

Luke 15:11-32 | The Lost Son

InterVarsity Bible Study Guide (60 minutes)

WELCOME (7 minutes)

Icebreaker: Did you ever want to run away from home as a kid? Why?

We are studying the Bible together because we want to grow in our love for Jesus through Scripture and because we want to grow in our witness to Jesus through Scripture.

As we get started, I want to give you a heads up that toward the end of our study, I will invite you to take a next step of faith.

Let's pray and ask God to help us as we study today's passage together...

GROUP NORMS (3 minutes)

Let's remember our group norms as we study together today:

1. Use "I" statements (speak for yourself, not for everyone)
2. Avoid judgmental statements (no shame or blame)
3. Allow space for everyone to share if they choose
4. Practice active listening and give advice only if invited to do so
5. What we share here stays here (confidentiality)

INTRODUCE the Scripture Text (3 minutes)

As we enter the remainder of chapter 15, remember that Jesus is still speaking to a mixed crowd of tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and scribes. We already studied the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin, but Jesus actually taught three "lost" parables in a row. Now we will study the third, the parable of the lost son.

You may want to reference Deuteronomy 21:15-21 for more understanding (that the original readers of Luke would already have had).

SEE the Scripture Text (10 minutes)

Let's read the passage and talk about what we see.

- Who are the characters? How are they connected?
- What is happening? When? Where?
- Which words are being repeated?
- Is the author comparing or contrasting anything?
- Would you like to point out anything else you notice?

Luke 15:11-32 NIV

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.

¹⁷ "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! 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 servants.' ²⁰ 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.

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.

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.'"

DISCOVER the Scripture Text (25 minutes)

Let's discuss a few questions that will help us discover and understand the text.

1. Why does Jesus include a third "lost" parable? How is it related to the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin?
2. Again, this audience includes both religious outsiders and religious insiders. How do you think each group would have received this parable? What thoughts and feelings might they have had about the father, the younger son, and the older son?
3. What is Jesus saying about himself through this third parable?
4. If we could communicate the core message of this text in just one sentence, what would it be? What do we sense God is communicating through this passage?

RESPOND to the Scripture Text: Invitation to Faith (10 minutes)

Consider for yourself whether you relate more to the younger brother who runs away and squanders everything or the older son who is always faithful but has a bitter heart. God wants a full house, where all his sons and daughters come in, and he is willing to do the work and bear the shame to make that happen.

Like I mentioned at the start, I will now invite us all to take a next step of faith. We don't want to just talk about the Bible, we want to live it out. If you have been following Jesus for a while, I would like you to consider responding by making a plan to have a spiritual conversation with a friend with whom you have not yet talked about faith in God ([resources here](#)).

If you are new to exploring faith, I would like to give you an opportunity to take a next step. First, I will share what it means to follow Jesus, and then we can see how each of us might want to respond. Let's open the [Invitation to Faith – Small Group](#) document and read it together...

CLOSE (2 minutes)

Let's pray and thank God for our time in Scripture together...

Tips for leading the group discussion:

- *Participate but keep your comments short to make space for others.*
- *Silence is okay. Encourage further discussion by saying "What else?" instead of commenting on every response.*