal-son.html

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10).

1 John 3:17-18: "If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth."

By meeting people's physical needs we are provided an opportunity to reveal a gracious Father who has promised to meet all of our needs in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19). We are to be conduits of God's grace so the wayward sons and daughters might come home.

The Psalmist asked the question, "Where does my help come from?" He answers it in the next verse: "My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of Heaven and Earth" (Psalm 121:2).

The younger son discovered the true help that he needed could only be received from his father and so he headed back home.

Chapter 2
The Wayward Journey
Luke 15:11-16

1. Jesus tells the Parable of the Lost Sheep, and the Lost Coin, and then introduces the Parable of the Lost Son. Who do you think Jesus is addressing in these parables, and why is the Parable of the Prodigal Son especially crucial for them to understand?

2. The younger son in the Parable of the Lost Son asks his father for his share of the inheritance. What does this request signify about the son's attitude and relationship with his father?

3. How does the younger son's longing to eat the food meant for the pigs serve as a pivotal moment in the story? What does feeding pigs signify in terms of his journey and realization of where he is currently at in his life?

4. Why do you think no one helped the younger son during his time of need? How might being brought low enable a person to receive grace?

[illegible]

Chapter 3

The Homecoming

Luke 15:17-24

This parable is a story of both a prodigal son and a prodigal father.

Prodigal: 1. spending money or resources freely and recklessly. (The younger son)
2. having or giving something on a lavish scale. (The father)²⁹

²⁹Oxford Languages.

Part 1: "Coming to his senses"

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death" (Luke 15:17).

The mention of "servants" doesn't specify the exact number the father had although we know there was more than one. In first-century Jewish culture, the number of servants in a household could vary widely based on the wealth and social standing of the family. Wealthier households might have more servants, while less affluent families would have fewer or none at all.

Here are some of the various types of servants found in a Jewish household:

1) Domestic Servants: These individuals would be responsible for general household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and other domestic chores such as washing the feet of guests.³⁰

2) Agricultural Workers: In households with agricultural land, there might be servants involved in farming activities, tending to crops or animals.

3) Herders: In households with livestock, there might be individuals responsible for herding and taking care of the animals.

³⁰[www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maundy_\(foot_washing\)](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maundy_(foot_washing))

It wasn't uncommon for younger children, particularly sons, to be involved in herding or tending to livestock. This is reflected in the biblical story of David, who, before becoming the renowned king of Israel, spent his early years as a shepherd (1 Samuel 16:11-13). The role of herding or tending to animals was often considered a task suitable for younger family members, as it required agility, and the ability to navigate tough terrain. It also served as a form of training for responsibility and leadership.

4) Craftsmen or Artisans: Wealthier families might employ skilled workers for specific tasks such as carpentry, metalwork, or other artisanal work.

5) Personal Attendants: Affluent households might have personal attendants or stewards who manage the household affairs, and finances, and supervise other servants. This is shown in the story of Joseph in Genesis 39:4: "Joseph found favor in his [Potiphar's] eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his household, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned."

6) Servants for Special Occasions: For wealthier families, there might be servants specifically designated for special occasions or events, such as preparing for feasts or celebrations.

7) Nannies or Caretakers: Families with children might have servants responsible for childcare and the general well-being of the younger members of the household.

How many servants were hired in his father's house we don't know, but we do know that "they had food to spare". The phrase "they had food to spare" suggests that the father's household was prosperous and had an abundance of resources. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that He lavished on us" (Ephesians 1:7-8a).

What does it mean that the younger son "came to his senses"?

A literal translation of "came to his senses" or "érchomai eis heautoû" is that he had "come to himself"³¹ For the first time in this story the younger son told himself the truth about himself. The truth is that his life apart from his father has led him to the point of starvation. The truth is that his father's servants have leftover food to spare. What am I doing staying here?

³¹www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1438/kjv/tr/0-1/

Part 2: "The Rehearsal Speech"

"I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:18-19).

You may have noticed that the younger son did not say that he had sinned against God but that he had sinned against Heaven.

Jesus is speaking to a Jewish crowd made up of tax collectors and Pharisees and neither group would ever say the name of God so it is not surprising that Jesus chose the words He did. In Judaism, there is a strong tradition of not pronouncing the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter Hebrew name of God, which is commonly written as YHWH. The exact pronunciation of this name is not definitively known, and it is considered so sacred that its correct pronunciation is not spoken out loud.

This practice is rooted in a deep reverence for the name of God and a desire to avoid any potential misuse or irreverence. When reading the Hebrew Scriptures aloud, many Jews use substitute names for God, such as Adonai (Lord) or Hashem (The Name). This reflects the cultural and religious emphasis on treating the name of God with the utmost respect and avoiding casual or unnecessary use of the divine name.

For the first time in this parable, the younger son follows his Jewish roots by using an alternative way of saying he had sinned against God without using God's name.

"Some scholars (myself included), contend that it should be translated, "even unto Heaven"; a Hebraism for, I have sinned exceedingly-beyond all description."³²

The prodigal son is aware of his father's material resources, but he only comes to understand the profound extent of his father's abundant grace and forgiveness upon his return home. At this point, He isn't even thinking about the possibility of being restored as a son, but he believes there is the possibility if he comes repentantly back unto his father that he might be taken back as a hired servant.

³²Clarke's Commentary. www.studylight.org/commentary/luke/15-18.html

Part 3: "The Journey Home"

"So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Luke 15:20).

This parable of the prodigal son mentions five things the Father did to his son and then five more things he did for his son.

There is an important message for us to receive because the number five in Hebrew is the letter "hey" which represents grace, demonstrated through both the father's actions and words.³³

What is revealed to us in this parable is a story of both a prodigal son and a prodigal father.

Prodigal: 1. spending money or resources freely and recklessly. (The younger son).

2. having or giving something on a lavish scale. (The father).³⁴

What five things did the father do upon his son's return home?

1) He saw him.

The text says, "When He was still far off the Father saw Him"—what that tells us is that when we were far away, the Father saw us too.

³³www.hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_One/Aleph-Bet/Hey/hey.html

³⁴Oxford Languages.

Romans 5:8: "But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God saw us in our need for Him and with love in His heart for you He gave His only Son (Luke 15:20). If the father saw him when he was far away, it means that his eyes of compassion were always searching for his son and eagerly waiting for him to come home to receive his grace. His love for his son remained steadfast through it all.

2) He had compassion.

The Father sees his son and has compassion for Him even before his son utters a single word. The father's response is characterized by compassion and love. His compassion causes him to move toward his son. This signifies the father's overwhelming joy and eagerness to welcome his lost son.

Lamentations 3:22-23: "Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

3) He ran to his son.

The compassion caused the Father to run. The Father's compassion prompted Him to sprint. In the Greek language, there are distinct words for running – one conveying a casual jog and the other an intense, race-winning sprint (tréchō)³⁵.

³⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5143/kjv/tr/0-1/

Which of the two Greek words do you think were used to describe the father running to welcome his son home? He ran like Usain Bolt. The sprint toward his son was motivated by his compassion and love and also to protect his son.

What Jewish tradition tells us is that when a young man would shame his father (in the manner that the younger son did), a group of elders would grab him and they would break a pot at his feet and say "You are now cut off from your people!"³⁶This ceremony known as kezazah means "the cutting off".³⁷ For more information on this ceremony reference the Talmud, Ketubot 28b.

In this case, because he had sold his inheritance before his father's death the elders would be on the lookout for any attempt to return home. The ceremony which would have occurred on the outskirts of the village would have prevented the younger son from ever returning home.³⁸

"According to the ceremony of kezazah, the father would typically remain at home, emotionally detached from the proceedings, to await the son's explanation. During this ceremony, the mother had the option to attend and appeal for mercy, unlike the father, who traditionally did not participate. In a striking

³⁶Landon Galloway. The Prodigal Son. www.destinyleaders.com/the-prodigal-son/ February 16, 2017.

