

## Session 2

# CANCELLED

## The Younger Brother

Luke 15:11-32

In Luke 15 we encounter compassion that turns the world upside down. A shepherd risks everything for a lost sheep, a woman frantically searches for a misplaced coin, and a father throws open his arms to a prodigal son. We learn to celebrate what was lost and has been found. Luke 15 is largely about the theme of redemption in the unlikeliest of stories and the prodigal son story is the shining example of such a theme.

***Have you ever made a request for something that you were not ready for? Was it a gift? A job responsibility? A relationship?***

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## UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT:

Luke 15 transcends typical interpretations and tales of forgiveness. It delves into the very nature of God's love – a love that actively seeks, relentlessly pursues, and celebrates the homecoming of the prodigal. Here, the Pharisees and religious elite, clinging to rigid notions of righteousness, become the backdrop against which God's radical redemption shines even brighter.

But Luke 15 is not just about God's love for humanity; it's a mirror reflecting our own capacity for compassion and acceptance. The parable of the Prodigal Son, arguably the most famous, exposes the human heart in all its complexities. We witness the younger son's reckless abandon, the elder son's simmering resentment, and the father's boundless forgiveness. Each character compels us to examine our own relationships, our judgments, and our ability to embrace those who have strayed.

Beyond individual stories, Luke 15 paints a broader picture of God's redemptive plan. The lost sheep and coin symbolize humanity's fallen state and God's relentless pursuit of restoration. The parable of the Lost Son, while often seen as an individual narrative, can also be interpreted as a representation of God's love for both Israel (the elder son) and the Gentiles (the younger son). This wider lens invites us to consider the universality of God's grace and the potential for transformation within every human soul.

Ultimately, Luke 15 invites us on a journey of discovery, introspection, and celebration. It challenges our preconceived notions about God, ourselves, and our relationships with others. As we delve into these parables, we may find ourselves questioning, reflecting, and perhaps even experiencing a transformation of our own hearts. So, step into the world of Luke 15, prepare to be surprised, and allow yourself to be drawn into the joyous embrace of the one who relentlessly seeks the lost and celebrates their return.

***Read Luke 15:11-32. Briefly summarize the story in your own words.***

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## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### **The Younger Son** (Luke 15:11-16)

**<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.**

**<sup>13</sup> "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. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.**

Luke 15:11-16 paints a vivid picture of the younger son's descent from entitlement to desperation. His demand for his inheritance reflects impatience and greed, a desire for independence fueled by a distorted view of freedom. He leaves for a "far country," symbolically distancing himself from his father's love and values.

The squandering of his wealth is swift and reckless, highlighting the fleeting nature of material possessions and the destructive power of impulsive choices. The famine that follows amplifies his consequences, pushing him to the lowest point – feeding pigs, considered unclean by Jewish tradition. Not only has he fallen socially and economically, but now he has fallen spiritually.

Hunger gnaws not just at his stomach but also at his pride. He longs for even the pigs' food – a stark contrast to his earlier extravagant lifestyle. Verse 16 marks the turning point, the moment when despair might lead to true repentance.

While this passage often focuses on the son's eventual return, these opening verses lay the groundwork for understanding his transformation. They depict the consequences of sin and the desperation it can lead to, setting the stage for the powerful message of forgiveness and redemption that unfolds later in the parable.

***While many of his priorities are less-than-stellar, he does demonstrate one key virtue: he boldly comes to the Father and makes a request. What do you think the younger brother can teach us about prayer?***

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**CONTEXT AND HISTORY: How do these verses help us to see the context of family life and inheritance in Israel during the time of Jesus?**

Psalms 103:8-14, Deuteronomy 21:15-17, Proverbs 13:22

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**The Son Who Sobered Up** (Luke 15:17-20)

**<sup>17</sup> “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! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ <sup>20</sup> 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.**

In just four verses, Luke paints a poignant picture of self-reflection, repentance, and overflowing forgiveness. The son's "coming to his senses" marks a turning point. He recognizes his dire situation and compares it to the comfort enjoyed by his father's hired servants. Furthermore, the last conversation the younger son had with his father was a request that was granted.

This realization sparks a crucial moment of self-reflection. *Maybe the father will grant another request?*

He prepares a speech, acknowledging his wrongdoing and offering to become a servant, demonstrating his humility and willingness to accept any consequence. From this point forward we are confronted with a Gospel-centered plot twist. Instead of waiting for the son to complete his prepared speech the father "runs and embraces him." Instead of willingly hiring him back on as a servant, the father provides unconditional love and acceptance, exceeding any expectations the son might have had. Instead of making him pay him back, the father gives him significance (a place in the family business), a robe (to cover his shame) and sandals (to care for his feet).

***What do you make of the father’s choice to extend grace to this son?***

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## **PATRIARCHS DO NOT RUN.**

One notable feature of this story is the physicality of the father. In this time period it would be considered wildly inappropriate for a patriarch of any stature to run. First, there was a wardrobe issue – the father would have to hike up his tunic. Second, there was a stratification issue – the father would have to leave his respectable position of being seated to move like a servant. Third, there was the relational issue – the son was wrong. His job was to come and repent.

But the father ran towards him anyway.

Can you spot the pattern in stories in scripture? God so loved that He gave us His Son. The Samaritan moved near the badly wounded man. Jesus dined with tax collectors and sinners. Grace and forgiveness means that we demonstrate our love by moving near those who are in need of this love.

***If someone in your family was coming to you to ask for forgiveness, would you be willing to close the distance with them? Would you be willing to run towards them as this father did?***

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## APPLYING THE TRUTH

- Grace closes the distance.
- Forgiveness is often extended personally.
- Oftentimes, social forces work against us in practicing forgiveness.

***Is there anyone in your life that you are praying for who needs to come to their senses?***

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***Discuss the challenges of practicing forgiveness in our current society?***

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***Has there been a time when you were the prodigal son who is running away from the father?***

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**Prayer Needs**

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