

## **Series – Jesus for My Family**

### **#3 Jesus Came to Seek and Save the Lost**

#### **Luke 15:11-32**

**Intro:** Did you know that the US has the highest number of missing persons globally? Every hour roughly 100 Americans, both adults and children, are reported missing (that's about 2,400 a day, almost 900,000 a year).

In the spiritual realm, when you study the three years of Jesus' life as recorded in the gospels you find that His life revolved around missing persons. Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He came sounding God's Amber Alert. Every individual far from God is a missing person, and Jesus spent His three years of ministry doing two simple things: ***Finding missing persons & Making committed disciples***.

**STORY:** A little boy was lost inside a busy shopping mall. He was standing in the aisle of a department store just crying and crying, "I want my mommy...I want my mommy." People who passed by felt sorry for him and many of them gave him nickels and dimes and quarters and treats to try to cheer him up.

Finally, a salesperson from the store walked up to the distraught little boy and said, "I know where your mommy is."

The little boy looked up and said, "So do I....just keep quiet, I got a good thing going here!"

It's serious to be lost. What's even worse than being lost is having no one looking for you, but don't worry Jesus came to seek and save the lost.

In Luke chapter 15, Jesus talks about a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son.

The parable of the lost sheep was easily understood by Jesus' audience because Galilee was largely a rural farming community. Jesus spoke about a shepherd who had one hundred sheep in his care. One of the sheep had wandered off and got lost, so the shepherd left the 99 remaining ones alone and went off to look for it. When he found the lost sheep, he was so delighted he called for a celebration.

Jesus immediately gave the central application of the parable, saying, ***"I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."***

Jesus told a second parable with a similar meaning about a woman who had ten silver coins but lost one of them. Jesus pointed out that the woman lit a lamp and swept through the entire house until the coin was found. When she eventually found the coin, she called her friends and neighbors together and celebrated. Then Jesus said, ***"In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents"*** (Luke 15:10).

In this parable, Jesus is almost certainly referring to this woman's bridal headdress. If a girl lost one of the coins from her headdress, no doubt she would be very concerned until she found it.

**The overwhelming message of these two parables is that Jesus goes all out looking for the lost, because a lost sheep and a lost coin symbolize those who are helpless.** Being found is not something they can arrange for themselves.

In the third parable, Jesus made it clear that the lost son made his own decision. He went to the father, asked for an inheritance, went and squandered everything. He did not think, Dad, give me the money so I can end up in a pig pen. He simply thought a life without the father would be better than a life with the father.

**As we continue our sermon series, "Jesus for My Family," the title of today's sermon is, "Jesus came to Seek and Save the Lost."**

Everyone hearing this message likely has a loved one that is lost, a spouse, child, grandchild, brother or sister, maybe a parent; or you know someone who has a family member that is lost in the terms of not being born again.

Since the beginning of recorded history, families have dealt with prodigals. Adam and Eve had Cain, who killed his brother. Judas Iscariot's parents must have grieved for him. How would you like to be the parents of the man who betrayed Christ? Even John the Baptist might have seemed like a prodigal to strict Jewish parents. While his father served as a priest in the synagogue, John lived in the

desert, ate grasshoppers, and wore clothes made from camel's hair. The Old Testament books of Kings and Chronicles are filled with examples of bad kings who had good kids and good kings who had bad kids.

Mothers and fathers throughout history have stood in courtrooms, listening to a judge hand down a sentence that tore their hearts. Or they've listened to the policeman explain how their son/daughter were involved in criminal activity or a tragic accident. It happens in the best of homes. We are not alone in our pain.

All we must do is read the news headlines to know the words of scripture are true: that people in the last days will be ***"abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, and unholy."***

The "Parable of the Prodigal Son" is one of the most familiar of Jesus' parables. It is found in Luke 15:11–32. Since most of you are familiar with the story of the Prodigal Son, I thought I would read a different version - called the "Prodigal Son in the Key of F."

Feeling footloose and frisky, a feather-brained fellow forced his father to fork over his farthings. Fast he flew to foreign fields and frittered his family's fortune.

Fleeced by his fellows in folly, facing famine, and feeling faintly fuzzy, he found himself a feed-flinger in a filthy foreign farmyard. Feeling frail and fairly famished, he filled his frame with foraged food from the fodder fragments.

"Fooey," he figured, "my father's flunkies fare far fancier," the frazzled fugitive fumed feverishly, facing the facts. Finally, frustrated from failure and filled with foreboding, he fled.

