

Intro ideas: In one of the famous cinematic lines from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Judy Garland, who plays Dorothy, in the original *Wizard of Oz*, taps her ruby red slippers together and says, "There's no place like home."

What does home mean to you? Some would say home is a place of stability and refuge. Home can be a kind of sanctuary that helps drown out all the concerns and distractions of the world. For others, home provides the place where *you can be the real you*. As someone said, it is the place where we can be physically and emotionally naked. We say things, do things, and act all crazy at home unlike we would any other place. Can anyone identify with that? But I think most people would say, "Home is where the heart is." Home is a place of family and friendship, a place where our deepest relationships are cultivated. Home is a place of love where the deepest love should be given and the deepest love should be received.

I think there is something inherent about how God has made us that makes us all long for a true and better home, a place that is a refuge, a place where you can be the real you, and a place where you can experience the deepest love you have ever known. The Bible teaches us that this is God's desire for us and he has spared no expense to ensure that we can know and experience his amazing love for us and be at home with him. That is why I want us to invite us to think deeply about...

### **"The Prodigal Love of God." Luke 15:1-32**

In Luke 15, Jesus shows us the heart of God in a way that few other chapters in the Bible have the capacity to unfold, and it does so with great relevance for those new to Christianity and those who have been in the faith for a very long time.

The first two verses set the tone for the whole chapter. If we don't understand verses 1 & 2, we won't understand the famous parables that follow. *Read 1-3*

- Verse 1 tells us great news: tax collectors & "sinners" drew near to Jesus. "Tax collectors" were a despised group of people. Often understandably so, because they would swindle and steal from their debtors. "Sinners" refer to the blatantly immoral, but Luke is really saying this is how the Pharisees viewed these people. That is why some translations put the word "sinners" in quotations. Because everyone in the story, except for Jesus, including the Pharisees should be classified as sinners.
- There was something magnetic about Jesus. Everywhere you turn in the gospels, you find imperfect people being drawn to him.
- Sadly, there was a problem among the religious leadership because they actually thought *this was a problem!* They grumbled, saying, "This man receives and shares meals with such despicable and ungodly people."
- This provokes Jesus to tell a parable, really made up of three parables that contain some of his most famous teaching. It is vital for our understanding of the passage to see that Jesus directs these parables to the Pharisees and Scribes.
- *Trans:* I want to read the first two parables, the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin, primarily as reference points for us because they contain themes more fully developed in the parable of the Prodigal Son, which is our focus this am.

*Read 4-7 & 8-10: Picture of a lost sheep and a lost coin... Briefly explain...* With these three parables, Jesus desperately wants us to . .

#### **I. Recognize we are hopelessly lost apart from God's grace (15:1-19).**

*Read 11-13*

- Two sons. And these two sons could not be more different. I get this because we have two girls, and in many ways they could not be more different. *Pic:* Two days ago, we pulled the grill out... Kessed, our almost two year old, was playing in dirt with a huge smile on her face, while our four year old, Parker, was standing over her with her arm covering her face saying, "No Kessed, I can't watch. She's going to get a worm!"
- These two brothers provide an even greater contrast. The older brother was hard working, responsible, and compliant. The younger brother was carefree, irresponsible and driven by selfish ambition. So much so that he asks for his inheritance before his father's death. Few actions in the first century could have been more offensive and disrespectful than this. The son essentially says, "I'll take your gifts, but not you."
- He then takes a trip very far away from the familiarity of home and the accountability of those who loved him. Verse 13 says, "he squandered his property in reckless living."
- *This is where we get the term "prodigal."* The word prodigal means "recklessly extravagant; [it refers to] someone who spends money and resources excessively, and lavishly."
- The prodigal son represents the immoral and irreligious. He went out and balled in Paris with all of his friends drinking, partying, and hooking up with all the ladies *without reservation*. He was recklessly extravagant in his wild living.
- And he is a picture the lost sheep of vv. 3-5, and the tax collectors and sinners of verse one. And the prodigal son is a picture of us.
- **"All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:6)**
- Here's the deal: even though God has a plan for us, even though he has mapped out how he wants us to live our lives, we have all deviated from his plan and done our own thing. "God, you're wise, but I am wiser. You have a great plan, but not as good as mine." And we go to our Father and say, "Give me my share, so I can go and live life how I want to live it." And to be sure, our own way is usually quite enjoyable. Reckless living feels so satisfying and *pleasurable!*

*Trans:* But *verse 14-16* teaches us that sin is pleasurable for a short time and it carries a high price. *Read 14-16*

- He spends everything and finds himself in a desperate situation. He's out of cash, a famine hits, and his needs start to rise. Instead of having an abundance to spend, he now finds himself in want, so much so that he hires himself out to feed pigs.
- It was so bad that verse 16 tells us that he longed to eat the pods that the pigs ate, and absolutely no one was there to help him.
- This is our spiritual state. Apart from God's grace, we are helpless, weak, and lost. His folly finally drives him to hit rock bottom.
- Can you see him there?