³⁷Kenneth Bailey. The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants. June 3, 2005. Inter Varsity Press.

³⁸T.J. Kid. 1:5, 60c. www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/kezazah

departure from these customs, the prodigal's father defied convention. Instead of maintaining emotional distance, he ran to meet his son, revealing his legs, and forgave him even before the customary kezazah ceremony could sever the son's connection with him."³⁹

The son would have never been able to reach his father so the father ran to meet his son.

Psalm 24:3: "Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place?"

In the same way, we were unable to reach God so He sent His Son.

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

"In the first century, a Middle Eastern man never ran. If he were to run, he would have to hitch up his tunic so he would not trip. If he did this, it would show his bare legs. In that culture, it was humiliating and shameful for a man to show his bare legs."⁴⁰

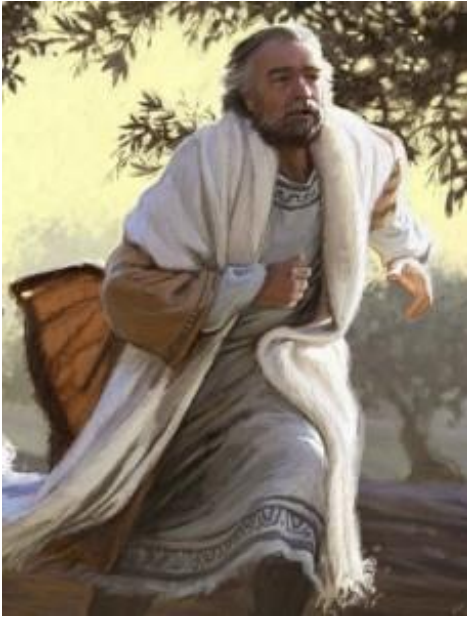
The father runs and shames himself to get to his son before the community reaches him so that his son does not experience the shame and

³⁹Shelia Arnett. Kezazah: "The Cutting Off".

www.sheliaarnett.weebly.com/blog/kezazah-the-cutting-off September 1, 2015.

⁴⁰Matthew Williams. The Prodigal Son's Father Shouldn't Have Run! Putting Luke 15:11-32 in context. Biola Magazine. May 31, 2010. www.biola.edu/blogs/biola-magazine/2010/the-prodigal-sons-father-shouldnt-have-run.

humiliation of their taunting, rejection, and everlasting expulsion from the community.



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"Our heavenly Father has taken our shame through His Son, Jesus, who willingly endured the cross on our behalf. He took our sins' shame so that we would not have to. As a result, we can be forgiven, restored — accepted."⁴²

Hebrews 12:2: "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

⁴¹The Prodigal Son.www.sharinghorizons.com/the-prodigal-son/. February 22, 2016.

⁴²Ibid.

4) He threw his arms around him.

"Threw his arms around him" (epipíptō): to fall into one's embrace.⁴³ Can you envision your heavenly Father rushing toward you with arms wide open? The Father warmly embraced Him, enveloping Him in a tight hug. Let us not overlook the context of this moment, remembering where the younger son had been (toiling with pigs) and completing a taxing journey through scorching, dusty terrain to return home. The noticeable odor would have preceded the embrace. This is a picture of God's grace. You don't need to clean yourself up to come to God. The son doesn't earn his way back into the father's favor by cleaning himself, he simply comes to his senses and returns to his father as he is.

"Manmade religion says you have to clean yourself up before you approach the Lord, but grace shouts, "Come as you are!" In the covenant of grace, God takes all the initiative:

- He loves us first (1 John 4:19)
- He forgives us first (Colossians 2:13)
- He accepts us first (Romans 15:7)

...and what we do is respond to what He has done,"⁴⁴ we receive the grace He wants to give.

"For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit

⁴³www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1968/niv/mgnt/0-1/

⁴⁴Paul Ellis. Conditional Acceptance?

www.escapetoreality.org/2015/02/26/2-corinthians-6v17-18/ February 26, 2015.

of sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children" (Romans 8:15-16).

At that moment, the father embraced his son. Similarly, seize this moment to embrace the love of your Heavenly Father, letting His affection encompass you.

5) He kissed him.

I believe that translators have downplayed the father's action in this instance by oversimplifying the father's action toward his son. The father did not simply kiss his son. This depiction could lead us to envision the father giving the son a quick peck on the cheek or forehead. One might even be tempted to imagine the father giving his son air kisses on either side of the cheek. With the smell coming off the son, would you blame him? However, this interpretation that the father "kissed him" doesn't fully illustrate what Jesus said.

Kissed "kataphiléō" to kiss much, again and again.⁴⁵ The compassion the father had for his son and the joy in his return home is revealed in the way that he lavished kisses on his son. He showered him with kisses, the overwhelming joy of the father being reunited with his lost son.

⁴⁵www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2705/niv/mgnt/0-1/



What do we learn about the grace of God from the actions of the father?

The grace of God is

- 1) immediate
- 2) complete
- 3) sacrificial
- 4) undeserved
- 5) lavishly extravagant

⁴⁶The Parable of the Prodigal Son.
www.bloggersforthe kingdom.com/parable-of-the-prodigal-son/

Part 4: "The Interrupted Repentance Speech"

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son'" (Luke 15:21).

Jesus purposefully reveals the entire rehearsed speech to the audience, emphasizing a significant message at the precise moment when the son is interrupted from completing his prepared words to his father.

Rehearsed Speech

"Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:18b-19).

Recitation/Repentance Speech

"Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (Luke 15:21b).

What part of his repentance speech did the younger son not be able to complete?

"Make me like one of your hired servants."

His speech is cut off after acknowledging his sin and his unworthiness as he is now ready to receive grace. God will never let you earn His love, goodness, blessing, favor, joy, or peace, by becoming a hired servant. He is interrupted, before the request to make him a hired servant

because Jesus died for our sins to make us a part of the family of God as sons and daughters.

"So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith" (Galatians 3:26). See also Ephesians 2:19, Romans 8:14-17, John 1:12-13, 1 John 3:1.

The point in the interrupted repentant speech is that you can't work your way into a relationship with your Father as a hired servant. Your place in the family of God is not achieved through your actions or words; rather, it is a result of what the Father has graciously extended to you. When you come to your senses and receive the grace available in Christ, you are embraced and welcomed home.

Part 5: "Gifts of Grace"

"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 fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate" (Luke 15:22-24).

Upon the prodigal son's return, we first discovered the five things the father did in response to his son's return; he saw him, he had compassion for him, he ran to him, he embraced him, and he kissed him. Now after receiving his son back home, the father gives five gifts of grace to him. The number five symbolizes God's grace, goodness, and favor toward humans."⁴⁷

The Robe

The initial gift bestowed upon him was a robe. Isaiah 61:10, proclaims, "I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." This verse vividly portrays the transformative work that God has performed on our behalf.

⁴⁷www.biblestudy.org/bibleref/meaning-of-numbers-in-bible/5.html

The robe stands for honor and covers our sins and our shame. We are robed in Christ's righteousness. Grace says, "Here is your honor and it puts the robe of Jesus' righteousness on you." The inclusion of the word "quick" in the phrase "quick, bring the best robe" suggests a sense of urgency and immediacy. The father reinstates his son's honor and dignity immediately.

Before Jesus' crucifixion, He endured the indignity of being draped in a false robe, an act of mockery. As John 19:2 recounts, "And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him." This was a heart-wrenching scene as the King of kings was derided with a bogus crown and robe. "For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:2b). Because Christ endured, we now have the privilege of standing in Jesus' robe of righteousness because He paid a high price for it. He bore the shame and mockery that we rightfully deserved, allowing us to freely receive His perfect robe of righteousness. Truly in Christ, we have been given the very best robe.