Faraway, the father focused on the fretful familiar form in the field and flew to him and fondly flung his forearms around the fatigued fugitive. Falling at his father's feet, the fugitive floundered forlornly, "Father, I have flunked and fruitlessly forfeited family favor."

The faithful Father, forbidding and forestalling further flinching, frantically flagged the flunkies to fetch forth the finest fatling and fix a feast.

Faithfully, the father's first-born was in a fertile field fixing fences while father and fugitive were feeling festive. Frowning and finding fault, he found father and fumed, "He frittered family funds, and you fix a feast for the fugitive?"

Frankly, the father felt the frigid first-born's frugality of forgiveness was formidable and frightful. But the father's former faithful fortitude and fearless forbearance to forgive both fugitive and first-born flourished unfurl the flags and finery, let fun and frolic freely flow. Former failure is forgotten; folly is forsaken.

## PRAY

Prodigal means "wasteful...reckless...extravagant," I have preached this story and called it the "Parable of the Prodigal Father." Because you could say that the father wasted His love on a wayward son.

I have also preached this parable focused on the elder son, because the wayward son, who left home, is **not** the prodigal Jesus highlights. The story was addressed to the Pharisees and scribes who had the same spirit as the elder brother.

Henri Nouwen says: "The parable might well be called ***"The Parable of the Lost Sons (plural)."*** Not only did the younger son, who left home to look for freedom and happiness in a distant country, get lost, but the one who stayed home was lost in his own backyard.

Whether your prodigal is in a far country or living in your house, Jesus is a friend of sinners and is out to seek and save the lost.

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them. Did you ever notice that. He divided his property between **THEM**. That means that the older son got his inheritance too, and it was a double portion.

**I want to use this story to show you how much Jesus loves the lost.**

**Notice three Phases of the relationship between the Prodigal and his Father.**

## I. REBELLION

Notice this young man came to the point in his life when he said I will no longer be

under the constraint of my father. I will no longer accept his advice. I will do what I want to do. And that is an expression of rebellion.

The Webster's Dictionary defines rebellion as: **opposition to the one in authority; defiance of or resistance to established leadership**

1 Samuel 15:23 (KJV) For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft... This verse refers to when King Saul was ordered to destroy the Amalekites and everything they had: but he spared Agag, the king, and kept the best of the livestock (1 Sam. 15:1-9).

Saul proposed that his intention was to sacrifice the animals to the Lord, but there is no excuse for disobedience. In Samuel's rebuke—and in Saul's response—we see that rebellion arises when the fear of man is greater than the fear of the Lord.

Rebellion says I want things my way. I do not want to do things the way my parents have taught me, or the church. I want to live my own life, and I want to have my own identity and do my own thing. Just so you know, the bible says we all like sheep have gone astray. We were all lost and rebellious at one time.

Notice how dad handled the request and departure. He graciously responded to his son's request. No lecture. No prophetic warning of storm clouds of failure.

One of my sayings over the last 25 years when people leave our church for whatever reason is "leave a light on." There is a connection between how you release your child and how they return.

This young man came to his father, and he demanded his freedom. He demanded his part of the estate. Just so you know, to ask for your inheritance is about the same as saying, "Dad, I wish you were dead."

Now this father had taught his son, he had given him godly principles to build his life, this father had demonstrated love and kindness to his hired hands, but his son came to a point when he no longer be under to be under his father's control.

**There are three things that this father did that you can do.**

**First, he let him go.** He recognized the fact that the son was now of legal age and

could now make his own choices. And he recognized the fact that the son was going to express rebellion against him, and he simply let him go.

You never let them go in the sense of stopping to pray for them, or loving them, but there comes a time when you cut the apron strings.

Don't you think this father knew this young man was going to live a dangerous life, that he was going to squander his wealth? And yet he as a father came to the point when he simply said I have no other choice but to let him go. Because when a child comes to that point in their life when they are determined to be on their own the tighter you hold on, the more they rebel against it.

**Secondly, he let him make his own mistakes.** He took everything his father had graciously given him and blew it. Young people are usually not wise with money. This young man was not wise. You can't always protect your child from hurt or from making foolish mistakes. There are some lessons you and I cannot teach our children because they will not let us, they must learn the hard way.

**Third, he let him reap the consequences of his own choices.** He didn't jump in and rescue the child when he had blown it all. He loves his child, but the Bible doesn't say anything about the father wiring money or sending him food.

