

Sermon: How to Be Found

Text: Luke 15:11-32

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Introduction: This parable has been given so many different titles down through the years. Each title reflects a bias as to how the story will be used and interpreted. My sermon title is no exception: *How to Be Found*. Most of us grew up knowing this third parable in Luke's 15th chapter as the story of *The Prodigal Son*. Timothy Keller has called it "The Prodigal God" which is also very appropriate when you understand that "prodigal" means "recklessly extravagant" or the idea of having spent everything. There are other approaches: "Parable of the Loving Father" (Craddock), "Parable of the Waiting Father" (Thielicke) and "Parable of the Perfect Father" (Cargill). You get the idea.

The 15th chapter of Luke carries in it stories of a lost sheep, a lost coin, and finally a lost son (in reality, two lost sons). The familiar titles tend to focus on the idea of being lost where the more positive view would be about the idea of being found. And that will be our approach.

To have some balance in our discussion, let's look at How One Can Be Lost, and then a solution of How One Can Be Found with some appropriate lessons to be learned.

I. How One Can Be Lost (vv. 11-16)

Luke 15:11-16 (NIV) ¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

One Can Be Lost by

A. Failure to submit to proper authority

A sure sign of trouble in any family is a rebellious heart as it relates to authority.

Immaturity is when you only care about yourself. It is when one does not show any responsibility for others or any respect toward others.

Some time around two years old a person thinks he is the center of the universe. Ten years later there is the illusion that he knows everything and certainly parents don't get it! In another ten years, it is discovered this assumption may not be true. At about age 30, one is willing to admit that outloud to their parents. Usually this happens just in time as they are now thinking of having children.

The prodigal son was probably quite young. Usually between 18-20 years old a Jewish man was married (Jeremias).

In our story, this is really a picture of the Fall where Adam wanted to "be like God." He thought he knew better than God.

What has happened here is quite extraordinary. Asking for one's inheritance before the death of the father was unheard of! "Kenneth Bailey goes so far as to interpret the son's request as equivalent to a wish that his father were dead, and the father's response as an almost inconceivable expression of patience and love."

- Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, p. 176

Another way to become lost is to:

B. Follow sinful appetites

The idea of casting off all restraints and rules is not freedom, but a new form of slavery. Augustine said, "the far country is forgetfulness of God."

**Paul knew the dangers of misunderstanding "freedom." [Galatians 5:13 \(NIV\)](#)
¹³You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.**

Wasteful, self-centered living always ends at the same place: alone. It is when the money runs out and the parties stop that you see whom you really have as friends. This young man had squandered his inheritance and now found himself in the unenviable position of having to work to eat. Looking back, even selfishly, he must have wondered if this had been a smart move. He actually had to work for a Gentile and do what no self-respecting Jew would even consider doing: feeding pigs. Quite a change in lifestyle and diet had occurred.

Very common to Luke, it is interesting that both extremes of the prodigal's situation are depicted by an eating imagery. It says early in our story that no one gave him anything to eat. What we see is pods off trees in one scene and a feast and party in the other. This young man had, what we call, "hit rock bottom." He was either going to die or find a way back to his father's house.

It is what we can call:

II. How One Can Be Found (vv. 17-24)

Luke 15:17-24 (NIV) ¹⁷"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.' ²⁰So 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. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

To be found you need to:

A. Come to your senses (repent)

There is this wrong concept of God, the Father, out there. It is that the Father loves and forgives *unconditionally*. That is only half-true. God does love us without question or condition, but one must repent to receive forgiveness, to be made whole, and to come home.

This reminds me of: **II Timothy 2:11-13 (NIV)** ¹¹Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; ¹² if we endure, we will also reign with him. If we disown him, he will also disown us; ¹³ if we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.

The prodigal son had attached, literally glued, himself to this foreign farmer employer. To go home the son would need to change his mind about what he valued and start behaving out of love toward his father.

In a recent bible study we read:

Isaiah 30:1 (NIV) ¹“Woe to the obstinate children,” declares the LORD, “to those who carry out plans that are not mine, forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin;

The phrase “obstinate children” is literally “rebellious sons.” The word idea of “alliance” was translated “blanket” in **Isaiah 28:20** and means “a protective covering”- Motyer, p. 218

Maybe like a security blanket?

