

**Stories**  
***Lost Boys***  
Luke 15:11-32

August 6, 2023

HDBC

A few weeks ago, we examined the first ten verses of this chapter. Two short stories leading to a third, much longer story. All about lost things and found things. This is the lost and found chapter. The focus of the first two was pretty clear. We are lost and separated from God. He loved us enough to come and find us. In this third story **Jesus raises stakes** and offers some new elements.

**Sheep** wander off aimlessly and coins roll off the table and into a hidden place. It's one thing to think about sheep and coins which are innocent in their lostness. But what about people who make their own decisions. How will God treat them?

**This story** is commonly called ***the prodigal son***. That is appropriate. But I want to argue this morning for some alternate titles. It could be called the story of ***the loving father*** for he is the true hero. It also could be called the story of ***the lost boys*** because there are actually two sons who need to be saved. Let me read the text, then we'll take a look at the details. **Read the text.**

## 1. The Characters

### 1) A loving father

The father represents God. He loves his kids unconditional.

### 2) An honest rebel (younger brother)

Represents a lost person who wants to live for self, to be his own God.

This person sees God as a cosmic killjoy. Too many rules!

### 3) An angry imposter (older brother)

Represents the Pharisees of Jesus' day, and those who seem to be ok with God because of outward actions but on the inside they are lost.

They were imposters, just going through religious motions. Felt they were above regular sinners. Too good to need to be saved. Works salvation.

Both are separated from the father, but in different ways.

## 2. The Scenes

The story can easily be seen in three scenes or three acts.

### 1) Scene one: Good times lead to deep trouble (12-16)

Estate planning for Jewish families was not complicated. The father simply divided his estate among his living sons, with the oldest getting a double portion. A man could voluntarily choose to divide it while still living, but for a son to ask would have been unthinkable. It would send multiple messages that were not just about money.

*I no longer want to be under your authority.*

*I no longer need a relationship with you.*

*I no longer care about our family.*

**Surprisingly**, the father agreed. He divided his assets between his two sons. The younger son immediately cashed it all in and left town for a new life. **His wallet was full of cash and his head was full of dreams.** Both would evaporate much more quickly than he could ever imagine. He *squandered his estate with loose living*. He was spending fast with no thought of what would happen when it was gone. **At least he was honest in his rebellion** against His father. He wanted to live it up and he did.

**Two things** happened that ultimately got his attention. He ran out of money and a terrible famine hit the land. He not only had no money but could find no suitable work. He found himself feeding pigs. This was a role no self-respecting Hebrew would ever consider. It got so bad he was even envious of the pods that the pigs were eating. **He was starving to death physically and spiritually.** He needed to be found, to be saved. However, the next move was his. The father knew where he was and was ready and waiting for his son to make a choice.

### 2) Scene two: Sincere confession finds surprising grace (17-24)

The text says *he came to his senses*. C.S. Lewis says **pain plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul**. This young man was in pain, and it opened his eyes to his condition. He was living among pigs and was not eating as good as they were. His memory quickly took him to the hired servants at his father's house who were much better off. He then took a series of steps that led him into the waiting arms of his loving father. **The first step is a realization of his condition.**

In his book *Glorious Mess*, Mike Howerton tells about a childhood experience playing "mud football." After a huge downpour, he and his buddies found a gully filled with two inches of standing water.

We had a blast. Every tackle would send you sliding for yards and yards. The ball was like a greased pig, which meant tons of fumbles and gang tackles and laughter. I remember tackling one of my friends and watching him skim across the surface of the water for something like four miles and thinking, "I might be in heaven." When he got up, I noticed something stuck on his shoulder. I peered closer, wondering, "What is that?"

Now, there was a huge, concrete sewage runoff drain right next to the gully. And apparently during heavy rains, all sorts of things got backed up, and I don't know if the apartment complex immediately next to the school burst a pipe or what, but I do know we didn't really pay attention to the debris in the gully until I noticed that something on Craig's shoulder. I peered closer and suddenly realized it was a soaking piece of toilet paper. In that same instant I realized the smell surrounding me was a bit more pungent than a typical mud football game ought to smell.

I yelled out, "We're playing in POOP WATER!" and we bolted for home as fast as we could. Talk about an instant of mental transformation ....

**Sometimes in life we need our thinking transformed.**

**He made a decision.** He would repent of his actions and attitudes. He would make a complete U-turn of his life. He determined his course of action, and it would take him *away from sin and toward his father*.

**He prepared his speech.** He would not wing it or leave it to chance. He would acknowledge his sin. He would own it in confession & repentance.. He understood that he was unworthy of being his father's son. He had forfeited that. He would appeal to his father's mercy and grace

**He started.** He did what he said he would do. He took steps toward his father. Let me just say it only takes one step toward God. One of the greatest statements in the entire story is found in verse 20. *While he was still a long way off, his father saw him*. That means the father was watching, waiting, longing and anticipating the return of this son.