When you are a Jew and you take a job feeding hogs, that is as low as you can go. Without a doubt, the hardest part of loving and praying for our prodigals is realizing how far they might have to sink to. But a broken heart opens them to the love of Jesus who is full grace and truth.

If we bail out our kids and interfere with the natural consequences that sin brings, if they don't have to suffer for their mistakes and learn from them, then they will never benefit from the mistakes they make.

The first stage was rebellion. The second stage is...

## **II. REEVALUATION and REPENTENCE**

Look at verse 17, this is talking about the young man, "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and

**here I am starving to death! 18I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men."**

Here is a young man who begins to wise up. Here is someone who took for granted all the blessings he had at home, all the privileges he had to be the son of a respected father and to be part of a home and a family. His friends are all gone. He is out in the hog pen, in the stink and in the sludge. And he begins to evaluate, and he says, even the people who work for my father have it better than I do. So, he said I am going to return to my father and earn back his favor.

And after reevaluation there comes repentance. Notice he said I am going to return to my father. And I am going to say, ***"father I have sinned. Make me like one of your hired men."*** **You know there is a change in his heart when he changed from saying father GIVE ME to saying father MAKE ME.**

When you come to a point in your life that you recognize where rebellion has led you; the loss of your family, loss of your position, loss of your character, the loss of your future, and you come to the point when you no longer say give me but you say God make me what you want me to be, there's been a change of heart.

**What do you do while you are waiting for loved ones to come to their senses?**

***First, you never stop praying.*** You pray because the devil is your adversary. That is why the Bible says that you put on the whole armor of God. And after you put on the whole armor of God, Paul says you pray always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit. Jesus said we ought always to pray and not faint.

When your prodigal will not listen to you and when you are powerless to do anything about their self-destructive behavior, God is not powerless. God can do what you and I cannot do.

***Not only should we pray for them but,***

***Second, commit them to God.***

To commit them to God means that you go on with your life. You go on with your

Christian service. Regardless of what people say, regardless of gossip, you as a believer in Jesus Christ stand on the Word of God and continue to be who God wants you to be and at the same time, trust your child to God. **Things might be out of your control, but they are not out of God's control.**

**Thirdly, wait with expectation.** That's the hard part. This father was looking for his son to return every day. He believed the truth of Proverbs 22:6, ***“Train up a child in the way he should go, and even when he is old he will not depart from it.”*** (ASV)

Don't get the attitude that you've waited on God long enough. Taking matters into your own hands is a recipe for disaster, just ask Abraham and Sarah. There is always a waiting period. Do not short circuit God's timing.

### **III. THE RETURN**

Then notice stage three in verse 20, THE RETURN; **"So he got up and went to his father. "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. 21" The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22" But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So, they began to celebrate."**

**The father, because of his experience, knows two things.**

1. He knows that the son, because of his maturity level and the character with which he left home, is bound to fail. He knows that, if the son comes home, it will probably not be as a successful businessman, but more likely worn down with a wounded and broken spirit.
2. The second thing the father knows is that the village will not treat him well. Since his departure, all the townspeople have told him openly and repeatedly that he should not have granted the inheritance in the first place, that this son is a scoundrel and deserves nothing short of death. He



knows that the son, to get home, will have to endure the scorn of the crowd with every step he takes through the village.

The father does 5 things that would be considered outrageous to Jesus' audience.

**1. The first thing the father does is HE RUNS.**

When the word comes to him that his son has been seen on the outskirts of the village, the father runs to him. Instead of letting his son endure the gauntlet of scorn and shame alone, the father runs to him.

It's an outrageous thing he does, because an Oriental nobleman with flowing robes never runs anywhere. He lifts his robe, and runs down the road, through the village, in front of all the people. He humiliates himself.

And Jesus explains why. He says, ***"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him..."*** - Luke 15:20. That's how the father feels about his lost children. He has compassion.

Imagine this from the son's perspective. He knows that the town hates him. He knows there is no way he can get to the father without people seeing him. And sure enough, at first sighting on the outskirts of the village, word starts spreading. People are going to gather. He's about to endure the worst moments of his life. He expects to see jeers and angry faces. But to his utter amazement, rather than experiencing the ruthless hostility he deserves for what he's done, he finds a visible demonstration of his father's love.

*First, the father runs.*

**2. The second thing the father does is HE KISSES HIS SON.** The text says, he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. – Luke 15:20

Picture yourself in this scene. You have wronged God, and you know it. You know you must admit all your wrongdoing and repent and really mean it. So, you approach Him. And you've got your whole speech planned. Only He doesn't even let you begin. The minute you approach Him, He embraces you.

