



## HG261: Sharing Our Faith Like Jesus *The Lost Son*

Luke 15:11-32

Home Group Study Notes

9 July 2023 - Paulin Woolnough



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*

Have you ever lost anything that you couldn't settle until you found 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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### **Introduction**

Although this parable is known as the Prodigal Son or the Lost Son it is the father who is the hero of the story not the son, it tells us more about a father's love than a son's sin. It follows on from 2 other parables, the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin neither of which could fend or think for themselves, but here, Jesus refers to the person who *knows* what he is doing, someone who could reason and think and who finally came to his senses, Luke 15:17, "*he came to himself.*" What Jesus wants to point out to us here is the tenderness and the forgiveness of God, he doesn't moralise over what we've done, he doesn't lecture us or make us feel guilty, we do that ourselves. He is gentle and tender and sees us coming because he's been watching and waiting with arms outstretched saying, "*you may wander... you may leave me but I will never ever let you go. Come on home.*"

### **A Right image of the Father**

It is so important to have a true and accurate image of God, he is not like us and we often project onto God the attitudes and feelings we have towards ourselves and those we have of others. As Blaise Pascal wrote, "*God made man in his own image and man returned the compliment.*" Never assume that God feels about you the way you feel about yourself or the way you feel about others unless of course you love yourself and others intensely, compassionately, without condition and freely. Always look to Jesus for your image of God because Jesus came down in human form and revealed to us what God is like. God does not condone or sanction evil, he wants us to deal with our sin and turn from it but he does not withhold his love from us when he finds sin in us. God's sorrow lies in the image we have of him, his heartache comes about over our self absorption and self sufficiency, of our suspicion and often fear of him and these things all create distance from him.

Richard Foster wrote "*Today the heart of God is an open wound in love. He aches over our distance and preoccupation. He mourns that we do not draw near to him. He grieves that we have forgotten him. He weeps over our obsession with muchness and manyness. He longs for our presence.*"

### **The Younger Son**

It wasn't so unusual for a father to distribute his estate before he died if he wanted to retire from the day to day management of his affairs but there was a certain callousness and reason behind his son's request. An inheritance is something that one should wait for and here the young man is more or less saying "*give it to me now, I'll get it anyway when you are dead.*" There was no love behind the request. As a son living in his father's home this young man had everything he needed, but he is ungrateful, impatient and eager to go off and explore the world, he wants his share of his father's estate and he wants it now! So the father released the young man's inheritance and divided his property between him and the elder brother and he let his son go. The younger son got what he wanted and set off to spend his money on wild living, and the elder son tells us what that looks like in v 30, "*this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes.*"

## **Sin destroys our lives**

The young man makes himself fatherless, homeless and eventually penniless due to his lack of self control, his new friends desert him and he ends up rooting about in the pig pen among animals the Jew would regard as unclean. He slides deeper and deeper into squalor and despair. Jesus, however says something that gives an excuse regarding sin, he says in v. 17, *“When he came to himself.”* Jesus is saying the boy wasn’t being truly himself, he was acting out of character because Jesus believed that as long as the young man was away from God he would never truly be himself.

## **The need to repent**

By coming to his senses the younger son knew that he had changes to make in his life. He recognised that he had been out of control indulging in sin and rebellion and the life he had thought was going to be wonderful had turned into a nightmare but thankfully he came to his senses. He badly regretted leaving the good life he had had with his father, he remembered just how good a man his father was not just to him but to his workers who had more to eat than he had at present and he greatly regretted his actions. He wanted to return to his father and confess and repent without condition. He felt worthless and would make no excuses for his poor behaviour. He never expected his father would restore him and he was willing to live as a hired servant in his father’s house if only his father would take him back. There were no conditions to his repentance.

True repentance leaves behind the rebellion and sin and turns again to God and here we see it does not set its gaze on much, just the hope of acceptance and inclusion. We may feel a bit smug reading this story and not identify with the young son because we have not indulged in wild living or been addicted to drugs, alcohol or sex but anything that creates a gulf between a Christian and God turns us into a prodigal. Gulfs between us and God can occur without us even noticing at first, we slacken off with reading our bible, our prayer times become stale, we skip church or meetings, we allow disappointment or fall outs with others to lead us away and we become too caught up in the world and culture. Before we know it there is distance between us and God and we can find ourselves quite defensive should anyone question our choices.

