

X. L.E.A.D. in Biblical Perspective
Lifestyle of Evangelism and Discipleship
“Lessons on Evangelism from the Parable of the Lost Son”
Luke 15:11–32
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Let’s look in Luke 15. This is God’s Word and it’s the truth. Luke 15:1–7 says [1] *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. [2] And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.” [3] So he told them this parable: [4] “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? [5] And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. [6] And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’ [7] Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*

[8] “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? [9] And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ [10] Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

What is it that Jesus warns you, history affirms, and likely you have experienced to some degree? He warns you that by the Gospel which you have been saved and which you are to proclaim to the world is a scandal. History affirms that those who do not come to Christ consider the Gospel scandalous. You are living in a culture in which the secular elite attempt to vacuum out religion in general but Christianity in particular which are in the crosshairs. Why is there such an animosity? All the religions of this world have in common the fact that they all tell you in one form or another what you have to do or give to maybe get salvation but you probably didn’t give enough or do enough in the end. Christianity says it’s what you do is the problem for it’s what God has done for you and now offers us a gift through His Son, Jesus Christ. If you turn from your sins and put your trust in Him alone who died on the cross and rose again and now offers you eternal life, then you can have eternal life. That message in particular is a scandal and is despised. Why?

Here are some reasons. Number one, the Gospel, unlike other religions, says you’re lost and you can’t save yourself. Secondly, it says you’re helpless, hopeless and you need a Savior. Thirdly, only Jesus can save you. All of that is an affront unless God changes how you hear it and see it. The other affront to it has to do with the exclusivity that only Christ can save you. So those are some of the reasons the Gospel is a scandal but the fact that the Gospel is so, is not new.

Jesus, Himself was a scandal. The Gospel writers take great pains to let us know just how scandalous anyone who didn’t come to Christ viewed Christ. The most obvious that saw Jesus as a scandal were the Scribes (the lawyers of the day and teachers of the law) and Pharisees (the ones who told everyone how to practice the law). There was one thing in particular that was scandalous to them and that is this constant habit so it is repeated throughout the Gospels that the

Scribes and the Pharisees were offended and began to bring a charge against Him. Their declared charge was that this Man who claims to be the Messiah can't be the Messiah because He's not holy and He's not holy because He eats, welcomes and receives tax gatherers and sinners.

A tax gatherer was absolutely despised. A tax gatherer was a Jewish person who had bought into a franchise by the Romans to collect their taxes and it was understood that they would collect a certain amount of taxes and anything else they could get above and beyond that was all theirs to keep. They were basically running a franchise of thievery. So they were considered traitors to their own people, the Jews, because they were working for the Romans and they were stealing from their own people. Zacchaeus was probably the most famous tax gatherer in the Bible and when Jesus got a hold of his life he said he was going to pay back all that he had stolen.

Then there was the Pharisee and the sinner where the Pharisee prayed to himself in Luke 18:11b–12, [11b] *'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. [12] I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'* Basically he was saying he didn't need a Savior. Therefore is a Pharisee works his way to heaven what would be more scandalous than a Savior who says 'You need Me to be saved'?

So finally in this moment Jesus finally decides to answer the Scribes and Pharisees repeated charge with this parable. This is like a trifold parable, three stories in one. The consistency is there. There is something lost and it can't find itself. The one that lost it then finds it and when they find it then others rejoice with them. The one that is found is characterized as one who repents which is what it means to be found and saved. Then there is also this notion that there are some who are righteous and need no repentance. The Scribes and Pharisees look at themselves as though they don't need a Savior. They look at what Jesus does in grace to the sinners and the tax gatherers as it offending them and it offends them because they don't see that they need a Savior. That's why Jesus says there is more joy over one sinner who repents then over 99 who need know repentance.

Do you think Jesus is teaching in this text that there are people who don't need repentance that are righteous? No, He is teaching us that there are people who believe they are righteous and don't need repentance therefore a Savior is a scandal. So now Jesus gives a parable to the scandalized Scribes and Pharisees and it's here I feel totally inept. There are preachers who make a big mistake who think they need to bring the Bible into this century but that's not the challenge of preaching. The challenge of preaching is to get you back to the century it was written.

The first two iterations of this parable are a scandal and the third is even more so. Jesus is going to scandalize them even more when He finishes with the story we will look at in this study. He is going to scandalize the scandalized. This parable is like a bomb that has three explosions to these Scribes and Pharisees who are offended by what they see in Jesus who welcomes, receives and eats with sinners.