Trans: Verse 17 tells us what happened next... *Read 17-20a*

- *"He came to himself."* The NIV says, "He came to his senses." In the middle of all that now seemed so unfamiliar, he remembered the one who put food on his table and freely gave his very best for him.
- You see, there is more than a hunger for food at work. He is hungry for his relationship to be restored. He now realizes how grave his offense truly was. He sees that he has not only offended and sinned against his earthly father, but in a much greater sense, he had "sinned against heaven," which is to say, he sinned against God, the heavenly Father.
- This is a picture of repentance and change, and this is how we should respond. If you want to have a true and vibrant relationship with God, there needs to come a time in your life when this happens. (Baptism Video...) All over the world, people are coming to their senses, seeing their need for God, and making the journey home, and the only way home is through the cross & resurrection of Christ.
- So he resolves to go his father and beg him to have mercy on him. He rehearses what he will say in verses 18-19: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me like one of your hired servants."

Trans: But we are in for a great surprise in v. 20. The narrative shifts the spotlight from the son to the father, and in the process we will learn much about the heart of God. *Read 20.* This brings us to our second encouragement

## II. Realize God graciously pursues us with prodigal love. (15:20-32).

What is God's love like? I want to give you 6 characteristics of **The love of God.** #1

### ***This is audacious love.***

- The Father loves his son with great boldness. It says, "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran." Jesus gives us the idea the Father was earnestly watching for his son to return, and as he begins to see that familiar silhouette against the horizon, he drops everything and runs.
- *"He ran!"* This action cut against all of the behavioral customs of the day. "Running was considered to be undignified for an older person, especially for wealthy landowner such as this man." He demonstrates a total disregard for how others might view him. His focus is so unreservedly fixed on his son, the object of his love, that he would gladly sacrifice to make it known. His love was bold. #2. His love was gracious.

### ***This is gracious love.***

- P. Grace moves toward the unlovely. The father had every right to be angry, to give him the cold shoulder, to treat him like a servant and not a son. But the father, once again, displays the love of God. How? Because God loves the unlovable, and . . .
- Love always takes the first step. Before the son has a chance to speak, the father already extends love and acceptance. Way before you possessed the first inclination to love God, he was pursuing you. His love was also...

### ***This is affectionate love.***

- When you love someone, everyone knows it. No one should have to wonder if you love your spouse. If you love your friends...
- "It says he ran and embraced him." The word embrace in the Greek means he "fell on his neck." He took and buried himself in his son. "and kissed him." Love is affectionate and...
- Affection is personal... In each parable there is focus on "the one." It does not say hundreds of sheep, or hundreds of coins, or many sons were found, but one. God sees 7 billion people on the planet, and yet he is on you, and it is on me. He loves us specifically, directly, personally. If you were the only person on earth, Christ would have gladly died for you!

### ***This is forgiving love.***

- Recount his sin... Recount our sin... "God's forgiveness is always available. No history of sin is too great to be forgiven." (Bock)
- Our sin is great, but God's grace is greater.
- As they embraced, the son began to speak (v.21): "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." And before he can finish, the father interrupts: "Son, stop. Servants. My son is home. Strike up the band. Prepare the feast. It is time to celebrate!" Which brings us to our fifth characteristic of God's love. . .

### ***This is joyful love.***

- Rejoicing (v.5) "Rejoice with me." (v. 6) "more joy in heaven.." (v. 7)
- "Rejoice with me" (v. 9) "there is joy before the angels of God (v. 10)
- And they began to celebrate! In each of these three parables, there is a call to public rejoicing! Why? Because a miracle has taken place. Verse 24 is key: "For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found." And they began to celebrate."
- Every conversion is a miracle. And the greatest news I could share with you today is that this what God has done with us.
- For everyone who is in Christ, God has not only forgiven our sin, but has also given us a robe on our back, a ring on our hand, shoes on our feet, and has thrown a party...
- Did you know the moment you came home, all of heaven rejoiced? Just admit it. You don't have a framework for that.

