

The God Who Finds Lost Rebels

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[0 : 00] Bibles with me, please, and turn to the Gospel of Luke chapter 15. Luke chapter 15 contains perhaps the most well-known of Jesus' parables.

It's often called the parable of the prodigal son. But actually, it's a group of three parables that Jesus tells together in response to the coming of tax gatherers and sinners, and then the grumbling of the Pharisees that Jesus receives tax gatherers and sinners.

And so in response to that, Jesus tells three parables with the same themes and a couple of different pictures.

So if we want to read the text, then we'll pray, and then we'll dig in. So if you're able, please stand with me as I read from Luke chapter 15. Oh, I better...

All the hot air might make them do something else. Burn faster? I don't know. Smoke? All right, Luke 15. Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

[1 : 30] And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. So he told them this parable.

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?

And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.

Just so I tell you that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

Or what woman, having ten coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?

[2 : 44] And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. Just so I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

And he said, there was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country.

And there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him to the fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate.

[4 : 04] And no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread?

But I perish here with hunger. I will arise and go to my father. Father, I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. And he arose and came to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

And the son said, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, Bring quickly the best robe and put it on him.

[5 : 16] And put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. And bring the fatted calf and kill it. And let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. Now, his older son was in the field.

And as he came home, he drew near to the house. He heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked him, What do these things mean?

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

But he was angry. And refused to go in. His father came out and kept entreating him. But he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you.

[6 : 26] I have never disobeyed your command. Yet you never gave me a young colt that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him?

He said to him, Son, you are always with me. And all that is mine is yours.

And it was fitting. It was right. It was necessary to celebrate and be glad. For this, your brother was dead and is alive.

He was lost and has been found. So reads the word. Let us pray. Father, grant us eyes to see what Jesus is telling us.

[7 : 38] Help us understand what he's communicating through this. There's a big picture here. But help us to see what he wanted us to see.

And receive it with our hearts. Help us to see who we are here. Are we the sheep? Are we the coin? Are we the younger son? The older son? Who are we? Where do we fit? This we pray in Christ's name.

Amen. Please be seated. I'm going to start with an illustration.

Well, I'm not stealing because I'm going to give it credit to. The beatty. Anya wa belly. Bili. Remember the beatty?

We met him over at Capitol Hill Baptist. I think he preached or prayed or something. Big guy. He's a convert from Islam. Anyway, tells this story introducing.

[8 : 50] And his commentary on Luke. Introducing Luke 15. He says this. I am like most male drivers. I don't stop for directions.

Ever. It's in the real man's handbook chapter 3. Never stop for directions. It's part of what it means to be a man. The ask for directions gene is on the second X chromosome that men are missing.

Most men think getting from point A to point B is simply a matter of confidence. If we believe in ourselves hard enough, then we can get anywhere.

It's navigation by confidence. And the worst thing that can happen to a male driver like me is when I actually do figure out where I am or where I went wrong.

Every time we figure out where I am. Every time we figure out our way, it reinforces our confidence. It grows our sense of direction. The only thing that can undermine a man's confidence in driving is a woman in the car.

[9 : 59] You can fill a car with men who don't know where they're going. Do you know what they do? They figure it out together.

They share their confidence with one another until everyone is sure they know the way. But put a woman in the car and the first thing she says is, do you know where you're going?

I think we're lost. I've seen that house before. They say, pull over and ask for directions.

That's right. And it could be some guy who's clearly as lost and aimless as you. You think you can figure out any misdirection.

And a woman thinks anyone but you can do it. Let me set the record straight. I've never been lost. If I had, I wouldn't be here. All the previous episodes of misdirections were resolved by me.

[11 : 05] That's why I'm here. I figured it out. I made a turn or turned around and presto, here I am. And I know exactly where I am.

I don't know why men think turning around or asking for directions is such a bad thing. But I do know this. If we try to live our spiritual lives by being confident, going our own way, figuring it out, never turning around, then we are truly lost.

We will never find our way home to heaven like that. One essential thing about the spiritual life is that it requires turning around.

