



## SONSHIP OR SLAVERY? • The Lost Son

### What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

Luke 15:11-24

Last week we begin a look at the stories in Luke 15. Jesus told the stories to answer the muttering Pharisee who wanted to know why Jesus was welcoming losers and eating with them. The stories show that he does more than welcome them. He goes after them, searches carefully for them, finds them, and carries them home. And He does it all for joy.

This week we'll begin to look at the third story. Though it continues in the same direction as the parables of the lost sheep and coin, this one has at least two major difference. One, it's significantly longer with more vivid details. And two, it has a curious second act that is lacking in the other two. We're going to save act two for next week, and focus on the details in vv. 11-24.

There are three main scenes in the first act of the story. vv. 12-16, vv. 17-19. and vv. 20-24. Let's look at each in turn.

#### Sin and Misery

In vv. 13-15 Jesus describes the typical pattern of sin. Sin almost always starts off fun and spirals downward into misery. Observe with your group all the details that show this process at work. Take note that Jews were not fond of pigs. The fact that he ends up feeding pigs shows how low he had sunk.

Also observe that he has traded in sonship for slavery. He used to enjoy all the privileges that were his to enjoy as the son of his father. Now he's reduced to a humiliating job and starvation.

#### Repentance

In vv. 17-20 Jesus gives us a pretty detailed view of what repentance looks like. Pay close attention to the description of the son and note three things.

1. *He comes to his senses.* The first step in repentance is to realize the folly of having traded what God wants for us for some inferior substitute, no matter how bright and shiny it may appear at first. 2 Tim 2:24-26 is a great picture of how this happens as God mercifully intervenes in our lives.
2. *He is broken and has no sense of his rights.* There's no presumption or demands, just an overwhelming sense of need.

### What's the Big Idea?

In this story Jesus gives a vivid depiction of sin and it's resulting misery, repentance and it's essential elements, and the redeeming love of the Father.

### What's the Problem?

We have a faulty view of God and His grace which causes us to remain in slavery to sin when He really wants to restore us as sons and daughters.



3. *He goes seeking mercy.* Repentance is more than feeling wretched for sin. It requires an actual change. Judas felt bad, but rather than repenting and being restored he killed himself. Peter repented, went to Jesus, and was forgiven.

Observe too that he has no sense or hope of being a son. He is a slave and the highest hope he can muster is to be a slave of his father rather than a pig farmer.

#### The Love of the Father

In this final scene of the act we get to see the hero of the story – the father. Notice all the verbs that tell us what he did.

*The father saw him.* He was watching, observing and thus aware of his son's move towards him.

*He was filled with compassion.* No anger, just joy in the sons return.

*He ran to his son.* When was the last time you saw an old man run? They look ridiculous, but dignity is not his concern.

*He threw his arms around him and kissed him.* He is lavish and affectionate giving a far warmer reception than the son dared dream.

*He said to his servants...robe, ring, sandals, fattened calf, celebrate!* This isn't merely a party, it's a party for his son. The robe and ring are symbols of his sonship. He calls him "this son of mine," and restores him.

Take time with your group to look at and enjoy everything the father does. Marinate in it because this is the image of God that Jesus is trying to impress upon us. Unfortunately, we are slow of heart to believe it.

When I have screwed up huge, especially since coming to Christ, it is hard for me to imagine God would watch for me, be filled with compassion towards me, run to me, throw his arms around me, kiss me and restore me again. It's likely that you and the people in your group struggle to believe that too.

That has to be why Jesus made this story so lavish. He's trying to convince us of what He knows His Father is like.

The Pharisees thought God was a mean grouch like they were. Jesus tells this story to challenge and correct their (and our) faulty view of God so that we would go to Him for mercy, and praise Him for His grace.

*Though I always draw from all kinds of sources – consciously and unconsciously – I think I ought to acknowledge that I was significantly influenced in writing this particular study by a sermon I heard by John Piper and my sketchy notes of it.*

#### What's Our Response?

You want to see the members of your group allow Jesus' picture of the father's lavish love correct their view of God.

As a result you want to help them be emboldened to repent of any unconfessed sin in their lives.

## What Are the Questions?

Luke 15:11-24

### LAUNCH

What's one of the most disobedient things you did as a kid? Did you ever confess it to your parents? What happened?

### EXPLORE

1. Reviewing from last week, what is the big question Jesus is responding to in these parables?

2. What is His answer?

Read Luke 15:11-32.

3. There are two big differences between the first two stories and this one. What are they?

4. We're going to look at the second act next week and focus on the details in vv. 11-24. Why do you think this story is so much longer?

Read 15:13-16.

5. Take a look at the first scene. What does it describe?

6. What is the trend in this guy's life throughout this scene?

7. He began this story as a privileged son. How would you describe him now?

8. How would you title this scene?

Read 15:17-19

9. What is being depicted in this scene?

10. What are elements of repentance?

11. How does he see himself?

12. How would you title it?

Read 15:20-24.

13. This is where we see the hero of the story. Make a list of the father's verbs in this act. What does each one tell you about the character of the father?

14. How does the father's behavior affect the son's status?

15. How would you title this scene?

16. Why do you think Jesus told this story?

### APPLY

17. How does this story invite you to reorient the way you see God? Why is your view of God so important?

18. What keeps you from seeing the Father in this way?

19. Is there an area of your life in which you need to return to the Father, perhaps where you have

experienced the downward spiral of sin? What keeps you from doing so?

20. How does the father in this story mirror the way you view God? How does he differ?

21. Which behavior of the father is hardest to believe God would do for you?

## What Are the Answers?

1. Why do you hang out with losers?
2. For joy. But I don't just welcome them, I go after them and search for them and carry them home.
3. Many more vivid details, and a second act.
4. The details are there to appeal to our hearts and persuade us of something.
5. It describes the ruin that the son's sin brings into his life.
6. Downward spiral. Sin always gives the best first and then gets progressively more wretched.
7. He's become a slave.
8. Allow the group to choose. I used "Sin and Misery."
9. We see the steps and process of repentance.
10. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?"
11. He sees himself as a slave.
12. Choose your own. I used "Repentance."
13. See "What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?"
14. He restores him to sonship.
15. I used "The Love of the Father."
16. Allow the group to discuss. I think He told it to radically confront their view of the Father and show us that's He's much more gracious that we realize. He did this so that we would go to Him for mercy, confident of His affection for us.
- 17.-21. Allow the group to discuss.

## Memorize

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.

Luke 15:20