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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 profoundly fascinating that one of Jesus' most beloved and enduring stories appears only in the Gospel of Luke. There, nestled within the fifteenth chapter, is a story so simple in its telling yet so immeasurable in its depth that generations have returned to it, discovering something new each time.

"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]

What a remarkable description. "The Gospel in the Gospel." And perhaps no story within that chapter captures the heart of that good news more beautifully than the parable we have come to know as the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

The fact that Luke is the only Gospel writer to preserve this extraordinary parable does nothing to diminish its significance. Scripture contains many treasures recorded only once, yet their power continues to speak across generations. The Parable of the Lost Son is one such treasure. It invites us to do more than observe its characters. It challenges us to recognize ourselves in the story and, above all, to discover the heart of the Father.

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

Throughout this book, I use the terms Parable of the Prodigal Son and Parable of the Lost Son interchangeably. Yet this narrative encompasses far more than one son's rebellion; it invites us to consider both brothers, the father's heart, and what it truly means to be lost and found. A parable, at its core, is a simple narrative designed to reveal a profound spiritual truth.[2] Jesus frequently used ordinary people, familiar circumstances, and everyday experiences to communicate extraordinary truths about God, His Kingdom, and the human heart, and He often did it through parables. His stories were simple enough for a child to remember, yet profound enough to occupy the hearts and minds of theologians for centuries.

So why did Luke alone preserve this particular story? Perhaps the answer can be found in the unique portrait of Jesus that Luke so carefully paints throughout his Gospel. Again and again, Luke draws our attention to themes of repentance, forgiveness, mercy, compassion, and God's relentless love for those who are lost. He shows us a Savior who notices the people others overlook, welcomes those others reject, and extends grace to those whom society has already judged.

And in the Parable of the Lost Son, those themes come together with breathtaking beauty.

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[2]Oxford Languages Dictionary.

Here is a father who does not stop loving his child when the child walks away. A son who discovers that the far country cannot provide what he thought it would. A home that remains open even after rebellion. And a father who, when he finally sees his lost son returning, does something culturally scandalous in its tenderness: he runs to meet him.

Through this story, Luke reveals a God whose love reaches toward the broken, the ashamed, the rebellious, and the wandering. His love is not reserved for those who have lived perfect lives.

That is why this parable has remained beloved through the generations. It is not merely a story about a young man who leaves home; **it is a story about the heart of God.**

Before we explore the characters, let's consider why Jesus told this remarkable story in the first place.

Why Did Jesus Tell This Parable?

Luke 15 opens with tax collectors and sinners gathering around Jesus to hear Him. The Pharisees and teachers of the law responded with criticism: "This Man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1–2).

Their complaint sets the stage for everything Jesus says next.

The religious leaders couldn't understand why someone representing God would welcome

people they considered sinful and unworthy. But Jesus saw what they couldn't: the very people they rejected were the people He came to seek and save.

To address their complaint, Jesus delivered three complementary parables: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. While the first two culminate in unmixed celebration, the third leaves its climax hanging in suspense—will the elder brother ever enter the feast? Jesus was not merely reassuring tax collectors of God's welcome; He was directly confronting the self-righteousness of those who resented that mercy.

The tax collectors and sinners needed to know they were not beyond the reach of God's grace, while the religious leaders needed to realize that self-righteousness had blinded them to the Father's heart. One group discovered that grace could rescue them in their open rebellion; the other had to learn that moral performance made them no less dependent on that same mercy. Both groups desperately needed to understand grace—and so do we.

Read the Story for Yourself

Take a moment and let the words of Luke 15:11-32 settle into your heart. As you reflect on the story, consider what surprises you about the father, what the sons reveal about themselves, and whether anything challenges the way you have understood this parable.

You may have read these verses dozens of times. Yet familiarity can sometimes keep us from seeing familiar truths in a new light. I hope that, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, you will discover fresh dimensions of God's grace and a deeper appreciation for the immeasurable beauty of this marvelous parable.

Ask yourself four questions:

- What surprises you about the father's response to his younger son?
- What does the younger son believe about himself and his father?
- Why is the older brother so angry when his brother returns?
- What does the father reveal about his heart toward both sons?

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.'"

Who Are You In This Parable?

Before we explore the meaning of Jesus' teaching, we need to address a common misconception: that the younger son's lost condition should continue to define us after we have received Christ.

Scripture teaches that we were once separated from God by sin. We were lost, spiritually dead, and in need of a Savior. In that sense, we can identify with the younger son. But the Gospel does not leave us in that condition.

If you have received Jesus Christ, you have been reconciled to God, made alive in Christ, and brought into the Father's family. Your past explains where you came from, but it does not define who you are now.

Paul declares, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). He also writes, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

These are not merely poetic expressions. They describe the new identity and life God has given you in Jesus. This truth is foundational to everything we will explore together.
With that foundation in place, we can begin to look more closely at the characters Jesus placed within this story. Each character reveals something profound about the human condition, our relationship with God, and the extraordinary nature of grace. The younger son represents the person who knows he is lost. The older son represents the person who does not recognize his need for grace. And the father reveals the heart of God, whose love reaches toward both.

Wayward Son

When we consider the younger son, we are reminded of the universal condition of humanity. Scripture tells us that "sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12). When Adam sinned, sin entered the human story, and its consequences spread throughout humanity. Paul makes the truth unmistakably clear: "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Before we received the grace of God, we were wayward. Paul describes our former

condition by saying, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live" (Ephesians 2:1).

Remembering who we were apart from Christ should keep us humble. When we encounter people whose lives have been damaged by sin or whose choices have led them far from God, we must not look down on them as though we were somehow better. We, too, needed a Savior. The same grace that reached us is available to them.

Grace produces compassion, not superiority. It reminds us that we are not members of God's family because we were better than someone else. We belong because of what Jesus has done for us and the grace we have received by faith.

The younger son particularly connects with the tax collectors and sinners who were gathered around Jesus when He told this parable. These people knew they were sinners. They knew they were despised by the religious establishment. They understood what it meant to be considered unworthy, unacceptable, and beyond redemption. Yet they were drawn to Jesus just as the wayward son, after coming to his senses, was drawn back to his home.

As Jesus described a young man who had squandered his inheritance, descended into poverty, and eventually found himself feeding pigs, the tax collectors must have understood the imagery in a deeply personal way. They knew what it meant to live outside the approval of respectable society.

Jesus gave His listeners a revelation they desperately needed to hear: the father welcomed his returning son. The son's rebellion had not erased the father's love, and the distance between them had not extinguished his compassion. When the father saw his son returning, he ran to meet him.

That is grace.

Matthew, formerly known as Levi, was himself a tax collector before Jesus called him to follow. His transformed life became a living testimony to the truth Jesus was communicating through this parable. Matthew's life demonstrated that the people society considered outsiders could become disciples, followers, and ambassadors of Jesus. Matthew's story reminds us that God's grace does not merely rescue people from their past; it gives them a completely new future.

Yet there is another danger we must address. Many believers live in fear that a single stumble turns them back into a wayward child, suspecting that God has expelled them from His family. They continuously question their security, wondering if they must restart their relationship with God from scratch. Yet Scripture anchors those in Christ in a far more secure identity.

When you became a new creation in Christ, your identity changed. "The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Your old life was crucified with Christ. You have been born from above. And just as a child cannot become unborn, the new birth is not something that God

reverses every time we stumble. This does not make sin insignificant. It means that sinner is no longer your identity. You can make destructive choices. You can experience painful consequences because of your decisions. You can live contrary to the identity God has given you. But in Christ, you are still a saint; therefore, Peter admonishes believers, "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 1:14–15). Embrace your true identity in Christ, living authentically as the holy and beloved individual you've become (Colossians 3:12).
This is why Jesus told this story.

Our journey began with us separated from God by sin. But the Gospel tells us something astonishing: God did not wait for us to become worthy before He acted. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). It is the truth captured so beautifully in the words of the beloved hymn, "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] We were lost, but grace found us.

[3]John Newton. Amazing Grace. 1779.

Older Son

The story, however, does not end with the younger son. In many ways, the older son is the most overlooked character in the entire parable—and perhaps one of its most important. The younger son was lost in rebellion, but the older son was lost in religion. This contrast is at the heart of the parable. Christianity, at its core, is not about religious performance; it is about a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. It is about knowing God intimately, experiencing His love, and living in communion with Him. The elder brother measured his relationship with his father by what he had done, while the younger son returned home because he recognized what he needed: his father.

The parable challenges the Pharisees to recognize themselves in the older brother. Jesus exposes the spiritual blindness that can cause people to trust in their own righteousness while resenting the grace shown to others. His story invites them to recognize their need for the same mercy they were unwilling to extend.

For those who are bound by religion, the condemning voice of the enemy is always there, telling them they need to do more. And when they do more, it is still never enough. There is always another standard to meet, another failure to correct, another reason to question whether they have done enough to earn God's approval. But those who have received the finished work of Jesus have a completely

different foundation. There is "now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). We do not have to answer the accusations of the enemy by pointing to our own goodness. We point to Jesus and His finished work on our 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!"[4]

Perhaps the greatest wake-up call for anyone who attempts to earn salvation through good works comes from Jesus Himself 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 plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from Me, you evildoers.'"

These are sobering words. Notice what these individuals point to when they stand before Jesus. They point to what they did. They point to their accomplishments, their ministry, their supernatural works, and their religious activity. Yet Jesus does not respond by saying they simply failed to do enough. The words "I never knew you" bring the issue of relationship into sharp focus. These individuals point to their

[4]Paul Ellis. The Grace Commentary. www.thegracecommentary.com/matthew-11/#matthew11v28

religious accomplishments, but their confidence rests on what they have done rather than on a genuine relationship with Christ.

Jesus is not teaching that obedience is unimportant. He is exposing the danger of relying on religious activity as proof of our standing before God. Our salvation rests on God's grace, received through faith in Jesus Christ—not on our ability to establish our own righteousness.

Scripture is clear that nothing impure will ever enter Heaven (Revelation 21:27), and James reminds us that if we fail in even one point of the Law, we become guilty of breaking all of it (James 2:10). If our entrance into God's Kingdom depended upon our ability to keep the Law, none of us could stand. The self-righteous elder brother needed the love and grace of his father just as desperately as the wayward son did.

And this brings us to one of the most beautiful moments in the entire story: the moment when the wayward son "came to his senses" and became the restored son.

The Restored Son

Believers are people who, at some point in their lives, awakened to the reality of their need for salvation—a salvation graciously provided through Jesus Christ. That awakening looks different for every person. For some, it comes after years of wayward living. For others, it comes through a personal failure, a life crisis, or

a moment when everything they thought they could depend upon suddenly disappears. For still others, God uses the testimony of a family member, friend, or another believer whose transformed life becomes the invitation to consider the Gospel for themselves.

Our paths to Christ are as diverse as our stories. Yet there is a common thread running through every genuine conversion: we come to recognize that we have fallen short of God's glory and that we cannot save ourselves. We discover that Jesus Christ is the pathway to reconciliation with our Heavenly Father.

Perhaps you were living like the younger son when God opened your eyes. Or perhaps you were more like the elder brother—trying to do everything right, believing that your morality, religious activity, or good works made you acceptable to God. Maybe it was a personal failure that finally exposed your need for grace. Maybe it was a crisis that brought you to the end of yourself. Maybe you watched someone else encounter Jesus and saw something in their life that you desperately wanted for yourself. God can use a thousand different circumstances to bring us to the same realization: we need Him.

In the life of the wayward son, it was not until the money ran out and the famine came that he recognized his need for help outside of himself. While he had money, he had options. While life was comfortable, he could convince himself that he was doing just fine. But when everything he

had depended upon disappeared, he "came to his senses."

Adversity can expose needs we have long ignored. When life is comfortable, we may rely on our own abilities or circumstances for security. But when those supports disappear, we may begin asking deeper questions: Where does my security come from? What am I living for? Where do I turn when I cannot save myself?

For the younger son, the famine became the circumstance God used to awaken him to his need for his father. His worst moment became the beginning of his journey home.

This revelation of our need for God's grace is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit opens our spiritually blind eyes so that we can see and receive the grace that is available through Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "And when He comes, He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8). The Holy Spirit convicts us of our need for salvation and points us toward Jesus.

Paul reminds us, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). Salvation is not something we achieve once we finally become good enough. It is a gift. Grace is offered, and faith receives it.

The Holy Spirit's work does not end when we receive salvation. His role in the life of the believer continues as our Helper. Jesus said, "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you

another Advocate to help you and be with you forever" (John 14:16). Jesus also promised that the Holy Spirit would teach us all things (John 14:26). He does not simply lead us to the Father's house; He teaches us how to live as sons and daughters once we arrive.

This distinction is incredibly important.

Too many believers have experienced salvation but have never learned how to live from their new identity. They have come home, but have allowed the mentality of the far country to follow them through the door. They know they have been forgiven, but they do not understand their inheritance. They know they are saved, but they do not know how to live from the abundance of what Christ has already accomplished for them.

As you'll discover throughout this book, it is essential that we learn to embrace the inheritance we've been given in Christ, experience the abundant life He died to give us, and celebrate the victory that is already ours 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.

The journey through this story becomes something far greater than simply learning about a rebellious son who finally came home.

It becomes an invitation to discover who you are now that you are home.

You are the restored son.

You are the beloved daughter.

You are part of the Father's family.

You have an inheritance.

And your Father is not standing at a distance, wondering whether you deserve a place at His table. He has already welcomed you home.

Paul writes that in Christ, "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 1:7–8).

God's grace lavished on us.

That is where our journey begins.

As we explore this parable, we will consider the younger son's rebellion, the emptiness of the far country, the father's extraordinary welcome, and the older brother's struggle to understand grace. Each part of the story reveals something important about the human heart—and, even more importantly, about the heart of our Father.

Above all, we will discover more of the limitless love of our gracious Father.

Because this story is not ultimately about how far a son can wander. It is about the extraordinary love of a father who welcomes his child home and the grace that invites us to discover the fullness of life in his family.

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?

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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?

