

## THE BIG IDEA: God's gift of mercy is greater than our sense of fairness

### The Take-Off

Today, we're landing the plane on our "Lost+Found" miniseries, and before we turn to one of the most well-known stories Jesus ever told, let me set the stage for us by pointing out a huge problem with any organization but especially the church:

The longer we're in it, the less we remember what it was like to be out of it.

It is so easy to forget what it was like to be on the outside, but ALL OF US were outsiders at one point, and it is a powerless church that forgets that truth.

I know you're in Luke 15, but keep your finger there and turn over to Ephesians 2 and let's read starting in verse 11.

Twice Paul calls them to remember that they were on the outside, that Jesus came to destroy the things that kept them on the outside, and that now they are included when before they were excluded.

Remember.

Parents, what would you say to your child if she grew up, got famous and turned into a diva?

I'm not sure what your exact words would be, but probably something along the lines of "remember who you are; remember where you came from."

That's what we're going to see in the last story of Luke 15.

3 men - 1 father and 2 sons.

One simple message: remember...

Let's read it, and then talk through each of the 3 characters we find in the story...

**Luke 15:11-32**

### 1. The younger son (**IMAGE / broken arm**)

- a. v. 12 / The younger son wanted what he wanted when he wanted it
- b. He asked for his share of the inheritance which had have gotten when the father died
- c. He basically said that his father was dead to him
- d. His share was 1/3 of the inheritance (the older son would have received the other 2/3)
- e. v. 13 / "not long after" - he couldn't leave fast enough; "distant country" - he couldn't go far enough
- f. He put a great distance between himself and the father and squandered his share
- g. "Squandered" - Greek word means "to scatter abroad, dispense" / He made it rain!!
- h. How did he do it? Through "wild" living - Greek means shamelessly immoral (only used here in the NT)
- i. v. 14 / the famine came after he'd blown through his resources (isn't that the way it always goes??!)
- j. v. 15 / he may be a lot of things, but he isn't lazy - he got a job, but as a Jew feeding pigs, this was the lowest you could get
- k. This was dirtier than Mike Rowe's Dirtiest Jobs
- l. v. 16 / when you want to share a meal with pigs, you're not in a good place
- m. If we were going to use a metaphor to illustrate where this son was, we'd use a broken arm
- n. He's far from home, far from his father, far from all he'd known, out of money and craving pig slop
- o. This son is broken, but something amazing happens, something I'm praying happens for many prodigals today
- p. v. 17 / "he came to his senses"
- q. This sounds like "he got his act together" or "he fixed his thinking" but it's nothing like that
- r. What it literally means - and some of your translations may say this - is that he came to himself
- s. RECLAIMED IDENTITY!!
- t. v. 18 / "I have sinned" - not made a mistake, bad choice, got my priorities jacked up
- u. He called it what it was - sin
- v. v. 19 / literally, "a father like you deserves better than a son like me"
- w. How badly did he want to be home? Enough to forfeit his place as a son just to be around the father
- x. v. 20 / "so he got up" - he moved, left, did something besides just feel bad about his condition

### 2. The father (**IMAGE / open arms**)

- a. The father who was seen briefly in the first verse returns here in v. 20
- b. He is a man of grace who gave to his son what he did not legally have to give

- c. Not only is he gracious, but he is expectant
- d. v. 20 / “his father saw him” - because he was looking for him
- e. **We have a heavenly Father who sees us from a distance** and doesn’t make us “return all the way”
- f. The grace of God runs to the brokenness of man!
- g. **James 4:8**
- h. The father didn’t care how he looked - he was “moved” with compassion and could not stand still
- i. v. 21 / as soon as the son begins to talk about being unworthy of his identity, the father stopped him
- j. The father doesn’t only rescue; he restores / “to return to a prior condition, position or place”
- k. v. 22 / robe = royalty / ring = authority / sandals = luxury (servants didn’t wear sandals)
- l. He is making an obvious, powerful statement: **YOU ARE MY SON**
- m. v. 23 / he was a celebrator, open arms to receive lost ones back home
- n. If only the story could have ended here, but it wasn’t a story about lost people who know they’re lost, but a story about lost people who don’t know they are lost
- o. As the music fades from the party, the story takes a ““Stranger Things” “we’re not done yet” plot twist
- p. Cue the ominous music, and meet...

### 3. The older son (**IMAGE / crossed arms**)

- a. v. 25 / This is the son who received 2/3 of his father’s inheritance, and he was out in HIS field working and missed the big return, but heard the celebration when he came home
- b. v. 26 / he asked what was going on - I wonder if he may have thought it was a party for him?
- c. v. 27 / he was told 2 things but only focused on one
- d. v. 28 / he got mad and refused to go in; the father went looking for him (he’s always looking)
- e. v. 29 / his answers reveal so much - “slaving for you” - “never disobeyed” - “yet you never”
- f. Translation? It isn’t fair! He doesn’t deserve to be celebrated but I do!
- g. The older son was focused on fairness more than “foundness”
- h. But **God’s gift of mercy is greater than our sense of fairness**
- i. v.31 / The father reminded him who he was - “MY SON” - and what he had (Father’s presence, provision)

#### The Landing

A few takeaways from this story:

1. Both sons lost identity, but only one son was found because only one son remembered who - and whose - he was
  2. Both sons squandered. The younger son squandered his father’s resources; the older son his father’s relationship
  3. Our sense of fairness will keep us from celebrating God’s gift of mercy
  4. The father was ready to receive the repentant; the older son was not
  5. Our reaction to the repentant reveals more about our hearts than our obedience to the rules
  6. Both sons were lost. The younger son in wickedness; the older son in righteousness
  7. We don’t know what the older son did. Maybe that’s because God wanted to leave it up to us to finish the story
- How will we finish the story? What do the arms of The Gathering look like?

#### **[IMAGE / 3 arms]**

STORY: A birthday party for Agnes (Tony Campolo)

What I love about this story is that it allows us to remember who we are as a church

We are here for those who aren’t here yet

We’re rescuers who needed to be rescued

We value God’s mercy more than our fairness, and that allows us to love each other, the city, the world, with open arms... just like our Father.

Let’s pray.