



“UNREASONABLE GRACE”

Luke 15

Small Group Plan

Jesus once told a trio of “lost” stories. The first two were about a lost animal and a lost object, but the third story was about a lost person. All three are about the tragedy of being lost, but it’s the last story that strikes so close to home.

Even though it was told so long ago it is a completely modern story. A young man inherits an estate, cashes it in, and parties until he’s broke. And when he receives his inheritance, he doesn’t leave home with a sense of mission. There is no sense of purpose. He’s not planning to seek his fortune. He’s planning to spend his fortune. And he learns the hard way that you can’t enjoy things that money can buy, if you ignore the things that money can’t buy — loyalty, commitment, patience, and purpose, to name a few.

Yes, all three stories are about the heartbreak of “lostness,” but this last story is a bit different. The sheep was lost because of foolishness, the coin was lost because of carelessness, but the boy was lost because of willfulness. He chose to leave. As one writer put it, “God has given us the freedom to be miserable.”

OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- What is the closest you have come to running away from home? Explain.
- If you were to run away to a “far country,” where would you go and why?
- If you had access to a lot of wealth to “squander” how would you do it?

LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

— THE REBELLION —

LUKE 15:11-16

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The 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. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.”

- Why would a boy with such a loving Father choose to leave?
- What does this parable tell us about the nature of humanity?
- What is the modern equivalent to being “in need” (v. 14)?
- What has changed in this Jewish son that he now wants to eat the food of a pig?

— THE REALIZATION —

LUKE 15:17-20A

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! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.”

- What brought the boy back to “his senses?” Find the process in the story that turned the boy’s life around.
- To what “sense” (v. 17) — attitude, mind-set, disposition) did he return?
- Why did he rehearse his speech?
- What was he expecting from his father? Why?

— THE REUNION —

LUKE 15:20B-24

²⁰ “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.”

- What does the Father in the story teach us about the nature of God?
- What does the story reveal about God’s deepest emotions?
- List the action verbs attributed to the Father. Is this how our current society pictures God? Explain.
- How does this parable speak to the issue of grace and works?

— THE RESENTMENT —

LUKE 15:25-32

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So 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. ²⁹ But 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. ³⁰ But 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. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

- Who or what does the older brother represent?
- Why does Jesus tell this story and to whom is it aimed (vs. 1-3)?
- Is it possible to be with the “Father” (God) and not have His heart?

USE IT / APPLY IT ...

- Who are you most like in the story — the leaving prodigal, the hurting Father, the returning prodigal, the resentful older brother? Explain.
- Can do you identify with the experiences of the younger son? How?
- Is your spiritual journey more like the younger son or the older brother? Explain.
- This story ends with celebration. What do you have to celebrate?
- As you close in prayer, ask God for His heart of mercy and grace.