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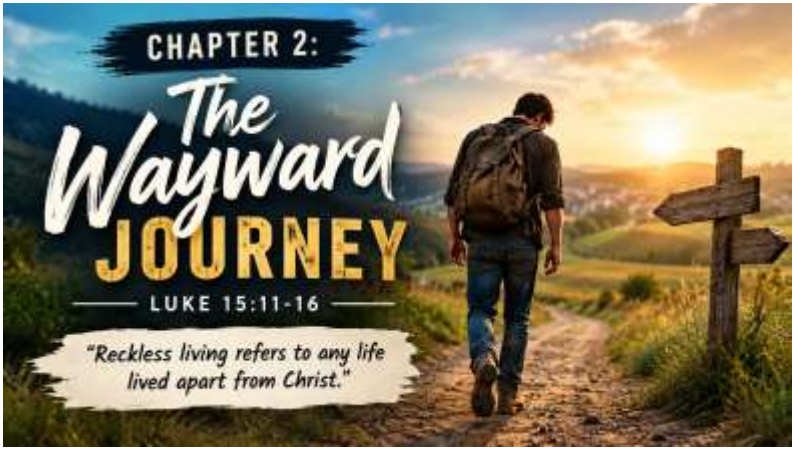
3. The text suggests that every person can identify with the wayward son at some point in their life. In your journey of faith, how did you come to your senses and receive God's grace?

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."

Before Jesus tells the parable of the lost son, He first tells two other parables about other things that have been lost. When we read all three parables together, we gain a fuller understanding of the message Jesus was teaching that day. Each story reveals another dimension of God's heart toward what is lost and His joy when the lost is found.

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" (Luke 15:4-7).

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" (Luke 15:8-10).

Jesus was telling these parables to an audience that included tax collectors and sinners—people the religious leaders considered unworthy of their attention. The lost coin would have communicated something important to everyone listening: even when something is lost, it has not lost its value to the one who seeks it. The woman does not dismiss the coin because it is missing. She lights a lamp, sweeps the house, and searches carefully until she finds it. Then she calls her friends and neighbors to celebrate. Jesus uses this picture to reveal the joy that comes when the lost are found.

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.[5] 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).

[5]www.biblehub.com/topical/d/drachma.htm

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

While Bible translators often label this third story The Parable of the Lost Son, this title is somewhat incomplete. The narrative focuses not on one son alone, but on two brothers—and ultimately centers on the central character of 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).

The immediate question we might ask is, "Why did the younger son want to leave his father's house? Jesus does not tell us specifically what was going through the younger son's mind when he decided to leave. However, his words and actions reveal much about his heart. His request for his inheritance was more than a desire for financial independence. It revealed a desire to live independently of his father.

The younger son believed he could thrive independently of his father. Rather than valuing the relationship, love, and security he had received, he wanted to pursue life on his own terms.

That is often the heart of rebellion: wanting the Father's gifts without wanting the Father Himself.

The younger son believed that freedom and fulfillment could be found in living life on his own terms. His request was shocking because he demanded his inheritance while his father was still alive. Driven by his desire for material possessions and worldly pleasures, he wanted to build a life independent of his family and the values he had been taught.

He wanted his freedom, and he was willing to leave everything familiar behind to pursue it.

Why Did the Father Give Him the Inheritance?

This raises an important question: Why did the father distribute the inheritance to both sons when only the younger requested it? His decision reflects both his overarching generosity and his willingness to respect their free choices.

Giving the younger son his portion was not an endorsement of the reckless life he intended to pursue. Rather, the father allowed his son to exercise his own will, even knowing that the choices he made could bring painful consequences.

Love does not always prevent someone from making a bad choice.

The father could have refused his son's request, but he allowed him to make his own decision. His willingness to let the son leave did not mean that he approved of the decision or wanted to

see his son suffer. It meant that he did not force his son to remain in the relationship.

The son's freedom to choose did not remove the consequences of his choice. He could take his inheritance and leave home, but he could not make the far country provide the love, security, and belonging he had known in his father's house.

This gives us an important insight into the human condition. God's goodness does not mean that every choice we make will lead to good consequences. Nor does every painful circumstance mean God has caused it. But even when our choices bring suffering, and even when circumstances are beyond our control, God's goodness remains. He can meet us in the consequences, reveal our need, and lead us toward the life and relationship for which we were created.

Why would God, represented by the father in this parable, give His children good things that they could potentially use for destructive purposes? If Jesus tells us that our Father gives good gifts to His children (Matthew 7:11), would giving the younger son his inheritance seem like a misguided decision?

The question is sincere, but it is based on a faulty connection between the goodness of a gift and the way the recipient chooses to use it.

John tells us that "God is love" (1 John 4:16). As our loving Father, God has given humanity the ability to make choices. He does not force us to

love Him, obey Him, or follow Him. From the beginning, God allowed humanity to exercise its will, even when that freedom could be used to make destructive choices (Genesis 2:17).
The father in the parable was not obligated to give his son his inheritance at that moment. Yet by giving it to him—even when the son's request essentially communicated that he wanted his father out of his life—the father demonstrated the depth of his love. The son could leave his father's house, but he could not leave his father's love.

Grace Does Not Become Less Good Because We Misuse It

Every human being experiences what theologians commonly call common grace—God's goodness, mercy, and blessings extended to humanity in general. The air we breathe, the beauty of creation, the ability to reason, natural talents, physical life, common morality, and the providential care of God are all expressions of His goodness.

Every day we live, we experience gifts we did not create and could never earn.

Yet people can take the good gifts of God and use them in ways that are destructive to themselves and others. The misuse of a gift does not make the gift itself evil. The goodness of what God gives is not determined by what we choose to do with it.

James reminds us, "Every good and perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17).

The Father extends common grace to all humanity, but through Jesus Christ we receive something even greater: saving grace. This is the grace the younger son will come to experience later in the story—not merely the blessings of the Father's gifts, but the restoring embrace of the Father Himself.

How Much Was the Younger Son's Inheritance?

What exactly would the younger son have received? Jewish law did not require a father to distribute his inheritance before his death. Nevertheless, the father in Jesus' parable did so. According to the Mosaic Law, we can determine the proportion each son would have received.

Deuteronomy 21:17 states that the firstborn son was to receive twice as much as the other heirs. This helps explain the significance of the birthright that Jacob desired from Esau in Genesis 25:29–34.

Therefore, the younger son would have received one-third of the estate**,** while the older son would have received two-thirds. As one commentator explains, the father essentially simplified matters by distributing the inheritance to both sons at that time.[6]

But the size of the inheritance is not the most important detail. What matters is what the

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

younger son was communicating by asking for it.

The father understood that his son was asking to sever his relationship with him. The request was not simply, "Give me what belongs to me." It was, in effect, "I want what you can give me, but I no longer want to live under your authority."

And yet the father still gave it to him.

Why? Because the father loved his son.

The son's rejection did not cancel the father's love. The son could walk away from the relationship, but the father did not stop being his father.

That is good news for us as well. In Christ, we can be assured that nothing can separate us from the love of our heavenly Father: "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 8:38–39).

"Father, Give Me"

The request would have been extraordinarily offensive within the culture of Jesus' day.

John MacArthur explains that for a son to make such a request in the ancient Middle Eastern village context would essentially communicate, "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."[7]

Kenneth Bailey, a New Testament scholar who spent many years in the Middle East, similarly observed that when he asked people in that part of the world what it meant for a son to request his inheritance while his father was still alive, the answer was consistently that the son wanted his father dead.[8]

In essence, the son was saying, "I would rather have your possessions than have you."

The Son's Rejection Goes Even Further

The younger son's rejection becomes even more significant when we understand the legal and cultural context of his request.

The Mishnah indicates that even when a father divided his property among his heirs, the property remained under his control while he was still alive (Baba Bathra 8:7). In other words, an inheritance was normally something a son received after his father's death—not something he simply demanded while his father was still living.

By demanding his inheritance early, the younger son issued a profound insult—essentially declaring that he valued his father's estate far more than his father's life. His true desire was not merely a change of address, but complete

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[7]John F. MacArthur. The Prodigal Son: An Astonishing Study of the Parable Jesus Told to Unveil God's Grace For You. Harper Christian Resources.
[8]Ibid.

autonomy: he wanted his father's possessions without his father's presence. Yet in a remarkable display of grace, the father did not force his son to remain. He granted him the freedom to walk away, while never relinquishing his love.

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 describes the life the younger son chose after leaving his father. His departure was more than simply a change of location; it was a deliberate rejection of the life and relationship he had known.

The son's actions were deeply dishonorable within the Jewish culture of the time and may have violated the legal customs governing inheritance. Taking his wealth and leaving the family was also a serious violation of the honor and responsibilities expected within the family.

As Clarke suggests, "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."[9]

But what kind of life did the younger son pursue?

[9]Clarke's Commentary. wwwstudylight.org/commentary/luke/15-13.html.

The Greek word translated "wild living" is asṓtōs, meaning riotous, reckless, or wasteful living.[10] It describes a life without restraint—a life characterized by excess and self-indulgence.

The younger son squandered his inheritance through extravagant and reckless spending. He may have spent his wealth on lavish parties, entertainment, excessive eating and drinking, and every form of indulgence available to him. His wild living also included sexual immorality. The elder son later accused his brother of wasting his father's property on prostitutes (Luke 15:30). The Greek word used for prostitute, pornē, refers specifically to a woman who sells her body for sexual purposes.[11]

The son had not merely left his father's house. He had left behind the values, relationships, and religious culture in which he had been raised. He traveled to a "distant country," placing himself far from the influence of his family and Jewish community. In that foreign environment, he was free to pursue whatever lifestyle he desired. He may even have participated in practices and forms of worship that were completely contrary to the faith in which he had been raised.

Wild living reflects a lack of restraint that often leads to increasingly destructive choices. Reckless spending can lead to poverty, addiction, bondage, immorality, and broken relationships.

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[10]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g811/niv/mgnt/0-1/
[11]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g4204/niv/mgnt/0-1/

For a time, however, the younger son undoubtedly enjoyed himself. That is one of sin's great deceptions: **sin can be pleasurable before it becomes destructive.**

Hebrews 11:25 speaks of "the pleasures of sin for a season." Scripture acknowledges that sin can offer pleasure, but that pleasure is temporary.

The younger son experienced the fleeting pleasures of sin firsthand. He had money, freedom, temporary friendships, and seemingly unlimited opportunities to satisfy his desires. Yet what initially looked like freedom eventually became bondage, and what looked like abundance left him with nothing.

Proverbs warns: "There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death" (Proverbs 14:12).

Sin rarely presents itself as a road to destruction. It presents itself as a road to pleasure, freedom, fulfillment, and self-discovery. It whispers, "You deserve this. You only live once. Follow your heart. Do what makes you happy."

But the path eventually reveals where it leads.

John describes the allure of this world as "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). These desires promise satisfaction but can never provide the life our hearts truly need.

The younger son is the obvious example of reckless living in this story. He took his

inheritance, left his father, and wasted everything on a life centered around himself.

But there is something important we must not miss: the younger son was not the only son who misunderstood his relationship with his father.

The older brother's rebellion looked very different. He did not take his inheritance and flee to a distant country. He remained at home, worked hard, and appeared outwardly obedient. Yet, as we will discover later in the story, he also failed to understand his father's heart.

One rebelled openly; the other struggled beneath a façade of obedience.

The younger brother was lost in rebellion.

The older brother was lost in self-righteousness.

Both sons were impoverished—not financially, but spiritually. Both had access to their father's love. Yet both were living disconnected from the relationship their father desired with them.

This reveals an important truth: the true measure of poverty is not the absence of wealth; it is the absence of God's love ruling our lives.

The younger son was spiritually destitute in the far country. The older son was spiritually destitute while standing in his father's field.

One was obviously lost. The other was deceptively lost.

Jesus would later describe the two paths this way: "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, then, is bigger than the list of sinful behaviors we might associate with the younger son. At its deepest level, reckless living is any life lived apart from God.

The younger son's rebellion was visible. The older son's rebellion was hidden beneath outward obedience. But both were ultimately pursuing life on their own terms.

As Augustine wrote, "Without God what am I but a guide to my own destruction?"[12]

The question is not simply, "How far have I wandered?

The deeper question is, "Am I living in the Father's love?"

Because any life lived apart from receiving the Father's love is a life headed in the wrong direction.

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).

[12]St. Augustine of Hippo. Confessions Book IV

The younger son had gone from having everything to having nothing.

He had once lived in abundance. But now his resources were gone. And just when he had spent everything, a severe famine struck the country.

The timing is significant.

The famine did not cause the younger son's poverty. His reckless living had already brought him to the end of his resources. But the famine exposed the emptiness of the life he had chosen and brought him to a place he could no longer escape through his own strength.

What began as a feast quickly collapsed into a famine—exposing sin's ultimate deception. While sin masquerades as freedom, pleasure, and abundance, it inevitably leaves the soul spiritually destitute. It promises a banquet but delivers a drought, stripping away the very joy, peace, and rest our hearts were created to enjoy.

Jesus, however, gives us what sin can never provide.

He said, "I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11).

He promised, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you" (John 14:27).

And He invited the weary, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

The younger son had pursued everything the world could offer, only to discover that none of it could sustain him.

Yet there was something redemptive about the famine.

Had there been no famine, the younger son may never have come to his senses.

Sometimes God allows us to reach the end of ourselves so that we will finally recognize our need for Him.

We see this principle throughout Scripture.

Brought Low So We Can Look Up

Consider Jonah.

God called Jonah to go to Nineveh, but Jonah ran in the opposite direction. He headed toward Tarshish, deliberately attempting to escape the assignment God had given him.

Notice how Scripture describes his journey:

"But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down 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).

- Jonah went down to Joppa.
- Then he went down into the ship.
- Then he went down into the depths of the sea.

Eventually, he found himself in the belly of a great fish.

His physical descent mirrored his spiritual condition. Jonah had chosen his own way rather than God's way, and his rebellion took him downward. Sin has a destructive trajectory. Whenever we turn away from God's direction, we are moving away from the life He has designed for us.

Yet God used Jonah's downward journey to bring him to a place of surrender.

Inside the fish, Jonah finally prayed. He cried out to God from the depths of his distress and acknowledged that salvation belongs to the Lord.

Jonah had to be brought low before he was ready to look up.

The fish was not God's final destination for Jonah. It was God's instrument for redirecting him.