The Signet Ring

The second gift bestowed by the compassionate father to his son was a ring. In times past, individuals of significant stature would employ their signet ring to seal important documents. A notable example is when Joseph was elevated to the position of second-in-command in Egypt, Pharaoh entrusted him with his own ring (Genesis 41:42). In a similar vein, God bestows upon believers in Christ both authority (the ring) and honor (the best robe) today. We are given the authority of Christ to carry out the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18) and to become involved in the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:18).

A mere servant does not receive the finest robe or the privilege of wearing a ring on their hand. However, through the redemptive power of the cross, we are reborn into the family of God, and that ring symbolizes our sonship and authority within the Kingdom of God. What a truly remarkable gift this is!

Sandals on the Feet

The sandals represent your standing in the household of God that you are not a hired servant nor will you ever be, you are a child of God. Hired servants did not wear sandals. Slaves went barefoot.⁴⁸

⁴⁸Vincent's Word Studies. www.biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/15-22.htm

We see how much better the New Covenant is for us (because it is upheld by Jesus' faithfulness, not ours) through the parable of the lost son. When we examine the story of Moses' encounter with God compared to the prodigal son's encounter with his father, we see what grace has done for us in Jesus.

Ephesians 6:15 reminds us that we have been fitted with the sandals of the Gospel of peace. To be "fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace" means to be spiritually grounded in the message of peace found in the Gospel. The good news, that Christians carry is centered on the peace that comes through faith in Jesus Christ. This peace includes reconciliation with God, inner peace, and the promise of eternal peace. This is also what the restored son was given as the sandals were placed on his feet. Believers are encouraged to be grounded in and share this message of peace. The Gospel is as shoes to the feet; it beautifies and adorns (Song of Solomon 7:1).

Comparing Moses's story to the parable of the prodigal son we discover how much better New Covenant living is. The burning bush marked a turning point in Moses' life. It was a moment of divine intervention that redirected the trajectory of his life from being a mere shepherd in Midian to becoming the leader and deliverer of the Israelites. God's presence in the burning bush, along with His call and assurance, propelled Moses into a remarkable journey of faith.

In this account, we see God meeting Moses in an unexpected place, (a burning bush), at an unexpected time in his life (living as a fugitive nomadic shepherd). It serves as a powerful reminder that God's plans and interventions can come when we least anticipate them, and His presence can transform ordinary moments into extraordinary life-altering encounters.

"When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:4-5).

This is the first time God appeared and spoke to Moses and His first instruction to Moses was: "Do not draw near." In contrast, let's see the difference found in the parable of the prodigal son that Jesus shared in Luke 15.

"Do not draw near this place" in the Old Covenant with Moses' encounter at the burning bush compared to "when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him" of the New Covenant.

Under the one who would give the Law to the people, Moses was not allowed to draw near to God. Under grace, the father of the prodigal son

runs toward his wayward son the moment he sees him even though he has sinned.

Moses was instructed to remove his sandals before God. Sandals or shoes represent possession and one's standing. For Moses to be told to remove his sandals meant that he had no right to stand before God. But under grace, the father commanded that sandals be put on his son's feet. Grace reconciles us to the Father! Through the finished work of Christ and our faith in Him, we stand righteous before God. We have been clothed in Christ and given His right standing (Galatians 3:26-27, 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Moses could not draw near because he was standing on holy ground. Under grace, we can draw near and stand before God because our footing is firmly on the ground of grace, a place where the accomplishments of Christ have paved the way for our righteousness.⁴⁹

Fatted Calf

The prodigal son was half starving, and the fatted calf was killed for him. Remember it was his hunger that awakened him to his condition and need to return home. It would take the sacrifice of the fatted calf to restore the younger son into the family.

⁴⁹Dr. Matthew Webster. Heavenly Conversations: How Hearing God's Voice Transforms and Blesses Our Lives. 151-154.

The killing of the fattened calf is such a rare event noted by the older brother's response in Luke 15:27.

Why was it a fattened calf and not a lamb that was slaughtered at the return of the lost son? The choice of a fattened calf instead of a lamb holds symbolic significance within the cultural and religious context of the time.

The fattened calf was considered a luxurious and special animal. It was often reserved for festive and celebratory occasions. Killing a fattened calf for a feast conveyed a sense of abundance, joy, and extravagance. The father's decision to celebrate with a fattened calf underscores the magnitude of his happiness and the significance of the son's return.

In contrast, a lamb was a common sacrificial animal in Jewish religious practices. Lambs were often used for sin offerings and burnt offerings in the context of worship and repentance. The choice of a fattened calf, therefore, emphasizes the father's desire to express not only forgiveness and reconciliation but also to celebrate the restoration of the son with a grand and joyous occasion.

Remember the point Jesus makes from the earlier parables, The Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin:

"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent" (Luke 15:7). "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). Jesus uses a fattened calf to drive home the point that the expensive sacrifice for sin has been made and it has led to a grand celebration of rejoicing in the lost being recovered.

This parable of the prodigal son reveals our relationship to God and what He offered to redeem us. The parable centers on the response of the father rather than the actions of the sons.

The father would be unjust to let the sins of the younger son go unpunished. Hebrews 9:22 says, "In fact, the Law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

For sin to be forgiven a sacrifice had to be offered for humanity and that sacrifice was our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus became the ultimate sacrifice for our sins. John 1:29: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'"

The Celebration

Notice that the father has the calf killed before the celebration.

Without the sacrifice, there is no celebration. This is a picture of Jesus on the cross. Because He died, we have life, and we have reason to celebrate because He has restored us in our relationship with God. As we receive communion, we are doing it in remembrance of Jesus' sacrifice for us (Luke 22:19, 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). Communion is our celebration that Jesus purchased for us to have His divine health and life in our mortal bodies. We have the forgiveness of sins through His shed blood.

Growing up playing basketball I always wanted to do well to impress my dad. There was one year when I played on a team that was not very good. What a drastic change from the previous year when we finished second in the league. In the preceding year, every game my dad attended resulted in a victory for our team. This success prompted him to establish a new tradition – celebrating each win at the same restaurant. The feasts became a symbolic representation of our team's triumph. The friendly wait staff, having grown accustomed to our regular visits, started to eagerly anticipate our arrival on Saturday and even joined in the celebration when we entered the restaurant.

However, everything changed the following year when our team didn't win much. After our first loss, my dad took me out to eat at the same place, prompting my confusion.

Why celebrate when we hadn't won? I fixated on the idea that my performance was the cause for our celebration, overlooking the truth: the celebration was because my dad and I were together which is reason enough to celebrate. The celebration in the parable of the lost son was because "this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32b).

We celebrate a victory feast as we receive communion because Christ is our Victor. He made a way for us to forever be with our heavenly Father and this caused all of Heaven to rejoice.

Chapter 3
The Homecoming
Luke 15:17-24

1) What does the phrase “they had food to spare” signify about the father’s household? How does it relate to the concept of abundance and grace?

2) What do you think it means for the younger son to “come to his senses”? How does this moment lead to his decision to return to his father?

3) Why does the son not complete his rehearsed speech about becoming a hired servant?

4) Reflect on the five actions of the father when he sees his son returning. How do these actions symbolize grace?

5) What is the cultural significance of the father running towards his son? How does it challenge traditional expectations of a father's behavior in that cultural context?

6) How does the interruption in the son’s speech emphasize the concept of sonship we have in Jesus and the unconditional love of the father?

7) What do each of the five gifts of grace represent and what does that mean for you in Christ?

8) Reflect on the significance of the fatted calf being sacrificed. How does it symbolize the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus on the cross?

