

## The Heart of a Father

Let's begin with three parables Jesus told the tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees and scribes, recorded in Luke, Chapter 15. He told them to these people one parable after the other, with all three coming together to deliver a single message to them... and to us. For the first two parables, I encourage you to read them carefully and completely, but I'll only give you the Lord's concluding words for each. It's the last of these three parables that will be the focus of our study.

### **The Parable of the Sheep *Luke 15:7 (NLT)***

***“In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!”***

### **The Parable of the Lost Coin *Luke 15:10 (NLT)***

***“In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.”***

In the two parables, it's clear Jesus was pointing his audience to the joy of God and His angels in Heaven at the presence of “*even one sinner*” who repents and asks Christ to be his or her Savior and Lord. Now, let's dig into the third parable and unpack the lessons it teaches.

### ***Parable of the Lost Son Luke 15:11-32 (NLT)***

#### Verses 11-12

***“To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. {12} The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.”***

In these beginning verses of the parable the younger son demands his inheritance from his father. This was not normal for the way things worked in those first century days in Israel. It was expected that sons would wait for the father to die before his estate was divided up. (It's important to note that both sons

received their portions. The older son apparently did not object to receiving his portion early. According to Hebrew tradition, It would have been double that of the younger son's portion. We'll look into this later in the study.)

### Verses 13-16

***“A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. {14} About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. {15} He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. {16} The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.”***

The younger son took his inheritance and foolishly left home to a “distant land.” There, he “wasted all his money on wild living.” Soon he was left with nothing. The Scriptures tell us he was left in that far away land in the midst of a famine that suddenly “swept over the land.” Without any resources and no way to obtain food, the young man “began to starve.” There he was, trapped in a situation of his own making, left to the consequences of foolishly having dishonored and distained the blessings of being under the covering of his father. (Some things never change. We see this happen in today's society far too often. It's just sinful, fallen human nature)

The young man was desperate. He managed to persuade a local farmer to let him work, tending his pigs. In return, the young man could eat the same pig slop he fed to the pigs. You might say, he reaped what he sowed. Disdain, dishonor and disregard for his father left him no better off than the pigs he fed! We know that nothing was more offensive to a Jewish man than to be around pigs. The younger son had indeed, hit the bottom!

#### Our First Principle

We will reap what we sow... more than what we sow...  
and later than we sow, whether good or bad.

## His Sin Found Him Out. Regrets and Shame Were All He Had Left.

### Verses 17-19

***“When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! {18} I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, {19} and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.’”***

The young son felt the reality of the position his foolishness had left him in. His awful condition made him ready to repent to his father. Yet, he still lacked the understanding of what he had done. It was not that he just made a bad choice and disdained his blessings, but in rejecting his position in his family, he failed to realize the depths of his father’s love for him.

#### Our Second Principle

We often fail to understand the deep, grace-filled, loving heart of our Heavenly Father for us as His children.

The son was right about one thing. He finally understood his sin, that it was against both his earthly father and Heavenly Father. He was right to say, *“I am no longer worthy of being called your son.”*

#### Our Third Principle

Our actions will never qualify (or disqualify us) for forgiveness. We often fail to understand that whatever we have done or not done is not as powerful as the loving forgiveness of our Heavenly Father. Even the most unworthy acts... and attitudes are forgivable.

#### Our Fourth Principle

God will never love you less than you are as His son or daughter. For Him, it’s not a question of your past. Jesus

took care of that. All you need to do is surrender to His perfect will and repent of yours, which is humanly flawed and sinful. He will lovingly welcome you into His family.

We could paraphrase Verse 19 as:

Father, I'm desperate. I'm willing to settle for far less than being your son. Will you just allow me to be no better than a hireling, and certainly no longer your son?

## What a Surprise It Must Have Been!

### Verses 20-21

***“So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. {21} His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’”***

Let's not let Verse 20 slide by us. It tells us the father saw him coming at a very long distance. This surely means he was waiting, searching in the distance with expectation, longing for the return of his son. It also says the father was so *“filled with compassion”* that *“he ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.”* All this happened before the son ever said a word to his father. There was not yet any apology or repentance that could be communicated to the father. There are profound principles to be gleaned from the father's actions.

