

The
PARABLE
of the
LOST



INTRODUCTION

Jesus often taught in parables, which are brief but profound stories that used everyday circumstances to illustrate deep spiritual truths. These parables were not just moral lessons but were designed to reveal the mysteries of God's Kingdom to those with open hearts while confounding the self-righteous. Also, these parables reveal the Kingdom of God and invite the listener to live an interactive life with God.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells three powerful parables – together known as the Parable of Lostness – the **Parable of the Lost Sheep**, the **Parable of the Lost Coin**, and the **Parable of the Prodigal Son**—all revealing the heart of God toward the lost. The Parable of Lostness in Luke 15 is commonly known as **“the gospel within the gospel story”** as it reveals the heart of God.

While the Parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin are significant, they serve as an introduction to the longer and more complex Parable of the Prodigal Son. The progression from one hundred sheep to ten coins to one son builds up to a climactic moment in the chapter. Through these parables, Jesus challenges His audience to recognize God's delight in saving the lost and to join in the celebration.

Luke 15 is closely linked to Luke 14, especially in how the Pharisees - the law keepers - responded to Jesus (14:1-6; 15:1-2), His emphasis on welcoming the outcasts and sinners – the law breakers (14:13, 23; 15:1-2), and the repeated call to *“hear”* (14:35; 15:1). These connections reinforce a key message: **those who truly listen to Jesus are invited to share in God's joy.**

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

Luke 15:1-7, *“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’ ³Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴‘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? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷I 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.”*

By welcoming and eating with sinners (Luke 15:1), Jesus demonstrated the presence of God's kingdom and the availability of forgiveness to all. In a way, this is a parable about God's kingdom, because it reveals that God Himself is actively seeking and rescuing His people, just as He promised. Additionally, there is an implied critique of the religious leaders—they were failing in their duty to seek and care for the lost.

When Jesus asked, *“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep...?”* He likely made the Pharisees and scribes uncomfortable as their *“religious’ purity”* made them look down upon shepherding, as an unclean profession. This contrast was intended to challenge their thinking.

At the same time, the image of a shepherd was deeply meaningful in

the Old Testament and Jewish tradition. It symbolized God's care for His people and was often used to describe leaders, including the coming Messiah. In Scripture, people without proper leadership are compared to sheep without a shepherd, emphasizing their need for guidance and protection.

Shepherd Theology in the Old Testament

The concept of **God as a shepherd** runs deep in the Old Testament, particularly in Ezekiel 34, which closely parallels Jesus' parable. **Ezekiel 34** carries a typical shepherd theology and has a striking similarity to some phrases and wordings in the parable such as the sheep wandering over the mountains and hills (vs.6), God searching for His sheep (vs.11), caring for them (vs.16), judging their oppressors (vs.17,20,22), and appointing a Davidic shepherd to care for them (vs.23-24). In addition, God would judge the shepherds who failed to care for the sheep.

Psalms 23 also depicts God as a shepherd who diligently attends to the sheep to ensure they don't get lost or step into trouble.



Key Lessons in Parable of the Lost

1. God actively seeks the lost.

As a shepherd refuses to accept the loss of even one sheep and searches until he finds it, God also does not want anyone to be lost. Like the shepherd, **He actively seeks out the lost** and rejoices when they are found. This parable teaches us who God is and what Jesus' ministry is all about. It reminds us that God is loving, compassionate, patient, and full of grace—a Shepherd who actively seeks the lost and rejoices when they are found.

Understanding God's character shapes how we see ourselves, how we treat others, and how we live in the world. If God is caring and full of grace, then His love should shape our identity and how we treat people. If we falsely perceive God to be harsh rather than gracious, we tend to focus on those who seem "safe" in the fold rather than seeking the lost as God does.

2. Biblical meaning of being Lost and Repentance.

The biblical meaning of "*lost*", particularly in Luke's Gospel, is different from how we commonly use the word in English. In everyday language, "*lost*" can refer to something misplaced, forgotten, or no longer



possessed. It can describe a person who is ruined, hardened, or morally fallen, or someone who feels helpless, directionless, or lacks confidence.

