JESUS

THE LIFE THAT CHANGED THE WORLD | WEEK FIVE

THE PARABLES OF THE LOST & FOUND

PARABLES

Today we're jumping into Luke chapter 15. This is an amazing chapter because it has **three stories Jesus told**–and all three are connected.

These stories are called **parables**. A parable is a made-up story Jesus used to teach a **big spiritual truth**. Think of it like this: Jesus took things from everyday life and used it to help people understand things about **God and His kingdom**. In other words, He showed how these earthly things were com*parable* to the heavenly things. (Did you catch that?)

For example, Jesus once told a story about someone finding **buried treasure** in a field–gold, jewels, priceless stuff! When the person realized how valuable it was, he could hardly contain his joy! So, he **sold everything he owned** to buy that field and get the treasure. Jesus said, *"That's what the Kingdom of Heaven is like! It's so wonderful, it's better than anything else!"*

Now, the three parables in Luke 15 all teach the same main idea. But before we read them, let's find out why Jesus told them in the first place. Let's read **Luke 15:1–3** to see what was happening.

Yeah, so basically, some religious people were grumbling, "Why is Jesus hanging out with 'those people' who've made such a mess of their lives?"

Just picture in your mind someone you think is *really* bad (don't say anything out loud!!). Maybe they lie a lot, bully others, never listen, hurt people, or make terrible choices. Now imagine seeing **Jesus spending a lot of time with them**.

If we're being honest, we'd all think, *"That's weird… why would He do that?"* And that's exactly the question Jesus was answering when He told the three parables in Luke 15. They show us **why Jesus treats broken and sinful people the way He does**. It's all because of God's amazing love. ❤️

Let's start with the first parable…

How would you rank the top moments in the ministry of Jesus? He did so many amazing things and taught so many profound truths that it's impossible to rank them in order by importance. This eight-week study will work through some of the highlights of Jesus' ministry, culminating in His death and resurrection.

100 Sheep

Let's read **Luke 15:4-7**. Who do you think the lost sheep represented in this story? And who do you think is com*parable* to the shepherd? In your own words, what point is Jesus making in this parable?

10 Coins

Let's read **Luke 15:8-10**. What did the woman do when she found her coin? What did Jesus say the woman's joy was com*parable* to?

2 Sons

Let's read **Luke 15:11-32**. Just like the other parables, **something is lost**–this time, it's a son, **the younger son**. But to really understand this parable we have to pay attention to **both brothers–the lost one and the older one**.

The Younger Son

Let's start with the younger son. It's pretty obvious he messes up big time–but his mistake is **even bigger** than it might seem at first.

See, today, our culture often says success looks like:

- Getting good grades
- Being popular
- Making lots of money
- Being talented at sports or arts

These are all *individual* achievements. But back in Jesus' time, **family honor** was everything. Being a good son or daughter was all about bringing honor to your family–like by helping the family business. This was way more important than personal goals or accomplishments. If you embarrassed your family, it didn't just hurt *you*… it hurt **everyone** connected to you.

That's why what the younger son does in Jesus' story is so shocking. When he asks his dad for his inheritance early, he's basically saying, *"I wish you were dead. Just give me your money."*

Then he leaves his family, leaves his people, and runs off to a faraway place. He wastes **money that took generations to build**, and he ends up feeding pigs–which was especially gross, unholy, and humiliating for Jewish people. Everything he does brings **shame** to his family.

So, this isn't just a small mistake. It's a **huge rejection** of his father. *Ouch.* So, here's the deal…

Sin is more than breaking rules –it's rebellion against God.

Sometimes we think sin is just doing bad things, like saying bad words. But it goes way deeper than that. Deep down, sin is when we say to God, *"I don't want Your way. I want my way."*

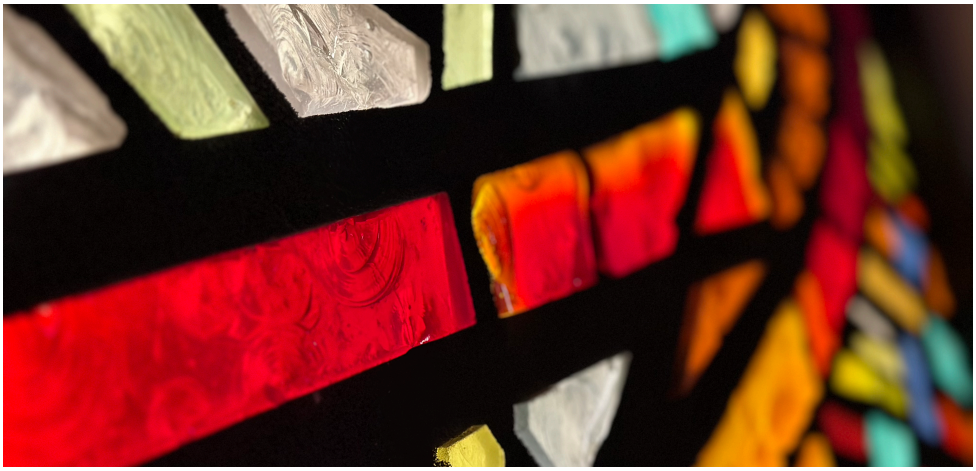
Just like the younger son, we often want what *we* want, even though everything we have comes from *God*. That heart attitude–putting ourself first–is the real problem. None of us like to be told what to do, and when we have that younger-son attitude with God–when we refuse to live the way He wants–we're not just breaking His rules, we're saying, *"I know better than You, and I'll be better off without you."*

