

COVENANT — JESUS CHRIST

The Lost Sheep, Coin, and Son

LESSON 07

APRIL 19, 2026

LESSON TEXT

Luke 15:11–32

FOCUS VERSE

Luke 15:20–21

²⁰And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

²¹And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

TRUTH ABOUT COVENANT

Jesus is passionate about covenant inclusion.

MY RESPONSE TO COVENANT

I will search for the lost and welcome them home.

COVENANT CONTEXT

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus continually reached for people the religious leaders excluded, such as sinners and tax collectors. Jesus intentionally invited them into covenant relationship with Him and taught the religious leaders that He came for all, not just for them. In order to prove this principle, Jesus told three signature parables in Luke 15.

TEACHING OUTLINE

Icebreaker: If you have ever found it difficult to include someone new in your group of friends, how did you make it work?

Teacher Tip: Connect the group's answers to Jesus' teaching in Luke 15 to include others.

Lesson Connection: Share the Lesson Connection.

I. THE TEMPTATION TO EXCLUDE

DISCUSS: *How did you feel when you were excluded and saw yourself as an outsider? If someone helped you feel welcome, what did they do?*

- A. The Pharisees' Complaint
- B. Jesus' Response
- C. I will resist the temptation to exclude others.

***DISCUSS:** How do you treat people others may consider “less than?” How can you love people as Jesus loves them?*

II. THE FIRST TWO PARABLES

- A. The Lost Sheep and the Rejoicing Shepherd
- B. The Lost Coin and the Rejoicing Searcher
- C. I will join in the Savior’s mission to seek for the lost.

III. THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL

- A. The Undeserving Prodigal

***DISCUSS:** What do you think of the younger son in this parable based on how he treated his father and his inheritance?*

- B. The Running Father (I)
- C. The Frustrated Older Brother

***DISCUSS:** To which of the three parables in Luke 15 do you feel the greatest connection? What about the story resonates with you?*

- D. I will extend the Father’s lavish mercy to others. (V)

***DISCUSS:** Think of a time in your life when Jesus Christ “received you” (welcomed and accepted you). What was that experience like?*

Internalizing the Message

PRAYER FOCUS

Lead the group in prayer and consider the following topics of focus:

- For God to help us remember the mercy He has given us
- For God to show us how to extend His mercy to others

LESSON CONNECTION

A preacher lost his favorite Bible. Now, this was no ordinary Bible. In addition to being a journaling-style Bible with both personal and sermon notes from years of use, there were also signatures from some of this preacher’s favorite Pentecostal ministers. The list was long and included James Kilgore, Nona Freeman, J. T. Pugh, Vesta Mangun, and the like. It had taken him years to collect so many autographs of so many godly Apostolic voices. The preacher had searched out these individuals at conferences, waiting and asking for them to sign his Bible. Those signatures represented a spiritual legacy of truth that meant so much to him.

He looked for the Bible for months, hoping it was simply misplaced. His family joined him in the search, but to no avail. He had three small children who were made fully aware of the enormity of the loss to their dad. This was communicated through questions like: “Are you sure you never had it?” “Did you see it anywhere?” and “It’s okay if you remember or even lied about it; just tell us if you know where it is.” All the interviewing, searching, and searching again did not result in finding the treasure.

The preacher grieved at the loss of one of his most cherished earthly possessions. He marveled at how it could have

happened. He had been so careful to protect it from damage or loss. The preacher was completely devastated as the Bible remained lost for months that eventually turned into years. But one day his wife was doing some spring cleaning, including in the children's toy room. There she found the Bible, signed by some spiritual "giants" of the faith, stashed in a little girl's suitcase. What an unlikely place for the Word of God to be stored: amid a baby doll, extra clothes, and miscellaneous items for make-believe. The joy the preacher felt overcame the frustration he felt at what his little girl had incidentally done. She had packed it because it was "important" for a trip she was taking in her sweet, playful imagination. "Daddy, I forgot I had used it to play. I am so sorry," she sweetly lamented.

All was forgiven quickly because all that mattered was that he had found this precious Bible so dear to his heart. Why it was lost and how it had been lost were overshadowed by the celebratory relief of it being discovered and restored to its rightful owner. If you have ever lost something meaningful to you, this story and the three Jesus told in Luke 15—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son—should resonate with you. The joy of finding what is lost will always supersede the agony of the search. Through these parables Jesus invites us to share in His loving perspective. Like the shepherd, the woman, and the father, He invites us not only to search for those who are lost, but also to rejoice when they are found.

BIBLE LESSON

I. THE TEMPTATION TO EXCLUDE

All of us have likely faced that dreadful moment when you walk into a room only to realize the person you were counting on to be there is not there. The adrenaline rush is something for which you were not prepared. You had a plan, a strategy of how to get through this awkward social setting, and now you are left with nothing. Your safety net of friendship is non-existent. You stand there alone, searching the crowd for a friendly (and hopefully familiar) face. *Act natural*, you tell yourself, but alas there is nothing natural about you feeling comfortable in this kind of environment without a friend to help you relax, even just a little bit.