And that's the kind of story we get to in Luke 15. Now, it's often the last parable, the large parable, makes up most of this chapter.

It's called the parable of the prodigal son. What does prodigal mean? I never thought of that before. I always say, oh, yeah, I know that parable. Prodigal.

[12 : 15] He's the guy that, you know, went away and lost everything. Prodigal. You look it up, it says reckless, wasteful, a fool, a rebel.

Well, I added the last two, but reckless and... So, here in Luke 15, as I said, Jesus is responding to the gathering of all these tax gatherers and sinners on the one hand.

They have come, and Luke says they've come to hear him. They haven't come to be healed or see miracles. They've come to listen. They want to hear him. That's the setting.

And in response to all of them coming to Jesus are the Pharisees. So, you have two groups. You have the Pharisees and the scribes who are complaining and grumbling that Jesus, as a rabbi, would accept them, would eat with them, would fellowship with them, would treat them with grace and acceptability.

So, this is... And so, he tells these... This parable, three-part parable, in response. Now, the one... I want you to see before we dig into it, there's a structure here in Luke, in the whole chapter, that is a chiasm or chiasm, depending on how you say that.

[13 : 38] What we see is as the story unfolds, he reports the story. It gets to a turning point, and then it's repeated in reverse. So, in your outline, if you have it, you can see the parallels.

It begins with Jesus receiving and eating with sinners. It ends with, in verse 31, 32, the father eating and receiving the sinful son.

And then, after Jesus received... You got the grumbling, and the grumbling is echoed at the end again. And then you have the... In verses 3 to 10, you have the two parables of lost and found, the sheep and the coin, lost and found, response of joy.

And then, in verse 20 to 24, again, you have the father receiving the son, the lost and found, the response of joy. And in the middle of it... That's why I love chiasm, because it shows you what the point of the whole story is.

It shows you, like an arrowhead, it's pointing to the central part of the story. And the central part of the story is two parts. It's the father's compassion on the repentant son.

[14 : 49] That's the point of the whole story. That's the point of the three parables. It's about the father's compassion on those who repent.

The lost and found. The dead and alive. And on the outside are grumblers. So, this story is told to these two groups.

You have the tax gatherers and sinners who come and hear the story about those who are lost, and they can identify with being lost. And on the other side, you have the Pharisees complaining about sinners being here, and you see a parallel with them with the older brother, complaining about receiving and eating with a sinner.

So, let's dig in a little bit. What it does portray, the big picture, it portrays the love of God. It's not really a parable about the prodigal.

It's about the father. It's prodigal about the seeking God, about the God who pursues and finds and then celebrates repenting sinners.

[16 : 07] That's what the parables are about. So, it's a portrayal of God's love for sinners. So, I want to break it down into two pictures. They're parallel pictures. The first picture we see in the first two parables in verses 4 through 10, the story of the lost sheep and the lost coin, gives us one picture about the God who is seeking.

And then in verses 11 to 32, which is commonly called the prodigal son story, it focuses on the father who is so gracious, the gracious God, the merciful God.

So, you have the seeking God and then you have the gracious God who receives sinners very graciously without demands. So, let's look at these pictures. First picture in verse 4 to 10, it portrays a God who is seeking and finding and rejoicing over repenting sinners.

A God who is seeking, finding and rejoicing over repenting sinners. So, we see three themes in both of these pictures. There's someone lost, someone found, and then there is joy.

Okay? Same three themes. So, in verse 4, we see the lost. We see that this man has lost one of his sheep. A single sheep out of 99, right?

[17 : 34] What is it about sheep that we know? They're dumb. They wander. They wander.

They don't think. They graze. They wander. They're just sheep. They're not border collies. They're sheep.

They wander. So, Isaiah talks about that. All we, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us have turned to his own way. Right?

Like sheep, sheep wander. They go astray. Then we see in verse 8, we see another woman who loses a coin.

Ten silver coins loses one. Right? So, one coin out of ten. We had one sheep out of 100. Now, we have one coin out of ten. So, what is it about coins?

[18 : 31] Well, we know about sheep. Sheep wander. What about a coin? I don't know. What about a coin? It has value. Oh, it has value there. Very good. It has value.