To be found you need to:

B. Come home (be under the Father’s authority)

The prodigal had tried to be his own authority. He had even put himself under the authority of others. But at the end of the day, it was only his father who truly loved him. It was only his father whose authority was caring and protective.

By coming home the prodigal was saying not only had he made a mistake, but was now willing to obey the father’s will for him.

As parents, we have all heard our children say: “what do you think I am your slave?” What is somewhat ironic here is that the younger son who no longer could even be financially responsible for his father’s care was willing to come back into the family by taking on the position of a slave. He finally understood what it meant to be a son.

Philippians 2:3-7ab (NIV) ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. ⁴Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature-God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant... theologically, also a son.

Once home you need to:

C. Come understanding your relationship (child)

The father makes it clear the son is forgiven and completely restored. Everyone is invited to experience the joy of restoration firsthand (**15:5-7; 15:9-10**). And this is certainly a more important event than finding a sheep or a coin.

The purpose of family is to provide an environment in which everyone is accepted. The purpose of the church is to provide an environment in which everyone can be accepted. The eternal purpose of God is to provide a means by which we can be accepted.

The problem of acceptance was addressed in the opening verses of this 15th chapter: **Luke 15:1-2 (NIV)** ¹Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. ²But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

The elder brother always viewed his relationship to his father as that of a slave; there was no joy in his service. The younger son was willing to do anything and accept even the status of a slave, if it meant being back home with the father. Do you serve out of obligation or love? It will always depend on your relationship.

What can we learn from this? Let's see:

III. How One Can Be Taught (vv. 25-32)

Luke 15:25-32 (NIV) ²⁵“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷“Your brother has come,” he replied, “and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.” ²⁸“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ³¹“My son,” the father said, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.””

We can be taught:

A. By seeing the Father's response to sinners

Some, like the older son, see how God receives back sinners and they scream: unfair! What is not always recognized is that we are all sinners. We have all disappointed our father. No one is better than any other family member.

There are always those who cannot celebrate the good fortune of others.

Abundant, overflowing grace is always offensive. Some things go against what seems fair. There are those people who get paid the same for much less work. There is rain that falls on the righteous and the unrighteous.

“Everyone applauds forgiving love. However, the fact remains that it is also a constant danger of becoming a cheap blessing, erosive to all ethical seriousness.”
- Craddock, *Luke*, p. 116

Grace is never earned. It cannot be purchased. The father runs to his younger son (quite undignified) and completely accepts him back. Coming home, being found, means that the son has nothing to offer, only ask for. He cannot take care of his father. The father will take care of him. “Faith is trusting in the presence and care of God, that he is the rewarder of those who seek him.” - Bock, *Luke*, p. 416

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV) ⁶And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

One Can Be Taught

B. By appreciating the Father’s love

The father’s love is not arbitrary or selective, but for everyone. The father tried to tell the older son that he loved them both . He would not choose between them.

And where else would a wise person choose to be, but with the father. The psalmist understood:

Psalms 84:10 (NIV) ¹⁰ Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere; I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked.

An appreciation of God’s love for us needs to be instructive.

1. It is possible to serve faithfully, but not be in fellowship with the Father.
2. Service should always be out of love for the Father.
3. A man must have a proper relationship with his brother before his Father.
4. It is possible to be heir to everything the Father has and have no joy.
5. If you do not share the burden of the Father’s heart for the lost, you will never share in the joy of restoration.

God's grace and love are utterly amazing. As Henri Nouwen points out, "God rejoices. Not because the problems of the world have been solved, not because all human pain and suffering have come to an end, nor because thousands of people have been converted and are now praising him for his goodness . No, God rejoices because *one* of His children who was lost has been found."

Conclusion: All three parables in **Luke 15** have common themes of lostness, being found, and rejoicing over that which was lost being found. Yet, you will notice in our parable there is no one searching for the lost son. It is the responsibility of the son to respond to a Father's love. God still waits today for those who are lost and away to return home. He still hopes for those who have been there all along to also take an interest in the lost and to be able to rejoice when other sinners are found and restored.

I know sometimes I feel like Henri Nouwen who wrote: "I am still not free enough to let myself be held completely in the safe embrace of the Father. In many ways I am still moving toward the center. I am still like the prodigal: traveling, preparing speeches, anticipating how it will be when I finally reach my Father's house. But I am, indeed, on my way home. I have left the distant country and come to feel the nearness of love." - *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, p. 15