## **The Fathers Heart**

The son sets off for home, probably anxious, hungry and definitely in need of a bath. Before he left he would have worn the finest clothes and been perfectly groomed now he returns looking a mess, ashamed and hopeful that his father might find a place in his workforce for him. What happened was not at all what he expected because while he was still a far way off his father saw him and went running towards him, the father saw the boy before the boy saw his father because he’d been out watching for him, hoping he would return. Look what Jesus says , *“the father saw him and was moved to the depths of his being and ran and flung his arms around his neck and kissed him tenderly.”* V20. The father didn’t see a messy failure he saw his errant, repentant, beloved son who was once lost but was now found.

## **The Older Brother**

Now if we were honest we might say that we have more sympathy with the elder brother. This son was a good son, compliant and probably never put a foot wrong and he was not at all happy to see the return of his brother and particularly incensed about the welcome his brother received. Perhaps if the younger son had come back weeping and the father had rejected him then the older brother might have felt better about things, but as it was the older brother simply couldn’t rejoice because of the fine welcome his brother received, it wasn’t fair. The elder brother refused to go into the celebrations despite his father coming out to plead with him and in doing so he dishonoured his father as much as the younger son had. The older son complains and make his case to his father saying, *“I have never disobeyed your orders, all these years I’ve been slaving away for you, you have never given me so much as a kid to share and enjoy with my friends yet he has been off living with prostitutes and this is the welcome and reward he gets.”* Vs 29-30.

He reels off his brothers sins. He feels justified and entitled and is boastful about all his good works and behaviour so there is no way he will apologise to his father for his own outburst and attitude.

What must his father have thought as the son threw back in his face all the dutiful years he had worked without reward. Is that what loving service is about? Do we work and serve God out of duty and do we complain when we see others doing better, living easier, getting accolades and attention that perhaps we think we deserve or are entitled to?

*“How could God have let this happen to me, I’ve worked so hard over the years”* Others might have thought our service was out of love but maybe underneath we have been resentful and angry, *“no one else would do it, so I had to do it”* perhaps our service is for recognition at times.

The father reminds the older brother that he is always with him and everything he has is available to him and he gently scolds him revealing his son’s blindness. This son didn’t really understand what being a son means and as a result he couldn’t see what it means to be a father, he couldn’t see his father’s joy at having his wayward son return to him. His son had been lost and now he was found and he was home, but the self righteous thinks that the repentant should go on being repentant and get on with sorting themselves out and that life should be made a bit difficult. The Father however was joyful wanting to celebrate, his forgiveness was absolute, without condition, his son was sorry, he *knew* his son was sorry and that was enough.

The story of the elder son was aimed directly at the Pharisees and set in the light of their charge that Jesus *“welcomed sinners.”* Like 15.2. The Pharisees had no understanding or appreciation of a father’s love and they certainly had no sympathy with a prodigal sinner. They resented that the lost sinner was forgiven, accepted and welcomed home, and so Jesus uses this older son to help them see that they behave like a jealous older brother who was resentful and refuses to join in the celebrations. This parable shows that the father loves his sons equally and that is the truth about our heavenly Father, he loves us all equally, he doesn’t have favourites, he’s not influenced by our service or behaviour he just loves every person the same and he is grieved when we fall out and when there is lack of unity.

### **Hidden sin**

We can be both brothers at different times. Like the younger son we can fall into sin and distance ourselves from God but we can also be like the elder brother and become self righteous when we look at others and count their failings. It’s easy to see the sin of the younger son, less so the hidden sin of the older brother, a sin that we all will deny, *“jealous me?...judgemental?.....Never!”* But most of us will suffer from these emotions some time or another. In the father’s eye both sons were as secure and loved as each other, the young son received a celebratory welcome on his return, the older brother was always with the father and had access to everything.