Does it do anything on its own? No, it's lifeless. It's helpless. It doesn't do anything. Someone has to use it. That's interesting.

Are there people in life that are lifeless? Helpless? They don't necessarily wander, but they're helpless. Okay. Maybe there's some sinners and tax collectors that are going to relate to that.

Well, so both of these are lost. Sheep and a coin. So, then there's someone found. Verse 5. The shepherd or the man leaves the 99 and goes after the one sheep.

Notice that he, verse 5. No, verse 4. He leaves the 99 and goes after the one.

[19 : 36] And he keeps going until he finds it. He leaves 99 for one. What does that tell you?

Every one of those sheep are important. And in that culture, understand that he's not leaving 99 to themselves. There's other shepherds there. In fact, typically, they gather the sheep into a pen and they go under the staff and they count them.

And so, he comes up one short. He says, okay, guys, you stay with these. I'm going after. Find the lost sheep. And then we have verse 8. The woman seeking for her lost coin. Look at the effort that she does.

She lights a lamp and she sweeps the house and she seeks diligently until she finds it. It's a careful effort. Lighting, sweeping, searching.

So, we have lost and found. And then, notice in each, in both of these, we have the joy that follows. So, in verse 6, we have the man who's carrying the lamb, the sheep home on his shoulders, rejoicing.

[20 : 45] He comes home and he asks others to come and celebrate with him for the lost has been found. Same thing with the woman. In verse 9, when she finds the coin, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says, rejoice with me for I found the coin that I had lost.

So, notice that they're calling to rejoice with them. Share with me. And now you think, you know, a woman loses a coin and really, is she going to call her friends and neighbors to rejoice over that?

And by the way, how do you lose one of the coins? She's probably poor. She's in a small little hut. It's probably either a dirt floor. And so, it's gotten lost.

Or maybe it's straw. And so, she's got to clean up until she can find it. But there's joy. There's joy, joy, joy.

And then verse 7 and verse 10, at the end of each of those parables, pictures, Jesus gives an application. Jesus directly says, verse 7, so, just so, in the same way, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than 99 who need no repentance.

[22 : 02] What a statement. Every time a sinner repents, there's joy in heaven. There's rejoicing in heaven. There's a party in heaven. Didn't you see that?

And then he says it again, verse 10. So, I tell you, in the same way, like this woman who calls her friends and celebrates, the lost has been found.

I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. So, Jesus says there's joy in heaven, and now he says there's joy before the angels.

Who's rejoicing in verse 10? Who's before the angels? It's not the angels. Who's before the angels? God. God's rejoicing in front of the angels.

Interesting, isn't it? Over once, he's delighted. Every time a sinner repents, it brings him joy. Ever thought of that?

[23 : 03] When you turn back to him, do you think of him that way? I mean, in a normal Christian life, we repent all the time, don't we? It's not just the first time.

Because I keep falling, right? I keep falling. Jesus says you fall, you know, a righteous person is the one that falls seven times. He gets back up seven times. Repents.

Turns back. All of us, like sheep, have gone astray. We all do that. That's normal, natural. So, Scripture tells us over and over that God's love, about God's love in seeking sinners.

Think of the Old Testament. Who's the very first sinner that God sought? Way back in Genesis. Adam. Adam. Adam.

Adam. Have you eaten? And then Cain and Abel. He goes after Cain.

[24 : 07] He seeks him. He sought Abraham. He sought Jacob. He sought after Moses and Israel and David.

And he sent the prophets after the people time, after time, after time, after time. He keeps seeking sinners. He's very reluctant, right, with Israel to punish them.

He hates to do that. So, Ezekiel talks about this. Ezekiel 34, thinking about a future time for Israel.

Ezekiel 34 says, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep.

And I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them from the peoples and gather them from the countries and I'll bring them into their own land.

[25 : 17] There they shall lie down in good grazing land and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself, declares the Lord, will be the shepherd of my sheep.

And I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God. I will seek the lost. I will bring back the strayed. I will bind up the injured.