However, when Jesus says, *“The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost”* (Luke 19:10; also, in Luke 15:24), He means something deeper. **In Luke’s context, “lost” refers to a person who has moved away from God and His family, resulting in spiritual death.** Being lost is not just about confusion or misdirection—it is **about being separated from the very source of life and in need of God’s saving grace.**

Luke’s Gospel and this parable of the lost emphasize the importance of repentance, reminding us that it is a necessary and ongoing part of our lives. However, repentance is not about earning salvation through human effort. The Bible consistently teaches that God

Truth that seeks the Lost

Our Lord said, **“I am the Truth,”** and again, **“The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.”** Truth, then, is not some distant mystery we must labour to uncover—for it is already seeking us. It is not something we must strive to find, but a Living Person calling us to listen and respond. This is the pattern woven throughout God’s dealings with humanity in the sacred Scriptures.

After sin entered Eden, it was not **Adam** who cried, *“O God, where are You?”* but God who called, *“Where are you?”* as He searched for Adam among the trees. It was God who first spoke to **Abraham**, who revealed Himself to **Jacob**, and who met **Moses** in the burning bush. Again and again, God took the first step.

He sought out **Gideon** on the threshing floor, appeared to **Isaiah**, and laid His hand on **Jeremiah** before he was even born. When **Ezekiel** sat in despair, God opened the heavens. **Amos** was neither a prophet nor the son of one, yet the Lord spoke to him. God has always been the pursuer.

In the New Testament, the story is no different. **The Gospels do not tell a story of men seeking after God, but of a Saviour relentlessly seeking after men.** Jesus was not just a teacher—He was the Truth itself, and truth often demands something radical and uncomfortable, i.e., to surrender to His Kingdom.

takes the first step—He is the one who seeks, calls, and extends grace. At the same time, Scripture also makes it clear that we have a role to play. **Salvation is fully God's work, yet we are fully involved in responding to His grace.** There is a big difference between genuinely responding to God's love and trying to make ourselves appear righteous. True repentance is about accepting God's grace, not proving our worth.

Also, repentance is not just about being sorry for individual sins but also *"reordering our entire lives toward God."* We are coming under the Kingdom of God. It is not merely a regret or a change in behaviour alone, but a deep transformation of the heart that turns away from self-sufficiency and towards trusting in God.

3. The Joy of Restoration is communal

The parable emphasizes a communal aspect, **where the shepherd's joy serves as an invitation for others to rejoice.** Jesus underscores that this joy belongs to God and is uniquely connected to the repentance of even one sinner. Rather than simply stating that heaven rejoices over a sinner's return, He contrasts this with the ninety-nine righteous who did not repent, highlighting God's deep concern for the lost and the joy that follows their restoration. Luke wants his readers to grasp Jesus' message and embrace the same perspective.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep is a powerful reminder of God's active pursuit of sinners and His joy in their restoration. May this parable shape our understanding of God, our view of repentance, and our response to those in need of His grace. **The question is—will we reflect God's heart and join in the celebration?**

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? ⁹And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

The key difference between this parable and that of the Lost Sheep is the emphasis on the **woman’s diligent search**—*lighting a lamp, sweeping, and seeking carefully.*

The **woman’s search** represents **God’s diligence and determination in bringing His people back.** God is the diligent searcher, taking the initiative to recover what belongs to Him. Her careful effort and persistence in finding the lost coin highlight the lengths to which she was willing to go. This diligence stands out even more in this parable than in the other two.



If a woman is so diligent in finding something valuable and rejoices when she succeeds, how much more will God persist in seeking and celebrating the return of His lost people? Both the search and the joy are essential elements of the story. The shepherd's joy upon finding his lost sheep and the woman's celebration with her friends mirror the greater reality of Jesus rejoicing over a sinner's return.

In this analogy, **the woman represents God**, just as certain female actions or attributes in the Old Testament are used to describe Him—such as a *mother's comforting love* (Isaiah 66:13), *a woman in labour* (Isaiah 42:14), *as a nursing and protective mother* (Isaiah 49:15, Matthew 23:37). Jesus' recognition of women and their role among His followers was something new and significant in the ancient world, shaping both the early church and its life today.

Ultimately, the Parable of the Lost Coin reinforces the overarching theme of Luke 15: God's relentless love, the value of each individual, and the call for His people to rejoice in the redemption of others rather than exclude or condemn them. It is a reminder that **God is not passive in salvation—He actively seeks, finds, and celebrates.** The question is—will we reflect God's heart and join in the celebration?



