

# Journey to Jerusalem

LENT 2022

## Growth Group Curriculum

Week 3 – March 20, 2022 – Luke 15:11-32

**Growth groups are one of the best and easiest ways to find community at church. Thank you for loving and caring for each other.**

Jesus continues on his way through Samaria, to Jerusalem for his final Passover. The beginning of Luke 15 tells us that tax collectors and sinners were gathering around him and listening to him. At the same time, the religious leaders were grumbling against Jesus because he was so welcoming to people on the outside, to people who in their eyes were “unclean.” Their grumbling is reminiscent of the grumbling of the Israelites when Moses was leading them to the Promised Land.

Jesus responds with three parables about things that get lost. A sheep, a coin, and a son, or more accurately, two sons. One son is lost because he leaves the father’s house, the other son is lost, even though he remains at home. One son chooses to come home and is received by the father, whereas the older son chooses to stay at home and resents the actions of his father and brother.

The younger son asks for his share of the inheritance. To ask for his inheritance while his father was still living was unthinkable. He treats his father as though he is already dead. After realizing how bad his life has become, the younger son returns home humbled and hoping for a fresh start. The father has been waiting and watching. There has not been an all-out search for the son like we see in the parable of the lost sheep and lost coin. Instead, the father waits, keeping his eyes alert and hoping for his son’s return.

The older brother stayed at home. He had been obedient and he seems to expect something for his obedience and is not pleased by his father’s response. He grows angry and refuses to join the celebration of the “return” of his lost brother, even after the father goes out and pleads with him. Resentment has gotten the best of the older brother.

As the parable ends, we don’t know what the older brother will decide to do. Will he join the celebration or not? The older brother’s response is connected to the attitudes of the religious leaders. They think they are on the inside, but they have missed the main message of forgiveness and grace.



At the heart of this parable is the father. As Tim Keller says, the father is the true prodigal. The word prodigal means recklessly extravagant and we see the father's recklessness as he welcomes his wayward son home. A middle eastern father in that day and age would have never taken such action, nor would he have gone outside to talk to the older brother. Jesus continues to remind people of the graciousness and hospitality of God.

## Exploring the Text

Luke 15:11-32

<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> "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. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father. "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. <sup>21</sup> "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup> "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. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup> "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup> 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup> "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' <sup>31</sup> "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> 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.'"

## Questions

*If you are answering these questions alone, we would urge you to try journaling. Rather than just pondering the answers, try writing them out along with a prayer to the Lord.*

- 1) Jesus was a master story-teller and told numerous parables and stories about the kingdom of God. Who do you know that is a great story-teller, and what makes their stories so great?
- 2) Putting yourself in the older brother's shoes:
  - a. How would you have felt when you heard about your younger brother demanding his inheritance?
  - b. Further, how would you have felt when your younger brother came back and was celebrated?
- 3) Upon the younger son's return, both he and the older brother agreed that he did not deserve to be received back into his father's house. Given the unexpected response the father had to his younger son's return, describe each brothers' reaction.



- 4) The father showed unfathomable mercy to his younger son. Have you ever had trouble receiving mercy? Why do you think that is?
- 5) Describe a time when you felt like life was unfair, but later God showed you how he used that situation for your good.
- 6) Why do you think the father did not go looking for the younger brother who had gone to a faraway country, but that he did go looking for the older brother who had remained at home?
- 7) The older brother stayed at home and in the end was resentful of the way that his father treated his younger brother. Resentment happens when our hurt turns to hate. Share about a time when you have been resentful or held a grudge. What did you learn from that experience?
- 8) We often refer to this story as the Prodigal Son. The word prodigal means recklessly extravagant. Tim Keller says we should see the father as the one who is the true prodigal - that God is the one who is recklessly extravagant in his mercy. Share about a time you have been a part of, or witnessed, God's extravagant mercy.