And I will strengthen the weak. And the fat and the strong, I will destroy. He seeks sinners. Like Jesus said, I did not come for the righteous.

I did not come for the healthy. I came for the sick. I came for the sinner. God tirelessly seeks and finds and rejoices in sinners who turn back to him.

That's the first picture. The second picture is in the longer story of the father and two sons. So our first picture is God seeking, finding, rejoicing, right?

[26 : 25] So the second picture is similar, but it's got a different parallel picture to it. I'll put it this way. Repenting rebels fall into God's gracious and open arms.

Repenting or returning rebels fall into God's gracious and open arms. Can you picture the son coming to the father? So it's a picture about the returning rebel, but it's more about the father.

It's more about how he receives them. Not reprimanding, not chastising, not hard, but soft and welcoming.

Love that picture. So this story unfolds in four parts. We have the son's rebellion, and then we have his repentance, and then we have the father reconciling him, and then we have rebellion again of the older son.

So look at the rebellion. This guy really goes for it. So Jesus begins the other story, verse 11, as a man who has two sons. So it's about a man with two sons.

[27 : 46] And the younger, verse 12, says to his father, give me the share of property that is coming to me. Now that's interesting, isn't it?

That is not normal in that culture. It is very rare. It is considered disrespectful and selfish and greedy.

It's as if he's treating his father as if he's saying to his father, I wish you were already dead. Give me what's mine.

I want mine. It's all about me. He spurns his duty to his father. He's to serve his father like the older son. I've served you. Not the younger son.

No, I want my independence. I want out. Now he's only going to get a third because the older brother gets double portion, right? But he wants to take his and go. And notice what he does then.

[28 : 48] He, verse 13, not many days later, the younger son gathered all that he had and took a journey into a far country. A far country.

Why a far country? He can't wait to get as far away from his family as he can. And maybe, why does he want to go far away where no one knows him, where no one knows him?

Where he can do whatever he wants and nobody knows him. No prying eyes. I can just cut it loose.

Do what my soul wants to do. So, it tells us that he squandered his property in reckless living.

So, reckless. There's the word for prodigal. He squandered. He just spent it. He would be considered in wisdom literature of the Bible as a fool.

[29 : 52] A fool. A fool. Does not budget. Does not think about how he's going to spend. He just spends it on whatever he wants. He squanders it.

Scatters it is literally the word. He's reckless and wasteful. So, verse 14. When he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in the country and he began to be in need.

Now, where does this famine come from? What happens? Where do famines happen in the Bible? What do famines do in the Bible?

They drive people back to God. What brought Ruth and Naomi back to Bethlehem? Famine. A famine is what's called by the theologians a dark providence.

It's God moving, but in a dark way. It seems bad, and it certainly is bad and hard and difficult, but it drives people to their knees.

[30 : 59] Or it drives people back to God. Not always, but often. In fact, remember what Jesus said in Luke 13. You know, when the people said, hey, hey, what do you think about Pilate sacrificing all these people, right?

Slaying all these people, and Jesus said what? He said, do you think those people are worse than anybody else? That's why they suffer? And then he said, repent, lest it happen to you.

Oh. Then he brought up another tragedy, the column that fell on 18 people and killed them. And again, he said, do you think they're worse? Do you think they deserved it more than anybody else? Do you think that's what that's about?

No, that's not what it's about. It's about you being awakened by that tragedy to repent, lest you die before you have a chance to repent. That's what it's about.

That's what tragedy is about. Every tragedy that happens in the world, that's about God's dark providence. To bring people to repentance because they're too hard and won't listen otherwise.

[32 : 02] You with me? So isn't it interesting Jesus throws a famine in here? He's already spent everything, but then you add a famine and what happens?

Oh man. What can he do? Nobody's going to hire him. The only job he can get is out in the field with pigs because nobody wants to do that job.

And the pigs eat better than he does. Oh, and I love this line. Verse 15. So he went out and hired himself to one of the citizens of that country who sent him out in fields to feed pigs.

Verse 16. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate. I mean, that's got to be pretty low, right? And then watch. I love this line. And no one gave him anything.