The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-31, "Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The 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. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He 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! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰So 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. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For 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. ²⁶So 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.’”

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the best loved of all the parables as well as the longest.

While “*The Parable of the Prodigal Son*” is the most commonly used title, “***The Parable of the Lost Sons***” is a more fitting name. Jesus begins the story by stating that a father had two sons, emphasizing that both play a significant role in the parable. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that both sons are lost—each in his own way—making the title “*Lost Sons*” appropriate.

The parable is structured in two distinct parts: Act 1 – “*The Lost Younger Brother*” and Act 2 – “*The Lost Elder Brother*.” This division highlights that both sons, though different in their actions, are equally in need of their father's grace and restoration.

Act 1 - The Lost Younger Brother

In Act 1 of the parable, the younger son makes a shocking request—he

asks his father for his share of the inheritance. For the original audience, this would have been astonishing and deeply offensive. In that culture, requesting an inheritance while the father was still alive was equivalent to wishing him dead. The younger son's request was not just disrespectful; it revealed his heart—he wanted **his father's wealth, but not his father.**

The father's response is even more shocking than the son's request. In a traditional Middle Eastern culture, a father would have been expected to respond with outrage, likely driving the son out of the family with nothing—perhaps even with a beating. But this father does nothing of the sort. Instead, he simply “divided his property between his sons.”

Most of Jesus' listeners hadn't witnessed a Middle Eastern patriarch reacting this way. By granting the request, the father willingly endures a deep loss of

The Prodigal God

When we hear the word “**prodigal**,” we often associate it with recklessness, wastefulness, or someone who has wandered far from home. However, when we look deeper, we realize that the **true “prodigal” in this story is not the son—but the father.**

The word “**prodigal**” actually means **recklessly extravagant, lavishly generous, or spending resources freely.** While the younger son certainly wasted his inheritance in reckless living, it is the father who demonstrates the true essence of prodigal generosity. He responds to his son's return not with anger or punishment, but with extravagant love, grace, and restoration. **This reckless, extravagant love of the father mirrors God's love for us.**

When we reflect on this parable, we realize that it is not just a story about the **lost son**, but about the **Prodigal God**—a Father who loves **extravagantly**, forgives **recklessly**, and restores **lavishly.**

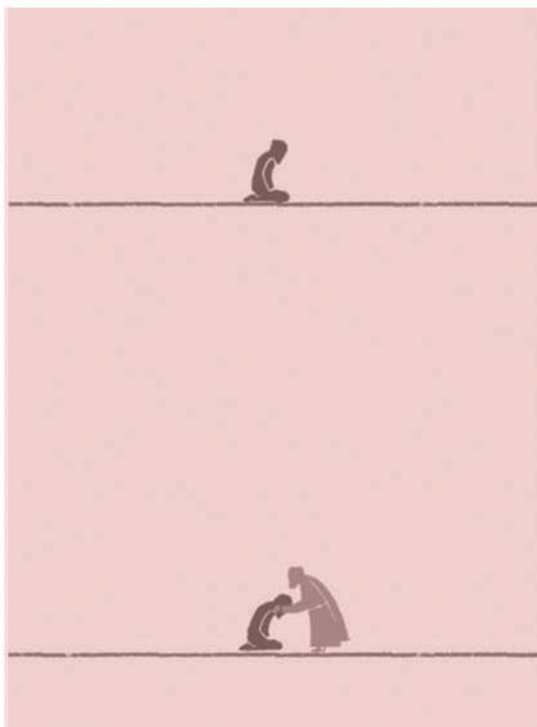
Jesus, Himself, is the ultimate example of this **prodigal generosity.** He left His heavenly home, poured Himself out completely on the cross, and welcomed sinners into God's family at the ultimate cost—His own life. His grace is limitless, His love extravagant, and His invitation open to all.

honor and the pain of rejected love. Typically, when our love is rejected, we respond with anger, retaliation, or emotional withdrawal to protect ourselves from further hurt. **Yet this father does the opposite—he continues to love his son, absorbs the pain, and does not turn away.**

The son leaves for a distant country and recklessly wastes all he has on a wild and uncontrolled lifestyle. Eventually, he finds himself in the lowest possible state—living among pigs in filth and hunger. It is in this desperate moment that he comes to his senses and forms a plan.