### **An everlasting love**

Although the title of this study is called the Lost Son it would have been more suitably called The Loving Father, because there is no more powerful a picture of a loving and a forgiving God nor of the motivation that lay behind Jesus ministry. He came to tell us about the Father and he wants us to know that the way this father loved his younger son is the way our heavenly Father loves us, even when we backslide. The person that this parable refers to is already saved - a Christian who has fallen into sin. Thankfully this parable teaches us the doctrine of *“once saved, always saved.”* We are loved as Jeremiah said *“I have loved you with an everlasting love, I have drawn you with loving kindness, I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O virgin Israel, again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.”* 31:3-4

### **As always, its all about Jesus**

Look at Jesus and you see God. Jesus is what the Father looks like and who doesn’t love Jesus? His humanity, compassion, extravagant generosity and tenderness, his authority in every situation, his hatred of hypocrisy and fierceness clearing out the temple, his playfulness among friends, the parties, the picnics and meals he enjoyed with them, the fishing trips they went on, the very fact that he *had* friends, he wasn’t aloof or standoffish or distant from others, he loved people and got involved in their lives.

Like us he had his own doubts and fear when he faced death yet he was unflinchingly brave and he was loyal and above all he unconditionally accepted others and loved them even when they chose not to choose him. If we could all be just a little bit more like the One True Son and have more of his joy, his contentment and his peace. He came that we might have life, life in all its fullness, the fullness of joy, the fullness of peace, the fullness of relationships, the fullness of love and friendship. And even when we face sickness and death he gives us the fullness of hope, hope and the knowledge that he goes through it with us and that he will run out to meet us when the time comes and welcome us home. If we could only show others that is the Jesus we know and who loves them too.

We love to hear stories of miracles and we think they are so important, and they are, yet the central miracle of the gospel is Christ Himself, risen and glorified, who all the time watches for us, pursues us, abides in us and offers Himself as companion for the journey. Don't journey without him. Jesus is who the Father looks like. He is the shepherd who went out looking for the one sheep that was lost, because it was *his* sheep and he wanted it back, he is the woman who turned the house upside down looking for a lost coin because it was *her* coin and she wanted it back and he is the Father, wanting his son to stay with him, yet letting him go and then watching and waiting for him to return because he is *his own* son and he wants him home with him. I hope that you are walking closely with the Father, but if life has created a gulf and you are a bit lost, perhaps wishing you could find your way back to intimacy with him, don't wait any longer, just go home, speak to Jesus about it, you will find him waiting, watching for you and ready to celebrate your return

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## Emmanuel Church Text 2023



*The LORD bless you and keep you: the LORD make his face shine on you  
and be gracious to you: the LORD turn his face toward you  
and give you peace. Numbers 6:24-26*

**Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD**

**P** 01277 632120 **E** [Emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org](mailto:Emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org) **W** [Emmanuel-church.info](http://Emmanuel-church.info)  
**FB** Emmanuel Church Billericay **T** EmmanuelCM12 **YT** Emmanuel Church Billericay



## **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:** Do you define yourself radically as your Abba Father's beloved child? If not why not? If so, why so? Have a listen to Cory Asbury's songs, *The Prodigal* and *Reckless Love*, just go to YouTube and put in a search.

**2:** The inner Pharisee is judgemental. Share your struggles with resentment, anger, hardheartedness and unforgiveness. Ask the group to pray over you the grace to forgive yourself and anyone who has wounded you.

**3:** At this moment in time is there distance between you and God? Is repentance common practice for you or do you avoid it? Do you see the need for it? How easy is it for you to find your way home?

**4:** Jesus is the face of the Father. Share from personal experience what efforts you make to stay centred, to overcome busyness and self absorption in order to remain aware of the Risen Christ abiding within you.

**5:** What stirs in your heart when you read of the father's welcome as he runs to meet his errant son? Do you believe this is how God would welcome you? Does it express the cry in your heart for intimate belonging?

**6:** Is there an area in your life where you feel God must be pretty pleased with you because of your hard work and faithfulness? How do you feel knowing that he is just as pleased with the person who does nothing and is it fair that some people get all the recognition and accolades and you may get none?



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?

**Emmanuel Church, Laindon Road, Billericay, Essex. CM12 9LD**

P 01277 632120 E [Emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org](mailto:Emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org) W [Emmanuel-church.info](http://Emmanuel-church.info)  
FB [Emmanuel Church Billericay](http://Emmanuel Church Billericay) T [EmmanuelCM12](http://EmmanuelCM12) YT [Emmanuel Church Billericay](http://Emmanuel Church Billericay)

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