

Questions for Small Groups | April 7, 2019

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The Great Explorers — Jesus at Table with the Father – The Table Manner of Joy

Focus Passage: Luke 15:11–32

Context: Luke 15:1–32

Other Passages Referenced:

Sermon Recap: In Luke 15, Jesus tells three parables. Each parable highlights Jesus' table manner of joy. Each parable is filled with joy and rejoicing over the lost being found. As those who know we were lost but now are found—spiritually dead and brought back to life by Jesus—we find joy in our own salvation, joy in the salvation of others, and joy in being part of the process of finding the lost.

Introductory Comments to Leaders

The parable of the *lost* or *prodigal* son is one that will likely be familiar to most members of your group. You'll note that some translations label the story the "Parable of the Prodigal Son" and others the "Parable of the Lost Son." The lost son really fits the context better with the preceding parables of the lost coin and the lost sheep. It would be good to point out that the parable could well be called the "Parable of the Two Lost Sons." One went away to a distant land and one stayed home and worked dutifully. Only one of the sons realized how lost he was. The Look Question 6 about the difference in the brothers' senses of worthiness may be helpful here.

In terms of personal relevance, we want to recognize that each of us has some younger brother tendencies—impatience, wanting our good life now to satisfy our appetites. We also have some older brother tendencies—a sense of superiority, jealousy, and possibly anger. Sometimes we do the right things with the wrong motives, doing the dutiful things "for" the Lord without delighting "in" the Lord. The key gospel point to drive home is that Jesus is the perfect older brother who left the Father's home to go find us who were lost. We were dead and He brought us back to life. It's hard to imagine a greater source of joy.

Try to stimulate some conversation about our joy or lack of joy in seeing others come to salvation. Gently encourage prayer, mindfulness, and intentionality about sharing our testimonies and the gospel message with both younger and older brothers who are lost.

Background Helps

- The English word "prodigal" is not a biblical word as such. It does not appear in the text of the Bible itself, although it is often found in the English passage heading for this Luke 15:11–32. "Prodigal" is primarily defined as spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant. If you have not read it, Tim Keller's book, *The Prodigal God*, develops the idea that God is a prodigal God who spends all that He had to save us.
- Jewish inheritance in Bible times – "The older son would receive two thirds of the estate and the younger son one third (Deut 21:17). Actually the younger son would receive slightly less than a third if there were daughters, for money would be needed for their dowries. Usually such a division of the inheritance took place upon the death of the father, but it could occur earlier."¹

Hook: *Pick a Question to Help Ignite Conversation*

¹ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 405.

What typically brings you joy?

Do you make a distinction between happiness and joy? ... If so, how?

Look—Observing and Interpreting:

READ Luke 15:11–32

1. To whom is Jesus addressing this parable? (Need to look back to Luke 15:1–2.)
2. If you were writing the heading for Luke 15:11–32, how would you complete the phrase: “The parable of the ...”?
3. How do you explain the younger son’s return to his father after he recklessly spent all of his inheritance his father had advanced to him?
4. How do you explain the older brother’s reaction to his father’s lavish reception of the younger son?
5. How does the father explain his reason for the feast celebrating the return of the younger son?
6. Read Luke 15:21 and 15:29 and describe how the attitude of the younger brother contrasts with the older brother.

Illustrations:

Illustrations and quotes can be found on the “Sermon Slides” link at the bottom of www.wcchapel.org

Took: *Applying the message to our lives.*

1. How do you identify with the younger brother?
2. How do you identify with the older brother?
3. How do you see these parables pointing toward the gospel message?
4. How does the joy over the lost being found compare to other joys in your life?
5. Is the Holy Spirit pointing out anything in your heart or in the way you think that He wants to change?

Prayer: In addition to praying for one another please:

- Pray for someone you relate to who is currently lost without Jesus.
- Ask God to give you an opportunity in the coming week to have a gospel-centered conversation with someone who does not yet know Jesus.
- Pray that you will see the opportunity and that the Spirit will enable you to be a witness to the gospel.

What we hope members glean from the passage:

1. The groups mentioned are the tax collectors and sinners (outcasts) and the Pharisees and scribes (religious leaders). Although Jesus speaks within the hearing of all of them, his target audience is the religious leaders.
2. A number of good options are possible here. (... the lost son ... two lost sons ... a welcoming father ... etc.)
3. We hope to highlight that his desperation led him to realize his complete unworthiness. Yet there was a confidence in the goodness of his father that led him to believe he could return to him in the role of a servant. He was already serving pig farmers, so it would be better to serve his own father.
4. The older brother considered his father's lavish welcome of his younger brother to be wasteful, which may have meant he thought his younger brother had already wasted his portion of the inheritance and was now diminishing what was left that by rights should go to the older brother. The older brother also was jealous of the father's extravagant celebration of the younger son, seeing that he had been consistently fulfilling his duties and had not had any celebration given for him.
5. The return of the younger son was like receiving him back from the dead. In the context, if people celebrate finding a lost sheep or a lost coin, how much more a lost son.
6. The younger brother saw himself as completely unworthy of the father's generosity while the older brother saw himself as deserving.