### Our Fifth Principle

God will never lose His compassionate love for His children, even when we are wayward and unworthy. He's living with the expectation that we will return to Him.

We can only imagine how our disobedience hurts Him, yet there He waits, ready to forgive and restore us to our rightful inheritance as children of God.

### Our Sixth Principle

God's heart is bigger than your sin's heartlessness. This was proven by the Lord Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross. He knew no sin, but became sin so we could return in righteousness to the Father. Just ask for His forgiveness. It's bigger than your sin.

### It Was Party Time!

#### Verses 22-24

***“But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. {23} And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, {24} for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.”***

### A Robe, A Ring and Sandals

In biblical times, only a particular class of people wore a robe, a ring and sandals. These items were signs of privilege. They indicated that a person who wore these had the means, position and power necessary to own them. Such were the nobility, successful business people, landowners, priests, or perhaps officers in the warrior class. Common farmers, field workers, tradesmen and especially slaves had no means or often no right to wear these things. Many just had the bare necessities to put on their backs. The poorest and slaves had nothing to indicate they were anything more than the lowest rung in society.

The prodigal son had fallen from the privileged position of a landowner's son to shameful destitution in a pigpen. He had lost all pride. He expected nothing from his father, except the hope that perhaps his father would provide a way to survive and to avoid starvation. He was ready to just be a field hand.

We can only imagine how it must have felt to have his father run

to him and command he be restored to the trappings of a privileged son. We cannot know, but I wonder if the robe, the ring and the sandals had been kept in readiness, awaiting his son's return? God waits with the trappings of salvation, prepared for his sons and daughters return when we stray away from Him.

#### Our Seventh Principle

There's a holy robe awaiting God's children. You will be arrayed in the finest white robe of righteousness.

#### Our Eighth Principle

There's a feast waiting. It will have no end. It will celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb. You will be Jesus's bride, His guest of the highest honor. It's a love story that will go on for all eternity!

### The Other Lost Son (Yes, the Eldest was Also Lost!)

#### Verses 25-29

***"Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, {26} and he asked one of the servants what was going on. {27} 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.' {28} The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, {29} but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. {30} Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!'***

Now we come to maybe the least understood part of the parable. Yet, it holds perhaps the more important lessons for us. A close look at the elder son's reaction to his brother's return is revealing. Here are some of the lessons of life we can learn from it:

The older brother never gave up his anger toward the younger one. Verse 28 says that when he was told of the party, he “*was angry and wouldn’t go in.*” Even when his father begged him, the older brother refused. His reply to the father was to justify his feelings of anger and the offense he’d taken up against his sibling. His response to the father literally begging him to join the celebration was sharp and filled with accusations. He had nothing good to say to his father. He spewed a number of lies in his self-justifying reaction to the invitation to join the party.

- He complained that he’d “*slaved*” in the fields for “all these years and never asked for a young goat for his own party.” (It was an obvious lie because he had a more than an ample inheritance and was lacking nothing. It was a sign of a pouting, self-righteous son who didn’t appreciate what his father had given him. It was a sign of bitter unforgiveness and a completely self-centered outlook.

The elder son exhibited an ungrateful neglect to consider that (at the beginning of the parable) he had accepted his portion of the inheritance when he should not have. It was the wrong thing to do. Since he was the elder, it was double of his brother’s, and was equally wrong or perhaps more so. He certainly could have all the young goats he wanted. He and his friends had ample opportunity to party in his brother’s absence.

- His bitterness had turned into the stink of self-righteous jealousy. He was captured by it and it clouded the truth, that he was loved and enjoyed great privilege. (It’s a truth we often fail to see and appreciate.)

### Our Ninth Principle

Be very watchful for falling into the sin of presumption.