What looked like Jonah's lowest moment became the place where he encountered God's mercy.

We see something similar in the story of Gideon.

Israel had turned away from God, and the Midianites repeatedly invaded the land, destroying the Israelites' crops and impoverishing the people. Judges 6:1 says that Israel was subjected to Midian for seven years.

Then we read: "Midian so impoverished the Israelites that they cried out to the Lord for help" (Judges 6:6).

The Hebrew word translated "impoverished" is dālal, meaning to be brought low, to become weak, or to be brought into a low condition.[13]

Notice what their impoverishment produced:
"They cried out to the Lord."

The very circumstance that brought them low became the circumstance that caused them to look to God.

The famine in the prodigal's story served a similar purpose.

The younger son had been living as though he did not need his father. He had demanded his inheritance, left home, and pursued life on his own terms.

Now he had nothing. No money. No resources.

No friends who could rescue him. No earthly solution. He had reached the end of himself.

And sometimes, when we come to the end of our own strength, we discover that God has been inviting us all along to turn to Him.

Whether the circumstance is an oppression from an enemy, a famine, a season of barrenness, a financial crisis, a broken relationship, or another calamity we cannot control, God can use the lowest places in our lives to turn our hearts back toward Him.

That does not mean every hardship is caused by God. Nor does it mean that every tragedy is

[13]www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/nas/dalal.html

something God desires. But God is able to work through even the circumstances we would never have chosen.

He can turn our trials into testimonies.

- He can reveal Himself as our Deliverer when we need deliverance.
- He can reveal Himself as our Provider when we have nothing left.
- He can reveal Himself as our Comforter when we are hurting.
- He can reveal Himself as our Healer when we are broken.
- He can reveal Himself as our Strength when we are weak.
- And He can reveal Himself as our Guide when we no longer know which way to go.

This is part of the beauty of Romans 8:28: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

The calamity itself is not good. The famine is not good. The oppression is not good. The consequences of our own sinful choices are not good. But God is so good that He can work in and through even these painful circumstances to accomplish something redemptive.

God does not need the circumstances to be good in order to bring good from them.

The writer of Hebrews gives us an invitation that the prodigal son desperately needed:

"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).

The younger son had reached his time of need.

And that need was about to become the doorway to grace.

He had once believed that he could find everything he needed in the far country.

Now the far country had nothing left to offer him.

The son who had walked away from his father was now desperate for help. But where would he find it?

The Psalmist asked a question that captures the turning point in the prodigal's story: "I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from?" (Psalm 121:1).

The younger son had looked everywhere else.

Now he was about to discover where his help truly came from.

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. To survive, the son took a degrading job

feeding pigs. It was probably the only job available during the famine.
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."[14]

For a Jewish audience, then, Jesus' mention of pigs would have carried far more weight than it does for many readers today. The pig was not merely an unclean animal; it had become a powerful symbol of defilement and everything that stood in opposition to Jewish holiness.

Pigs were so despised that they were sometimes avoided even in ordinary speech.[15] There was also a popular image of the pig as a symbol of hypocrisy: because a pig's split hooves are

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[14]Mendy Kaminker. Pigs and Judaism: Deep Revulsion, but a Promising Future. www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2376474/jewish/Pigs-Judaism.htm
[15]Talmud, Shabbat 129b, Pesachim 3b, et al.

visible when it lies down, it can appear, at least outwardly, to have one of the characteristics of a kosher animal. The image suggested something that looked acceptable on the outside while being unclean within.

The depth of this cultural aversion is striking. In 1961, Israel even passed a law restricting the raising of pigs, although the law was later amended to permit pig farming in certain Christian areas of the country.[16]

So, when Jesus says that the younger son found himself feeding pigs, His audience would have understood the significance immediately. This was not simply a young Jewish man doing an unpleasant job.

It was the lowest point imaginable.

The son who had once lived in his father's house had now fallen so far that he was living among what his culture regarded as unclean animals—and longing to eat what they were eating.

Sin had taken him farther than he ever imagined he would go.

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

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

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 farms.[17] A better rendering of Luke 15:15 is this: "Who sent him to his farms or (property/lands) to feed pigs in their pens."

Jesus was showing His listeners just how far sin can take a person.

It can take you to the pigpen.

And the pigpen is a fitting picture of what sin does to us.

Before we received Christ, sin left us in a pit—dirty, helpless, and unable to rescue ourselves. 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).
I believe it is possible that the imagery of Psalm 40:2 would have resonated with Jesus' audience as He told this portion of the parable. The son had descended into a place of mud, uncleanness, and desperation. Yet the story was not ultimately about the pigpen. It was about the Father who could bring him out.

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[17]www.biblehub.com/greek/agrous_68.htm

When the Pigs Had More Than He Did

Luke gives us an even more heartbreaking detail: **"He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything" (Luke 15:16).**

The son was not merely hungry. He was starving. He had reached the point where he looked at what the pigs were eating and desired it for himself.

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, 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.[18] This underscores the significantly better conditions of the pigs currently enjoying sweet carob tree pods in comparison to his situation.

[18]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2769/niv/mgnt/0-1/

Carob tree pods as pictured here:[19]



This makes the story even more striking.

The one who had once possessed an abundance of wealth was now envying the food of pigs.

And there is something else Luke tells us that is significant: **"No one gave him anything."**

At his lowest point, nobody came to his rescue.

The people who had enjoyed his generosity when he was wealthy were nowhere to be found when his money ran out. The friends who surrounded him during his season of abundance had disappeared when he could no longer provide anything for them.

Proverbs captures this reality: "Wealth attracts many friends, but even the closest friend of the poor person deserts them" (Proverbs 19:4).

The younger son was learning a painful lesson.

Not every person who celebrates with you in your abundance will stand with you in your poverty.

Some relationships can be built around what we provide rather than who we are.

When the resources disappear, those relationships disappear with them.

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[19]www.manyeats.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/carob-pod-beans.jpg

The famine would have made matters even worse. The entire region was suffering, meaning that those around him were likely struggling with their own needs. Even people who might have wanted to help may have had little or nothing to give.

The man who hired him to feed the pigs had provided him with employment, but that did not necessarily mean he had any obligation to provide for him beyond his work.

The younger son had found a job. But he had not found home. And there is an important spiritual lesson here.

When Self-Sufficiency Fails

The younger son first attempted to solve his problem through his own efforts.

He was hungry, so he found a job.

He was poor, so he worked.

He was in a foreign land, so he adapted.

But none of it addressed the deepest problem.

His greatest need was not a job. His greatest need was his father.

Sometimes God allows us to exhaust every earthly solution until we finally recognize that our deepest need can only be satisfied by Him.

When someone finds themselves in a pit, Christians are called to care for those who are hungry, poor, hurting, and suffering.

James writes: "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?" (James 2:15–16).

John makes the same point: "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" (1 John 3:17–18).

In this way, we are reflecting the heart of the Father when we meet the needs of those in troubling times. Peter reminds us, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4:10).

Meeting physical needs is not opposed to the Gospel. It is one of the ways we can demonstrate the Gospel. When we feed the hungry, care for the hurting, clothe the needy, and serve those who are suffering, we become conduits of God's grace. And as we meet physical needs, we have the opportunity to point people toward the One who can meet their deepest spiritual need.

Philippians 4:19 reminds us, "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus."

The church demonstrates compassion because of the Gospel. We care for the whole person while pointing people to Jesus—the One who offers forgiveness, reconciliation, salvation, and eternal life.

The goal is not merely to make someone's life more comfortable in the distant country.

The goal is to help them find their way home.

There is an old statement attributed to Vance Havner that captures this tension: "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."[20]

The point is not that we should withhold a bed or a sandwich. Scripture clearly commands us to help those in need. The warning is that we must not confuse meeting a temporary physical need with addressing a deeper spiritual one.

The prodigal needed food, but he needed his father more.

He needed employment, but he needed reconciliation more.

He needed relief from his circumstances, but ultimately, he needed grace.

The goal was not merely to make his life more comfortable in the distant country. The goal was to help him find his way home.

And now, sitting in the pigpen—hungry, alone, and completely spent—the younger son was finally beginning to understand what he had lost.

[20]Vance Havner.wwwazquotes.com/quotes/topics/prodigal-son.html

Hunger for Home

The famine had stripped away his illusions. The pigpen had stripped away his pride. His hunger had stripped away his self-sufficiency. And now something was beginning to change.

He was becoming hungry for home.

The Psalmist had asked: "Where does my help come from?" (Psalm 121:1).

The next verse provides the answer: "My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of Heaven and Earth" (Psalm 121:2).

The younger son had searched for help in the distant country.

He had searched for it in his wealth. He had searched for it in pleasure. He had searched for it in his friends. He had searched for it in his own strength.

None of them could save him.

Now, at the bottom of the pigpen, he was finally beginning to look in the right direction. Home.

His hunger was doing something his abundance never could.

It was turning his heart back toward his father.

The pigpen was not the end of his story. It was the place where he finally became hungry enough to go home.

Chapter 2
The Wayward Journey
Luke 15:11-16

1. Jesus tells the Parable of the Lost Sheep, 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?

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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?

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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?

5. How does the younger son's realization that he can only find true help from his father relate to our understanding of seeking God's help in our lives?

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)[21]

[21]Oxford 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).

There is something powerful happening in this moment. The younger son has finally begun to see clearly. The life he thought would bring freedom has left him enslaved, and the independence he believed would satisfy him has brought him to desperation.

Isn't that one of sin's great deceptions? It promises freedom and fulfillment apart from the Father, yet cannot provide the life and satisfaction only He can give.

But grace has a way of awakening our memory.

"When he came to his senses…"

That phrase marks the turning point.

But what does it actually mean that the younger son "came to his senses"?

The Greek expression used here carries the idea of coming back to one's right mind, or literally, "coming to himself."[22]

And that is exactly what happened.

For the first time in this story, the younger son told himself the truth.

[22]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1438/kjv/tr/0-1/

He stopped pretending that life apart from his father was satisfying and faced the painful reality of where his choices had led him.

That realization marks the beginning of his return. Before he could change direction, he had to recognize that the road he had chosen was not leading him to the life he wanted.

Notice what comes to his mind first: the servants.

He doesn't immediately think about his position as a son. He doesn't yet comprehend the depth of his father's love or imagine that restoration could possibly be waiting for him. His mind is still operating from the perspective of someone who has failed and believes he has forfeited his place.

But he remembers something: **"Even my father's servants have more than enough."**

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 depending on the wealth and social standing of the family. Wealthier households might have had numerous servants, while less affluent families would have had fewer or none at all.

But Jesus intentionally places this detail in the story because it gives us a glimpse into the kind of household the prodigal had left behind.

His father's house was a place of provision, purpose, and abundance.

Here are some of the various types of servants that might have been found in a Jewish household:

1) Domestic Servants

These individuals would have been responsible for general household tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and other domestic chores, including washing the feet of guests.[23]

2) Agricultural Workers

In households with agricultural land, there might have been servants involved in farming activities, tending to crops or caring for animals.

3) Herders

In households with livestock, there might have been individuals responsible for herding and caring for the animals.

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 because it required agility and the ability to navigate difficult terrain. It also served as a form of training in responsibility and leadership.

[23]www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maundy_(foot_washing)

Think about that for a moment.

The work that looked ordinary would become preparation for something extraordinary.

David was tending sheep before he was tending a kingdom. What looked like a lowly assignment was actually forming the character of a future king.

4) Craftsmen or Artisans

Wealthier families might employ skilled workers for specific tasks such as carpentry, metalwork, or other forms of craftsmanship.

5) Personal Attendants

Affluent households might have personal attendants or stewards who managed household affairs and finances and supervised other servants.

We see an example of this in the story of Joseph: "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" (Genesis 39:4).

6) Servants for Special Occasions

For wealthier families, there might have been servants specifically designated for special occasions or events, such as preparing for feasts and celebrations.

And this detail becomes especially significant when we remember what happened when the prodigal finally came home. His father didn't

simply welcome him home. He threw a celebratory feast, with servants ready to prepare and serve the meal!

7) Nannies or Caretakers

Families with children might also have servants responsible for childcare and the general well-being of the younger members of the household.

So, how many servants were actually employed in the father's house? We don't know. Jesus doesn't give us the number. But Jesus does give us something far more important.

"They had food to spare." That little phrase opens a window into the abundance of the father's house. While the younger son was starving in a foreign land, even his father's servants had more than enough.

Then came the thought that changed everything: **"And here I am starving to death."**

In effect, he was asking himself, "What am I doing staying here?"

His father's house had not ceased to be a place of provision. The son had simply left it, believing he would be better off on his own.

And now he remembered.

This is what grace does. Grace does not deny the truth about where we are; it leads us home, where we belong: receiving the love of our Heavenly Father.

Part 2: "The Rehearsal Speech"

Coming to his senses was the beginning of the journey home. But before the younger son ever reached his father's house, he began rehearsing what he would say. Luke tells us, **"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 can almost picture him walking home, repeating these words over and over in his mind. He had thought through what he would say, how he would confess his failure, and what he hoped his father might allow him to become.

There is something significant about the words he chooses. Notice that the younger son does not say, "I have sinned against God," but instead says, **"I have sinned against Heaven."** Jesus is telling this story to a Jewish audience, and this wording would have been familiar to them. Within Jewish tradition, there was a deep reverence for the name of God. The sacred name represented by the four Hebrew letters YHWH was not ordinarily pronounced aloud. Instead, Jewish readers commonly used substitute expressions such as Adonai (Lord) or Hashem (The Name) when referring to God. This reflected their desire to treat God's name with the utmost reverence and avoid using it casually.

For the first time in this parable, the younger son follows that familiar Jewish pattern by using an alternative expression for God. Rather than

directly stating that he had sinned against God, the son uses a cultural idiom that commentators interpret as meaning "even unto Heaven"—a Hebrew expression emphasizing the weight of his transgression, "exceedingly—beyond all description."[24]

The son had come to his senses. He knew he had sinned, but he still didn't understand the depth of his father's love. He was planning to return as a servant. His father was ready to welcome him as a son.

The son was thinking about earning his place back. His father was ready to restore him through love.

The son remembered his father's provision. Now he was about to discover his father's heart.