Who's the no one? Not one of those pigs would share. They're being pigs. That's what it says.

- [33 : 07] The no one is the same. It's masculine plural and so are the pigs. Masculine plural. So he's literally saying, not one of those pigs would share.
- Doggone pigs. That's why they get their name. You're being a pig. I love that. I had a little humor into that. Then verse 17.
- Okay. So that's the rebellion. He hit. He's. The famine humbles him. He becomes needy. He's humiliated to go feed the pigs. He hits the bottom. He's driven to his knees.
- What will he do? Verse 17 says, but when he came to himself. Some translations have he came to his senses. That's the right idea.
- He came to himself. He woke up. He's. You ever been there? Woke up and realized how lost you were? You stopped being stubborn about asking for directions?
- [34 : 10] He woke up. How'd that happen? Some people never wake up. Some people never hit bottom.
- Or realize they hit bottom. Or they do know they hit bottom, but they're too stubborn to change. Or to look for help. There's too much pride. I'll figure it out.
- Will you? And then. So here's the steps of repentance. One.
- Verse 17. He's awakened. Verse 18. Part two. Is he turns. He makes a turn. He says, I will arise and go to my father.
- Father. He makes a decision. He makes a turn. I'll go back. I will return. I'll make a 180. I'll go back and I'll admit I'm wrong.
- [35 : 09] He's under conviction. And then the third. He confesses. Right? Verse 18. And I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. What was his sin?
- We had an interesting discussion downstairs before service this morning. What was his sin? He says he sinned. What was his sin? It was rebellion.
- It was kind of throw it in his father's face. Very dishonor. Honor your father. No, he did not honor his father. So he did sin before his father. How did he sin against God?
- You could say that too, but how? How about the spiritual? Being spiritually unclean. Oh, yeah. If he's a Jew going to feed pigs, that's the worst of the worst. That is an offense.
- But the way he spends his money. He's a fool. He's a squanderer. And by the way, I'm not saying that as one pointing it.
- [36 : 08] I've been there. I can do that too. I can be the fool. I can be the squanderer. I can follow my soul. My soul wants pleasure now. My soul wants to be relieved now. My soul wants to escape now.
- That's why Jesus said, hate your soul in this world and you'll save it. If you follow your soul in this world, you will die. You will ruin your life. Because your soul wants what?
- It wants pleasure. It wants relief. It also, David, remember his soul, my soul longs for God. So, David interpreted his soul that was cast down, that was so under pressure as also what he was needing was God.
- My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. My soul can go really high and my soul can go really, really low. But if I follow my soul, I will lose my life.
- And that's what he does, right? So, he confesses. He has remorse for his sin. Look at verse 19, what he adds. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.
- [37 : 18] Treat me as one of your hired servants. And by the way, by hired servant, he means the lowest of the low slaves. Not even the one that's full time in the house.
- But the one that you hire from time to time, day laborer. That one. Which he did in the other country feeding pigs.

But he remembered, hey, my daddy treats his day labors better than this. I can go home and at least be this. I think he might hire me back.

I don't know. But what is that attitude in repentance? Notice. See? He comes to himself. He awakens. He turns under conviction. He confesses. Now he has a sense of unworthiness.

So, true repentance has that humility, that sense of unworthiness. It has no excuses. No claim.

[38 : 21] It accepts full responsibility for his actions and the consequences of those actions. He does not feel entitled. He does not feel entitled.

That's up to the father. Humble yourselves under his mighty hand. And if he puts you down, you go down.

And you say thank you. Because I'm not worthy. Yes. Yes. Yes. But then Peter says, and he will lift you up.

He will lift you up. Might take a while. Might be a few decades. Might be in the resurrection.

Maybe if the rapture comes, I'm all for that. Yeah. So, then you see when he finally gets to his father, verse 21, you know, his father comes and kisses him and hugs him.

[39 : 25] And then, verse 21, the son still does what he said he was going to do. Okay. He follows through. He still says, Father, I have sinned. I'm not worthy.

He still gets that out. He doesn't get out the last part, though. Did you notice? You know, let me be one of your higher sleeves. He doesn't get that. Why? I think his father cut him off.

