

## The “Lost” Parables Luke 15:1-32

Have you ever had the thought, “If people really knew me, they would reject me?” To avoid this risk, we sometimes wear masks we think people will like. We hide who we really are, putting ourselves under constant strain.

We often feel this same way about God. We think we are rejected and condemned rather than welcomed and loved. We do our best to please him but feel that we will never measure up.

What’s your image of God? The fact that He knows all about us, and Him being perfect, holy, just, and sinless, does it ever cause us to view ourselves as condemned and rejected? People often paint an image of God being harsh and punitive. But now let’s look at **Luke 15:5 and 20**. These verses show God in descriptive words of jubilation, compassion, and caring.

In these three parables about lostness—the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son—Jesus sets us straight about God’s attitude toward sinners. The result is a startling picture of God.

The Parable of the Lost Sheep: **Luke 15:1-7**.

The Parable of the Lost Coin: **Luke 15:8-10**.

The Parable of the Lost Son: **Luke 15:11-32**.

### Discussion:

- In these three parables we see that the Pharisees and scribes murmured about the fact that Jesus received and ate with publicans and sinners. In comparison, Jesus says that God receives them with joy, and they are worth seeking and searching for. In keeping with Old Testament Law, the Pharisees and scribes were overly concerned with keeping themselves ceremonially “clean.” These religious leaders were bothered that Jesus associated with those who were rejected and viewed as not clean.
- If we could imagine ourselves as Pharisees listening to these stories that Jesus was telling, some questions and thoughts may come to mind.
  - Why is Jesus spending time caring about the lost? Does he know about what type of people these sinners are?
  - Doesn’t He know the Law?
  - It doesn’t make sense to leave ninety-nine sheep to go looking for one.
  - Why not be content with the remaining nine coins?
- Now listening to these stories as one of the people the Pharisees called a “sinner,” and hearing how the lost were received could bring about thoughts of acceptance and value. It could also bring about feelings of joy and gratitude hearing that heaven rejoices over just one sinner that repents.

- When reading parables, it is not only helpful to put ourselves in the stories as characters, but to also imagine the sights, sounds, smells, and feelings. Imagine smelling a dirty sheep and seeing it covered with bruises and cuts. Imagine hearing the faint cries of distress.
  - What about seeing your son in ragged dirty clothes, and smelling like the “hog pen.”
  - Palestinian women received ten silver coins as a wedding gift. Beside the monetary value, these coins held sentimental value, like that of a wedding ring. How would you feel losing one of the coins?
  
- In these parables the shepherd, the woman, and the father represent God. The lost sheep, coin, and the younger son represent the “sinner”, and the older brother represents the religious leaders.
  
- The intense reactions to the losses and discoveries of the shepherd, woman, and father show the seriousness, sincerity, diligence, care, and the determination of God to seek the lost. God cares for the “one” even though there are millions of people saved.
  
- When we lose or misplace things that are important or valuable to us, we generally put on diligent searches for them. We often try to remember the last time we had or saw the item. We often will retrace our steps, looking in many places to find the lost item.
  
- As we take a closer look at the third parable, the Pharisees and teachers of the law may have felt the younger son was a bit arrogant in asking for his father’s belongings. This was disregarding the authority of his father as the head of the household.
  - They may also have felt that the younger son was getting what he deserved as punishment for his riotous living.
  
- The Pharisees may have expected the father in the last parable not to accept the son back at his previous status, but to treat him as a hired servant or even as a slave. They probably wouldn’t have accepted him back at all.
  
- The details in **verses 20-24** reveal that our Father in heaven is loving, kind, forgiving, and full of compassion. God is willing and capable to fully restore the lost and fallen to a status as children of God. This portrait of God lets us know that we can be fully accepted by the Father—in spite of our sin. It is God’s desire that none should perish, but that all should come to receive eternal life. God is a loving and caring God, full of grace and mercy.
  
- Instead of ending the story at **verse 24**, Jesus goes on to describe the reaction of the older son (**vv. 25-32**). Perhaps Jesus wanted to make the point that the Jewish leaders and even people today can be non-accepting and not willing to forgive. Many may hold our past against us even as God has forgiven us. And just like the older brother, the Jewish leaders may have also compared their behavior to that of the younger brother in order to say they were better.
  - The older brother represented the Pharisees who were angry and resentful that sinners were being welcomed into God’s kingdom.
  
- This parable can motivate us to love those who are lost, because at some point we were lost also. Knowing that heaven rejoices over one sinner that repents should motivate us to share the Word of God with others.

**Other notes:**

- The shepherd and the woman actively looked for the sheep and the coin which could not return by themselves. The father in the third parable watched and waited for his son to return. The younger son was a human being with a will of his own. God gives us opportunity to return, to respond. But He will not force us to come to him.
- The sheep foolishly wandered away (**15:4**); the coin was lost through no fault of its own (**15:8**); and the son left out of selfishness (**15:12-13**). God's great love reaches out and finds sinners no matter why or how they got lost.
- People who repent after leading notoriously sinful lives are often held in suspicion. Even some churches are somewhat unwilling to admit them to membership. We should rejoice like the angels in heaven over one sinner that repents.
- The gifts were more than the father simply providing for the returning son's needs when he gave him a robe, a ring and sandals (**15:22**). The gifts symbolized how he again accepted him as a son. A robe signified honor; a ring, power; and sandals set him apart from the barefooted servants.

How great is God's love for the lost? Turn to **Romans 5:8**.

**Prayer:** *Thank God for his active, tender, compassionate love for you and for all people.*

**Now or Later**

Put yourself in these stories as the lost sheep and lost son. Allow yourself to experience God's response to you. What thoughts and feelings do you have as you take in God's love?

**Homework:** Read about The Good Samaritan. **Luke 10:25-37**