Sometimes coming to your senses means more than realizing you've taken a wrong turn. It means finally realizing, "I know where home is!"

And when you know where home is, there's only one thing left to do: Turn around. Head straight to your loving Father.

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).

[24]Clarke's Commentary. www.studylight.org/commentary/luke/15-18.html

The younger son had finally come to his senses. He had rehearsed his speech. He had acknowledged his sin. And now he did something that required more than words: he got up and went home. He didn't stay in the pigpen wishing things were different. He didn't continue rehearsing his apology from a distance. He took the first steps toward his father.

But what happens next reveals something the son could never have fully understood while he was still sitting in that faraway country. Before the son could reach the house, before he could explain himself, and before he could offer to work as a servant, his father was already moving toward him.

Luke 15:20 records five distinct actions of the father toward his returning son: he saw him, he had compassion on him, he ran to him, he threw his arms around him, and he kissed him. Then, as the story continues, we will see five more things the father does for his son. There is a beautiful picture of grace woven throughout these actions. The fifth Hebrew letter "Hey", which represents the number five, is often associated with grace. The message of grace is unmistakable: **everything the father does toward his returning son is an expression of grace.**[25]

There is also an interesting word that helps us understand both characters in this story: "prodigal". We usually associate the word with

[25]www.hebrew4christians.com/Grammar/Unit_One/Aleph-Bet/Hey/hey.html

the younger son because he spent his inheritance recklessly and extravagantly. But prodigal can also describe someone who gives something on a lavish or extravagant scale.

Prodigal:
1. spending money or resources freely and recklessly. (The younger son).
2. having or giving something on a lavish scale. (The father).[26]

The parable is a story not only about a prodigal son, but it is also about a prodigal father. A father whose love and grace are extravagant.

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

1) He Saw Him

Luke says, "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him." The son was still far from the house when his father noticed him. He had not yet reached the village. He had not yet offered his apology. He had not yet had an opportunity to explain himself. The father saw him before the son could do anything to prove that he had changed.

That detail gives us a beautiful picture of God's heart toward us. When we were far away, God saw us too. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God did not wait for us to clean ourselves up before He

[26]Oxford Languages.

loved us. He did not wait until we became worthy before He moved toward us. He saw us in our need and responded with love.

The father had not stopped loving his son simply because his son had left. The son's rebellion had not erased his identity as a son. His father's love remained steadfast even while his son was far away. And when the son finally turned toward home, his father was watching and ready to respond.

2) He Had Compassion

Luke says that when the father saw his son, "he was filled with compassion for him." Notice the timing. The father had compassion before his son said a single word. He had not yet heard the rehearsed speech. He had not received an explanation. He simply saw his son—and his heart moved toward him.

This is the heart of our Heavenly Father. His compassion is not reluctant or begrudging. He does not look at us and say, "Well, I suppose I'll forgive you this time." His compassion flows from who He is.
Lamentations 3:22–23 reminds us, "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." God's compassion is not something we have to persuade Him to give us. His compassion is part of His character.

And the father's compassion does something important: it causes him to move toward his son.

3) He Ran to His Son

Luke says, "He ran to his son." The father didn't slowly walk toward him. He didn't wait for his son to cover the remaining distance. His compassion caused him to run.

In the Greek language, there are distinct words for running – one conveying a casual jog and the other an intense, race-winning sprint (tréchō). The Greek word Luke uses, tréchō, carries the idea of running or moving quickly.[27] The picture is not of a father reluctantly making his way toward his son. This is a father who is eager to welcome him home.

There is also an important cultural dimension to this scene. In the first-century Middle Eastern world, a respected older man was not typically expected to run. Running in a long robe required him to gather up his garment, exposing his legs in a way that could be considered humiliating. The father's willingness to run would have been striking to Jesus' original audience.[28]

[27]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5143/kjv/tr/0-1/
[28]Matthew 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.



The Father Ran to Receive the 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!"[29] This ceremony, known as kezazah, means "the cutting off".[30] For more information on this ceremony, reference the Talmud, Ketubot 28b.

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[29]Landon Galloway. The Prodigal Son. www.destinyleaders.com/the-prodigal-son/ February 16, 2017.
[30]Kenneth Bailey. The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants. June 3, 2005. Inter Varsity Press.

"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 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."[31]



The father ran toward his son, willingly humbling himself to reach him before the community could.

The son could not simply walk back into the village and reclaim his place in the family. Before he could reach his father, he would have

[31]Shelia Arnett. Kezazah: "The Cutting Off". www.sheliaarnett.weebly.com/blog/kezazah-the-cutting-off September 1, 2015.

had to face the community he had dishonored. They would have shamed him, rejected him, and cut him off from receiving restoration.

But the father intervened.

He ran to his son. He embraced him, welcomed him home, and publicly restored him to his place in the family.

And here we see an even greater picture of the Gospel.

Our heavenly Father has dealt with our shame through His Son, Jesus Christ, who willingly endured the cross on our behalf. Jesus took upon Himself the shame associated with our sin. He bore our guilt and condemnation so that we could be forgiven, restored, and fully accepted by God.

Hebrews 12:2 says, "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."

The cross was shameful, but Jesus willingly endured that shame because He knew what His sacrifice would accomplish. He took what belonged to us so that we could receive what belonged to Him.

The son could not make his way back to his father on his own terms. The father had to come to him.

That is the Gospel.

Our salvation is not the story of humanity successfully climbing its way up to God. It is the story of God coming down to us.

Psalm 24:3 asks, "Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place?" The answer is that we could never make ourselves worthy enough to stand before a holy God. We could never climb high enough, work hard enough, or clean ourselves up enough to bridge the distance created by sin.

So, God came down.

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Jesus came from the Father, full of grace and truth. He entered our world, stepped into our brokenness, carried our sin, and endured our shame so that we could come home to the Father.

The father ran toward his son.

And in Jesus, God ran toward us.

4) He Threw His Arms Around Him

Luke says the father "threw his arms around him." The Greek word used here, epipíptō, can carry the idea of falling upon or embracing someone.[32] This was not a distant greeting. The father didn't stand several feet away and offer his son a polite handshake. He embraced him.

And we should not rush past the condition of the son when this embrace happened.

[32]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1968/niv/mgnt/0-1/

He had been living among pigs. He had been starving. He had travelled a long, exhausting journey through dusty terrain to get home. He would not have arrived looking clean, respectable, and put together. Yet the father did not say, "Go wash up, and then we'll talk." He didn't tell his son to clean himself before coming close.

The father embraced him as his son.

And that is how God wants us to understand our relationship with Him. We don't approach Him as slaves trying to earn acceptance. Through Christ, we come as beloved children who have already been welcomed by grace.

Religion often tells us, "Clean yourself up, then come to God." Grace says, **"Come to God, and let Him receive you as you are."** The son didn't earn his way back into his father's favor; he simply came to his senses, got up, and returned home.

This is the beauty of the Gospel. God takes the initiative. He loved us first (1 John 4:19). He forgave us (Colossians 2:13). He welcomed and accepted us (Romans 15:7). Our response is not to earn what God has already provided through Christ, but to receive the grace He freely gives.

Paul describes this new relationship with God in Romans 8:15–16: "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by Him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself

testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

5) He Kissed Him

Then Luke tells us that the father "kissed him." At first glance, that may seem like a small detail, but the Greek word Luke uses is much more expressive than a quick kiss on the cheek. The word kataphiléō carries the idea of kissing repeatedly or affectionately.[33]



The father wasn't simply acknowledging his son's return. He was lavishing affection upon him.[34]

Imagine the scene. The son has come home filthy, exhausted, and smelling like the place he had been living. He has spent a third of everything the father owned. He has rehearsed a speech explaining why he is no longer worthy to be called a son. And before he can even finish that speech, his father is embracing him and covering him with kisses.

The son expected a lecture. He received love.

He expected rejection. He received acceptance.

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[33]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2705/niv/mgnt/0-1/

[34]The Parable of the Prodigal Son. www.bloggersforthekingdom.com/parable-of-the-prodigal-son/

He expected to become a servant. He was received as a son.

The father's response was completely disproportionate to what the son deserved—and that is precisely what makes it grace.

The father did not give his son what his actions deserved. He gave him what his heart had been waiting to give him all along.

When we look at these five actions together, we begin to see the heart of our heavenly prodigal Father. He saw his son while he was still far away. He had compassion before the son could explain himself. He ran toward him rather than waiting for him to attempt to come home. He embraced him without requiring him to clean himself up first. And he lavished affection upon him with repeated kisses.

This is what grace looks like.

Grace sees us when we are far away.
Grace moves toward us in compassion.
Grace reaches us when we cannot reach God on our own. Grace embraces us before we can try to make ourselves worthy. Grace lavishes upon us what we could never earn.

And in those five actions, Jesus gives us a picture of a Father whose grace is 1) immediate, 2) complete, 3) sacrificial, 4) undeserved, and 5) lavishly extravagant.

Part 4: "The Interrupted Repentance Speech"

The younger son had rehearsed his speech all the way home. He knew exactly what he was

going to say when he stood before his father. But when he finally arrived, something unexpected happened. His father had already run to him, embraced him, and covered him with kisses.

Now the son begins the speech he had practiced: **"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).**

At first, it sounds almost identical to the speech we heard earlier. And that is exactly what Jesus wants us to notice.

Earlier, the son had rehearsed these words: **"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).**

When the moment finally comes, Jesus reveals something remarkable: the son never finishes his speech.

He begins exactly as he had planned. He confesses his sin. He acknowledges his unworthiness. But then the speech stops.

The words **"make me like one of your hired servants"** never come out of his mouth.

Why?

Because before the son can negotiate his way back into the household, the father has already decided to restore him.

This interruption is one of the most beautiful pictures of grace in the entire parable. The son came home believing he would have to earn his place. He was prepared to exchange his status as a son for the position of a servant. He thought his best hope was to work his way back into his father's good graces. But his father would not allow him to reduce himself to a servant.

The son was willing to settle for less than what the father wanted to give him.

He came home asking to be a hired servant, but his father came running to restore him as a son.

There is a profound message here for anyone who has ever believed they have to earn their way back to God. God will never invite you into His family as a hired servant who must continually work to earn His love, goodness, favor, joy, peace, or acceptance. Through Jesus, He has made you His child.

Galatians 3:26 says, "So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith." Scripture repeatedly reinforces this truth. Ephesians 2:19 says that we are no longer strangers and foreigners but members of God's household. Romans 8:14–17 describes us as God's children who have received the Spirit of adoption. John 1:12 tells us that those who receive Christ are given the right to become children of God. And 1 John 3:1 invites us to marvel at the Father's love: "See what great love the Father has

lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"

Do you see what Jesus is revealing through this interrupted speech?

The son never gets the opportunity to say, "I'll work for You." He doesn't get to say, "I'll prove myself." He doesn't get to say, "Just let me earn my place." The father has already settled the matter.

You are my son.

This does not mean the son's sin didn't matter. He genuinely confessed it. He genuinely repented. He genuinely acknowledged that he had done wrong. But repentance was not a payment he made to purchase his father's acceptance. **Repentance turned his heart toward home; grace opened the door and welcomed him in.**

That distinction is important.

We don't obey God to become His children. We obey because, through Christ, we already are His children. We don't perform to gain His favor. We live from the favor He has already extended to us through Jesus.

Your place in the family of God is not achieved through your perfect words or your perfect actions. It is received through what the Father has graciously accomplished for you in Christ.

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).

When the prodigal son finally returned home, we saw five things the father did in response to his son's return. He saw him, had compassion on him, ran to him, embraced him, and kissed him. But the father wasn't finished. After welcoming his son home, he began to restore him. He gave him a robe, a ring, sandals, a feast from the fattened calf, and a celebration. Each gift reveals something about the heart of the Father and what grace does when sinners come home. The picture of grace in this passage is unmistakable.

1) The Robe

The first gift was the best robe. The father could have given his son ordinary clothing, but instead he instructed his servants to bring the best robe and put it on him. The robe publicly covered the evidence of his past and restored his honor. Isaiah 61:10 gives us a beautiful picture of what God does for us: "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."

Though the son returned bearing the consequences of his rebellion, the father instantly covered his shame with honor. Grace neither ignores our past nor demands that we

clean ourselves up first; it covers us with a righteousness we could never manufacture. We stand accepted not because of perfected performance, but because Christ has clothed us in His righteousness—hence the father's urgent command: "Quick! Bring the best robe."

There is no probationary period. There is no waiting to see whether the son will prove himself. The father immediately begins restoring what the son believed he had forfeited. The son had returned believing his past had disqualified him from being a son, but his father was not interested in making him prove that he deserved to come home. He simply covered him.

There is something even more powerful when we consider what Jesus endured to give us this robe. Before His crucifixion, Jesus was dressed in a robe as an act of mockery. John 19:2 tells us, "The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and put a purple robe on him." The King of kings was mocked, humiliated, and clothed in a robe intended to ridicule Him. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that Jesus endured the cross, "scorning its shame."

He willingly bore shame so that we could receive righteousness. He was mocked so that we could be honored. He was stripped so that we could be clothed. He took what belonged to us so that we could receive what belonged to Him. That is grace. The prodigal son did not bring a robe home with him. His father supplied it. In the same way, we cannot manufacture the righteousness God requires. Jesus provides what

we could never provide for ourselves. In Christ, we have been given the very best robe.

2) The Signet Ring

The second gift was a ring. In the ancient world, a signet ring would represent authority and was used to authenticate documents or transactions. We see this imagery in the story of Joseph when Pharaoh elevated him to a position of authority and placed his own signet ring on Joseph's hand (Genesis 41:42). By placing a ring on the returning prodigal, the father was not treating him as a pardoned servant, but fully reinstating him as an authorized son.

This gesture reveals a profound Gospel truth: grace does not stop at adoption—it delegates kingdom authority. Through Christ, we are given "the right to become children of God" (John 1:12; Galatians 3:26). Just as the signet ring empowered the son to represent his father, Jesus declared, "All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to Me" (Matthew 28:18), and then commissioned His followers to carry the Gospel to the world (Matthew 28:19–20; 2 Corinthians 5:18).