**He confessed.** He demonstrated humility, responsibility and maturity. And notice the father's response. **He was restored.** The father must have shocked the son with his reaction.

**He ran to him.** This is the only time God is picturing as running.

**He kissed him.** He put **a robe** on his shoulders and **ring** on his finger. He was a son, not a servant. All was forgiven. Relationship was restored.

**This would** have been a great place for the story to end. But Jesus had another point to make for another audience. There were two sons in the story. Both lost. The lostness of the younger son was obvious by his actions. But the older son was also alienated from his father.

**On the outside** everything appeared to be right. But on the inside things were bad. Rather than living in the joy of his father's love, **he grew bitter thinking he could earn his father's approval through his works.** It led to resentment and anger. Things were clearly not right with him. This became apparent when the honest rebel came home.

### 3) **Scene three: An angry tirade reveals a sinful heart (25-32)**

I've already indicated that this brother is a picture of the Pharisees. They were far from being saved. They believed they had no need for grace because they were trying to earn their way through works.

**While** the younger son was blowing his inheritance the older son was tending the family business. He was being responsible. He stayed. He did the right things. But, as Jesus makes clear in the story, **he had a heart problem.** When the younger son came home and he saw the great celebration that his father was providing for him, he got jealous, angry and bitter. **He refused to join the celebration.** This was just like the Pharisees. As sinners were being drawn to Jesus and being liberated from their sin and guilt, all they could do was scoff and condemn.

**But watch what the Father does.** He pursues this older brother. He appeals to this older son in an interesting way. Don't miss 32. When he got saved **we had to celebrate.** Remember the other two stories? At the end of each Jesus indicated that there is celebration in Heaven when one

person is saved. The fact that this brother was not celebrating was an indication that he was not saved.

**And so**, the father appeals to him to come around. Even though the hearts of the Pharisees were hard and rigid, Jesus' offer of salvation was for them, as well. This is indicated in the attitude of the father toward this older son. He didn't condemn him, but appealed to him. Interestingly, **Jesus ends the story with the older brother still in an angry, lost condition.**

### 3. The Application

There are **two kinds of sinners pictured in this story**. They don't look alike. They don't act alike. But they are both lost and needed to be saved. They represent two kinds of people who are both lost.

**One is openly sinful.** He does not care about God or religion. He makes little or no attempt to act spiritual. He lives for himself. This person is dead spiritually and that death is obvious on the outside.

**The other** has the outward appearance of piety. They do religious things, say religious words. They go through the outward motions but there is no life on the inside. They too are dead spiritually, regardless of their outward actions. Both are separated from God and need to be saved. Both are loved by God who wants them to be saved. Both can experience God's grace. **One son got right with the father, the other did not.** Picture of different responses today. Some respond and some do not. But all are called. Note the steps taken.

### 4. The Steps

When you get an invitation to a formal event there is often a little card in the invitation with the letters RSVP. It's your response to the invitation. The Father is inviting all to be reconciled to Him. Only those who respond, like the younger son, will be saved. Remembering the actions of the younger son, I want to use the letters as a reminder of the steps to being saved.

#### **R Repent**

Change of heart. Decision to change attitude toward sin and God and the direction of your life. Turn around. Repentance is essential for salvation. Jesus said, ***unless you repent, you will all perish.***

## **S Surrender**

Yielding of your will to Christ. The son needed to come back under the authority of His father. He needed to surrender as Lord of His own life. Notice that he did not come on his terms but yielded to the Father. To be saved, we yield to Christ, we come on His terms. That son had been the master of his own life and it resulted in disaster. That happens to all who think they can be the lords of their own lives. It will eventually crumble.

## **V Verbalize**

Verbalize your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior. When he got to his father, **he had some things he needed to say**. He confessed his sin & took ownership. It was a heartfelt apology. It was an honest confession.

*If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.* Romans 10:8-10

Verbalizing your faith in Christ to Christ is important. Tell Him you trust Him. Tell Him you are placing your faith in Him as Lord. Don't miss that word, Lord. As you do so you are surrendering your will to Him.

## **P Proclaim**

Proclaim your faith through baptism. The next natural and important step is to proclaim your new faith through baptism. Listen to what Peter said when he preached on the day of Pentecost.

*Peter said to them, repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 3,000 people got saved that day and they were immediately baptized as a proclamation of their faith in Jesus.*

**Samaritans, Ethiopian eunuch, Paul, Lydia, Philippian jailer.**

Where are you?

Do you need to take the first step and **Repent**?

Do you need to take the next step and **Surrender**?

Do you need to **Verbalize** your faith in Jesus as Lord? Prayer

Do you need to **Proclaim** your faith through baptism?