### ***This is prodigal love.***

- God's love is extravagant, free, lavish, and abundant. His love is recklessly strong. I love the words of Brennan Manning, who once wrote: "I could more easily contain Niagara Falls in a teacup, than I can comprehend the wild, uncontainable love of God." God has withheld absolutely nothing from us. His love is fierce and incomprehensible.
- Rather than the parable of the Prodigal Son, I would be more accurate to call this "The Parable of the Prodigal God."
- **1 John 3:1** says in the NIV translation, "**See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.**"
- God's reckless, extravagant grace is our greatest hope, and it is our only hope!
- And knowing this love is what frees us to live with great confidence and power. His love ignites our love for him, and consequently, our love for others.

- **John Stott** said, **“The Cross is the blazing fire at which the flame of our love is kindled, but we have to get near enough for its sparks to fall on us.”**

*Have you drawn near to Christ and his cross? Have you received the bold and audacious, gracious and affectionate, joyfully forgiving, prodigal love of God?*

We might expect the story to stop there, but remember, the father has two sons. The older son was working in the fields when his younger brother returned home. Check out v. 25

- *Read 25-27.* The older brother was angry. He wanted justice, not grace, and rather than rejoicing, he grumbles. Like the Pharisees, standing outside of the party of God’s kingdom, the older brother refuses to go in. He crosses his arms, sits outside and pouts!
- The irony here is that he would have received 2/3 of the inheritance because he was the firstborn son.
- But the Father, once again, goes out to pursue his wayward son. (*Verse 28: “His father came out and entreated him...”*)
- Sadly, the older brother still refuses to go in. We find his rationale in *Verse 29: “I have served, I never disobeyed your command, and you never even gave me a goat...”* He’s essentially saying: “You’re throwing this guy a feast, while you won’t even take me to McDonalds! What is wrong with this picture!?!”
- This is how Pharisees operate. They are obsessed comparing performance and base their worth on being superior to the next person. Listen, if you compare your spirituality to those around you, your motivation will be pride, not the pleasure of God.
- More importantly, we learn that there are two ways to reject the father and his love. One is blatant disrespect and immorality; the other is prideful moral goodness. Most people only think immoral people are alienated from God, not moral people, but this parable teaches us that religious people may be in worse shape than irreligious people.
- The self-righteousness of the older brother actually alienated him from the father. He felt like the father should be in his debt. He tried to control the Father’s love and action through his performance, and that is exactly what “religious” people do who do not understand grace. Religion says, “I obey and perform, therefore I am accepted and loved.” The gospel says, “I’m loved and accepted through Christ with a prodigal love, therefore I will gladly obey.”
- I can get into heaven by being good enough, but no one is good enough and everyone needs the free gift God extends to us.
- The older son, this religious son pictures the ninety-nine “who need no repentance.” And “The apparent insider is an outsider.” (Bock)
- Many churches are filled with older brothers, which is why people want nothing to do with the church, but here’s the beautiful thing: we have the opportunity to be different, to be both transformed and humble, confident in God’s love for us.
- What is worse, the Pharisees, not only found themselves on the outside of the kingdom but they were upset about those who were actually entering. They grumbled, while heaven, which includes God himself, rejoices with great joy!

Trans: P. Don’t miss how the story ends.

- *Verses 31-32:* Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. He was not and now is, and for that we must rejoice!
- Jesus concludes with intentional abruptness. He does not tell us if the older son joins the feast. Why? Because those who were listening were faced with the same choice. Jesus speaks affectionately to religious people who are still on the outside and says, “Come to the celebration and feast.”

Be honest. The gospel is much more radical than you imagined... So what is the point of Luke 15?

**The Point: Receive and rejoice in the prodigal love of God.**

**So have you received it? Are you rejoicing in it?**

**Conclusion:**

Jesus has just taught this story in the hearing of two very distinct groups. There were many younger brothers and many older brothers in the crowd. But the two groups had one unified need: to come home. There is little doubt that many who heard rejoiced at what they heard and believed, while others continued in their rejection of Christ. What about you?

With a smile on his face, and his arms outstretched, Jesus calls us all to come home. It’s as simple: 1) Recognizing your Need (“he came to his senses); 2) Turning back to God (by confessing your sin); 3) Receive the gift of his love. (we receive this gift by faith.)

Call out to God and say, “God, I need you. I trust in the work of Christ on my behalf. I receive the gift of his substitutionary death and believe in his resurrection, and I’m coming home. Return to God! Come home!” Let’s pray. Some of you need to say that to God right now. Others just need to pray that you would know, in a deeper sense, the prodigal love of God.