The signet ring reminds us that grace does not merely forgive our past. It restores our true identity, entrusts us with a sacred mission, and assures us that in Christ, we forever belong.

3) Sandals on His Feet

The third gift was sandals. The sandals represent your standing in the household of God: 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.[35]

The son had come home with nothing to offer and no claim to make. His father ordered sandals to be placed on his feet. The sandals are another visible sign that the father was not receiving his son back as a hired hand. He was restoring him as a member of the household.

The contrast between Moses at the burning bush and the prodigal son is a stunning picture of grace.

When God appeared to Moses, He commanded, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Moses stood before a holy God and was told to remove his sandals.

But in Luke 15, the father gives his returning son the opposite command: "Put sandals on his feet."

Think about that! Moses was told to take off his sandals. The prodigal son was given sandals. Moses was told not to come closer, yet the father ran toward his rebellious son and welcomed him home.

What changed? Not God's holiness, but what Jesus would accomplish for us.

Through Christ, the barrier of sin has been dealt with, and we have been given His righteousness.

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

Now, as Hebrews 10:19–22 declares, we can approach God with confidence. We are no longer outsiders afraid to draw near. We are welcomed into His presence through Jesus.

The prodigal son didn't earn his place in the father's house. He received it because of his father's grace.

He didn't come home because he had cleaned himself up. He came home and was welcomed, clothed, and restored by a father whose love was greater than his son's failure. That is the wonder of grace.[36]

There is also a beautiful connection to the Armor of God. Ephesians 6:15 speaks of having our feet fitted "with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of Peace." The Gospel gives us firm footing because Jesus has made peace between us and God. We no longer stand before God trying to prove that we belong. We stand on the finished work of Christ. Our footing is grace, our peace is Christ, our standing is righteousness, and our invitation is to draw near.

4) The Fattened Calf

Then the father gives the fourth gift: a feast. "Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate." This was no ordinary meal. A fattened calf represented abundance and was associated with a significant celebration. The father's response demonstrates just how

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

extraordinary this moment was. His son had been lost, and now he was found. The father wasn't reluctantly allowing the son back into the house. He was throwing a celebration.

Jesus has already prepared us for this response in his earlier parables. After the shepherd finds the lost sheep, Jesus says, "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). Then, after the woman finds her lost coin, He says, "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).

The pattern is unmistakable. Something lost is found. Something dead is restored to life. And Heaven celebrates. The fattened calf communicates the extravagance of the father's joy. His response is not, "Let's discuss everything you did wrong." It is, "Let's celebrate. My son is home!"

And while the parable is not a direct explanation of the atonement, the New Testament makes clear that our forgiveness and reconciliation with God ultimately rest upon the sacrifice of Jesus. John the Baptist looked at Jesus and declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 NASB). The celebration of Luke 15 points us toward the greater reality revealed throughout the Gospel: our reconciliation with God came at a tremendous cost. Jesus gave Himself for us.

Grace is free to us, but it was not cheap.

The valuable fatted calf was sacrificed so the celebration could begin. And in the greater story of Scripture, that sacrifice points us toward the cross, where Jesus would willingly give His life for our sin and reconcile us to God.

The father welcomed his son freely because the cost of our redemption would ultimately be paid by another.

5) The Celebration

And now we arrive at the final gift: the father celebrates. Notice the order. First comes the sacrifice, and then comes the celebration. The father says, "Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate." There is a powerful Gospel picture here. Our celebration is not based on our performance. It is based on what has already been accomplished for us.

Jesus went to the cross. Jesus gave His life. Jesus bore our sin. Jesus rose again. And because of what He accomplished, we have every reason to celebrate.

Growing up playing basketball, I always wanted to play well because I wanted to make my dad proud. One year, I played on a team that wasn't very good. That was a dramatic change from the previous season when we had finished second in the league. The year before, every time my dad came to one of our games, we seemed to win. That eventually created a tradition. After our victories, we would go to the same restaurant to celebrate. The staff knew us. They knew our

routine. They would see us walk through the door on Saturday and seemed ready and waiting to celebrate with us.

But the following year was different. We didn't win very often. After one particular loss, my dad took me to the same restaurant. I remember wondering why. Why were we celebrating when we had just lost? I had unknowingly connected the celebration to my performance. In my mind, we celebrated because I had played well and because our team had won.

But my dad was teaching me something I didn't fully understand at the time. The celebration wasn't ultimately about whether I had won the game. It was about being together. My dad didn't take me to that restaurant because I had earned the right to celebrate. He took me because I was his son.

Years later, I see something of the Father's heart in that memory. We assume God celebrates us when we perform well and withdraws when we fail. We imagine that His pleasure rises and falls with our spiritual performance. But Luke 15 gives us a different picture.

The father celebrates because his son is home.

Jesus brings the parable to its climax with these words: **"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 15:32).** The celebration isn't

based on the son's performance. It is based on his restoration.

And that changes everything.

We don't celebrate because we have performed perfectly. We celebrate because Jesus has accomplished perfectly. We don't celebrate because we have finally become worthy. We celebrate because Jesus has given us His righteousness.

That is why communion is so significant. When we receive the bread and cup, we remember the sacrifice of Jesus and proclaim what He has accomplished for us (Luke 22:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:24–26). We remember that our forgiveness, reconciliation, and new life came through His finished work.

And we celebrate.

Not because we are the victors, but because Christ is.

The prodigal son came home expecting to become a servant. Instead, he discovered that his father had never stopped being his father. He came home expecting punishment and received compassion. He came home expecting rejection and received an embrace. He came home expecting to beg for a place in the household and instead received a robe, a ring, sandals, a feast, and a celebration.
This is the heart of the Gospel. Grace doesn't merely bring you back to where you were. Grace restores what you thought you had lost. And the greatest gift of all is not the robe, the ring, the

sandals, or even the feast. It is the Father Himself.
You were lost, and He found you. You were far away, and He brought you near. You were trying to earn your way back, and He ran toward you.

You came home with a speech. Your Father came running with grace.

And when you met your heavenly Father's warm embrace, there is only one appropriate response: celebrate His grace and worship Him with a grateful heart!

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 does each of the <u>five gifts</u> 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.

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 readers focus on the younger son and overlook his older brother. Yet the older brother is essential to understanding Jesus' message. Perhaps this is not merely the Parable of the Prodigal Son or even the Parable of the Lost Sons, but the Parable of the Gracious Father—a father whose grace reaches toward both sons. Jesus gives the older brother such significant attention because the two sons reveal different expressions of the same underlying problem. The younger son openly rebels, while the older son trusts in his own obedience. Their behavior looks very different, but neither understands the father's grace.

The tax collectors and sinners gathered around Jesus, drawn by His message of grace. Meanwhile, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law looked on in indignation, deeply offended that Jesus welcomed such outcasts—and even shared meals with them.

Jesus later reinforced this truth in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9–14), aimed squarely at those who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else. The Pharisee stood proudly before God, listing his religious accomplishments, while the tax collector recognized his need for mercy. One relied on his own achievements; the other relied on God's grace. Jesus concluded with a startling verdict: "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 18:14). The takeaway is unmistakable: religious performance cannot justify us—we are declared righteous by faith alone.

Paul makes this same truth explicit in 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."

This is why the older brother is so important to the story. Jesus wanted the Pharisees to see themselves in him. The younger brother was easy to identify as a sinner. He was rebellious, selfish, and openly distant from his father. But the older brother looked respectable. He stayed home. He worked. He obeyed. He appeared to be everything the younger brother was not. Yet when the father welcomed his lost son home, the older brother refused to celebrate. His problem was not that he had broken the rules. His problem was that he had never understood the heart of the father.

As one writer has observed, "The Prodigal Son portrays two areas of human failure that encompass all sin: independence and indulgence."[37] The younger son pursued independence through indulgence. He wanted

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

the father's possessions without the father's presence. The older son pursued independence through performance. He wanted the father's reward because he believed his obedience had earned it. One son ran away from the father. The other stayed home but had a heart that was far from him. Both were lost. Both needed grace. And both were being invited to receive it.

This helps us understand why the tax collectors were so significant in the setting of Luke 15. In first-century Jewish society, tax collectors were regarded as sinners and social outcasts. Many worked within the Roman taxation system and were viewed as collaborators with an occupying power. Because tax collectors could profit from the system by collecting more than was required, they were often associated with corruption and exploitation. There were several forms of taxation under Roman rule, including land taxes, head taxes, and customs taxes. Customs taxes were collected on goods transported through ports, tax offices, and city gates. Tax collectors had opportunities to manipulate the value of goods and collect more than was required, keeping the difference as profit. To those being taxed, this could feel like institutionalized robbery.[38]

Tax collectors could also use intimidation and hired muscle to collect money from people. As one description puts it, "Most were despicable,

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

vile, unprincipled scoundrels."[39] Whether every individual tax collector behaved this way or not, the reputation of the profession was enough to make them social and religious outcasts. And yet Jesus welcomed them. That is exactly what offended the Pharisees.

Consider Levi. Matthew 9:9–13, Mark 2:13–17, and Luke 5:27–28 record Jesus calling Levi, a tax collector, to follow Him. Levi's name is associated with the idea of being attached, pledged, or joined.[40] His life reflected that description. Levi had attached himself to the Roman system and made his living collecting taxes from his own people. Then Jesus came along and simply said, "Follow Me." Everything changed. Levi became Matthew.

The name Matthew is associated with the idea of "gift" or "gift of God."[41] There is something beautiful about the transformation represented in those names. Levi had built his life around taking from people. Matthew would become someone who gave what he had received—the message of God's grace through Jesus Christ. The man who had once been identified by his occupation was now identified by his relationship with Jesus. And Matthew did not keep that grace to himself. Filled with excitement over his transformed life, he invited his friends to a gathering so they could meet Jesus too. His

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[39]Joel 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.
[40]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3018/kjv/tr/0-1/
[41]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3156/kjv/tr/0-1/

friends happened to include other tax collectors and sinners. The very people the religious leaders wanted to avoid were the very people Jesus came to save.

This is why the older brother matters so much. If Jesus had told only the story of the younger son, the Pharisees could have easily listened to the story and thought, "Yes, those sinners need to repent. They need to come home." All the while remaining blind to their own condition. They could have compared their righteousness with the tax collectors' sinfulness and concluded that they were better. But Jesus would not allow them to remain outside the story. He gave them a character to identify with: the older brother.

The older brother does not celebrate when his younger brother comes home. Instead, he becomes angry. He refuses to enter the celebration. He complains about his father's generosity and points to his own record of obedience. His words reveal the condition of his heart: "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders" (Luke 15:29). Notice his language: "I've been slaving for you." He does not speak like a beloved son. He speaks like a servant demanding payment. He has been physically close to his father while relationally distant from him.

This is the danger of self-righteousness. We can be around the things of God while never actually resting in the grace of God. We can obey the rules while missing the relationship. We can serve faithfully while secretly believing God

owes us something in return. The younger brother wanted the father's inheritance without the father. The older brother wanted the father's reward without the father's grace. Both sons had misunderstood what it meant to be a son.

This is why the father goes out to both of them. He runs to the younger son when he sees him coming down the road. Then, when the older son refuses to come inside, the father goes out to him too. The gracious father moves toward both sons.

That detail is remarkable. The father does not reserve his compassion for the son whose rebellion is obvious. He also reaches toward the son whose anger and self-righteousness are keeping him outside the celebration.

The younger son had to discover that his past failures did not prevent his father from welcoming him home. The older son had to confront a different misunderstanding: he had been living as though his years of service were the basis of his standing with his father.

One son needed to discover the father's grace after rebellion. The other needed to discover that his father's generosity was never a wage he had to earn.

And that is the uncomfortable truth Jesus was placing before the Pharisees: the greatest obstacle between them and the Father might be their belief that they were already righteous enough without grace. Grace is not a reward for the worst sinner or a bonus for the best

performer. It is the undeserved favor of God, received through Jesus Christ.

We see this same attitude of the Pharisees when Jesus enters the home of Zacchaeus in Luke 19. Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector, and when Jesus invited Himself into his home, the crowd responded with anger: "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner" (Luke 19:7). Once again, the religious crowd could not celebrate when a sinner was welcomed by grace. The crowd sounded remarkably like the older brother.

Now, when we hear the older brother's words in the Parable of the Gracious Father, we should hear something more than the complaint of one angry sibling. We should hear the voice of the Pharisees themselves.
That is why the story is ultimately not just about a prodigal son. It is about two lost sons and a gracious Father who comes looking for both. The question Jesus leaves hanging in the air is not, "Will the younger son come home?" It is, "Will the older son come inside?"

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 field working. Fieldwork was laborious and exhausting. It required long hours, physical effort, and perseverance. At first glance, we might be tempted to admire the older son for his

diligence. After all, his younger brother had squandered his inheritance, while the older son had remained home working faithfully. But if we stop there, we miss the significance of where Jesus places the older brother in the story.

The older son is not simply working in the field. His location reveals something about his relationship with his father. There is a distance between them that goes far deeper than physical space. The older son was living in his father's house, but he was not living as the identity of a beloved son. He was functioning more like a servant.

As one commentator observes, "The logical thing for the elder son to have done would have been to go at once to the father, but something was missing in the rapport which he should have had with the father. He was living the life of a slave in the house of his father."[42] That observation captures something crucial about the older brother. He was free, but he was living as though he were a hired servant.

This is especially significant because the father already had servants who could perform the difficult work in the fields. Earlier in the parable, when the younger son returns home, the father gives instructions to his servants to bring the best robe, put a ring on his finger, put sandals on his feet, and prepare the celebration. The father had people who worked for him. The older

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

son, however, was not one of those hired servants. He was a son. Yet he was living as though he had to earn his place through his work.

Here lies the tragedy of the elder brother: possessing full access to his father's estate, he lived with the poverty mindset of an orphan. Though dwelling in the family home, he functioned like a hired hand—relating to a loving father as an exacting master, and treating an inherited blessing as a wage to be earned. His error was not his diligence, but his belief that performance was the currency required to buy his father's love.

As the story unfolds, his attitude becomes increasingly clear. His words reveal that he believed his obedience entitled him to something from his father. He viewed his years of service as a debt the father owed him. His obedience was no longer an expression of love; it had become a means of earning.

