

## Return Home

Last week we started a series called “Home”. Going through what is often called the “lost chapter” in the Bible. It’s Luke 15, and in this passage, Jesus talks in parables about the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost sons.

A parable is simply a story with a deeper (or sometimes hidden) meaning. It is a short story designed to convey a concept to be understood and/or a principle to be put into practice. The word “parable” in Greek literally means, “to set beside,” as in the English word “comparison”.

Jesus was speaking a language that all Jews could understand, b/c in the Jewish culture back then, things were explained in word pictures. Word pictures placed emphasis on the attitudes, concepts and characteristics for the listeners.

Parables required the listeners to be self-critical and put themselves in the appropriate place in the story. Who are the listeners?

Luke 15:1 (NIV) **Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.**

Tax collectors were viewed as traitors to their people, selling out their family and their own people to collect taxes for the oppressive Romans plus taking extra for themselves - stealing from their own people. *Synagogues would not accept their money and their testimony was not valid in Jewish courts.* They were considered worse than people from the pagan nations.

**Sinners** were whom the religious leaders avoided. Social outcasts. *People who weren't like Jesus, liked Jesus.* “Were gathering” conveys this was an ongoing pattern in Jesus’ ministry, not a one – time event.

Luke 15:2 (NIV) <sup>2</sup>**But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”**

*Who are the Pharisees?* Religious leaders who studied & obeyed the scripture and insisted that all Jews should observe the 600-plus laws in the Torah (first 5 books of the O.T. - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) which they memorized word for word.

*Who were the teachers of the law?* Scribes who were professionally trained to develop, teach and apply the OT law. They went beyond interpretation of Scripture, however, and added many man-made traditions to what God had said. The traditions eventually became more important than the law itself.

\*Pharisees didn’t complain that Jesus is teaching sinners. Condemned him eating with them. Socializing with them. Pharisees were *exclusive*. They thought it was inconsistent with the dignity of someone so knowledgeable in the Scriptures to “eat with sinners.”

*But, Jesus was Intentionally Inclusive in Seeking and Loving the Lost.*

Last week: Lost sheep. If a man has a 100 sheep and loses one. Leave the 99 & go find it. Put it on his shoulders, bring it home to safety. Call all his friends and celebrate.

Jewish culture in Biblical days was a shame/honor driven society. Virtually everything that is done in Jewish culture brings either shame or honor to a person and their family. Motivation is seeking honor for oneself & avoiding shame *at all costs*. So, to lose a sheep as a shepherd would be a shameful thing.

Luke 15:8 (NIV) "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?"

In the "lost coin" parable, the ten silver coins refers to a piece of jewelry with ten silver coins on it worn by brides. The equivalent of a wedding ring in modern times. It held a lot of sentimental value and it was a cherished item. Grab a broom and start sweeping the dirt floor looking for it. To lose a coin from a piece of bridal jewelry in her own house would be even more shameful than losing a sheep.

Luke 15:9 (NIV) And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'

Luke 15:10 (NIV) In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Just as w/the Shepherd the pattern is to Intentionally Seek, to Find and to Celebrate.

This shows the scope of God's personal care and concern for individuals and would have been of great comfort to the "sinners" Jesus was teaching. Poor men and young boys – related best to the shepherd & lost sheep. Women would have related best to the lost bridal coin. But Jesus saved the last parable for everyone present by dealing with the relationship of a father and son(s).

There is SO MUCH in this parable! We are going to camp here for the next several weeks and pull out some amazing, yet practical truths to help grow and guide us.

**Our Direction in Life is Determined by Which Voices We Decide to Follow.**

There are voices vying for our attention. God, our culture, ourselves.

Luke 15: 11 – 12 (NIV) 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.

On the surface this doesn't look too bad but there's more than meets the eye going on here. The split would have been 2/3 of the estate for the older son and 1/3 for the younger son. Here's the catch: the father still had the right to live off the proceeds. So not only does the son ask the father to divide the estate and inheritance but he really has no right to spend it until his father dies. Translation: Father, I can't wait for you to die before I go and spend my inheritance". Can you imagine how painful this must have been for the father?

Son has a decision to make: Is it better to stay at home, w/the Father or go search for what I desire in a distant country? Value? Respect? Love? Acceptance? Which voice will he follow b/c *Our Direction in Life is Determined by Which Voices We Decide to Follow*.