First, he decides to return to his father and confess his wrongdoing, while acknowledging that he is no longer worthy to be called a son. Secondly, he plans to ask his father to take him back—not as a son, but as a hired servant. Rabbinic teaching emphasized that an apology alone was not enough for those who violated community standards—they also had to make restitution. Therefore, the son wanted to make restitution by becoming a servant to his father.

As the son approached home, weary and broken, **his father saw him from a distance and ran to him without hesitation, arms open, his emotions unrestrained.** He embraced his son with tears and kisses.



The son, caught off guard, tried to launch into his carefully rehearsed speech—offering to work as a servant and repay his debt. But before he could complete what he started, the **father turning to his servants commanded, “Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet”**

Robe - The finest robe in the house is the father’s own—was a clear sign of restored status and belonging. By using the finest robe, he was publicly honouring and restoring his son to the rightful place in the family. The son had returned in rags, expecting to be a servant, but instead, he was clothed in grace and love.

Ring - In biblical times, rings—especially signet rings—were symbols of authority, inheritance, and family identity. By giving the son a ring,

the father restores his place in the family, signifying that he is not a servant, but a fully accepted son with all the rights and privileges that come with it.

Sandals - In biblical times, slaves and captives went barefoot. So, receiving sandals symbolized the son's freedom and restoration by grace. No longer a slave to sin, he was given a fresh start, walking in a new direction—back into his father’s love and family.



There would be no repayment, no begging, no earning his way back. The father's love was freely given.

Finally, the Father orders the servants to prepare a celebratory feast, featuring the fattened calf as the main dish. In that culture, meat was a luxury, rarely eaten in daily meals and reserved for special occasions and gatherings. A full-fledged feast was planned, with music and dancing to celebrate the restoration of the younger son to life, family, and community.

THE KEY LESSON OF ACT 1

God's love and forgiveness have the power to pardon and restore any sin or wrongdoing, no matter its severity. It does not matter who you are or what you have done—whether you have oppressed others, committed terrible acts, or harmed yourself. The younger son in the parable realized that his father's house had *"food to spare,"* but more importantly, he discovered that it also had limitless grace to spare. There is no evil too great for the Father's love to forgive, and no sin that can outmatch His grace. As followers of Christ, we are called to embody God's love and forgiveness, reflecting His grace and restoration in our own lives.



Act 2 - The Lost Elder Brother

When the elder brother learns from the servants that his younger brother has returned and has been fully reinstated by their father, he is furious. Rather than rejoicing, he refuses to enter the celebration, making a public display of his disapproval. His refusal forces the father—the head of the household—to step away from his own feast to address his son. In Middle Eastern culture, this would have been seen as a humiliating act for a man of his status, yet the father willingly goes out to plead with him.

The elder brother's anger is not just about the feast itself but about what it represents. He protests, *"You never even gave me a young goat for a feast, yet you give him the fattened calf?"* However, the real issue is deeper than just the calf—it is about the cost of the father's decision. By reinstating the younger son, the father has made him an heir once again, meaning he will now receive a portion of the remaining estate. This is unacceptable to the elder brother, who sees himself as the one who earned his place through years of hard work and obedience. In contrast, his younger brother, who had squandered everything, was being welcomed back without conditions. **To the elder son, this feels unjust.**

Why does the elder brother refuse to go in? He gives the reason: *"Because I've never disobeyed you."* The elder brother is not losing the father's love in spite of his goodness, but because of it. It is not his sins that create the barrier between him and his father but his pride in his moral record. **What keeps him from joining the feast is not his wrongdoing, but his self-righteousness, which blinds him to his need for grace.**

The older son represents those who question God's unconditional acceptance through Jesus. They believe that God's acceptance is solely based on their spiritual achievements, which often leads to deep insecurity. This insecurity manifests in pride, a strong need to defend their own righteousness, and a critical attitude toward others. To reinforce their sense of worth, they may reject different cultures, judge others harshly, harbour resentment, and use these attitudes as an outlet for their suppressed fears and frustrations

Despite the public insult, the father's response is remarkable. Instead of reacting with anger or rejection, which would have been expected, he speaks with gentleness and grace. He explains that the reason for the feast is to celebrate the lost son. He invites him to the feast with love and respect and waits for a response from him. The story ends abruptly

Both Wrong; Both Loved

Jesus does not categorize people as moral "good guys" and immoral "bad guys." Instead, He reveals that everyone is engaged in their own form of self-salvation—seeking to use God and others to gain power, control, or validation. The difference lies only in the methods we choose to pursue it.