It comes when we fail to walk in gratefulness for what our Heavenly Father has given us. It feeds on anger, jealousy and bitterness. It’s the sin of a presumptuous sense of entitlement. There is no entitlement. We get our ring, robe and sandals from God by His love and grace. It’s purely a gift we never deserved.

## Our Tenth Principle

Never look self-righteously down on another's sin!

Elevating your opinion of yourself above any one else is an open door to the devil. He will eat you alive with an evil, judgmental spirit. It's a door to disaster. God doesn't ever look down at you. He just loves you. He lifts you up! Do the same with your brothers and sisters.

### Verses 31-32

***“His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. {32} We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”***

The father's love for his elder son showed in the gentle appeal in response to his son's harsh words. The explanation is clear. Jesus told this third parable after delivering the “punch lines” in the first two. Here they are again, below. There is great joy in Heaven when a sinner returns home to our Heavenly Father. This emotion of joy in Heaven is never tempered by what the sinning child has done or not done. It never responds to the past. It looks to the future and celebrates our redemption through the blood of Jesus on the cross.

#### ***Again - Luke 15:7 (NLT)***

***“In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!”***

#### ***Again - Luke 15:10 (NLT)***

***“In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.”***

In spite of his older son's judgmental stinking attitude, the father bathed him in the sweet aroma of loving concern. His desire was that forgiveness would flow and fellowship between the two brothers would be renewed.

### Our Eleventh Principle

God sees all sin as the same.

The Bible says we've all sinned (Romans 3:23). Our Heavenly Father sees one sin as bad as the next. Knowing this should make every one of us humble and thankful.

The Apostle Paul surely understood this eleventh principle better than most of us. In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he made this clear. Reading what Paul wrote should be a teachable moment for every one of us. If we cannot replace "*I am the worst of them all*" with our own names, it would be good for us to deeply reflect on this lesson once again, until we can!

#### **1 Timothy 1:15 (NLT)**

***"This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" - and I am the worst of them all. "***

#### **1 Timothy 1:15 (NKJV)**

***"This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."***

#### **1 Timothy 1:15 (TPT)**

***"I can testify that the Word is true and deserves to be received by all, for Jesus Christ came into the world to bring sinners back to life—even me, the worst sinner of all!"***

### Our Twelfth Principle

Christ became the "*worst sinner of them all*" so you no longer would have to claim that title.

There's no longer such a thing as "*the worst sinner of them all.*" You can never be *the worst* [or] *chief sinner.*" Start calling yourself "blessed of the Lord" and thank God in Christ for your redemption!

I'd like to end this study with The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. I will ask you to just read it and other than giving you one final Scripture and a quick story about John Newton. Then, I'll make a short comment. Let it and all you have read, speak to your heart.

## The Parable of the Pharisee and Tax Collector

**Luke 18:9-14 (NLT)**

***“Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: {10} “Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. {11} The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: ‘I thank you, God, that I am not a sinner like everyone else. For I don’t cheat, I don’t sin, and I don’t commit adultery. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! {12} I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.’ {13} But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, ‘O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.’ {14} I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.””***

**1 John 4:29-21 (NLT)**

(In a larger font)

***“We love each other because he loved us first. {20} If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? {21} And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.”***

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I heard Pastor Robert Morris tell a story about John Newton, who wrote “Amazing Grace.” Pastor Morris said, “John Newton was a former slave ship captain. He was now old and blind. Newton said, “I can see two things clearly. One, I am a great sinner. Two, Christ is a great Savior.””

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I am no less a sinner than you are. You are no less a sinner than I am. There is a nail-scarred hand that does not judge the depths of

your sin or mine. That nail-scarred hand reaches out to you and me. When we grasp it from the depths of our sin, Christ lifts us up and puts us on streets of gold so we can start dancing with Him.

“Although my memory's fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior.”<sup>1</sup>

John Newton

With every blessing,  
Dr. Bob Abramson

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[www.mentoringministry.com](http://www.mentoringministry.com)

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/26320-although-my-memory-s-fading-i-remember-two-things-very-clearly>.