



HG232: Parables And Possessions
The Parable Of The Lost Son

Luke 15:11-32

Home Group Study Notes

28 November 2021 - Revd Christine Williams



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

How might the possibility of another lockdown affect
your Christmas celebrations - or will it?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs
of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using
Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



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Home Group Sermon Notes

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The Bible is a wonderful book. 66 books written in many different genres; history, poetry, letters, prophecy, story. Yet there is only really one story. It is the story of God's love for the people whom he created, their rejection of him and their redemption. It is a story told in many ways but perhaps the simplest and most easily understood form is the story that we are looking at today.

Our story today is always thought of as the story of the Prodigal son and in our church Bibles the heading is the 'Lost Son', but he is only a little part of the story. (The headings were not in the original script they are a later addition.)

The younger son wanted to get away from home. We don't have any details but he had an older brother who would inherit the lion's share of the farm after their fathers' death. Maybe the young brother couldn't get on with his big brother, maybe he was just bored and wanted to see the bright lights. But whatever the reason, he wanted to get away. What he said to his father was a shocking thing to say in any culture of the world. Effectively he was saying, 'I can't wait for you to die. Can I have my inheritance now?' Surprisingly his father let him go. The father did not keep his son tied to him. He let him choose to make a mistake – and it was a really big mistake.

He went off and did just what he wanted to do. There are no details. Fill in the gaps for yourselves. What would you do with a lot of money and a determination to have a lot of fun? But when the crunch came and there was a famine he found himself a long way from home, penniless and without any friends. He hit rock bottom - No money, no friends and no future (because he had spent it all). It was then that his thoughts turned to home. It is when people hit rock bottom that so often they think about home either their physical earthly home, their parents and old friends, or else their spiritual home with Father God.

This young man could imagine his home-coming. Quite likely all his family and especially his father would be angry with him. He could expect a lot of ‘I told you so’, ‘you’re a worthless scumbag’, or ‘look what a mess you have made of your life!’ He knew it was true. They would certainly be disappointed in him. But maybe they would take him back as a servant, a farm worker who could work hard to earn his food and have a roof over his head.

He was deeply sorry for what he had done. He had said a terrible thing to his father. He had messed up his life. He wished he could have his time all over again. He rehearsed what he would say to his father. He would tell him how sorry he was. He would tell him how he had sinned by turning away from his fathers’ love and that he had no rights now to be considered to be his son, but would his father be kind enough to let him work on the farm for his keep. He made the journey home a very different person to the one who had left.

His homecoming was not what he had expected at all. He expected anger. He expected rejection. He expected punishment. But what he found was a father who was waiting for him; who was excited and jubilant because his son was back and who wanted to throw a party for him. His new relationship was so different from his old relationship with his father. He realised the power of his father’s love. His father said, ‘my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found’.

So although we always call it the parable of the Prodigal Son it is better described as the story of the Lost Son. It ties in with the other two lost things in the chapter, the lost sheep and the lost coin. Jesus was telling all 3 parables in answer to the criticism by the Pharisees and teachers of the law that he was mixing with undesirables. They said or thought that if he was a good Jew, if he was supposed to be a rabbi, if he was claiming to be the Messiah then surely, he must know that he should be keeping away from sinners and keep himself holy. These wicked people would contaminate him. Sinners were not loved by God. They had failed. They were in a pit they had dug for themselves. But Jesus told these stories to show that the lost were exactly the people whom he came to find. Far from them contaminating him by their sin, he was infecting them with his goodness and with his holiness. They were discovering the forgiveness of God through him. In the parable the younger son was a representative of the tax collectors and sinners who had flocked around Jesus because they found in him hope of redemption.

