

CAPITOL STUDIES

FEBRUARY 11, 2026 • WEEK 5



LUKE FOR LEGISLATORS SECOND SESSION

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Theme Verse

Luke 19:10

For the Son of Man has come to **seek** and to **save** that which was **lost**.



The Parable of the Lost Sons



HERE IS THE STORY OF A FATHER AND HIS TWO SONS. This is a parable about relationships and choices. Jesus is continuing the plea for what is lost. “It is a mistake to infer that the sons represent believers, since they are sons of the father. The household is not the household of faith, but of Israel. The prodigal represents the sinners who were repenting and coming to Jesus; the older brother represents the Pharisees and scribes who were grumbling about Jesus receiving the sinners. But both groups needed repentance.”¹

In the beginning of the chapter, we were introduced to the crowds who followed Jesus. There were those who knew they needed help and healing, the tax collectors and sinners, and those who thought they needed no help or healing, the Pharisees and scribes. The parables about the lost sheep and the lost coin demonstrated that the lost are so precious, there is rejoicing in heaven when one is found. This is both astounding and encouraging. Today we come to what some might say is the most powerful parable ever given. It really is a story about two lost sons at opposite ends of the spectrum, a story about the magnificent mercy of the Father toward both these sons. Let’s look at this revealing earthly story with a heavenly meaning: there’s joy in the Father’s forgiveness. The real hero of this story is the Father who graciously welcomes all repentant sinners.

Pastor Arin Hess, *Chaplain, Capitol Studies*



I. THE SELFISH SON

Luke 15:11-12

And [Jesus] said, “A man had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ So he divided his wealth between them.”²

The younger son wanted his share of the inheritance. Some believe this was tantamount to saying, “Why don’t you just die and get out of the way so I can get my money and do what I want?” We can only surmise what prompted the younger son to wish his father was dead just so he could have his inheritance. In that day, if a son dishonored his father in this way, he would have been written off as dead or disowned and would get nothing. But in this parable, the father gave his son the inheritance. We can imagine how this must have grieved the father. The son’s inheritance would most likely have been in land and livestock, which he would have had to sell to get spending money. As soon as that was done, he quickly prepared to leave. He was leaving for good, rejecting his family and his heritage in Israel.

II. THE SINFUL SON

Luke 15:13-14

And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. ¹⁴Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished.

Wasting: This ‘loose living’ was a life of licentiousness. The son was out from under his father’s restraint and living it up. Lloyd J. Ogilvie says, “We stuff our lives with what we can taste or touch, save or sell. The question is not ‘What will we do when the money runs out?’ but ‘What can we squeeze into life and acquire before the undertaker arrives?’”³

Want: (Galatians 6:7-8) His money was running out, and to compound matters, a famine had come. Sin and selfishness revealed his true friends.

III. THE SHAMED SON

Luke 15:15-16

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.

Humility: He was working for a Gentile who raised pigs, the animal of greatest aversion to the Jew.

Hunger: “Hunger finally drove him to become a hired servant of a citizen of that far country—a lowly *misthos*, a day laborer, the bottom of the three ranks of servants.”⁴ Here was a Hebrew feeding swine and wishing he could eat the carob pods fed to them! At this point in the parable, the Pharisees were probably thinking, “No good Jew would ever do this.”



IV. THE SENSIBLE SON

Luke 15:17-19

But when he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men. '"

Remembrance: He remembered the generosity of his father. "It wasn't guilt that brought the prodigal home; it was the father's grace."⁵

God has a way of bringing us to the end of ourselves. Our way is not always the best way. Selfishness is a judgement in itself. "He came to himself, which is to say, that reason returned. As one sage wrote, 'Pain plants the flag of reality in the fortress of a rebel heart.'"⁶ Sometimes we have to let our children hit bottom. We can't keep bailing them out. "Some [people] have to experience the wages of sin, or they will never understand the Gospel. If they don't understand sin has consequences, then why do they need salvation? ...We can sympathize them right into hell.... The father let his son go, but never stopped loving him. He never stopped praying for him. He never stopped looking for him."⁷

Repentance: He returned to the place of goodness. This was a genuine turning to the father, asking for forgiveness and restoration. "The first step to spiritual sanity is repentance, a return to a realistic understanding of who God is and who we are in relation to Him."⁸ The son had to come back as an outcast. He had dishonored his family and his Jewish community.

Resignation: He rehearsed what he would say in repentance. Humbly he begged his father to allow him to work as one of his day laborers. "What a change of heart! He's no longer negotiating. He's gone from 'give me' in verse 12 to 'make me' in verse 19."⁹

V. THE SYMPATHETIC FATHER

Luke 15:20-24

So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son." 22 But the father said to his slaves, "Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; 23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found." And they began to celebrate.

Note: The father is the central figure in this parable.

Compassion: The father was probably up on the rooftop multiple times a day looking for his wayward son. He surrendered all decorum when this older man 'ran' to meet the prodigal. "In that culture, for a father to run was undignified. It was dishonorable. He was taking the disgrace on





Himself.”¹⁰ He likewise hugged him and showered him with kisses. These were the hugs of “I thought I would never see you again.”

Confession: This son began the monologue he had rehearsed to present to his father, “I have sinned. I am not worthy.”