That's serious. That's rebellion. That's what sin really is. Thank God it's not the end of Jesus' parable! We also learn…

No matter how badly we mess up, God always welcomes us back home.

Here's the amazing part of the story: when the younger son finally comes home, his father doesn't yell, punish, or reject him.

He runs to him. He forgives him. And he throws a party.



Jesus was showing what God is like. Sometimes we think, *"I've messed up too much,"* or *"God must be tired of forgiving me."* But this story shows us the truth: **God's love is bigger than our biggest failures.**

God doesn't just forgive us reluctantly–He is **happy** to welcome us back. God loves you so much that when you come back to Him, He doesn't cross His arms–He opens them wide. No matter what you do, His love for you does **not** run out. Ever. ❤️

CHARLIE MACKESY MADE THIS BRONZE SCULPTURE OF THE EMBRACE IN JESUS' PARABLE. WHAT EMOTIONS CAN YOU DETECT IN THE FATHER'S FACE? WHAT DETAILS DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT THE PRODIGAL SON? HOW DOES THIS SCULPTURE CAPTURE THE DEEP TRUTHS OF JESUS' PARABLE?

The Older Son

Here's the twist–the older son didn't run away. He didn't waste money. He didn't live wildly. But in many ways, **his problem is even deeper**.

Let's think back for a second and make a few connections:

- In the first story, the shepherd **went looking** for the lost sheep.
- In the second story, the woman **looked everywhere** for her lost coin.
- But in the story of the two sons… who **went looking** for the lost son?

Well, who should have gone? The Father was too old, so it would have been **the older son's job** to go find his lost brother! But he didn't. It almost seems like the older brother was **happy his younger brother was gone**.

Now let's look at the party:

- In the first story, the shepherd throws a **huge celebration** when the lost sheep was found.
- In the second story, the woman throws a **huge celebration** when the lost coin was found.
- In the third story, who throws a **huge celebration** when the lost son was found?

So, everyone is celebrating–except one person. Who is that?

Yes, the older brother is **furious**. He complains to his dad, "I've always obeyed you. I've done everything right. And you've never thrown a party for me! Meanwhile, my younger brother–who messed up badly–gets a feast, new clothes, and all the attention!" The older brother feels like this is **totally unfair**.

So, what did the older brother do? Well, get this: Jesus **never said** if the older brother goes inside to join the party. The story just… stopped.

Why would Jesus end it like that?

Well, remember what started all these stories in the first place? The religious leaders were like the older son–they were **angry** that Jesus was showing love and favor to sinners.

So the cliffhanger ending was really a question Jesus was asking the religious leaders (and us): 👉 *"Lost people are coming back to God. Are you going to celebrate–or stay outside feeling better than them?"*

Now, we all think, "Of course we'd celebrate lost people turning to God!" But if we're being honest, we all carry around in our hearts the same problem the older brother and the religious leaders had. It's called **self-righteousness**.

That's a big word, but it's basically the attitude we have when we get frustrated because of how "good" we are compared to how "bad" others are. See if you can detect it in these thoughts:

- "I mess up at times, but at least I've never done something that bad."
- "Those people are so clueless, they're beyond help. The won't change."
- "I always do my chores, but my sister doesn't. She's so frustrating."
- "If people just listened to me, things would go a lot better."
- "I try to be nice, but some people are just rude all the time."

Here's what makes **self-righteousness** so tricky: there's usually a **tiny bit of truth** in it:

- Maybe you *have* worked harder than someone else.
- Maybe you *were* kinder, more responsible, or made better choices.
- And it's *great* to be recognized for doing good things!

The problem is, when we focus on how "good" we've been and make it our identity, it ruins our lives. It steals our joy and wrecks our relationships. If you're self-righteous, you'll be consumed by anger, fueled from a sense of superiority over others (like the older brother in verses 29-30). You'll never be able to forgive people or listen to criticism, because you'll think, "It's not my problem–those people are just wrong. I don't need to change."