Got it. In fact, I saw that on your face far away when I saw you far away. I saw your humility. I saw your repentance.

I saw a change in you. And if we're talking about the father being the father, oh, he was already there. He was already there with the famine.

He was already there with the awakening. Right? He already knew he was coming. And then when he makes that final move, he's overjoyed. And so, there we see, verse 20, we see the reconciliation.

[40 : 23] The father, it's not just that he accepts him back. He's reconciled. Notice, the father initiates it, verse 20. He sees the son. And the word see there means he recognizes.

He sees more than just the physical appearance of his son. He sees the spirit of his son. He sees more than just his son.

He sees how he's coming. He sees the face. He sees probably the tattered clothes. He sees the barefoot feet. Remember, this son has come out of a famine.

And he's absolutely penniless. And he's from far away. How does he get there? He's walking. He's walking and crawling. And by the time he gets there, he's in a tattered, broken position, physically.

And he's already been broken spiritually. So, the father, I love, just look at this picture of the father, verse 20. While he was still a long way off, he saw him.

[41 : 29] He saw him. He recognized him. He sees everything about him. And then he felt compassion. Then what's he do? This isn't what a father does.

He ran. He ran. He ran. He ran. And then the Greek says, he fell on his neck.

Which is translated, hugged him, right? He falls on his neck. Then he kept kissing him.

Kept on kissing him. He's delighted. Now, what kind of reception is this? I wonder how daddy's going to feel.

My attitude coming back, I'll take the lowest position. That's fine. I don't deserve. It's like the woman, right? Hey, you know, the little puppy can have the crumb under the table. That's good enough for me.

[42 : 34] Here's a father with warmth and open arms.

So here is this repenting rebel falling into the father's gracious and open arms. What a picture. What a beautiful picture. And that's the picture of the repentant one coming to God.

His arms are wide open. He's ready to hug and kiss. In fact, when he sees you coming, he's already running. He's not going to wait.

Okay. I'm going to make sure he gets it. He's running to you. Wow. Wow. What a lover of sinners. And this is the surprise in the story.

Okay. Nothing else is surprising in the story. This is the surprise. The reaction of the father. That's not normal. Most dads will be, see, I told you.

[43 : 43] You didn't learn a thing when I taught you, did you? You see, now you deserve what you got. You can see fathers doing that, can't you? I can see me doing that.

I can see you. Hmm. You see, our father is not like that. He's not like us. He's not full of anger and pettiness.

He's gracious. He's just delighted. And then verse 22, you know, the son starts to confess and, you know, say this. Got it, got it. Okay. He starts speaking to the servants.

Go get the robe and put the robe on him. Get the ring and put it on him. Get the sandals. He needs sandals. You can just see, just get these servants running around.

Get to work. He's back. Get to work. And then go get the fatted calf. Kill it. And let's celebrate. Fatted calf. That's only for special occasions.

[44 : 50] And if it's the fatted calf, then it's a big celebration because that's not just a little family meal. The fatted, that's a big, big, big meal. That's for big celebrations.

The fatted calf. Not just a little goat. Not just a little lamb. He's doing the fatted calf. They've been fattening this calf up for a while. Right?

This is for a special occasion. And dad says, now. Now is the special occasion. Why?

Because, verse 24. This, my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate.

He restores his son. Puts the robe back on. The ring back on. Sandals on his feet. That doesn't mean he gets inheritance. He's already spent his inheritance. But he gets, he's still got a, he's still going to be a son.

[45 : 52] Still going to be a son. Not going to be a servant. He's going to be a son. So, then we have the other. Or, as that one guy said, now comes the rest of the story.

Right? Verse 25. Meanwhile, back at the ranch, we got the older son who's out in the field still working because he's a diligent worker. He's a doer.

You can count on him. He's loyal. He's faithful. He's out in the field working. He came and drew near to the house. And he heard the music and dancing. That's quite a celebration. It's not just eating.

It's music and dancing. It's a hoedown. Or something. Whatever they did in those days. I don't know. It's a, it's a, okay. And he called one of the servants asking what it meant.