This is one of the great dangers of performance-based Christianity. We can spend our lives working for God while never learning how to rest in what God has already provided. We can serve, give, sacrifice, attend church, read our Bibles, pray, and do countless good things, yet quietly believe that God's acceptance of us depends upon our performance. When that happens, even good works can become a form of striving.

The story of Jacob gives us another picture of this struggle. In Genesis 32:24–29, Jacob

wrestled through the night, desperately seeking a blessing. His life had been characterized by striving, scheming, and trying to secure the blessing he wanted through his own efforts. Yet there comes a moment when Jacob is forced to recognize that the blessing he needs cannot ultimately be obtained through human effort. He must depend upon God.

There is a profound lesson here for us. The Christian life is not about exhausting ourselves trying to convince God to bless us. We do not have to wrestle our way into God's favor. We do not have to work our way into His acceptance. In Christ, we have already received what no amount of human effort could ever earn—grace invites us to stop striving for what God has freely bestowed.

The older brother should have been inside the house. He should have been celebrating. He should have been dancing, singing, and rejoicing that his brother, who was lost, had been found.

When the good news came that his brother had returned, he had a choice. He could leave the field, enter the house, embrace his brother, and join the celebration. Instead, he chose to remain 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. A brother who was lost is now safely home. None of us are promised tomorrow. James reminds us that our lives are like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes (James 4:13–14). The danger of the younger son's lifestyle makes his return even more remarkable. The miracle is not simply that his reckless choices did not result in his death; the greater miracle is that he came to his senses, recognized where he belonged, and chose to return home.



43 The father's response reveals the completeness of his welcome: the sacrifice was made, and the feast immediately began. Yet as the music fills the house, the narrative pivots to the elder brother standing outside. If he truly shared his father's righteous heart, how ought he to react when a wayward brother receives mercy and full restoration? Shouldn't he celebrate? Shouldn't he rejoice that the one who was lost had been found? Shouldn't he be

grateful that his brother was alive and home again?

Jesus had already answered that question earlier in Luke 15.

"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).

Jesus makes the same point in the parable of the lost coin. When the woman finds the coin she has lost, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin" (Luke 15:9). Jesus then explains the reason for the celebration: "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).

This is the genius of what Jesus has done in the earlier parables. He has already established the value that God places on every individual. The father is not showing favoritism toward the younger son while neglecting the older son. Peter would later discover this same truth and declare, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34).
The father's celebration is not evidence that he loves the younger son more. It is evidence that the younger son has returned home. And the older son has not been forgotten. The door was

open to the older brother too. He simply had to recognize that he was not standing outside because his father had excluded him. He was standing outside because he refused to enter.

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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Those bound by self-righteousness struggle to receive grace because they fail to recognize their need for it. Worse still, they grow indignant when unmerited favor is lavished on those they deem undeserving. Grace—freely given and impossible to earn—is inherently offensive to a heart obsessed with spiritual performance.[45]

[44]The 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-/
[45]Oxford Languages.

Hebrews 9:14 captures the contrast between trying to earn God's acceptance and receiving what Christ has already accomplished: "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."

Notice the progression. Christ does not cleanse us so that we can continue trying to earn God's acceptance through our works. He cleanses our conscience from "dead works" so that we can serve the living God. There is a difference between working for acceptance and serving from acceptance. The first is slavery; the second is sonship.

This helps explain why the older brother was so angry when he learned that his father had killed the fattened calf. The celebration itself became an offense to him. He could not understand why his father would respond to his rebellious brother with such extravagant grace. As one commentator observes, "The preaching of a crucified Christ, and of free and full salvation by Him, is highly displeasing and provoking to self-righteous persons."[46]

Grace is offensive to self-righteousness because grace removes the opportunity to boast. If salvation is freely given, then there is nothing we can point to and say, "I earned this." The cross leaves no room for human pride because

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

everything necessary for our salvation has been accomplished by Christ.

Luke 15:28 makes another important point: "The older brother became angry and refused to go in." Once again, Jesus places the older son on the outside. He is physically close to the father's house, but he refuses to enter the celebration. This would have been a powerful picture for the Pharisees listening to Jesus. They considered themselves to be on the inside because of their religious devotion, yet Jesus was revealing that their self-righteousness was actually keeping them outside the very grace they desperately needed.

Jesus had already warned them about this in Matthew 5:20: "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." Jesus was not telling them that they needed to become even more religious than the Pharisees. He was exposing the inadequacy of a righteousness based upon human performance. The righteousness required by God cannot ultimately be produced by religious effort. We need a righteousness that comes from Him.

In many ways, we could consider the story of the rich young ruler in Luke 18:18–23 to be a continuation of this same lesson. The rich young ruler approached Jesus with a question: "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Notice his question. He wanted to know what he must do. His thinking was centered on

performance. Jesus directed him toward the commandments, and the young man confidently responded, "All these I have kept since I was a boy" (Luke 18:21). His response sounds remarkably similar to the older brother's complaint: "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders."

Both men believed their obedience gave them something to boast about.

Both believed they had done enough.

Both had difficulty recognizing their need for grace.

And both needed to come to the end of themselves.

The rich young ruler eventually walked away sorrowful because he discovered that his righteousness was not as complete as he thought it was. Jesus exposed what he was unwilling to surrender, revealing that beneath his outward obedience was a heart still trusting in his own ability to secure his future. The Law has a way of doing this. It exposes our inability to achieve the righteousness God requires and brings us to the end of ourselves so that we will recognize our need for a Savior. The purpose of the Law is not to convince us that we can save ourselves; it is to show us that we cannot.

Romans 3:23 declares, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That includes the younger son. It also includes the older son. It includes the tax collector. It includes the

Pharisee. It includes the rich young ruler. And it includes us. The older son's greatest problem was not simply his anger. His anger was revealing what had been developing in his heart for years.

As one commentator notes, "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."[47] Bitterness had distorted the older son's perspective. He was so focused on what he believed he lacked that he could no longer recognize his father's generosity.

"You never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends" (Luke 15:29), he complained. Yet his father had already divided the inheritance between his two sons (Luke 15:12).

A performance-based mindset can cause us to live as though we lack what has already been provided. As believers, we have received a spiritual inheritance in Christ. The question is whether we will trust God's promises and live in the blessings He has given us through Jesus.

We see a similar attitude in the life of Esau. Genesis 25:29–34 tells us that Esau, the firstborn son, sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of food. He treated something of

[47]David Guzik. Study Guide for Luke 15. www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/luke/luke-15.cfm

tremendous value as though it were insignificant. Genesis 25:34 says that Esau "despised his birthright." His problem was not that the birthright had no value. His problem was that he failed to recognize its value.

The same principle applies to the inheritance we have received in Christ. The blessings and promises of God are not insignificant. They were purchased at an immeasurable cost through the finished work of Jesus. We should not live as though we are spiritual beggars when our Father has already given us an inheritance through Christ as sons and daughters. Grace has provided what performance never could.

The older son's words reveal just how deeply his slave mindset had affected him: **"All these years I have been slaving for you."** There it is. He finally says out loud what his actions had been communicating all along. He viewed himself as a slave rather than a son. That slave mindset had robbed him of the joy of his inheritance.

He was surrounded by the father's generosity but could only see what he thought he was missing. He was surrounded by the father's love but interpreted that love through the lens of what he could do for the father.

This is why grace must change more than our destination; it must change our identity. If we believe we are servants trying to earn God's favor, we will constantly measure our lives by what we have done and what we believe God owes us in return. But when we understand that

we are sons and daughters who have already been accepted through Christ, our obedience takes on an entirely different meaning. We no longer serve to earn His love. We serve because we have received His love.

The older brother's complaint becomes even more revealing when he says, "Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends."

Why a young goat? Why not mention the fattened calf?

In the culture of that time, a fattened calf represented a significant and costly celebration and would have been reserved for a special occasion. The older son contrasts that extravagant celebration with what he perceived as his own lack of recognition. He points out that he had not even received a young goat, or "kid," ériphos, which would have been of considerably less value than the fattened calf.[48]

His words reveal how deeply bitterness had distorted his perspective. He was not simply upset about a calf. He was convinced that his years of service had gone unnoticed. He believed that his father had failed to reward him adequately while extravagantly rewarding his rebellious brother. Leon Morris stated, "Every day his father's love was constant, and everything the father had was his. Yet, the

[48]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2056/niv/mgnt/0-1/

proud and the self-righteous always feel that they are not treated as well as they deserve."[49]

The older brother had completely missed the point of the fattened calf. The calf was not killed simply to provide an excuse for a party. The celebration was a response to restoration. It revealed the father's joy over a relationship that had been renewed.

The older brother saw wasted resources and an undeserving sinner receiving what he had not earned. The father saw a beloved son who had come home.
That is the dividing line between self-righteousness and grace. Self-righteousness asks, "What has he done to deserve this?" Grace asks, "Isn't it wonderful that he is home?"

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 elder brother's choice of words reveals the deep rift in his heart. Refusing to say "my brother," he distances himself with the cold label, "this son of yours". He then reduces his brother entirely to his worst failure— "who has squandered your property with prostitutes". While the father celebrates a restored son, the older brother remains trapped in the accusations

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

of the past. Yet the celebration has already begun. The father has received his son, and the older brother must decide whether he will recognize the restoration or remain outside, clinging to his brother's failures.

This is where the Gospel speaks powerfully into the story.

"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). The younger son has already been redeemed and restored to the family. The father did not require him to spend years proving that he had changed before treating him like a son. He immediately restored him to the place of belonging.

Yet the older brother wants to bring up the past.

This is one of the great differences between grace and condemnation. Grace looks at a person through the work God has done in them, while condemnation continually points backward to who they used to be.

We could have inferred from Jesus' earlier description of the younger son's lifestyle as "wild living" that sexual immorality may have been part of his rebellion. Yet the older brother specifically singles out prostitutes when he speaks to his father. Why mention this particular sin? Because he is not simply describing what his brother did. He is using his brother's worst behavior as evidence that he does not deserve the father's grace.

Prostitution carried enormous moral and social stigma within Jewish culture. The Old Testament established strong standards concerning sexual purity, and sexual immorality was treated as a serious violation of those standards. Beyond the moral implications, such behavior could bring tremendous shame upon an individual and his family. In a culture where community identity and family honor were deeply significant, a person who engaged in behavior considered sexually immoral could find himself ostracized and socially rejected.

There was also a deeper spiritual significance. The prophets repeatedly used the imagery of prostitution and adultery to describe Israel's spiritual unfaithfulness to God. Idolatry was portrayed as spiritual adultery because God's covenant people had turned away from Him and pursued other gods. Therefore, when the older brother points to his younger brother's association with prostitutes, he is highlighting not merely a financial failure or a poor decision but what would have been viewed as an especially shameful form of rebellion.

This helps us understand the depth of the older brother's accusation. He is essentially saying to his father, "How can you celebrate someone like him? Look at what he has done. Look at the kind of person he became. Look at the shame he brought upon this family." He is attempting to make his brother's past more powerful than his father's grace.

That attitude would have resonated deeply with the Pharisees listening to Jesus. The religious leaders were constantly defining people according to their past, their reputation, their failures, and their social status. Tax collectors were sinners. Prostitutes were sinners. The people Jesus welcomed were people the religious establishment had already judged and pushed to the margins. Yet Jesus repeatedly demonstrated that a person's past did not have the final word over their future.

There is an interesting cultural background that may add another layer to this scene. Earlier in the story, we considered the possibility of a kezazah ceremony, a communal act of rejection that could be used to sever relations with a person who had brought shame upon the family or community. According to descriptions of the ceremony, villagers could meet the returning individual at the outskirts of the community, break pottery at his feet, and symbolically declare that they were no longer associated with him. The purpose was to shame the individual and communicate that he was no longer welcome within the community.[50]
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

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

ceremony, banning his younger brother from ever returning home.

The older brother could not celebrate because he was still judging his brother by what he had done. And that raises an important question for us: Will we view people through the lens of grace, recognizing what God is doing in their lives, or will we continue to define them by their worst failures?

Jesus leaves the older brother's response unresolved. We are not told whether he enters the celebration later on. That open ending confronts every listener with a choice: remain outside, clinging to self-righteousness, or receive the grace of the Father and come into the party.

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?

10) How can the concept of undeserved favor (grace) impact our daily lives and the way we treat others?

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's grace in your life. When you believe what God says about you and what Christ has accomplished for you, you experience the fullness of His love, grace, and every spiritual blessing already given to you in Christ.

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

Before we conclude the story, let's consider what the main characters reveal about our relationship with God.

The younger son reveals our need for grace. Sin separated us from God, and we could never restore that relationship through our own efforts. The older son reveals how easily we can misunderstand grace when we rely on our own performance. But the father reveals the heart of God—a Father who welcomes the lost, restores the broken, and invites His children to enjoy life in His presence.

Our heavenly Father is generous and delights in giving. In Christ, He promises, "I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Hebrews 8:12). He remains with us through life's storms and walks with us through the fire (Daniel 3:24–25; Matthew 28:20). He will never abandon us or stop loving us, because "God is love" (1 John 4:8).[51]

If we want to understand what God is truly like, we must look at the father Jesus reveals in this parable. His response to both sons demonstrates that His love is not earned through good behavior or canceled by failure. Grace flows from who the Father is, not from what His children have done.

The restored son represents those who receive God's grace through faith in Jesus.

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

Paul expresses the invitation simply: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). Through faith in Christ, we receive the blessings God has provided for us, including forgiveness, salvation, righteousness, and sanctification. As Jesus declared, "He who believes in Me has everlasting life" (John 6:47).

The younger son's return to his father provides a picture of coming home to God. But our reconciliation with the Father is made possible through Jesus alone. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

The celebration surrounding the fattened calf also invites us to reflect on the greater work of Jesus Christ. Although the parable does not directly explain the atonement, the New Testament makes clear that our reconciliation with God rests on the sacrifice of His Son. Jesus willingly went to the cross to bear our sins, and through His death and resurrection, He opened the way for us to be reconciled to the Father. We do not earn our way home. Through faith in Jesus, we receive what He has accomplished for us.

Having seen how Christ's sacrifice makes this extravagant welcome possible, let's return to the final words of the parable:

"'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).