9) What is the connection between the celebration in the Parable of the Lost Son and communion? Think in terms of the sacrifice of Jesus and what it offers to us.

[illegible]

Chapter 4
The Older Brother's Struggle
Luke 15:25-30

The question is not whether God has given us our spiritual inheritance, but whether we possess it by faith. All the blessings and promises in God's Word have been paid for at the cross.

Many people who read the story of the prodigal son overlook the second son in the narrative, to the extent that even translators have labeled this teaching of Jesus as “The Parable of the Lost Son”. A more precise title might be “The Parable of the Lost Sons.” Nevertheless, even this doesn’t fully convey the central message of the parable; a more fitting and accurate title would be “The Parable of the Gracious Father.”

If the primary aim of the narrative was solely to emphasize that God’s grace is available even for the most egregious sinners through faith in Jesus Christ, then the inclusion of the second son in the story would be unnecessary.

However, the surprising aspect is that both sons receive almost equal attention in the parable because both need to receive the father’s saving grace. The younger son and his journey are detailed in Luke 15:12-24, while the older son and his reaction to his brother’s return unfold over eight verses in Luke 15:25-32. The intentional incorporation of the older son by Jesus serves a significant purpose in the overall narrative.

Why did Jesus include two sons? The answer is found in the first verses of Luke 15:1-2.

“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Who were the Pharisees referencing when they said that Jesus welcomes sinners? They were speaking of the tax collectors.

In another teaching known as "The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector," Jesus will address the attitudes of the self-righteous.

"To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (Luke 18:9-14).

The inclusion of the elder brother in the Parable of the Gracious Father is essential for the Pharisees to identify with him and see that by rejecting God's grace and trying to earn your salvation through works, you will never be justified before God.

Galatians 2:16: "Know that a person is not justified by the works of the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in

Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law, because by the works of the Law no one will be justified.”

“The Prodigal Son portrays two areas of human failure that encompass all sin: independence and indulgence.”⁵⁰

In first-century Jewish society, tax collectors were labeled as sinners and treated as social outcasts for several reasons. Tax collectors, especially those working for the Roman Empire, were seen as collaborators with an occupying force. The Romans had a heavy tax burden on the Jewish population, and those who collected taxes on behalf of the Romans were often viewed with suspicion and resentment. Tax collectors were known to exploit their position for personal gain. They would collect more taxes than required and keep the surplus for themselves.

“There were three types of taxes which were required by the Romans, who ruled Israel during the time of Jesus: the land tax, the head tax, and the customs tax system. The taxes were used to pay tribute to Rome, which had conquered Israel in 63 BC. The tax collector in the parable would have most likely been the one connected to the customs system. Throughout the Roman Empire, there was a system of tolls and duties that were collected at ports, tax offices, and the city gates. The rates were

⁵⁰Jack Hayford. The Greatest Thanksgiving Feast.
www.jackhayford.org/teaching/articles/the-greatest-thanksgiving-feast/

between two and five percent of the value of the goods that were transported from town to town. On long journeys, a person bringing goods from one place to another could be taxed multiple times. The value of the goods was determined by the tax collector. While there was some measure of control, tax collectors would often value the goods much higher than their actual worth, in order to make a profit. They would stop people on the road and demand these taxes, which could either be paid in currency or by forfeiting a portion of the goods. Those being taxed considered this institutional robbery."⁵¹

"Tax collectors often strong-armed money out of people with the use of thugs. Most were despicable, vile, unprincipled scoundrels."⁵²

The collaboration with the Romans and the perception of corruption led to a social stigma. As a result, tax collectors were often excluded from communal activities, and their social standing was compromised.

In Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:13-17, and Luke 5:27-28 Jesus invites Levi (a tax collector) to follow Him. The name Levi comes from the Hebrew word meaning to lend. The name itself also means attached or pledged.⁵³ How appropriate that Levi's name was exactly what

⁵¹Peter Amsterdam. The Pharisee and the Tax Collector. www.thefamilyinternational.org/en/faith-foundations/the-bible/the-pharisee-and-the-tax-collector/

⁵²Joel Ryan. Why exactly were tax collectors so hated? www.biblestudytools.com/bible-study/topical-studies/why-exactly-were-tax-collectors-so-hated.html October 11, 2023.

⁵³www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3018/kjv/tr/0-1/

he did for a living. Levi overtaxed Jews for the Romans whom he had pledged himself to. Jesus comes along, and simply invites Levi, "Follow Me" and Levi's life is forever changed. Levi is transformed into Matthew. Matthew comes from the Hebrew word "given". And it means "a gift of God".⁵⁴ Levi used to take from people, but Matthew will give to people what he received, the very gift of God, grace to others, Jesus Christ. Filled with enthusiasm about his transformed life and identity in Jesus, Matthew promptly extends invitations to his friends, who happen to be fellow tax collectors, for a gathering at his house to introduce them to Jesus.

If the parable of the lost son only told the story of the wayward son, the Pharisees would have become more haughty and self-righteous comparing their righteousness to that of the tax collectors as illustrated in the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the elder brother does not celebrate the younger brother's salvation. Similarly, there is an unenthusiastic and angry response when Jesus invites Himself to the home of a tax collector for salvation in Luke 19:7. The crowd responds, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

As we hear the words of the elder brother in the story of the lost son, we now perceive it with a new perspective, it is as if the Pharisees

⁵⁴www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3156/kjv/tr/0-1/

themselves are speaking directly through the words and actions of the older son. The wayward son is the tax collector who has received the salvation of the Lord, illustrated through the lives of Zaccheus and Matthew.

Part 1: "Working in the fields"

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing" (Luke 15:25).

When the younger son returns home where do we find the older son? He is out in the fields working. Fieldwork is laborious, exhausting work.

While we might be tempted to think of how noble it is for him to be out in the field working even after already being given his inheritance, we are missing the point of the placement of the elder son in the field. The relationship between the older son and the father is strained.

"The logical thing for the elder son to have done would have been to go at once to the father, but something was missing from the rapport which he should have had with the father. He was living the life of a slave in the house of his father."⁵⁵ The elder son was free but was living as though he were a hired servant. We know from earlier that the father had many hired servants who would have handled the difficult work in the fields. His attitude and lack of gratitude for all the father has given him are revealed as we progress in the parable.

We learn from the story of Jacob who tried to wrestle a blessing from God (Genesis 32:24-29),

⁵⁵Coffman's Commentary on the Bible.
www.studylight.org/commentary/luke/15-25.html

that when we abandon our wrestling/striving to get ahead in life and instead place complete trust in His grace alone, His provision flows without hindrance to us in our lives. The older son should have been inside the home, dancing, singing, and praising God that his brother had been restored to the family. When the good news came he chose to remain on the outside.

Part 2: "Reason for Celebrating Revealed"

"So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound'" (Luke 15:26-27).

This is truly a reason to celebrate. Your brother who was lost is now safely back home. Living a wild life is akin to living on the edge. None of us are promised tomorrow (James 4:13-14), and engaging in such risky behavior only underscores this reality. The miraculous aspect lies not only in the fact that his reckless living didn't lead to his death but more remarkably, that he came to his senses and chose to return home.

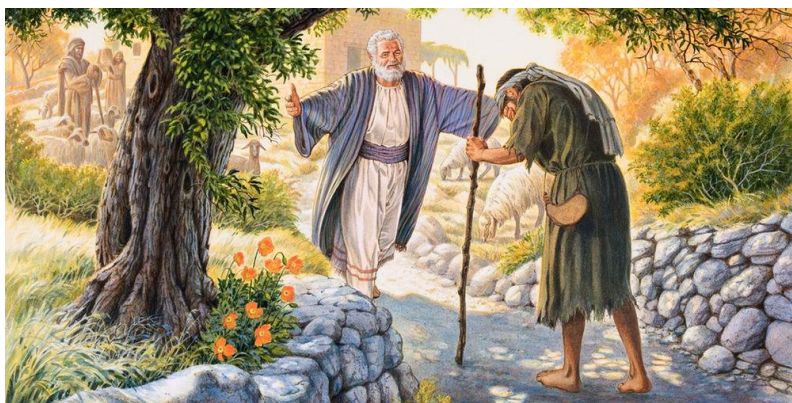
The father has killed the fattened calf meaning the sacrifice for sins to be removed has been done he has been received back home and is now forever safe.