But maybe worst of all, self-righteousness will **destroy your relationship with God**. When we start thinking we're **better than others**, we also start thinking we **don't need God's forgiveness as much**. We think: I'm not like those 'bad' people.

And then, guess what? One day you'll make a big mistake, and then you'll *really* be in a bad place, because you'll start to wonder if you've done enough for God to accept you. Have you???

That's why Jesus' story is so amazing. The younger son *knew* he had failed. He *knew* he didn't deserve another chance. But the father welcomed him anyway.

That's called **grace**– getting love you didn't earn. And when there's grace, there's joy. When there's forgiveness, there's a party.

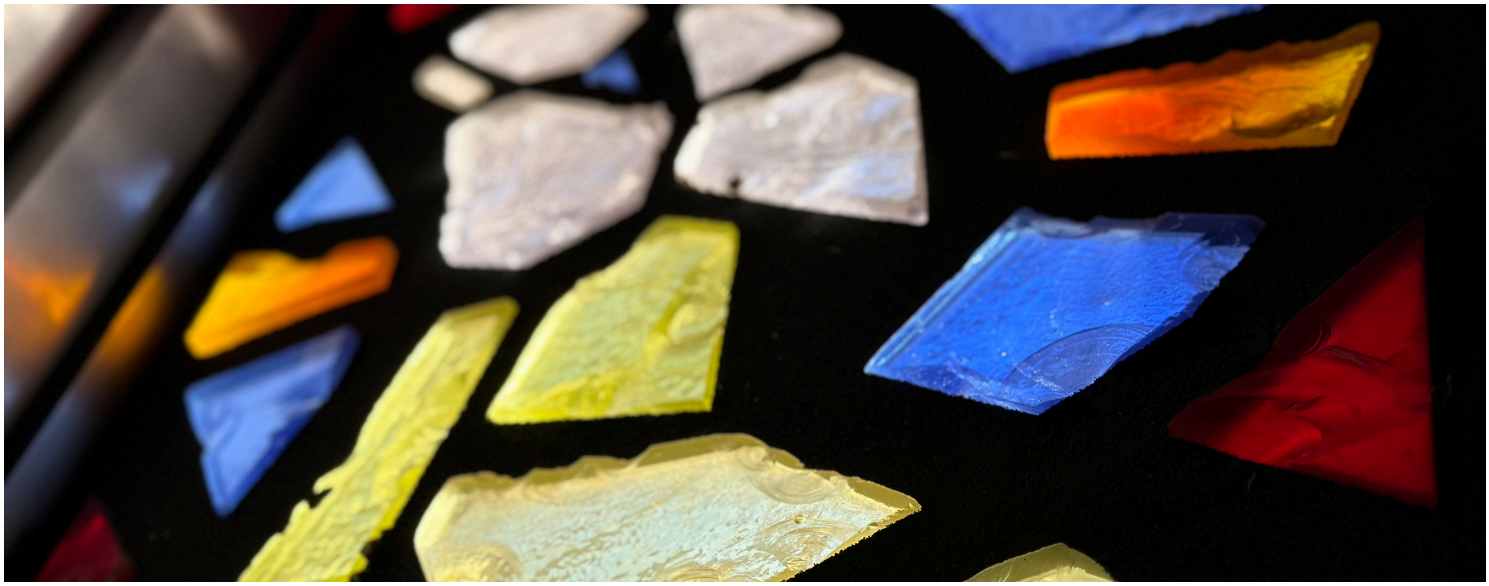
So today, don't pretend you've got it all together. Don't pretend like you haven't rebelled against God. Don't pretend like you don't need God's forgiveness. **Know** that you do–in the deepest way–and then **celebrate** that Jesus gives it to you freely. 🎉 Let the party begin in your heart.

OUR REAL OLDER BROTHER

Jesus is our **perfect Older Brother**. He didn't stay far away–He came down from heaven to **search for us**, just like the shepherd who looked for the lost sheep and the woman who searched for her lost coin.

But Jesus didn't just come to find us. He paid the **price** to bring us back into God's family. Remember what the father gave the younger son? A **robe**, a **ring**, **sandals**, and a huge **feast**. Those weren't just gifts–they were signs that the son was fully back in the family, not just a worker or servant.

That's why the older brother was so angry. All of those things came from the family's wealth (his inheritance!), and now they were being given to the brother who had failed? Ugh!

But Jesus didn't get angry about what it would cost Him to save us. He willingly **gave up His life**. On the cross, Jesus suffered so that we could be completely forgiven and welcomed as **children of God**. He gave much more than a few valuables–He gave everything. He didn't hold anything back.

And here's the best part: One day, Jesus is going to throw the **greatest celebration ever**–a feast for everyone who belongs to Him.What a joy it will be to be there, welcomed, forgiven, and home forever. 🎉