When the elder brother reacts with fury over his brother's celebratory return, the father responds without condemnation. There is a profound detail in the language Jesus uses: the father does not address him as "huios" — the formal legal term for "son"[52], but as teknon—a word expressing tender, personal affection akin to "my dear child."[53]

This contrast is striking. The elder brother's own words betray his heartsick, transactional mindset: **"Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders" (Luke 15:29).** While he viewed himself as an underpaid servant relating to a strict master, the father gently dismantles that slave mindset with intimate parental love, reminding his angry child that he was never a hired hand—he has always been a deeply loved member of the family.

This interaction carried particular significance for Jesus' original Jewish audience. Israel had been entrusted with tremendous spiritual privileges. As Paul asks in Romans 3:1–2, "What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew?"—answering that they had been entrusted with the very words of God. Romans 9:4 similarly lists Israel's adoption, glory, covenants, law, worship, and promises. The older son's position reflects the privileged status of the religious leaders and the nation of Israel. They dwelt in

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[52]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5207/niv/mgnt/0-1/
[53]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5043/niv/mgnt/0-1/

the "father's house" surrounded by covenant promises, yet many failed to recognize the Messiah standing in their midst.[54]

In refusing to step inside the feast, the elder son spurns his father's invitation—a tragic dynamic Jesus also exposes in the Parable of the Wedding Feast. In that story, a king prepares a wedding banquet for his son, but the original guests refuse to attend. Undeterred, the king sends his servants into the streets to gather outcasts and strangers to fill the hall. Both parables reveal the same sobering truth: those who rely on their own merit will miss out on the party, while those who recognize their poverty are welcomed in to receive God's lavish grace, the joy of life in the Father's presence.

The older son's reaction stems from a subtle trap: self-righteousness. He compares himself to his wayward brother rather than measuring himself against God's perfect standard. Comparison can make us feel righteous when standing beside someone we deem worse than ourselves, but God's standard is not "better than your brother"—His standard is perfection: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48).

The good news of the Gospel is that our perfection is found in Christ alone. As Paul writes, "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

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

Hebrews likewise declares, "For by one offering He hath perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Hebrews 10:14).

Only after establishing this foundation does the father deliver one of the most astonishing statements in the entire parable: **"Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours" (Luke 15:31).**

Though living under his father's roof, the elder son had measured their relationship solely through performance, remaining completely blind to the lavish inheritance already at his disposal. What an incredible picture of our standing in Christ! Romans 8:17 assures us that we are "co-heirs with Christ," and Ephesians 1:3 declares that God "has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ". Grace means we stop striving to earn what the Father has already freely lavished upon us.

Standing outside the banquet amidst surrounding abundance, the elder brother convinced himself he had been cheated. Consumed by what his brother received, he became blind to the wealth already in his hands—demonstrating how envy obscures divine provision. Like Eve in Eden, he succumbed to the ancient lie that God was withholding something good, mistaking a brother's reckless rebellion for a missed opportunity.

Satan perpetuates that same lie today. The deceitful whisper is that God is holding back blessings from you, and that true fulfillment must be pursued outside His care. While sin

falsely promises what only God can supply, grace reveals that everything we truly need has already been lavished upon us in Christ.
What we believe about God ultimately dictates how we live. When we view Him as an exacting master—withholding, disappointed, or waiting to punish—we inevitably operate like slaves, endlessly striving to earn His favor. But when we embrace the truth of His generous, unwavering love, we stop performing and step into rest. As Jesus promised, "Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).
The elder brother's accusation reveals how deeply bitterness had poisoned his heart. While Scripture never specifies how he learned of his brother's moral collapse—perhaps rumors of the young man's notoriety had preceded his return—the father's response remains astonishing. Even if reports of reckless living had reached the household, the father's love remained unshaken; no degree of scandal could alter his compassionate heart.

The parable deliberately leaves us without a final answer concerning the older son. We are never told whether he eventually enters the celebration. Jesus leaves the door open, just like I believe the father in the parable did as well.

Jesus placed the religious leaders at a critical crossroads: they could remain outside, imprisoned by self-righteousness, or step inside to embrace God's grace—much like Nicodemus,

who eventually moved from cautious inquiry to open faith in Christ (John 19:39–40).

Jesus ended the story on a cliffhanger because the choice ultimately belonged to His listeners—and that same invitation extends to us today. The Parable of the Lost Son offers hope across the entire human spectrum: from the obvious outcast to the religious traditionalist, from the person who knows they are lost to the one who has yet to realize it.

This universal grace is anchored in the father's declaration: **"We had to celebrate and be glad" (Luke 15:32).** The Greek word translated "had to" is dei, meaning that something is necessary or must happen.[55]

We see this same word in John 4:4, where Jesus "had to go through Samaria". That journey was not a geographical requirement, but a divine appointment to extend covenant grace to a Samaritan outcast at Jacob's well.

Jesus' journey to this well carries even greater weight when we consider its historical context. Jacob had purchased this very field in Shechem, erecting an altar dedicated to Elohey Yisrael—the God of Israel (Genesis 33:19–20). Jacob's well was covenant ground. Centuries earlier, God had pledged to Abraham: "I will make of you a great nation... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:1–3). Now, standing on that sacred ground, Jesus—the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant—meets a Samaritan woman. To the

[55]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1163/niv/mgnt/0-1/

Jewish religious establishment, she represented everything an insider would avoid: a Samaritan, a woman, and an outcast with a complicated past. Yet by meeting her at Jacob's well, Jesus dramatically demonstrated that the covenant blessing promised to Abraham was never intended for one nation alone. In reaching across cultural and religious barriers to offer her living water, Jesus proved that God's covenant of grace was designed from the beginning to bless all families of the earth—including the outsider, the foreigner, and the lost.

In the same way, the father's feast in Luke 15 was not an optional party; it was a divine necessity. Love could not remain silent, and grace could not refrain from celebrating. The Father does not stand at the door waiting to condemn; He watches the horizon to restore. Because a child who was dead is alive again, celebration is a divine mandate—and through Jesus Christ, the door remains wide open for every lost child to come home.

Live in God's Grace

If all followers of Jesus are represented by the restored son in this parable, then an important question remains: How do we consistently live in the grace we have received?

Paul reminds us that it is "through grace given unto us that we do not think of ourselves more highly than we ought" (Romans 12:3). Grace keeps us humble because grace reminds us that everything we have received from God is a gift. We did not earn our salvation, our

righteousness, our forgiveness, or our place in the Father's house. We received them because of who Jesus is and what He accomplished for us.

Grace also keeps us from developing the attitude of the elder brother. When we understand how much grace has been extended to us, we become more willing to extend that same grace to others. Instead of looking at the failures of the lost and asking whether they deserve to come home, we begin to see them through the eyes of our Father. We develop compassion for those who are far from God because we remember that we were once lost too.

Living in grace begins with a daily awareness of God's complete provision. Like the elder brother, who dwelt in abundance yet thought like an impoverished servant, believers often fall into the trap of striving for acceptance already granted and begging for blessings already bestowed. True grace invites us to stop working for God's favor and start living from the spiritual riches Christ has already secured for us (Ephesians 1:3).

Living in grace means learning to live from what God has already provided rather than continually striving to earn what He has already given.

So, what does living in God's grace look like practically?

1. Receive the forgiveness you have been given.

The first step in living in grace is recognizing that you are forgiven. You do not have to spend the rest of your life paying for sins that Jesus already paid for at the cross.

Paul writes, "In Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32). Notice the foundation of forgiveness: it is "in Christ." Your forgiveness is not based on how well you performed after you sinned. It is based on the finished work of Jesus.

Grace teaches you to stop looking backward at the record of your failures and start looking at the finished work of Christ.

The enemy may remind you of what you did, but the Gospel reminds you of what Jesus did.

2. Extend the forgiveness you have received.

Grace is not something we were meant to receive and then keep to ourselves. Because we have been forgiven, we can forgive others.

Paul says, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other" (Ephesians 4:32a). When we understand the magnitude of the grace God has extended toward us, we become less interested in keeping a record of someone else's failures.

Forgiveness does not mean pretending that what happened was acceptable. It does not mean ignoring injustice or refusing to establish healthy boundaries. It means releasing our right to carry the debt against another person and entrusting justice to God.

The elder brother could not celebrate his brother's restoration because he was still keeping a record of his brother's failures. Grace transforms our vision. Rather than holding debts against others, grace enables us to see restored believers as the Father sees them—as beloved brothers and sisters in Christ—and to join all of Heaven in rejoicing over their return.

3. Live with gratitude for what God has already given you.

Grace produces gratitude because grace opens our eyes to how much we have already received.

Instead of constantly focusing on what we do not have, grace teaches us to recognize what God has already provided.

You are not an accident. You are not an afterthought. You are God's workmanship, "created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10).

Gratitude shifts our focus from what we think we are missing to what God has already placed in our hands. It allows us to celebrate His goodness rather than becoming consumed by comparison.

The older brother could not enjoy his father's abundance because he was too focused on what his younger brother had received. Envy says, "What about him?" Grace says, "Look at what the Father has already given me."

4. Trust God's grace in difficult circumstances.

Living in grace does not mean that life will never be difficult. It means that difficulty does not have the final word.

God told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Sometimes God's grace changes our circumstances. Sometimes His grace changes us in the middle of those circumstances. Either way, His grace is sufficient.

When we trust God's grace, we do not have to understand everything before we trust Him. We can believe that our Father is good even when the road ahead is difficult. We can rest in His provision even when we cannot yet see how He will provide.

Grace permits us to stop striving to control everything and start trusting the One who holds everything.

5. Live as a beloved child who knows what belongs to them.

The fifth way we live in grace is by embracing our identity as God's beloved children.

The father told the older son, "Everything I have is yours" (Luke 15:31). The restored son had already experienced the visible expression of this reality through the gifts his father gave him: the best robe, the ring, and the sandals.

These gifts communicated restoration and sonship. The father was not merely allowing his son to remain on the property as a servant. He was restoring him to his place in the family.

This is the heart of the Gospel. In Christ, we are not merely forgiven sinners who have been permitted to stand somewhere near the Father's house. We have been adopted into His family.

We are His children, and we are "co-heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

This is why understanding sonship is so important. You will never consistently live from your inheritance if you continue to think like a servant who must earn everything from the Father.

Timothy Paul Jones tells a beautiful story in *Proof: Finding Freedom through the Intoxicating Joy of Irresistible Grace* about taking his adopted daughter to Disney World. After finally experiencing the Magic Kingdom, she said something that captured the essence of grace: "Daddy, I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours."[56]

Jones goes on to describe another conversation during the drive home. His daughter asked him which Disney princess he would have chosen as his daughter. Would he have chosen Snow

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

White, Cinderella, or Belle? His answer was simple: he would choose her.[57]

That is the heart of the Father toward us.

God did not choose you because you were the most deserving person in the room. He chose you because He wanted you. His love is not based on your ability to perform. Your failures do not cause Him to stop loving you, and your successes do not cause Him to love you more. And that is why the restored son could come home.

Grace and Peace Are Multiplied as We Know Jesus

Peter begins his second letter with a remarkable statement: "Grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (2 Peter 1:2).

Notice how grace and peace are multiplied: through the knowledge of God and Jesus.

Peter does not tell us that grace and peace increase because we work harder, strive more, or perform better. He points us to knowing Jesus.

The more we understand who Jesus is and what He accomplished for us, the more we recognize the grace that our heavenly Father has already given to us.

The word "peace" (shalom) in 2 Peter 1:2 carries the rich biblical idea of wholeness,

[57]Ibid.

completeness, well-being, safety, and peace.[58] God desires for us to experience the wholeness that comes from resting in His Son.

So how does grace become more evident in our lives?

Not through striving. Not through religious performance. Not through trying harder to convince God to bless us.

Grace becomes more real to us as our understanding of Jesus grows.

Everything the Father gave the restored son points us toward what we have received in Jesus.

The robe reminds us that we have been clothed in Christ's righteousness.

The ring reminds us that we belong to the family of God and have the authority of being ambassadors of Christ.

The sandals remind us that we have been restored to our place as sons and daughters.

The feast reminds us that God does not merely tolerate our return—He celebrates it. Our restoration gave Him great joy.

And the father's declaration, "Everything I have is yours," reminds us that in Christ we have been given an inheritance we could never earn.

The more we see Jesus, the more we understand grace. The more we understand

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[58]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7965/kjv/wlc/0-1/

grace, the more we can rest. And the more we rest in what Christ has accomplished, the less we feel compelled to live like the elder brother—striving, comparing, performing, and wondering whether we have done enough.

This is why Scripture says, "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

When we continually hear the good news of Jesus—His finished work, His righteousness, His forgiveness, His love, and His grace—our faith grows because we are continually reminded of what God has already done.

Grace is not multiplied because God becomes more gracious toward us.

God does not become more loving tomorrow than He is today.

Rather, our awareness and experience of His grace increase as we grow in our knowledge of Jesus.

The Father has already opened the storehouse.

Grace teaches us to stop standing outside wondering whether we are worthy to enter and to start living as beloved children who know they have been welcomed home.

This is the difference between living for God's favor and living from God's favor.

We do not strive to earn an inheritance.

We learn to live from the inheritance we have already received in Christ.

And when we understand the grace of God in this way, our lives begin to reflect the heart of the Father. We become more generous because He is generous. We become more forgiving because we have been forgiven. We become more compassionate toward the lost because we remember that we were once lost. We become less concerned with comparison and more concerned with celebration.
The invitation of the Father is still the same today:

Receive grace.

Live as My beloved child.

And celebrate what I celebrate—the restoration of the lost.

Why Do We All Need Salvation— and How Do I Get Saved?

We have now come to the most important question of all: Why do we need salvation, and how can we be saved?

The answer begins with something we would rather not talk about—sin.

The consequence of sin is death. Romans 6:23 tells us plainly, "For the wages of sin is death." Sin separated humanity from God and left us powerless to save ourselves. Without Christ, we were not simply struggling to become better people. We were spiritually dead and separated from the God who created us.

That is why we needed a Savior.

But the story does not end with our sin.

It ends with grace.

