

Good News, Great Joy, All People
“Re-Defining Lost”

Luke 15

Growth Group Discussion Guide

Opening Question (get everyone involved in discussion):

- Describe a time when you lost something precious to you. What did you feel? Did you eventually get it back?
- In this week’s passage, Jesus tells three stories in an effort to get his listeners to capture these dual emotions: the desperation of losing something, and the relief of finding it.

Read Luke 15:1-2 and then discuss the following.

- What does Jesus hear that prompts the telling of these parables?
- What do you know about the company he’s been keeping at meals?
- Why were the Pharisees and teachers of the law so troubled by Jesus’ dinner company?

Read Luke 15:3-10 and then discuss the following.

- Do you notice anything in either of these two stories that strikes you in a fresh way?
- What point is Jesus trying to make to the religious leaders through the emotions captured by these stories?

Read Luke 15:11-24, and then discuss the following.

- How does the third parable, through v. 24, reiterate the point that Jesus has already made?
- How does this parable (thus far) elaborate or add to that point?
- Is there anything in this story so far that you find especially compelling?

Read Luke 15:25-32, and then discuss the following.

- How do you initially respond to the elder brother? Do you have sympathy for him?
- How do the elder brother’s interactions with the father speak of what is in his heart?
- What keeps the elder brother from entering the feast to celebrate with his family?
- Why do you think Jesus constructed the story to end with this scene of the elder brother? How does it characterize the Pharisees?
- What is the first “twist” at the end of this story? (According to Pastor Josh, it is that being lost means more than what we have typically thought).
- Based on this parable, what does it mean to be “lost?” (Leaders: on Sunday, Pastor Josh said that being lost, in this story, is being alienated from the Father).
- Pastor Josh said that this story shows us that there are two ways of being lost. What are those two ways? (Seeking to be your own savior via a licentious life of self-discovery, or via strict moral conformity).
- Have you gravitated toward either one of these approaches to life? Which seems to characterize you more?
- At this point in your life, would you more readily identify with the younger brother—having returned from a place of obvious brokenness—or the elder brother—being inclined toward pride in your own moral record?

- What is the second “twist” at the end of this story? (According to Pastor Josh, it is found in the fact that the Father is not content just to have the younger son at his feast; he goes outside to plead with the elder brother to come in as well.)
- In this second “twist,” how do you see Jesus pleading with his enemies? Does this observation surprise you in any way?
- In Pastor Tim Keller’s book, *Prodigal God*, he mentions three symptoms of “elder brother” tendencies. Read and discuss these with the group. They are:
 - You have an under-current of anger throughout your life. You feel that God owes you a certain kind of life, due to your goodness. But life doesn’t go as it should. People who break the rules sometimes succeed in life and people who keep the rules sometimes fail. And if you think God owes you something because of your moral record, you tend to be angry at God, at life, or even at yourself for not performing well enough.
 - “Duty without beauty.” Like the elder brother, you might say, “All these years I’ve been *slaving* for you.” Note that when the younger brother comes back and says, “I’m not worthy to be a son, make me a slave,” the father makes him a son. But here, the older son, because of his spiritual condition, is functioning more like a slave. His obedience has all been a grind. There is no joy in the obedience. Elder brothers find God useful; but gospel-believing Christians find God beautiful. He is an end in himself. The elder brother does the things of the Christian life in a results-oriented way. Elder brothers pray with lots of petition, but not much adoration. Prayer is something you have to do to get things, rather than because it delights God or brings you near to God.
 - Religious, cultural, and class superiority. Why won’t the elder brother come into the feast? He views himself as superior to the younger brother. If you ground your self-image and value in your performance, you have to look down your nose and feel superior to people who you perceive to be lazy. You have to look down your nose at people who you see as failures. When you look at people of different races or classes or lifestyles, and feel superior to them, you are dangerously like the elder brother.
- Assuming that you can be honest with the people in your group, do any of these characteristics seem to be true of your life?
- What might it mean to repent of the *reasons* for which you’ve done good things?
- How can your heart be softened if you are more like the elder brother? (Hear Jesus pleading with you, from the cross, to come in.)

Prayer:

- In view of this parable and the preceding discussion, what ways do you need to pray for one another?
- What other needs exist in your group? Spend some time praying for them.