Clemency: This amounts to “forgiving and restoring rights.” His father immediately cut off this talk and commanded his slaves to clothe his son in the honored robe. Furthermore, they were to put the family ring on his finger and restore him to full rights and privileges of a family member, even providing sandals for those wayward feet. Next, his father set in motion plans for a welcome home party. The celebration began and the father announced, “My son was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.” What did the prodigal discover? “A Gracious Father, A Glorious Feast, A Great Forgiveness.”¹¹

VI. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS SON

Luke 15:25-30

Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. ²⁷ And he said to him, “Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has received him back safe and sound.” ²⁸ But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. ²⁹ But he answered and said to his father, “Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; ³⁰ but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him.”

Failed to Reflect His Father’s Heart: If we’re going to reflect the heart of God toward the wayward, then we’re going to rejoice in the repentance of every sinner. The older brother was angry. He wouldn’t even go into the house. His dad had to come out to him. Like his younger brother, he also had a worldly attitude. It was just that his worldliness was culturally acceptable.

Failed to Share His Father’s Grief or Defend His Father’s Honor: His father “began ‘pleading,’ which translates the term *parakaleo*, a term Luke used throughout his gospel to mean ‘implore.’”¹² The older brother kept the family business, but he was selfish. He didn’t care about his father. This was dad’s party. His brother did not ask for it. “[W]hen our self-generated piety, morality, and religion keep us from grace, we might as well have been squandering in the far country. We elder brothers leave the father without ever leaving the farm.”¹³

Focused Only on Self: What does he celebrate? His good works. “I have served. I have obeyed. I never did what he did.” “There are people who live in high-class pig sties.”¹⁴ They are upstanding citizens. They have nice houses, but not warm homes. They’re not physically hungry, but they are spiritually empty.



Frustrated over His Father's Generosity: He was accusatory toward his father's kindness. It's sad when people get upset about generosity. "You've had the father, and you want a goat?" Because of self-righteousness, he missed his father's mercy. Mercy is a display of grace. He didn't deserve it, but neither do we.

VII. THE SINNER'S SAVIOR

Luke 15:31-32

And he said to him, "Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found."

The father immediately directs the attention back to fellowship with him. It was not about the goat, the robe, the shoes. It was about the relationship with him. "It was the Father's mercy that brought the son home, not the Father's mouth. It wasn't the criticism. It was the grace. It was that compassion"¹⁵ (shown to both sons). Are there those we think don't deserve to come to Christ? Do we ask others to prove themselves by our standards instead of having compassion? Do we have a compassion that draws sinners? "God knows all the skeletons in your closet, in your attic, in the basement. He knows what you have done, and He says, 'Come unto Me.' The most defiled sinner is welcomed by the most holy Savior. Jesus is better at saving than we are at sinning because He will save to the uttermost. And that's why He came"¹⁵ to seek and to save that which was lost. There is great rejoicing when the lost are brought to Jesus!

CONCLUSION

"Jesus leaves the story hanging, with the older brother outside. We don't know if he ever came in to join the party, in spite of the father's gracious and gentle appeal. Jesus leaves the story there to make us consider our own response. If we are like the older brother, if we pride ourselves in being good, church-going people, if we see ourselves as better than prostitutes and drug dealers and thieves and other obvious sinners, then we need to judge our self-righteous pride. We would be greatly wrong to go out and join in the sins of the prodigal, so that grace might abound. But also, we would be greatly wrong to get angry at God for His grace toward such sinners and to demand that He give us what we deserve. Never ask God to give you what you deserve! We're all sinners, desperately in need of mercy, not justice...."¹⁶

"Rejoice in reconciliation; don't respond in anger. Rejoice in repentance; don't celebrate self-righteousness. Rejoice in the relationship; don't demand reparation. Honor the Father and manifest His grace."¹⁷

"If you, like the prodigal, have rebelled against God and have come to see your wretched condition, your response should be like his: Get up, leave your sin, go to the Father and appeal for His mercy. You will find it in abundance."¹⁸


Chaplain Arin Hess



SOFTLY AND TENDERLY, JESUS IS CALLING

1. Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling,
Calling for you and for me;
See, on the portals He's waiting
and watching,
Watching for you and for me.

*Come home, come home;
Ye who are weary come home;
Earnestly, tenderly, Jesus is calling,
Calling, O sinner, come home!*

2. Why should we tarry when Jesus
is pleading,
Pleading for you and for me?
Why should we linger and heed not
His mercies,
Mercies for you and for me?

3. Time is now fleeting, the moments
are passing,
Passing from you and from me;
Shadows are gathering, deathbeds
are coming,
Coming for you and for me.

4. O for the wonderful love He has
promised,
Promised for you and for me!
Though we have sinned, He has mercy
and pardon,
Pardon for you and for me.

Will L. Thompson, 1880

FOOTNOTES

1, 16, 18. Steven J. Cole, "Lesson 72: How to Receive God's Abundant Mercy (Luke 15:11-32)," *Bible.org*.

2. All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*, 1995 Update.

3, 4, 13. Lloyd John Ogilvie, *Autobiography of God: God Revealed in the Parables of Jesus*, Regal Books, 1979, pgs. 31, 16, 25.

5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17. Ken Endean, Sermon at Cornerstone Baptist Church, 10/3/21.

6, 12. Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke*, Zondervan, 2012, pgs. 384-86.

8. Gary Inrig, *The Parables: Understanding What Jesus Meant*, Discovery House, 1991, pg. 18.

11. John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Luke: An Expository Commentary*. Kregel Publications, 2009.



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WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY

Meeting during the
109th Legislature's
Second Session

SENATORS

6:45 – 7:45 A.M.
Wednesdays
Capitol Office #1004

STAFF

12:00 – 1:00 P.M.
Wednesdays
NE State Office Building
Morrill Room