The God who created us is not a distant Father who delights in our punishment. He is a loving Father who desires to bring His children home. Jesus revealed this heart of God in the Parable of the Lost Son. When the son returned, his father did not demand that he prove himself worthy of being restored to the family. Instead, he ran to him, embraced him, welcomed him home, and celebrated his return.

God knew we could never overcome sin or bridge the gap to Him through human effort, so He took the initiative in love. John 3:16 declares that God loved the world so much that He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

God did not ignore our sin; He dealt with it fully at the cross. Though tempted in every way, Jesus remained entirely without sin—making Him uniquely qualified as the Son of God to bear our penalty as our substitute (Hebrews 4:15). He did not merely give us directions on how to return to God; He personally became the way home. Acts 4:12 declares, "Salvation is found in no one else." There is no alternate path to reconciliation with God.

Because Jesus paid our debt in full, our salvation rests entirely on His finished work. On the cross, Jesus made the ultimate declaration of our reconciliation when He cried, "It is finished"

(John 19:30). Through Jesus, the Father's arms are open wide, inviting us to stop striving and step into the fullness of His grace.

When we trust in Christ, we can approach our heavenly Father with confidence rather than fear. Hebrews 4:16 tells us to "approach God's throne of grace with confidence." We receive the gift of eternal life, and we begin experiencing the abundant life Jesus died to give us (John 10:10). We also have the hope of spending eternity with Him.

If you have never personally placed your faith in Jesus Christ, you can do that right now. You do not need to clean yourself up first. You do not need to become worthy. You do not need to prove that you deserve God's forgiveness.

Remember the younger son. He simply came home. If you are ready to receive God's grace and place your trust in Jesus, I invite you to pray this prayer:

A Prayer of Salvation:
Coming Home to Grace

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your overwhelming love. You loved me so much that You sent Your Son, Jesus, to lay down His life for my sins on the cross. Today, I receive the gift of eternal life secured through His finished work.

Your Word promises that whoever believes in Jesus will be saved. I believe in Jesus—that He is the Son of God, that He died for my sin, that

He rose victorious from the dead, and that He is my Lord and Savior.
Thank You, Holy Spirit, for opening my eyes and helping me "come to my senses." By faith, I receive Your grace. The precious blood of Jesus washes away my past sin; I am forgiven, declared righteous, and no longer lost. Through Jesus, You have brought me home.
Thank You that Christ's resurrection conquered sin and death forever, placing me securely in Your favor. I place my trust in Your goodness, Your mercy, and Your purpose for my life, joyfully receiving my true identity as Your beloved child.
Now, as an ambassador of Christ, use my life to show others the way home. Give me opportunities to share Your grace and invite others into Your family. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

If you prayed that prayer and placed your faith in Jesus Christ, welcome home!

I am so grateful that the Holy Spirit used the parable Jesus taught to help you see your need for grace, come to your senses, and receive the salvation offered through Jesus Christ. I celebrate with you—and with all of Heaven—the decision to trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Jesus said there is joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7, 10).

So, imagine the celebration taking place right now. You were lost. But now you are found. You were spiritually dead. But now you are alive.

You were separated from the Father, but through Jesus, you have been brought home.

You are a restored child of God.

Your decision to follow Jesus is not the end of your story. It is the beginning of a new life in the love, grace, and truth of God.

You do not have to walk this journey alone. Find a grace-centered, Jesus-focused church where the finished work of Christ is faithfully proclaimed. Surround yourself with believers who will encourage your faith, anchor you in your true identity in Christ, and pray with you through life's trials. Look for a church family that will help you discover, develop, and deploy your unique spiritual gifts to serve others and build up the body of Christ.

Live in the grace of your Father—and invite others to discover His love.

Your journey of growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ is just beginning—and you were never meant to walk it alone. We invite you to join us online for worship and biblical teaching at Acts 433 Church by visiting www.acts433.com. Come be part of a community committed to knowing Jesus, living in His grace, and helping others find their way home.
Welcome to the family of God. Welcome home.

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?

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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?

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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?

Want to dive deeper? Join us on the Grace Conversations Podcast –Let's Talk About It! Available on Spotify, Apple, and all major platforms!



Appendix A:
Forever in the Father's House: The Security of Believers & Difficult Passages

An Exegetical Examination of John 6:47, Roman Adoption, Hebrews 6:4–6, and 2 Peter 2:20.

Part I: The Foundation of Security — The Present Possession of Eternal Life (echō) in John 6:47 & Roman Adoption Principles

A common barrier to resting in God's grace is the persistent fear that a single stumble can strip a believer of their standing in the Father's family. If the Parable of the Lost Son implied that a child of God could be disowned after every failure, it would effectively nullify the finished work of Jesus at the cross and leave our security in constant jeopardy. This study examines the key New Testament passages often cited to argue that salvation can be lost, demonstrating how their original Greek syntax and covenantal context affirm the unchanging security of all who are rooted in Christ.

The Present Possession of Salvation

Jesus declared, "Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life" (John 6:47). The Greek verb translated as "has" (echō) is in the present tense, meaning to have, hold, or possess.[59]

[59]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2192/kjv/tr/0-1/

Eternal life is not a future wage earned at the end of a lifetime of performance; it is a present reality imparted the moment one places faith in Christ.

"What if I believe in Jesus one minute but struggle with doubt the next?"

The moment you placed your trust in Christ, you crossed over from death to life (John 5:24). Eternal life is not a conditional reward you earn when your faith feels strong; it is a permanent reality anchored in Jesus (John 3:16). The New Covenant does not rest upon the rise and fall of your daily emotions or human perfection—it rests entirely upon the finished work of Christ (Hebrews 9:15).

Even when our human faith wavers, God's commitment to us never shakes. As Paul reminds us, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot disown Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). Because you are united with the Lord in Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17), Christ's enduring faithfulness far outweighs any temporary weakness of your own. You are held in His grip—and as Jesus promised, no one can ever snatch you out of the Father's hand (John 10:28).

There is security in that promise.

We also see the security of our salvation through Paul's use of adoption in Romans 8 and Ephesians 1. Paul is the only New Testament writer who uses the specific language of adoption in this way, just as Luke is the only Gospel writer who records the parable of the lost

son. That does not diminish the truth or significance of either teaching. In fact, Paul's use of adoption gives us another beautiful picture of what God has accomplished for us through Christ.

Paul's background as a Roman citizen informs his distinct use of adoption terminology "huiothesia"[60]. Under Roman law, adoption was an irrevocable legal act: the adopted child received an entirely new identity, full inheritance rights, and total cancellation of former debts. This historical backdrop illuminates Paul's assertion that God "predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will" (Ephesians 1:5).

Think about that for a moment.

God wanted you. He chose to bring you into His family. And it gave Him great pleasure.

As unbelieving sinners, we were alienated from God. But through faith in Jesus Christ, we are brought into the family of God. We are no longer outsiders. We belong. We become heirs. We receive a new identity.

And if adoption itself is breathtaking, John takes the thought even further. He writes, "See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!" (1 John 3:1).

Look at the language John uses: "lavished."

[60]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5206/kjv/tr/0-1/

God does not merely tolerate you. He does not reluctantly accept you. He does not adopt you while secretly wishing you were someone else.

He lavishes His love upon you.

And there is something even more breathtaking about this adoption. God's love is not merely a legal transaction where paperwork is completed, and your name is added to a family record. God moves into your life by His Spirit and imparts something of Himself to you. He begins creating a family resemblance in you (1 John 3:9). Paul is right that we are adopted into God's family, but Scripture also speaks of being born of God (1 John 5:1). God does not simply change your status; He gives you a new life.

Once adopted, you have eternal life and are part of the family of God forever. Understanding the significance of adoption helps us see why our salvation is secure in Jesus.

Scripture gives us even more assurance concerning the forgiveness we have received. "He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:12). God says, "I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins" (Hebrews 8:12). Paul writes, "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

Notice the tense: forgave.

It is finished. It is a done deal in Christ.

This does not mean sin is unimportant. It means sin is no longer the foundation upon which your

relationship with God rests. Your relationship with God rests upon Jesus Christ.

Having established the Scriptural truth of our present possession of salvation in Christ, we must address a common objection. Two specific passages are frequently cited to argue that a believer can forfeit their salvation. Yet before examining those texts, a fundamental question must be settled: If we are truly the restored sons and daughters of God, can we ever become lost again?

This is no mere theological technicality—it dictates how we experience our relationship with the Father. If every moral failure threatens to send us back to the "far country," we will spend our Christian lives looking over our shoulders in constant anxiety. But if our salvation rests securely on the finished work of Christ, we can stop living like fearful orphans and begin walking as secure sons and daughters.

Let's examine these two warning passages carefully, one at a time. My goal is to settle your mind and anchor your heart in the unwavering truth that the Father will never disown a child bought by the blood of His Son.

Part II: Understanding Hebrews 6:4–6 — The Distinction Between Enlightenment (phōtizō) and Saving Faith

"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. To their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting Him to public disgrace."

Let's begin with two important phrases: "once been enlightened" and "have fallen away."

Who are these people?

If Hebrews 6:4–6 refers to genuinely regenerated believers, it would imply that a child of God could become lost all over again. However, context reveals that the author is describing individuals who have heard and experienced the truth without receiving Christ in saving faith. The Greek verb phōtizō "enlightened" carries the idea of receiving knowledge[61], not personal conversion. The writer of Hebrews has already described these people as being "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), because they are "not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness" (Hebrews 5:13).

[6161]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g5461/kjv/tr/0-1/

These are people who have been exposed to the truth. They have heard the Gospel. They have been enlightened by the message. They have witnessed the goodness of God. But hearing the Gospel and receiving Christ are not the same thing.[62]

The writer continues by saying they have "tasted of the heavenly gift" and "tasted the good Word of God." The language of tasting is significant. They have experienced the goodness of what God offers, but they have not received it in saving faith. Paul tells us, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). They have tasted the good things of God, but they have rejected them. They have seen the light but preferred the darkness. They have heard the Gospel, but the seed never took root and grew (Luke 8:13). They tasted, but they did not consume the Bread of Life.

The writer also says they were "made partakers of the Holy Spirit." The first-century Jews had witnessed Jesus and the apostles ministering with supernatural signs and wonders. Many had seen healing and deliverance. Some had even seen the risen Christ. They had a front-row seat to the ministry of the Holy Spirit. They witnessed the work of the Spirit happening around them, yet witnessing the work of the Holy Spirit is not the same as being born of the Spirit.

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[62]Paul Ellis. The Grace Commentary. www.thegracecommentary.com/hebrews-6/#hebrews6v4

Then we come to the phrase "have fallen away." The Greek word parapiptō means to deviate from the right path.[63] The path of righteousness was before them, but they turned away from it and chose another path. This is not describing a believer who stumbles into sin. It is describing people who have been confronted with the truth and rejected it.

The writer says, "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 the Gospel and deliberately harden their hearts against it are rejecting the only place where repentance and salvation can be found: Jesus Christ.

In context, the warning is directed toward people who had witnessed the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit but were turning back toward the old temple system as a means of righteousness. They were placing their confidence in dead works rather than in a risen Savior.

This is why the writer says that 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 and returning to dead works is essentially saying, "Jesus, You need to die again. Once was not enough."

But once was enough.

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[63]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3895/kjv/tr/0-1/

The author of Hebrews repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus' sacrifice was once and for all. "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12).

Jesus does not need to die again. His sacrifice was all-sufficient.

Part III: Understanding 2 Peter 2:20–22 — Head Knowledge (epignōsis) vs. Heart Conversion in the Warning Against False Teachers

The second passage frequently used to argue that salvation can be lost is 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 by itself, without considering who Peter is talking about or what he says throughout the chapter, it is easy to conclude that Peter is describing believers who knew Jesus, became entangled in sin again, and lost their salvation.

But is that what Peter is saying?

We already know from multiple passages of Scripture that salvation is not earned through our works. It is not determined by how perfectly we navigate the entanglement of sin. Salvation is a gift from God, received by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).

The more we understand the New Covenant, the more peace we can have concerning the security of our salvation. Hebrews explains that the New Covenant is a covenant established through Jesus Christ. This is wonderful news because our salvation does not rest upon our ability to perfectly maintain the covenant through our own performance.

Hebrews 9:15 says of Jesus: "For this reason He is the Mediator and Negotiator of a New Covenant, 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."

The Old Covenant has become obsolete, but God's other covenant promises have not simply disappeared. The Abrahamic Covenant, the Noahic Covenant, and the Davidic Covenant each have their own significance within God's unfolding plan of redemption. The covenant that became obsolete was the Mosaic Covenant—the covenant centered upon the Law given to Israel.

Hebrews continues, "For where there is a will and testament involved, the death of the one who made it must be established" (Hebrews 9:16). Jesus' death established the New Covenant. He fulfilled the Law on our behalf. Jesus Himself said, "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).

So, if Peter is not talking about believers in 2 Peter 2:20, who is he talking about?

The context tells us.

Peter begins the chapter by saying, "There were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you" (2 Peter 2:1). These are the people Peter is addressing

throughout this chapter. They are false teachers who have encountered the truth but rejected it.

Part of the confusion comes from the phrase "knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Some translations make this sound as though Peter is saying these people personally knew Jesus as Lord and Savior. But the Greek word is epignōsis, meaning knowledge or precise knowledge.[64] Peter is describing exposure to the truth without genuine faith.

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, "epignōsis", 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 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.

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[64]www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g1922/kjv/tr/0-1/

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 (changed 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." (2 Peter 2:20)?

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.

Your Salvation is Secure in Jesus

Standing firm in the absolute certainty of your salvation changes everything! It rescues you from viewing yourself as a fragile wanderer always one mistake away from exile. Instead, it invites you to step boldly into the Father's fierce, unwavering love and walk in the triumph of who you truly are: a blood-bought, fully restored child of God.

And if you haven't yet surrendered your life to Jesus, this parable carries a jaw-dropping *revelation:* no valley is too deep, no past is too broken, and no distance is too far for God's wild grace to reach you.

As Acts 16:31a (AMP) boldly declares: "Believe in the Lord Jesus [as your personal Savior and entrust yourself to Him], and you will be saved." The moment you place your trust in Christ, your identity is rewritten forever. You are no longer an outsider looking in—you are family, anchored in grace, and welcomed to the Father's table!