The gospel offers a perspective distinct from other approaches: everyone is flawed, everyone is loved, and everyone is called to recognize their need for change.

In contrast, elder brothers divide the world by moral superiority, believing, *"Good people like us are in, and bad people—the real problem—are out."* Younger brothers adopt a similar mindset, even without belief in God, asserting, *"The open-minded and tolerant are in, while the narrow-minded and judgmental are the real problem."*

Jesus, however, presents a different standard: **"The humble are in, and the proud are out" (Luke 18:14).**

Although the sons are both wrong and both loved, the story does not end on the same note for each. Though the older son stayed at home, he was actually more distant and alienated from the father than his younger brother - not because of rebellion, but because of his blindness to his own condition.

with an unexpectedly gracious, dramatic appeal to the elder son by the father. And the parable leaves the elder brother's response open-ended, which challenges the reader.

Will he let go of his pride and join the celebration, or will his self-righteousness keep him outside? The father's grace extends to both sons, but only those willing to humble themselves can fully receive it. **The question is—will we reflect God's heart and join in the celebration?**

THE KEY LESSON OF ACT 2

While the parable highlights the younger son's self-destructive rebellion, it also delivers a sharp rebuke to the elder brother's moral superiority and entitlement. Jesus is making a radical point: both the irreligious and the religious can be spiritually lost. Both paths—rebellion and self-righteousness—lead to separation from God.

Each one of us is like both the brothers in the Parable. Like the younger son, we waste the gifts our Father gives us, disobey Him, and seek Him only when we need something. Yet, we are also like the elder brother, proud of our morality, comparing ourselves to others, and believing we are somehow more deserving. In our sin, we manage to be both self-indulgent like the prodigal and self-righteous like the Pharisee. But the story does not end there. While it reveals the depth of our sin, it also points us to the greater reality of God's grace.

A COMPARATIVE TABLE ON TWO LOST SONS

	Prodigal Son (Younger Son)	Elder Son (Older Son)
Attitude Toward Father	Rebellious, demanded inheritance, left home	Obedient in action but distant in heart
Actions	Squandered wealth on reckless living	Worked hard, remained faithful at home
Shame Brought to Father	Shamed the father by asking for his inheritance early, which was equivalent to wishing for his father's death	Shamed the father by refusing to celebrate his brother's return, believing only he had rightly earned his father's love
Consequences	Became destitute, humbled, sought forgiveness	Became bitter, resentful toward father and brother
Repentance	Admitted sin, returned home seeking mercy	Showed no need for repentance, felt entitled
Father's Response	Father came out of the house and welcomed him with open arms and restored him as his son	Father came out of the house and reminded him about his sonship and welcomed him to join the celebration
Heart Condition	Broken, humbled, repentant	Prideful, self-righteous, resentful

	Prodigal Son (Younger Son)	Elder Son (Older Son)
Symbolism	Represents sinners who repent and return to God	Represents self-righteous individuals, possibly religious leaders or legalistic believers
Lesson Learned	<p>1. God takes on the shame brought by the law-breaking sinner</p> <p>2. God's radical love is for sinners who openly rebel and later repent</p> <p>3. God's love and grace restore the repentant</p>	<p>1. God takes on the shame brought by the law-keeping sinner</p> <p>2. God's radical love is for scribes and Pharisees who think they have earned God's love, but still need His grace</p> <p>3. Those who rely on works rather than grace miss out on true joy and are in need of repentance</p>

Conclusion

All three Parables of Lostness – lost sheep, lost coin and the lost son, reveal a different aspect of God’s relentless love and pursuit of the lost. These parables reveal the reckless, unrelenting love of God—a love that seeks without hesitation, forgives without condition, and rejoices without reservation. Whether we are the wandering sheep, the hidden coin, the rebellious younger son, or the self-righteous elder brother, we all need the Father’s mercy.

The invitation remains open: God is calling, searching, and waiting. The question is—will you respond and join Him?



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