

Luke 15 The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. **2** And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." **3** So He spoke this parable to them, saying:

4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? **5** And when he has found *it*, he lays *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. **6** And when he comes home, he calls together *his* friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' **7** I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

The Parable of the Lost Coin

8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds *it*? **9** And when she has found *it*, she calls *her* friends and neighbors together, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!' **10** Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The Parable of the Lost Son

11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. **12** And the younger of them said to *his* father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls *to me*.' So he divided to them *his* livelihood. **13** And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. **14** But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. **15** Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. **16** And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him *anything*.

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, **19** and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."'

20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. **21** And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. **23** And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; **24** for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

25 "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **27**

And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'

28 "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. **29** So he answered and said to *his* father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. **30** But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'

31 "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. **32** It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.' "

Luke 15 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. 2 And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." 3 So He spoke this parable to them, saying:

4 "What man of you, having a hundred sheep...

The Audience - 2 groups: Pharisees and sinners

Group	Spiritual Condition
Sinners	Far from God but searching
Pharisees	Close to religion but far from God

Christ tells **three parables** in response:

1. Lost Sheep
2. Lost Coin
3. Prodigal Son

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His Departure

This request is shocking in Jewish culture: "**I wish you were dead so I can have the inheritance.**"

The younger son represents:

- Misuse of freedom

- Illusion of independence - wants God's gifts but not God Himself
- St. John Chrysostom notes:
 - "Sin begins when the soul desires God's gifts but not God Himself."

The Father doesn't keep us against our will

- Sometimes he lets us fall in sin to know what it's like to be far from His house

13 And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. **14** But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. **15** Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. **16** And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him *anything*.

The Spiritual Pattern of Sin

The story shows the **anatomy of sin**:

1. Desire independence from God
2. Distance from God
3. Waste the gifts of God
4. Spiritual famine

Luke 15:14 *"There arose a severe famine in that land."*

St. Ambrose says: *"The famine is the emptiness of the soul when it is separated from God."*

I try to fill that famine with:

- Pleasure - feel good, get what I need away from the Source of Goodness Himself
- Money - "I don't need God, I'll be fine"
- Power - my position, status
- Relationship - depending on others for my self-worth
- Distraction - entertainment, quick dopamine of social media

But the hunger of the soul remains.

- We forget: we're created in His image and only He can fill our need.

The Turning Point: Awakening

17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, **19** and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."'

- Sin causes a person to lose himself.
- Repentance begins when a person **becomes honest about their condition.**

Repentance isn't merely an emotion

1. **Self-awareness** - more than remembering the "good ol' days" of holiness, but longing to return
 - a. Sometimes encounter ourselves before encountering Christ
2. **Humility** - accepting to be a servant, giving up sonship just to be back in the Father's house
3. **Action** - must include a dynamic change - behavior, environment, mindset
 - a. metanoia = changing direction

The Father Responds

20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. **21** And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. **23** And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; **24** for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

Distance

- Saw him from a distance: He was waiting and looking for him (image standing in the high balcony)

Ran

- In ancient culture: Patriarchs **never ran**, considered humiliating
- The father does not wait for perfection.

St. Gregory the Theologian:

"God runs faster toward the repentant than the sinner runs toward God."

fell on his neck and kissed him

- Deep embrace
- Kissed his dirty, sweaty neck - accepts us at our worst, fallen condition
 - Came down to earth
 - Met the Samaritan woman at the well of her shame
 - Seeks out the lost sheep
- Didn't get cleaned up first or change his clothes. The Father accepted the son in the current fallen condition.
- He responds to **movement toward Him.**
- FBK: "let's make the Father's heart happy"

The Son's Confession cut short

- The son prepared a speech asking to be a servant. But the father **interrupts him**.
- God does not restore us **as servants** but as **sons**.

The Three Signs of Restoration

Gift	Spiritual symbolism
Robe	Restoration of dignity
Ring	Authority and sonship
Sandals	Freedom (slaves were barefoot)

4. The Elder Son – Encounter Through Humility

25 “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **27** And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’

28 “But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. **29** So he answered and said to *his* father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. **30** But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’

The elder son **represents the Pharisees**.

- This reveals another spiritual danger: **being near the Father but not knowing Him**.

He complains: *“These many years I have served you.”*

- The Greek word used implies **slave-like service**.
- He saw obedience as **burden**, not relationship.
- Relationship was transactional, not sonship

St. John Chrysostom:

“The elder son obeyed without love, and therefore he understood nothing of the father.”

The Hidden Sin of the Religious Heart

The elder son suffers from a danger of long-time believers:

- pride
- judgment
- resentment
- lack of compassion

The father responds with tenderness, even though he was “throwing a fit”

- Came out to meet him - tenderness

31 “And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. **32** It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’ ”

The father invites **both sons**.

The parable ends **without telling us what the elder son does**.

Christ leaves the story unfinished. Why?

Because **the ending depends on us**.

Will we enter the feast? Or stay outside in pride?

5. Why This Gospel is Read During Lent

In the Coptic tradition this reading prepares the soul for **deep repentance**.

Lent is the journey:

Stage	Spiritual Meaning
Departure	Sin
Famine	Emptiness of the world
Awakening	Self-examination
Return	Repentance
Embrace	Forgiveness

No matter how far we go, the way back is always open.

St. Isaac the Syrian writes:

“There is no sin that can conquer the mercy of God except the sin that refuses to return.”

7. Practical Spiritual Application

1. Honest self-examination
 - a. Am I filled or do I long for something more? What do I miss?
 - b. How far have I strayed from the Father's house?
2. Return without delay
 - a. Decide to go back to the Father
 - b. Knowing He will accept me in my filth, smell, sin.
3. Reject spiritual pride of the older son
 - a. Compare with others - we each have a unique relationship with our Father
 - b. Love/relationship > service or sacrifice
4. Most important: relationship with the Father
 - a. No matter what part of your prodigal journey you're on

The deeper question is NOT "Which son are we?" but

Do we truly know the Father?