But of course, the older son represented the Pharisees and teachers. From what the older son said to his father we can see that the reality was that he did not have a good relationship with his father. He was not 'being good' out of love for his father. 'All these years I have slaved for you and never disobeyed your orders'. He had worked hard and done what his father asked of him, but he had not enjoyed it because it felt like slavery. He had not loved his father or even noticed how his father was loving him. Trying to keep the law in all its detail was a chore. The pharisees worked really hard to please God but they did not have a relationship with him. They saw it as a business deal. 'I will work hard and do exactly what is asked of me and keep the rules. I expect some kind of reward for all my hard work and self-control. I have earned status here on earth and I hope one day to be rewarded with status in heaven'. It's all about self-interest. The older brother was only thinking about himself. The story ended with the father pleading with the older brother to come in and join the party to welcome the young brother home. We are not told if he ever did. It is hard for people to change when they have a mindset that says that they have to deserve to be children of God; that it has to be earned. Their relationship with God becomes a kind of slavery. Whereas when we find grace and realise that God accepts us as we are and loves us anyway, we are free. Our life changes not because we are working to be good but because his Holy Spirit works in us to guide us to the right paths.

A few Pharisees found grace. We know that Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and the Apostle Paul were all Pharisees who discovered the grace of God and found faith in Jesus. But most Pharisees and teachers of the law wanted Jesus removed from the scene. They actually wanted him dead. Jesus came to rescue Pharisees as well as tax collectors and prostitutes; in fact he came to save everybody, whoever we are. Both sons needed a new heart. Both sons were far away from their father. Both sons were lost. Perhaps the parable should be called The Parable of the Two Lost Sons.

Of course, the star of the story is the father. He loved both of his sons. They did not love him as he wanted them to. Nor did they love each other. They were both far away but in very different faraway places. There are two wrong ways to look for happiness: do what you like as the younger son did, and try to earn merit points by sheer hard work as the older son did. The father yearned for them as they left him, physically and spiritually. He wanted both of them to find a way back to him. It cost him to let his young one go. It cost him again to forgive and receive him back into the family. What is a love relationship if there is no freedom to choose? Love cannot be forced. He waited for the young son to come home.

Every day he thought of him and kept looking along the road. It says, ‘while the son 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.’ He was waiting for the day when his son would come home.

In the story the father represents God. God is our loving father who longs for us to come to him, to turn away from everything that distracts us, to choose to come back to him, and start on that journey home. And when we do, he comes running to meet us with his arms outstretched. The father cut off the speech that the young son wanted to say about being a servant because he didn’t deserve to be his son any more. He cleaned him up, got new clothes for him and threw a party. God throws a party for each one of us as we enter his kingdom. Perhaps the best title for this parable would be ‘The Parable of the Loving Father’ because it is a story about God’s mercy and grace. Tim Keller called his little book about this parable ‘The Prodigal God’. – ‘Prodigal’ meaning recklessly extravagant. God is recklessly extravagant towards us when we turn back to him. As we make our way home to him, ready to say how sorry we are and admit our shortcomings he comes running to meet us in his son, Jesus.

I don’t know where you stand with God at the moment. But if you are wanting to find a way back home, just do it. Tell God you want to come back to him. Admit where things went wrong. God wants to throw a party for you too. If you are making that decision then please tell me or someone who can pray for you.

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Emmanuel Church Text for 2021

*“We have this hope as an anchor for the soul,
firm and secure.”*

Hebrews 6:19



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. If the church is like a family, why might someone want to leave it?

2. Can you identify with the younger son? Are you still in a far country? Are you home again?

Do you have any tendencies to be like the older brother? In what way was the older brother sinful?

3. In the parables of the lost coin and lost sheep someone went to look for them. Who should have gone to look for the lost son but didn't?

4. The father in the story forgave his son, and Jesus taught us to say, 'Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us'. Our aim is to become more like Jesus. How well do we forgive and welcome home those who have wronged us?

5. Do you have a story about your return to the father that you can share with the group?

What would be a good way to celebrate when someone becomes a Christian?

6. What, out of all that we have studied during this series on *Parables and Possessions* really sticks in your mind?

What has strengthened your faith the most?

What has challenged your faith the most?

What has inspired your faith the most?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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