This experience is part of life. It is unavoidable. What makes this experience so harsh is no one wants to feel excluded. One of the most basic human desires is to be included. Our Creator made us for community, but it is sadly human nature to exclude others. While the reasons may vary depending on situations and personalities, as Christians we realize Jesus was the ultimate includer. He tore down the social walls of His time. He did not limit His circle by race, gender, social status, or even spiritual status. Jesus did for everyone what we look for others to do for us: He invited people just as they were. Jesus made everyone feel equally a part of what He was doing or what He was teaching.

***DISCUSS:** How did you feel when you were excluded and saw yourself as an outsider? If someone helped you feel welcome, what did they do?*

A. The Pharisees' Complaint

What endeared Jesus to the "outsiders" of that time was also what infuriated the religious "insiders." In an effort to stay ceremonially clean, the Pharisees avoided associating with anyone they deemed as unclean. For them only two types of people existed: righteous or unclean. There was no middle ground, not even an area of gray.

The Gospels make it clear that the Pharisees and Jesus did not overlook this tension. In fact, the first two verses of Luke 15 show that the tax collectors and sinners loved to hear Jesus and be around Him. This assures us they were permitted to be around Jesus, and the expectation was they would be included. It is why we see them come often to Jesus throughout the Gospels.

B. Jesus' Response

The setting for Jesus' message in Luke 15 is vital to understanding why Jesus taught these three parables in response to the Pharisees' criticism. He taught parables because He knew those who are hungry to know Him could relate, while those whose hearts were closed toward Him would miss the meaning altogether. And Jesus knew the Pharisees were prone to excluding people. While the symbolism of these three beloved parables is powerful and interesting, we must focus on the heart of the message: God has a heart for all people. The illustrations are different and the applications may be unique, but in each story, Jesus loves the lost enough to find and restore them.

C. I will resist the temptation to exclude others.

As believers, we recognize Jesus as our ultimate example of how we should live. He alone sets the standard of acceptable behavior. Some say our faith in God is worked out in human relationships. It is one thing to know in theory that we are to love others as He has loved us. However, the direct application and practice of that belief is not easy. In fact, it is often challenging, difficult work.

We may feel good about the way we treat people we like, but the true test comes in how we treat those we feel are unworthy of our best treatment. That is why the Pharisees could not accept what Jesus was doing by spending time with sinners. In their minds, those people were beneath them.

The Pharisees enforced a standard of their own creation. It is easy to quickly judge them, but prayerfully consider your own standards of valuing people. To whom do you give your best version of yourself? Who gets the most consideration and preference? Is it people you like (or are like you)? Jesus was demonstrating through His behavior and teaching that God's standard of value in people does not discriminate. Spiritual status is not the determining factor for His love and mercy. Whether they are sinners does not even matter. God loves people, period.

***DISCUSS:** How do you treat people others may consider "less than?" How can you love people as Jesus loves them?*

II. THE FIRST TWO PARABLES

A. The Lost Sheep and the Rejoicing Shepherd

In the first parable Jesus shared, a shepherd left a flock of ninety-nine safe sheep to find one that was missing. Right away we are challenged by the clear priority of *one* sheep that has left the safety of the fold. The sheep was so valuable that the other ninety-nine were left behind in pursuit of only one. Shepherds in Jesus' audience would have appreciated this parable because they understood sheep the most. They are herd animals. They are not meant to survive on their own; in fact, they cannot. Not only are sheep social, but they are easily spooked and naturally defenseless. Sheep depend on the care of the shepherd in order to survive.

This information provides understanding of why the shepherd would respond in such an extreme way. As humans, it is easy to think *Well, at least ninety-nine are still here*. But for the shepherd, with his great knowledge of the nature of sheep and the dangers out there, there was no time to delay. He needed to find the one lost sheep quickly. He searched and searched, calling the sheep's name until he heard it bleating in the distance. He lovingly scooped it up, laid it on his shoulders, and brought the one lost sheep back to the flock. He called his neighbors to rejoice with him because he had found his one lost sheep.

B. The Lost Coin and the Rejoicing Searcher

Jesus made this point again with a shorter parable. In this parable a woman lost one coin out of ten coins. Some scholars believe her ten coins amounted to her dowry. She lit a lamp, swept the house, and searched until she found the missing coin. Wow. Again, one would assume nine out of ten is close enough, but the value of that one coin in her eyes was worth her best effort to find it. When she did find it, she went door to door to invite her neighbors to rejoice with her that what she had lost was finally found.

C. I will join in the Savior's mission to seek for the lost.

Jesus' parables certainly highlighted His love for the lost, but they were also an engraved invitation for us to join Him in seeking the lost. Some people may be lost because they wandered away and don't know how to find their way back, like the sheep. Others may be lost, even while they are still in the house, like the coin. Whether they are long gone or still around, if they are lost, it is Jesus' mission and should be ours to help find them. Let us join in with Jesus to seek those who are lost and rejoice with everyone around us when they are found.

III. THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL

A. The Undeserving Prodigal

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is the last and the longest of the three. The indicting details seem to build a strong case against the wayward son. The young son wanted what would be his when his father died, but he wanted it before his father died. It was as if he wished his father were already dead so he could have his inheritance. As a parent, nothing could be more hurtful. When he left, he wasted everything his hard-working father had earned to give him. Imagine what the audience must have felt as Jesus shared this shocking parable with them.

***DISCUSS:** What do you think of the younger son in this parable based on how he treated his father and his inheritance?*

B. The Running Father

(I) Naturally, everyone would side with the slighted father against his ungrateful son. But Jesus continued to tell the story, and the young man's father was willing to forgive his son if he just returned. One day, he did just that. After a famine in a far country ravaged him and what little pride he had left, he walked the many miles home to his father's house and his father. In a culture that valued dignity and decorum, the father ran to meet his prodigal son. How did he know he was on his way home? Could it be that he was watching for his son to come home?

The father did not respond as many would; there was no "trial period," no reluctance on his part. Rather, the father

ordered a celebration unlike any other, and the son who was lost was restored as a son, not a servant. This measure of mercy assured his family, and all the neighbors who might have wanted to have him punished for his blatant dishonor, that his rightful place in the family had been fully restored.

C. The Frustrated Older Brother

But there was another family member in the story: an older son. Most of us would identify with him more than the wayward son or the father. Another natural human desire is the desire for justice. It would seem unfair that a child who had wronged a parent could be forgiven so freely. His brother had squandered what had been given prematurely, but the older brother had been faithful. He had dutifully served his family. Such kindness to the undeserving would have naturally seemed to undermine the value of the older brother's love and loyalty.

Here we see the power of Jesus' message that day. The parallels would have been painfully clear to the Pharisees. They would have seen themselves as the older brother who had not earned their father's praise. The Pharisees viewed sinners in the same way the older brother viewed his younger brother. How could they be so freely forgiven? That is because our God is a God of marvelous mercy, and He extends His covenant invitation to everyone, especially sinners.

***DISCUSS:** To which of the three parables in Luke 15 do you feel the greatest connection? What about the story resonates with you?*

D. I will extend the Father's lavish mercy to others.

Like any master communicator, Jesus knew this was His "mic drop" moment. The conviction of this final parable set in because the teacher left the application with the audience. It would be one thing for Jesus to have followed the sting of this story with a pointed finger and judgment, but He did not. He let the parable speak for itself. In so doing, we as the audience are left to answer the questions we have, not just from the perspective of the older brother, but with the realization we are also the wayward son.

While we may need to confront our tendency to demand justice as we see fit, this parable requires us to look in the mirror. We too have broken our Father's heart. We are the younger son at times; we are like the older brother at times. But Jesus is calling us to be like Him: like the Father. These parables are a clear call for us as believers to be more than recipients of God's love but also to be extensions of God's love to others. This hearkens us back to what Paul wrote to the church in Rome: "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us" (Romans 15:7). Amen.

***DISCUSS:** Think of a time in your life when Jesus Christ "received you" (welcomed and accepted you). What was that experience like? (V)*

***Teacher Option:** Tell the story below or share one of your own to illustrate how our Father still welcomes lost sons and daughters home.*

INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

It was a holiday the family would not soon forget. For years one of the adult children had not been home for the holidays. A bitter disagreement many years earlier had turned into months of awkwardness and misunderstanding. The parents and child had tried to talk, but all seemed lost. No one could agree on what had gone wrong, making them feel hopeless to find a resolution. It wasn't that the parents were unwilling to apologize; the child had made it impossible to do so.

Both sides were heartbroken, frustrated, and completely exhausted by the emotional weight of it all. Then came the silence. Communication from the child became scarce. A once close family relationship was slowly reduced to routine holiday greetings and simple "happy birthday" expressions over text messages.

The parents found themselves at a loss for what to do. Should they quit trying? They had offered repeatedly to meet with a mediator or even a family counselor. The parents were willing to meet any time, any place, with anyone their child felt comfortable mediating. The parents would pay for all expenses. All the child had to do was name the terms and show up. But the offer was repeatedly refused.

The father's resolve was simple. His inspiration was biblical: Love never fails. This became the parents' mantra and motive: We will keep loving. We will keep trying, no matter the response. Like the father of the prodigal, they looked for opportunities to be reconciled. They prayed for ways to create that opportunity.

The reality was they had no control of the situation. They had done all they could. They were repeatedly rejected by their own. Had they done everything right? No. But their offenses did not merit such a cold response from their child. But they kept loving. They kept offering to meet. They kept inviting the adult child to join them for the traditional holiday gatherings with the rest of the family. The response of "no" seemed to never end until one Thanksgiving, they received a surprising "Yes, I will be there."

The emotional roller coaster was unlike anything the family had experienced: Would the child really come? What would it be like for everyone to see each other again after so long? How would the child respond when welcomed home? The family will never forget the moment the father opened the door and the child walked through. With tears in his eyes, a crack in his voice, and arms opened wide, the father said, "Welcome home."

No matter how far you or someone you love has gone from God, He is still reaching. Come home. Tell your family and friends they can come home. God and we want them to come. And when they do, God and we will rejoice.