And he told him, your brother's come home. Your father has killed the fatted calf because he's received him back safe and sound. Not exactly the words of the father. So it's been summarized a little bit, kind of more blanded.

[46 : 51] Maybe this is a friend servant to the older son who has an attitude about this too. So his reaction, verse 20, 28 becomes angry.

He becomes, can you understand that? He becomes angry. Because all he knows, he doesn't know about the repentance. He doesn't know about all that stuff. All he knows is brothers come back and probably, as predicted, probably blew the whole thing.

Come back. Now he's needy. And daddy's celebrating. Understand, the older brother, he doesn't understand the other part. He just sees this, this wasteful, reckless prodigal back.

And dad's celebrating. The fatted calf. Now the older son's probably been taking care of that fatted calf. So he becomes angry.

Verse 29, then he, so his father comes out and entreats him. And that's in the imperfect, which means he kept on entreating him. He kept on entreating him. Come on, son. Come on inside.

[48 : 04] Come, son. No. Come on inside. Come on. No, I refuse. Come on, son. I want you to come inside. No. Rebel.

His rebellion hasn't come out before, but it comes out now. No. And then comes the grumbling and complaining. He answers his father. Look, these many years I have served you have never disobeyed your command.

Yet you never gave me a young kid, a young goat, kid, that I might celebrate with my friends. So what's he doing? I have been faithful.

I have never disobeyed. I am the righteous one. I am the faithful one. I'm the one you can count on. Get it? There are some Christians who are like that.

Not in a prideful sense, but they've just been, they've been the doers. They've been the right one. They've been in the right. They've been doing the right thing. Okay? Understand it from their perspective.

[49 : 09] So Delinda reminded me this morning in our church in San Jose when we were young pastor. In one year we had three unwed mothers in our congregation, our little congregation.

Three unwed mothers. How would the congregation respond to that? We had a divided response. It surprised us.

This is a very gracious church. We proposed, let's have a, because they're going to give birth, let's have a, what do you call it?

Shower. I never invited, so I don't know. You know, and let's help them. Let's love them. And if you said, now what will that communicate to our faithful daughters?

Oh, never even thought of that. Huh. Maybe it will communicate love for sinners. That's where we resolve.

[50 : 07] Our, our, once you said this, we're not hardline. They're just honestly asking that question. That's a good question. Let's be sensitive to that.

But let's still serve and love these girls. So it's similar. That could happen, can't it? That could happen.

I want those people here. Well, who are you to say who these people are? You're the same. You maybe haven't done the same kind of things. You haven't, maybe been as reckless. Maybe you're not as, maybe you're just, you were just the lost coin and got found.

Hmm. Hmm. So he grumbles. He compares. Verse 30, he gets to the point.

You know, I've been faithful. Verse 30, but when this son of yours, notice how he calls him. Not when my brother. When this, your son.

- [51 : 10] Your son. When this, your son came who devoured your property with prostitutes. You killed the fatted calf for him. By the way, how does he know it was prostitutes?
- Maybe he just knows his brother. He's going to blow it all on something. They were probably involved. We don't know. Doesn't matter. But what's the message of the brother here?
- He's comparing. You treat the disobedient, unfaithful son, the reckless one, better than me. What's he saying?
- He's saying it's unfair. He's undeserving. I deserve that. He doesn't deserve that. Why would you do that?
- You're throwing my faithfulness in my face by treating the unworthy one in such a celebratory way.
- [52 : 15] What's the father do? He's still gracious, isn't he? He doesn't chew him out. Wouldn't you want to chew him out? Who are you? He affirms him.
- Verse 30, yeah, yeah. Yeah, son, you're always with me. And all that is mine is yours. He reminds him. You want to have a party? Have a party. You want to invite your friends and take a go?
- Take a go. It's yours. Do what you want. I get it. You're always with me. I love your faithfulness. I depend on you.
- I got it. And all that I have, that's yours. You know that. But, verse 32, but it was fitting. It was necessary. It must happen to celebrate and be glad for this your brother.
- [53 : 12] Notice he corrects his language. Not just my son, but your brother. This your brother was dead and now is alive. He was lost and now is found.
- That's the point. That's why we celebrate. How can God the Father forgive and reconcile with sinners who are undeserving?
- How can God do that with us? I mean, obviously the picture is about our Father in heaven. And how he receives us when we return to him. How can he receive us?
- With wide open arms when we've done things that are so dishonorable to him. How can he receive us? Well, one, he loves us and he's been seeking us already.
- The real secret behind why we return to him is he was doing that. He was drawing us. He was convicting us.
- [54 : 14] He was sending a famine. He was sending something to drive us to our knees, to drive us to come back to him. But how can he reconcile with sinners who are undeserving?
- He is a God of righteousness. Well, Paul tells us in Titus 3. In fact, Paul describes our condition as very similar to this prodigal.
- He says in Titus 3, we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy.
- Though we sought pleasure, we were really still angry. Hated by others and hating one another. That's the bad news.
- Then Paul gives the good news. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us.
- [55 : 20] Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy. How did he work out his mercy? By the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.
- Whom he poured out richly on us through Jesus Christ our Savior. So that being justified by his grace, we might become heirs.