If the older son were genuinely leading a righteous life, akin to his father, how should his attitude be toward a sinner—his brother, no less—receiving forgiveness for his sins and being reconciled back to God?

Jesus had earlier posed the question to both the tax collectors and the Pharisees. "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls

his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep' (Luke 15:4-6). The same is true for the parable of the lost coin (Luke 15:9-10).

The genius of what Jesus has done here is He has already shown the value that God places on each person. This is not the father showing favoritism to the younger son and neglecting the older one as Peter discovered this truth about God, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34b). The grace was there for the older son, but unlike the younger son, he did not think that he needed it.

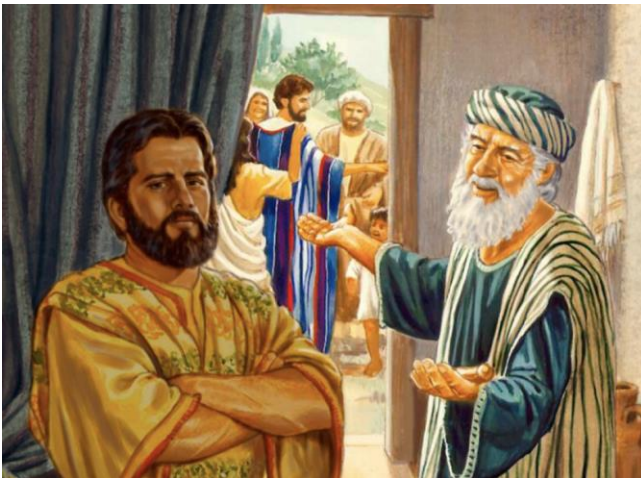


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⁵⁶Parable of the Prodigal Son or the Running Father. April 2, 2019.www.stmarysnorthchurch.org.uk/single-post/2019/04/02/Parable-of-the-Prodigal-Son-or-the-Running-Father

Part 3: "Angered by Grace"

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends'" (Luke 15:28-29).



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The self-righteous can't receive grace because they don't think they need it and they are angered by grace by those who receive it because it is the unmerited favor of God.⁵⁷

While the elder son tried to earn favor in the field (which you never can) the younger son received it by faith, and he set out to return home.

⁵⁷The Fourth Sunday of Lent Gospel Reflection The Prodigal Son Luke 15:1-3,11-32. www.linkedin.com/pulse/fourth-sunday-lent-gospel-reflection-prodigal-son-15-july-m/

⁵⁸Oxford Languages.

Hebrews 9:14: "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God."

The elder son is particularly angry at the fact that the fattened calf was killed. "The preaching of a crucified Christ, and of free and full salvation by Him, is highly displeasing and provoking to self-righteous persons; they are angry at it, that it should be free, that election to salvation should be of grace, that justification should be freely by the grace of God, and that pardon of sin should be according to the riches of God's grace, and salvation be by grace, and not by works."⁵⁹

In verse twenty-eight Jesus once again makes it clear that the son is on the outside. This is a key distinction for the Pharisees to learn that they are on the outside of God's favor. Jesus said, "For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall in no case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

If there was a part two of the parable of the prodigal son it would be discovered in the life of the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18-23. The rich young ruler wants to know what he must do to receive everlasting life. Jesus points him to obeying God's commandments. If you can live a

⁵⁹Gill's Exposition of the entire Bible.
www.biblehub.com/commentaries/luke/15-28.htm

perfect sinless life then you do not need grace.

"All these (commandments) I have kept since I was a boy", he replied (Luke 18:21). Look at how that parallels the older son's response:

"Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders."

"Exaggerations are common for those who hold on to bitterness. The older son finally showed this bitterness to the father, but only after it had done its damage in his heart over many years."⁶⁰

We know that all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23). So, we know that this older son is disillusioned to believe that he has never needed his father's grace. When it came to the question of salvation, Jesus pointed the rich young ruler to the Law, and the young man walked away sorrowful because he couldn't keep it. The Law will always bring you to the end of yourself and the purpose is that you might receive the salvation of the Lord, which is through grace.

The older son in his anger becomes accusatory of his father's generosity toward him. He must have forgotten about the inheritance that was already given to him in Luke 15:12. As believers in Jesus Christ, we have been given an incredible spiritual inheritance, enjoy it every day.

Our inheritance is all the blessings and promises in God's Word—spiritual blessings as well as

⁶⁰David Guzik. Study Guide for Luke 15.

www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/luke/luke-15.cfm

physical blessings like healing, provision, protection, and much more. Our attitude toward our inheritance is extremely important. It determines whether we receive it.

In Genesis 25:29–34, Esau showed an indifferent attitude toward his inheritance. He was the firstborn son but sold his birthright to his brother for a bowl of food. He didn't count it important to hold on to his birthright. He despised it (Genesis 25:34).

People who have Esau's kind of attitude toward their inheritance don't inherit. Today, the question is not whether God has given us our spiritual inheritance, but whether we possess it by faith. All the blessings and promises in God's Word have been paid for at the cross.

"All these years I have been slaving for you." He has revealed the truth that he has been living as a slave, not a son, out in the fields doing what should be done by the hired servants. He views himself as a slave, not a son. He has been trying to earn what his father wants to freely give him. This slave mindset has robbed him of the blessings of his inheritance. "Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends." "Every day his father's love was constant, and everything the father had was his. Yet, the proud and the self-righteous always feel that they are not treated as well as they deserve."⁶¹

⁶¹Morris, Leon L. "Luke: An Introduction and Commentary" (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988).

Why does he say that he was never even given a young goat instead of a fattened calf?

In the culture of that time, killing a fattened calf was a significant and costly gesture, reserved for special occasions. He says he was never even given a young goat (kid) "éripheos"⁶² which was of less value than the calf; that he had now given his other son.

The mention of not even being given a young goat is an expression of the older son's feelings of neglect or perceived unfairness. He is highlighting what he perceives as a lack of recognition and reward for his years of loyal service compared to what he sees as an extravagant celebration for his wayward brother.

He also misses the point entirely of why the fattened calf was killed. It was not killed for the sake of entertaining guests and partying. The calf was killed and it symbolized the atonement for sin and the joy that comes at the recovery of the lost son.

⁶²www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2056/niv/mgnt/0-1/

Part 4: "Accusations of the Past"

"But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him" (Luke 15:30)!

The older brother addresses the formerly wayward son as "this son of yours" not "my brother". The use of "this son of yours" instead of "my brother" reflects the older brother's sense of distance and disassociation from his younger brother. This choice of words underscores the relational gap between the two brothers, highlighting the older brother's refusal to recognize the restored relationship between the father and the younger son.

The older brother has failed to celebrate and only sees his younger brother through who he was in the past. However, the calf was already killed. "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). At this point, the son has already been redeemed and restored to the family. He has been given the best robe, the robe of righteousness that has covered his shame. He wears the signet ring meaning he has authority that comes with being in the family. The sandals were placed on his feet showing his standing as a son. Yet, the older brother wants to bring up the past, his old life.

We could have inferred from earlier when Jesus refers to the lifestyle of the lost son as "wild living" that prostitution might have been a part of it. However, at this point, this particular sin is

singled out by the older brother. Why might that be?