Now, let's back up for a minute and remember what the son had planned to do

when he first saw his father. In Luke 15:19, he planned to say, **“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of our hired men.”**

His plan was to admit his guilt and ask to become a servant. Now, look at his actual speech. He says, **“Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be your son.”** – Luke 15:21

What’s missing? - “His request to become a servant.”

Why is it missing? - “Because he’s overwhelmed by the father’s love.”

His plan was to earn his way back into his father’s favor. We don’t have to earn our salvation. We are saved by grace through faith. It is a GIFT of God.

God’s grace is described with four characteristics in Psalm 103:8-12.

Vs. 8 says, “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love.”

Verse 9 it says, “He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever.”

**STORY:** A guy complained to his buddy that whenever he argued with his wife, she got historical. His friend said, “You mean hysterical.” He said, “No, historical. She brings up the past and reminds me of every time I’ve failed her in the past.”

Psalm 130:3 tells us that if God kept a detailed record of our sins, none of us would ever be able to stand before him.

Verse 10 says, “He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”

Verses 11 and 12 say, “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west so far has he removed our transgressions from us.” Do you know how far that is - it can’t even be measured.

**3. The third thing the father does is DRESS HIM IN THE BEST ROBE.** Who do you

think owned the best robe in the family? The father.

**4. The fourth thing the father does is PUT A RING ON HIS FINGER AND SANDALS ON HIS FEET." – Luke 15:22**

The ring is a signet ring that the father would use to sign all documents, which means the son is a trusted, empowered member of the family. The sandals are a sign that he is a free man, not a servant.

**5. Finally, the father CALLS FOR A FEAST.**

He says, "Bring the fatted calf and kill it." – Luke 15:23

**Story...**A Sunday school teacher is telling this parable to the kids in her class, and she asks them the question: "There was one for whom the return of the prodigal brought no rejoicing, no laughter, only resentment and bitterness. Who was it?" One of the kids says, "The fattened calf."

He doesn't call for a fatted goat or sheep or chicken wings, but the fatted calf. Why? Because a calf could feed the whole village.

Do you see what the father is doing? He's inviting the whole village to share his joy. He doesn't want the son only to be reconciled to himself; he wants him to be reconciled to the whole community.

**Rebellion that results in restoration needs celebration.**

God has a love that no matter how far we've gone astray, and no matter how much we fail Him, He will never stop looking for us. And when a person comes to a place in their life and they recognize they are wrong, have repented of their sin, and want to come back and make it right, that is not the time to heap on guilt and condemnation. That is not the time to reject them. It's time to accept them and receive them and to love them.

**Forgive your prodigal.** This is your child, an individual who is struggling to find his

or her way in the world. He has doubts about his faith, even though he knows at the gut level of his soul that Jesus is the only way. She wonders how God can love her when he seems so distant. As we forgive, we free them to experience God's love, His grace, and His mercy.

**Forgive others.** Sometimes Christians can be the cruelest people on earth, because they're so judgmental. Their children may seem perfect, so they judge others. Forgive their ignorance and remember Jesus' words on the cross, ***"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"*** (Luke 23:34).

Jesus is communicating to every person who ever wanted to take a step towards God, how significant we are to Him, and how God feels about us. He doesn't just wait for us; He runs to us. He doesn't let us bear the shame of living our lives as if we don't matter. He walks through life with us no matter how much we have messed up. He won't let us bear the shame alone. He embraces us. He puts His best robe on us, the robe of Christ's righteousness. He puts His ring on our finger, sandals on our feet; we're joint heirs with Jesus, we are seated in heavenly places with him; we have power and authority.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, including the lost in your own family. You may be here today, and you have lost loved ones. I hope you're encouraged to know that your kids are God's kids too. He loves them more than we do. Jesus is still seeking the lost, but each person must make the decision to come home.

You may be here as a child of God, and it may be that you have squandered opportunities. It may be that you have gone out in the world and gone against what our heavenly Father has taught you in the Word of God.

It may be that you broke the heart of God, but today, the heavenly Father is watching for you to come back to Him. He is waiting to put His arms around you. He wants you to know that if you come there will not be condemnation, but forgiveness. He will not put you on a guilt trip, but He will receive you as a son/daughter and He will love you with unconditional love. **He will make the rest of your life the best of your life.**