Luke 15:13a (NIV) **Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country...**

When the son leaves for a “distant country” it is a heartless rejection of the home in which the son was born, raised and nurtured. This is a complete cutting off from the way of living, thinking and acting that had been handed down for generations. More than disrespect, it’s a total disregard of the treasured values of his family and his community. It brings shame to his father and family.

The son is probably excited about new opportunities in front of him and may have the mindset of “my dad is just out of touch. He’s doesn’t understand my needs; he’s just trying to control me”. I can handle whatever is in front of me. There’s a whole new world out there for me to explore and experience”! (The plot for the Little Mermaid)

As the son sets out on his journey the dad watches him as he walks down the road. He watches until the son is out of sight and too far for the sound of his father’s words “I love you son” to be heard.

To this point it’s manageable. The son has put distance between his home, between his father and himself, but the situation hasn’t gone south...yet. Here’s where we begin to see everything begin to unravel.

Luke 15:13 (NIV) **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.**

He was living it up in a life of lust, greed and indulgence. Whatever money could buy to make him happy, he bought. Sin rewards for a season, which is why it’s so tempting.

This is the point the son starts to really realize that *Our Direction in Life is Determined by Which Voices We Decide to Follow*. *And he listened to the wrong voices*. The further he drifts away from home the quieter his father’s voice gets and the louder the other voices around him become.

### **Sin Promises Freedom but Produces Slavery**

Sin Strips Us of Life. What Starts as a Desire Leads to Destruction When we follow the wrong voices. Sin deceives us into drifting. Drags us away from home. Sin is the tool the thief uses to steal, kill and destroy.

John 10:10 (NIV) **The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.**

All his desires were being fulfilled. Being: Valued, Respected, Loved, Accepted, Important. Nothing wrong w/those desires except when we listen to the wrong voices to fulfill them. What Starts as a Desire Leads to Destruction When it's Misguided.

Sin promises freedom but produces slavery. Sin always strips you of life. Sin always is about temporary pleasure. Sin is trading things of value for things of lesser value. Sin is saying "yes" to less than God's best for you.

Luke 15:14 (NIV) **After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.**

Where were all his friends who were along for the ride when he had money? When he was spending fast & furious on them they showed him respect, they accepted him, they valued him, they took advantage of him! He didn't plan for the loss of "friends" or for the famine. He was broke and alone b/c he followed the wrong voices and attempted to fulfill his desires in sin.

Luke 15:15 (NIV) **So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.**

This Jewish son sells himself as a slave to a Gentile and finds himself feeding pigs.

Luke 15:16 (NIV) **He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.**

Sin changes our desires. We can find ourselves doing things we never imagined.

Luke 15:17 (NIV) **"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!**

The son has a moment to reflect on his condition and realizes even his father's servants had it better than he did. He had a decision to make: Am I going to die here or head back home? *Is this life of sin how I am going to be defined?* If you are the son here today, you have the same choice. If you are drifting, you have the same choice.

What do you do?

**Repent and Return Home**

Own your sin. Start back home.

Luke 15:18 (NIV) **I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.**

Luke 15:19 (NIV) **I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.'**

Luke 15:20 (NIV) **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.**

## Small Group Questions

1. What was the best part of your past week and the most difficult part of your past week and why?
2. Read Luke 15:1 – 20. If you've heard this story before, did anything new stick out to you this time around? If you've never heard it before, what grabbed your attention?
3. Who does the sheep, coin and son represent? Who seeks, finds and starts the celebration over the lost sheep, coin and son? Why should this matter to us?
4. Steve stated that, "Our direction in life is determined by the voices we decide to follow". When have you found that to be true in your life? What are some of the voices that try to garner our attention? What do they promise?
5. Do you ever find yourself longing for or moving toward the "distant country" like the younger son does in this story? What is your "distant country"?
6. Read John 10:10. What does Jesus offer us? Why did the thief come? Steve stated that "sin promises freedom but produces slavery". Do you agree or disagree with that and why?
7. Reread Luke 15:17 – 18. What does the son realize? What does he own up to? When did you "come to your senses? Share about it.
8. In Luke 15:19, the son makes a decision to return home but immediately struggles with a thought. What is it? Have you ever struggled with feeling unworthy to come to God ("home")?
9. What was the reception of the father to his son? What is this a picture of in our lives when we come to the father?

Close in prayer.