The Jewish faith, as outlined in the Old Testament, had strict moral and ethical teachings. Prostitution was seen as a violation of these moral standards, which emphasized sexual purity and fidelity within the context of marriage.

In the Jewish culture, there was a strong cultural stigma attached to certain behaviors, and prostitution was often associated with impurity and social degradation. Engaging in such activities could lead to ostracism and social exclusion.

Prostitution was not only viewed as a moral transgression but also had symbolic implications. It could be seen as a metaphor for spiritual infidelity and the rejection of God's covenant. In the Old Testament, Israel's unfaithfulness to God is often portrayed using the imagery of prostitution and adultery.

First-century Jewish communities placed a high value on community cohesion and adherence to shared moral standards. Those who engaged in behaviors considered socially unacceptable, such as prostitution, might have been viewed as jeopardizing the moral fabric of the community. As we learned earlier the community would have desired to perform the kezazah ceremony banning the younger son from returning home. "The villagers would break pottery at the feet of the individual, symbolizing that they were no longer in community with the returning person.

They were breaking relations with him. It was a way of shaming the individual, of making him feel completely empty. Importantly, the ceremony would take place on the outskirts of the village before the individual could make his way back home."⁶³

Who might have led the charge in performing such a ceremony? The older brother/Pharisees would. Perhaps he was angered too at the missed opportunity to perform the kezazah ceremony, banning his younger brother from ever returning home.

⁶³Bobby Conway. Ever Heard of the Kezazah Ceremony? www.crossexamined.org/ever-heard-of-the-kezazah-ceremony/. June 19, 2023.

Chapter 4
The Older Brother's Struggle
Luke 15:25-30

1) Why do you think Jesus included both the younger and the older son in this parable?

2) Why were the tax collectors often called sinners in first-century Jewish society? Who represented the tax collectors in this parable and why?

3) Why do you think the older son is found working in the fields when the younger son returns?

4) In what ways is the relationship between the older son and the father strained, and what does this reveal about the son's attitude?

5) What is the significance of killing the fattened calf in the context of the parable?

6) What should the older son's attitude be towards a sinner responding to the Gospel, especially if it's his brother?

7) Why do self-righteous individuals struggle to accept grace, and how does this relate to the older son's reaction?

8) In what ways does the older son's attitude reflect the Pharisees' perspective?

9) How does the older son's focus on the younger son's past contrast with the father's perspective of redemption and restoration?

[illegible]

Chapter 5

Living in Grace as a Restored Child of God

Luke 15:31-32

Right believing is the key that unlocks the treasures of God in your life, giving you access to the fullness of His love, grace, and every spiritual blessing. The hindrance between you and your victory is found in any wrong beliefs. The battle has to do with what you believe (John 8:32).

Let's recap the cast of characters in the parable of the lost son and who each one represents once more.

The prodigal (lost) son: All of humanity.

All of humanity (except Jesus) inherited a sinful nature from Adam in the fall (Romans 5:12). Jesus was the exception because by being conceived by the Holy Spirit and not through a human father, Jesus was not subject to the same sinful nature that all other human beings inherit from Adam.

Essentially, the Virgin Birth is seen as a way to break the chain of inherited sin, allowing Jesus to be both fully divine and fully human while maintaining a sinless nature. The starting point to receive God's grace is to recognize that you need it. The older son never did because he thought he could earn it through hard work in the fields. Those who received the salvation of Jesus Christ first had to come to their senses and recognize they were sinners in need of salvation. We all must see who we are in this story, for we were the lost son before we believed in Jesus Christ as our Messiah and received the salvation of the Lord.

The older son: The Pharisees or anyone who tries to earn salvation through their works.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name drive out demons and in Your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers' (Matthew 7:21-23)!

What distinguishes Christianity from other world religions is its unique emphasis on grace and the concept of salvation as a gift bestowed by God through faith in Jesus. This sets Christianity apart significantly from other faiths that instruct adherents on specific actions or endeavors to attain eternal life, achieve nirvana, attain union with God, reach liberation from the cycle of birth and death, or pursue any other ultimate goal.

The restored son: Everyone who believes in Jesus.

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31a).

"All of God's blessings, including forgiveness, salvation, righteousness, and sanctification, come to us freely by grace and are received by faith. Who is saved? It is the one who trusts in the Savior (Acts 16:31). Jesus said, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).⁶⁴

⁶⁴Paul Ellis. The Grace Commentary. www.thegracecommentary.com/acts-16/#acts16v31

There is no other path to salvation for the lost son but to come back home. The only way back home to the Father is through Jesus the Son. "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

If the fattened calf had not been sacrificed, forgiveness for the son's transgressions would not have been possible. Similarly, if Jesus had not taken up the cross for our sins, we would lack a path to reconcile with the Father, as exemplified in John 14:6.

The father: represents our heavenly Father

People strive to understand the nature of God. Unfortunately, over the centuries, there have been distortions in portraying God. Misleading depictions have labeled Him as envious, distrustful, needy, angry, and distant, suggesting that He keeps a meticulous record of wrongs. The truth is that God is never envious and never seeks to take what others have; instead, He desires to generously give all that He possesses. In Christ, He keeps no record of the wrong things you've done (Hebrews 8:12). He remains steadfast through storms and walks with you through the fires of life (Daniel 3:24-25, Matthew 28:20) to express His unwavering love. He will never fail you, never fall short,

never fall out of love, because He's made of love, the very source of it all (1 John 4:8).⁶⁵

Do you want to know what God is truly like? Jesus reveals the nature of our heavenly Father in the parable of the lost son. The father in the parable and his response to the wayward son is characterized by unconditional love. Despite the son's rebellion, squandering of wealth, and reckless living, the father welcomes him back with open arms. This highlights God's boundless love and grace, which transcends human failures and shortcomings. The father's immediate and complete forgiveness of the prodigal son illustrates God's mercy. Instead of holding onto anger or resentment, the father forgives his son without hesitation. This reflects the biblical teaching that God is merciful and forgiving, ready to forgive those who receive the sacrifice of His Son. The father's posture of waiting and watching for the return of his son demonstrates God's longing for reconciliation with humanity. "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9b). No one is beyond the reach of divine grace. The lavish celebration the father organizes upon the son's return reflects God's joy over a repentant sinner. The parable highlights the idea that there is joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7,10), reinforcing the concept of God's delight in the

⁶⁵Darin Hufford. *The Misunderstood God. The Lies Religion Tells Us About God.* Windblown Media. p. 208-210. November 2, 2009.

redemption of the lost. The parable also addresses the issue of religious self-righteousness through the elder son. The father loved both sons equally. This emphasizes that God's love is not based on merit but is freely given to all, regardless of past mistakes or perceived worthiness.

Now that we have recapped the characters in the parable and who they represent let's pick up where we left off and conclude the parable of the gracious father.

“My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’” (Luke 15:31-32).

The older son, who represents the Pharisees and the religious leaders, becomes upset when he learns about the celebration of the return of his younger brother. The father's response to the older son's complaints includes the statement, “You are always with me, and all that is mine is yours” (Luke 15:31). The father responded to the older son's hostility with tenderness and reason. The Greek word “teknon”, the father used to address his elder son is a term of tender affection.