Heirs. Wow. According to the hope of eternal life. We become not just accepted, we become heirs.

We get the inheritance that we don't deserve. The hope of eternal life. How do we turn?

When we repented, how did we do it? How did that come about? When we still are led to repentance, how does that happen?

[56 : 26] How were we awakened? First, there's an awakening. There's a conviction. There's a waking up that I am in need.

That I am desperate. That I am dying. Well, as Paul puts it, God's love appeared. When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared.

God drew us. God awakened us. He calls it the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

It's the secret working of the Holy Spirit who has come and sought us and awakened us. Brought us from dead to life. Because when we're dead, we can't do anything.

He brought us to life. When we were lost and helpless. When we had wandered. When we had just been like the coin. Just sitting there helpless. Or we're the rebellious son.

[57 : 26] And either way, he comes after us and he awakens us and draws us and changes us. Remember how Jesus said it in John 6? You know, come to me.

Come to me. And then later he said, you can't come to me. Unless the Father draws you. Oh. So that's how I pray. Father, draw me.

Jesus, let me come. I want to come. Well, you know where that language comes from? The Holy Spirit. Okay.

It's all of God, Paul says. So he's magnified in our salvation. Not us. Not our work. He seeks. He finds. His arms are wide open. To the lost.

To the rebel. To those who have gone astray. To those who have turned their own ways. To those who are foolish and reckless. For those who are just simply lifeless and helpless.

[58 : 31] His arms are wide open. Turn to him. Confessing. With a sense of unworthiness. Convicted of your full responsibility.

Without claim or excuse. Come to him. Have you turned from God? I don't mean a long time ago.

Have you recently turned from God? Have you walked away? Have you. Maybe not physically. But in your spirit. In your attitude. In your soul.

Maybe even in your heart. Have you gone astray? And in your doing that. Have you been humbled?

Have you been humbled? Because as we resist God. What is it? God is opposed to the proud. Gives grace to the humble.

[59 : 31] So as long as you're proud. And resisting him. He's not with you. Well. He's with you to oppose you. He's going to bring hardship.

He's going to bring difficulty. He's going to bring you to your knees. Where are you? Have you got to the point. Where you're eating the food of the swine.

Or. They won't give you any. But you want it. Have you hit bottom? Turn. Turn to him.

Because every repenting rebel. Falls into the arms. Of a gracious and loving father. Let us pray.

Father we. We thank you for this. Tremendous. Picture that you give us. Of. Who you are. As the one who seeks. And finds. And then celebrates.

[60 : 30] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Father. That when we do turn. When we do. When we are awakened. When we. Begin to turn. And are convicted. And confess. And. And sense our unworthiness.

That's the work of you in our heart. Thank you for that too. And Father. Pray for those here. That may not be there yet.

They may still be resisting. They still may be walking away. They may still. Know they must turn. But they won't turn. Father.

Awaken them. Awaken them. And as necessary. Humble them. That you might lift them up. That they might fall into your arms.

This we pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.