What is meant by the father saying the elder son is always with him is that his older son has a privileged position as always enjoying his

father's company. This was a distinct Jewish privilege, particularly held by the religious leaders of the nation, as highlighted in passages like Romans 3:1-2 and Romans 9:4. All that God had was Israel's in the sense that they always had access to it because of the privileged relationship He had established with the nation.⁶⁶

When the father addressed the elder son he did not call him "son" as is commonly translated in many English versions of the Bible. Instead, he referred to him as "teknon" translated as child.⁶⁷ In Luke 15:11, the elder son never saw himself as a son, which led to his self-righteousness, bitterness, and anger. He was performance-oriented instead of conscious of his father's love for him. In comparison, the Father refers to the restored son as huiōs in Luke 15:24 which signifies someone who is born again.⁶⁸

In Matthew 21:18-22 Jesus curses a fig tree. Jesus cursed the barren fig tree as a prophetic picture of the curse unbelieving Israel had brought on itself (Matthew 21:19). The fig tree was in leaf so it appeared to be alive, but had no fruit and would bear no fruit. Israel appeared to be alive on the outside as well, but just like the tree, the nation was bearing no fruit for God. In Israel's case, it should have been the season for

⁶⁶Dr. Constable's Expository Notes.www.studylight.org/commentary/luke/15-31.html

⁶⁷www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5043/niv/mgnt/0-1/

⁶⁸www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5207/niv/mgnt/0-1/

bearing fruit because the Messiah was in their midst, but they didn't recognize Him and were completely barren like the fig tree. Jesus' prophetic message was that by rejecting the Messiah, you are still living under a curse.

We learn from Luke 15:28 that the older son has an opportunity to attend the celebration of the younger son returning home but he refuses to go in. This refusal is paralleled in another parable Jesus taught called the Parable of the Wedding Feast.

In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus tells the story of a king who prepared a wedding feast for his son. In this parable, the invited guests refuse to come to the wedding, and the king sends his servants to invite others, both good and bad, from the streets.

The connection between these two parables lies in the theme of invitation and acceptance. In the parable of the prodigal son, the older son refuses to join the celebration for his repentant brother, expressing resentment and self-righteousness. Similarly, in the parable of the wedding feast, the initial guests reject the invitation to the wedding, symbolizing the religious leaders and people of Israel who reject Jesus and the invitation to attend the wedding feast in Heaven (Revelation 19:7-9).

In both parables, there is an invitation to a celebration that represents God's Kingdom, and the response of the invited individuals reflects

their attitude toward God's call and the acceptance of His mercy and grace which is represented by anger and refusal to receive and rejoice seen in the response of the elder son.

The elder son's reaction shouldn't be surprising to us. When one has not received grace, how is it possible to extend grace to others? The mindset of the elder son is deeply ingrained in a performance-driven concept of righteousness. He views himself as someone who has meticulously followed rules and toiled hard for his father. This legalistic viewpoint fosters a sense of entitlement and makes it difficult to show grace to his wayward brother, whose merits wouldn't warrant such a celebration.

The elder son's self-righteousness blinds him to his own need for grace. He perceives himself as deserving and fails to recognize that, like his prodigal brother, he also falls short of perfection. Acknowledging one's need for grace can be difficult when a person has a comparison mindset and fails to see God's standard is perfection.

Jesus said to those who were still living under the Mosaic Law on the Sermon on the Mount, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made Him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." Our perfection is found in Christ. "For by one offering

He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14).

The father said to the elder son, “Everything I have is yours”. What an amazing statement to realize that in Christ God shares everything with us. Romans 8:17 says we are “Co-heirs with Christ”. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3).

“Alexander the Great had a general whose daughter was getting married. Alexander highly esteemed this soldier and generously offered to cover the expenses of the wedding. When the general presented Alexander’s steward with the bill, it turned out to be an exorbitant sum. To the steward’s surprise, Alexander smiled and instructed, “Pay it! Don’t you see—by asking me for such an enormous sum, he does me great honor. He shows that he believes I am both rich and generous.”⁶⁹

“How much more will your Father in Heaven give good gifts to those who ask Him” (Matthew 7:11b)!

God delights in providing good things to those who seek Him and trust in His goodness. The story of Alexander the Great’s response to the

⁶⁹Rev. Brent L. White. The Difference Between Living as a “Son” and a “Slave” in Galatians 4. www.revbrentwhite.com/2018/06/09/the-difference-between-living-as-a-son-and-a-slave-in-galatians-4/ June 9, 2018.

general's request for an extravagant sum parallels the concept that our bold requests honor God, acknowledging His abundant resources and willingness to give generously. "Everything I have is yours!"

Consider how profoundly blinded the elder son is by his envy and animosity toward his younger brother, preventing him from relishing the abundance that his father is eager to share. It appears that, subtly, the elder son has bought into the falsehood that he missed out on something extravagant that the prodigal living afforded his younger sibling.

This mindset reflects a parallel to the original sin, where the belief was that God withheld something that was for their good. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Today the deception of sin is that it can offer us something we don't have that will be for our good.

Right believing is the key that unlocks the treasures of God in your life, giving you access to the fullness of His love, grace, and every spiritual blessing. The hindrance between you and your victory is found in any wrong beliefs. The battle has to do with what you believe (John 8:32).

The elder son calls out specific sins committed by the younger son. "But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with

prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him”!

How was the older son aware of the younger son’s association with prostitutes? The only plausible explanation is that the younger son’s behavior was so notorious that news of it had traveled from the distant land where he resided back to his hometown. This serves to emphasize the father’s unconditional love even further. Despite likely hearing such reports, the father continued to have such love for his wayward son.

We are deliberately left without further details about the subsequent lives of the restored son and the elder son. The absence of additional information appears intentional. It remains a possibility for the elder son to experience repentance and willingly enter into the blessings of God’s grace alongside his brother. However, the likelihood of such a transformation might be low. Historical records show that most did not believe in Jesus as Messiah until after the Resurrection and Ascension, during the period when people were consistently joining the early Christian community (Acts 2:47).

There was a prominent Pharisee named Nicodemus who I believe did receive the salvation of the Lord. In the initial recorded encounter between Nicodemus and Jesus, in John 3, Nicodemus approaches Jesus with questions at night. Though he acknowledges Jesus as being from God, his motive seems

more about gaining knowledge than becoming a disciple (John 3:2). Becoming a disciple involved a formal process that often included a public declaration or acknowledgment of one's commitment to follow a particular rabbi. Such declarations were done during the day when the community was actively engaged in learning and discussions. Nicodemus meeting Jesus at night was intentionally done to show he had no interest in becoming His disciple.

In a subsequent meeting, Nicodemus, still unaware of his need for salvation from Jesus, attempts to save Him, not realizing he needs Jesus to die for him so that he might be saved (John 7:45-51).

The final mention of Nicodemus in the Gospel of John reveals a significant transformation. Nicodemus aligns himself with Joseph of Arimathea, who requests and buries Jesus' body after the crucifixion. Despite Joseph's fear of the Jewish leaders, Nicodemus joins in the act, contributing a substantial amount of myrrh and aloes (John 19:38-40). This association with the death and burial of Jesus suggests a profound shift in Nicodemus' beliefs. His willingness to be openly associated with Jesus in this critical moment indicates a likely conversion, emphasizing that Nicodemus has become a follower of Jesus Christ.

The Parable of the Lost Son offers hope to all, from the tax collector to the religious leaders of the day.

“We had to celebrate and be glad” (deî): it is necessary⁷⁰ to celebrate”. It is the very same word that was used when Jesus was compelled to go through Samaria to meet the woman at the well (John 4:4). It wasn’t that it was the only route Jesus could travel but that it was the necessary route to arrive at Jacob’s well to meet a Samaritan woman (John 4:6).

Jacob had bought this field from the children of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hundred pieces of silver, or lambs, (Genesis 33:19); and in it he built an altar, which he dedicated to Elohey Yishrael, the strong God, the covenant God of Israel, (Genesis 33:20).

What covenant would they celebrate and make an altar for? It was the Abrahamic Covenant of Genesis 12:1-3: “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

At this time Jesus was sent to a Samaritan (half-Jewish half-Gentile) woman at Jacob’s well where Jacob had declared God as a covenant keeper.

⁷⁰www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1163/niv/mgnt/0-1/

The promise of the blessing within the Abrahamic Covenant the One who will bless all nations (Jesus) has arrived at the altar dedicated to the covenant-keeping God of Israel (Genesis 33:19-20, John 4:5) to bless a Samaritan woman.

Live in God's Grace

Given that all followers of Jesus are symbolically represented by the restored son in this parable, we must explore how we can consistently live in God's grace. For it is "through grace given unto us that we do not think of ourself more highly than we ought" (Romans 12:3b).

It is through grace that we can combat adopting the attitude of the elder brother and instead have the compassion and love of God our Father for the lost.

Living in grace occurs when you are aware of God's continual provision for you. "Everything I have is yours" (Luke 15:31b).

Living in grace involves embracing and embodying the principles of God's unmerited favor, forgiveness, and love. Here are some practical ways to live in grace:

- 1) Recognize that you are forgiven through the grace of God. "In Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32b).
- 2) Just as you have received forgiveness, extend it to those who may have wronged

you. Choose to forgive and release the burden of holding onto resentment. "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other" (Ephesians 4:32a).

- 3) Live with gratitude for the blessings in your life, recognizing that everything good comes from God (James 1:17). A thankful heart helps you to appreciate the good work of God's grace in your life. "We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10a).
- 4) Understand that God's plan for your life is rooted in grace. Trust in His guidance, even when circumstances may be challenging. Believe that God's grace will sustain you through difficulties (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- 5) Recognize God's desire to bless you abundantly as His beloved child, "Everything I have is yours". The Spirit of sonship is key to walking in the fullness of your inheritance in Christ. That is what the best robe, the signet ring, and the sandals represent for the restored son, it represents sonship.

Co-author Timothy Paul Jones in his book *Proof: Finding Freedom through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace*, tells the story of taking his adopted daughter to Disney World. When she

finally experienced the Magic Kingdom, here was her response:

"Daddy, I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours. Outrageous grace isn't a favor you achieve by being good, it's the gift you receive by being God's. It's one-way love that calls you into the Kingdom not because you've been good but because God has chosen you and made you His own.⁷¹

"On the car ride home the daughter asked her father, "If you could have chosen Snow White to be your daughter, or Cinderella, or Belle who would you have picked?" The father said, "I would choose you. No matter what you say or do I'll always choose you." God could have chosen anyone in the world, but He chose you. No matter what you say or do, neither His love nor His choice will ever change. That's grace and that is truly amazing.⁷²

If you would like to walk in a greater measure of God's favor, 2 Peter 1:2 says that grace, which is the undeserved favor of God, and peace, can be multiplied to you. Peace in Hebrew is "shalom". Its definition includes wholeness, health, safety, and provision.⁷³ What this means is that when you walk in divine favor and peace,

⁷¹Timothy Paul Jones. Proof: Finding Freedom through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace. Zondervan Academic p.83. May 27, 2014.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7965/kjv/wlc/0-1/

you will walk in blessings in every area of your life!

But how does the undeserved favor and shalom of God increase in your life?

It is not by your laboring or toiling to earn it (remember the elder son's life). The Bible says that it comes as your knowledge of Jesus and His finished work increases. It comes as you learn more about and believe that through Jesus' one sacrifice at the cross, God removed all your sins, gave you His righteousness as a gift, and put you in Christ to enjoy everything Jesus has. Look to the symbolism of the five gifts the restored son received and know that all he was given you have in Christ. God's favor is multiplied in your life when you simply believe that the favor of God that is on Christ is also on you because of what Jesus' work at the cross has accomplished.

Whenever you hear preaching or teaching that brings you back to the person of Jesus, everything in your life will be blessed, and everything in your life will start to prosper because grace and peace are increased, not by doing more, but by seeing and receiving more. "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

When the unmerited favor of God is upon you as it was on Joseph you cannot help but prosper as God does even more than you can imagine (Ephesians 3:20).

Why do we all need salvation and how do I get saved?

The consequence of sin is death, as stated in Romans 6:23, and without intervention, we are powerless to avoid punishment for our sins. Without Christ, we were facing eternal separation from God.

Yet, our God is benevolent and characterized by love, as Jesus revealed in the parable of the lost son. Due to His immense love for us, God provided a means to escape the perils of hell (Matthew 5 and Mark 9) and gain access to eternal life (John 3:16).

In His compassion, God sent His cherished Son, Jesus Christ, to bear the weight of God's wrath and the penalty for all our sins on the cross, ultimately sacrificing His own life. Only Jesus Christ, the flawless and sinless Son of God (Hebrews 4:15), can completely fulfill the righteous requirements of God's holiness to atone for our sins.

Therefore, our salvation hinges on placing our faith in Jesus and acknowledging His perfect, completed work. Through this belief, we can confidently enter the presence of our heavenly Father (Hebrews 4:16), receive abundant life on Earth (John 10:10), and envision a glorious future in Heaven. There exists no alternative path to salvation other than making a deliberate decision to accept what Jesus has accomplished on our behalf (Acts 4:12).

If you have not yet received the salvation offered through Jesus Christ, would you join me in this prayer?

“Heavenly Father, I am so grateful for Your love for me. You loved me so much that You sent Your Son to the cross to die for my sins. I receive the gift of everlasting life that the finished work of Jesus on the cross offers to me. Your Word says in Acts 16:31 that if I believe in Jesus Christ I will be saved. Thank You for the work of the Holy Spirit who has opened my spiritual eyes and helped me to come to my senses to receive Your grace by believing in Your Son Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. The precious blood of Jesus cleanses me of all my sins. I am forgiven. I have been led back home to You my heavenly Father through Your Son.

I celebrate Jesus’ Resurrection which has defeated sin and death. I stand righteous through His blood. In Christ, I have Your favor forever. I trust that goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I look forward to all the wonderful plans that You have for my life as a restored child of God. With the power and authority I have been given as Christ’s ambassador, I pray for opportunities to lead others to receive Your salvation too. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.”

I am so grateful that the Holy Spirit used the parable Jesus taught for you to receive God’s grace and come home. Welcome to the family of God! I celebrate along with all of Heaven and

with you on making the most important decision you could ever make to embrace Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Your choice to follow Him marks the beginning of a remarkable journey that connects you with a community of believers sharing in the love, grace, and abundant life found in Christ. You are a restored child of God back safely at home with your heavenly Father forever.

As you step into this new chapter of your faith, know that you are surrounded by a family that supports, encourages, and uplifts one another. In God's family, we rejoice in victories together, shoulder each other's burdens, and cultivate a growing relationship with Him. I encourage you to find a grace-based, Jesus-centered teaching church. In the meantime, we welcome you to join us online for worship to help you grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ at www.acts433.com.

Chapter 5

Living in Grace as a Restored Child of God

Luke 15:31-32

1. Reflecting on the Parable of the Lost Son what is something new that you have learned? How might this parable be a catalyst for living in grace?

2. How does the emphasis on grace in Christianity distinguish it from other belief systems? What are some challenges and opportunities in communicating this distinction to people who have differing worldviews? How might this parable be the perfect way for someone to receive the grace God offers through Jesus Christ?

3. Discuss the misrepresentations of God throughout history. How has the character of the father in the parable challenged common misconceptions about God? In what ways can believers contribute to a more accurate representation of God's character?

4. How can believers embody grace in their relationships, daily activities, and decision-making processes? Why was this not possible for the elder son to do?

5. This chapter is full of deeper connections between the Parable of the Prodigal Son and other biblical parables or teachings. Which parable connection stood out to you the most and how do these connections enrich our understanding of grace and redemption?

6. Explore the challenges of living humbly in a culture that often values performance and achievement. How can believers navigate a performance-driven society while maintaining a humble and grace-centered perspective?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.