The first installment is the one about the shepherd who lost one sheep and left the 99 to find the one. First of all, Scribes and Pharisees despise shepherds. One reason Jesus uses the shepherd is that in the Old Testament the Messiah is pictured as a Shepherd. We see this in Ezekiel 34, Psalm 23, Psalm 118 and other passages where the Shepherd will seek the stray and lost sheep. Another affront to the Scribes and Pharisees is that the shepherds were the first to know about the birth of the Messiah. They saw the shepherds as the unworthy, underclass that were a bunch of thieves. So Jesus uses this to show that He is not only like the shepherd to fulfill

the shepherd prophecies of the Messiah but He also does what that shepherd does in that when one sheep wanders He goes after it. There is no shepherd that would leave 99 sheep alone in open country to go after one but this Shepherd will.

He is telling them that He is the Chief Shepherd, the Great Shepherd and the Good Shepherd who not only seeks to find, receive and to bring home but He is also on His way to a cross because He is going to die for those sheep. The Good Shepherd lays His life down for the sheep. That is a scandal for any shepherd that would do that and compare themselves to the Messiah in that way. The reason He welcomes, receives and eats with sinners is because He came for them, to seek them, find them and bring them home while all the time rejoicing that He is finding them. Not only does He rejoice but those who are found rejoice with Him. More than that He came to die for them on the cross.

Then He gives them the second iteration, the lost coin. In this one it is not one percent of what is lost as in the sheep that was lost but now it's a woman and the coin is ten percent of what is lost. In this one Jesus teaches us that lost sinners cannot and will not repent and come to Christ as Lord and Savior unless He relentlessly seeks them, until they realize their need of Him and that He loves them. Coins don't find themselves. They have to be found, just like sheep. Jesus identifies Himself here with the woman.

I believe in the first installment He is giving us the principle of Jesus the Shepherd – I have come to seek and to save the lost. In the second one He is giving us the process. I believe the woman is representing Christ by the Holy Spirit working through His bride, the church and says 'As the Father sent Me so send I you to seek and to save the lost.' How do you look? The first thing you do is light a lamp. As you bring the Gospel, you light a lamp as you look relentlessly with increasing diligence and intensity. Then you get a broom and start sweeping them to look more intently for them and then you get on your hands and knees to diligently look for them. This is what the bride of Christ, the body of Christ is doing as they are sent by the power of the Spirit by Christ to bring the Gospel to this world to find those sinners. When this coin is found it's another sinner that has repented and come home and for every one there is the emanation of joy from the one who finds it that envelops heaven and earth.

Now He comes to the third installment and if they aren't offended yet they are about to get really offended. This one becomes the greatest scandal of all to them. Let's look at this third story in Luke 15:11–12 which says [11] *And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. [12] And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.'* And he divided his property between them.

The Scribes and Pharisees would have been offended by the request made here by the younger son. We see here where sin takes root. I had a man tell me he thought the younger son here was a narcissist. Now I understand in today's society there is a technical definition of a narcissist that bears its own technical application but the fact is that we're all born narcissists. It is all about us and if there is a God then He exists just to make me happy. Notice the younger son. 'Give to me what is coming to me.' Back then the older son would have received two thirds of the property and the younger son would have gotten one third. So when would that be coming to him? He wouldn't have gotten this until the father died. So the son was basically saying 'father you exist for me and as far as I'm concerned you're as good as dead so go ahead and give me what's mine so I can get out.' So here we see a scandalous request.

Now we see a scandalous result. Luke 15:13–16 says [13] *Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. [14] And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in*

that country, and he began to be in need. [15] So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. [16] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

So by what we read here we know that he took a third of his father's estate and sold everything he was given and very quickly. We call that a liquidation, a fire sale where you generally only get about ten cents on the dollar. He doesn't care all that his father has put into this, he just wants to get out of it immediately. He leaves the covenanted land of Israel. He goes to an uncovenanted land, a Gentile country, to wander and squander, the two things that seem to always go together. The prodigal becomes a profligate. He begins to live in riotous (drunkenness) and reckless living. Later on, we'll find out his way of living included prostitutes. He is going to do it all until finally he has spent everything and then he gets to the last thing and the hand of a sovereign God brings a famine to the land. God accelerates his death spiral into depravity with the famine. It's an inevitable death spiral anyway. When the famine hits he has only one thing to do and that is to put himself as a slave to a Gentile. This son once saw himself in slavery to sonship in Israel but now he is even lower.

So now a Jewish boy is feeding pigs but it's worse than that for the pods that pigs eat which are inedible to humans, he would desire to eat but is not allowed to eat. In fact, he is not given anything to eat. He has been enslaved to die but on his way to death he is to feed pigs. So now he is beneath the level of swine at this point in his life. As I read that I can't tell you how my heart ached. There are so many people who believe the call of God is something to be emancipated from, where the call to sin is life yet it brings death and emptiness. The enslavement of his lifestyle leads him not just to the trough of pigs but under the hooves of pigs. Now in the providence of God a scandalous repentance is considered.

Luke 15:17-19 says [17] *"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! [18] I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. [19] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"*

I only know of two times where there seems to be an intentional painting of the destructiveness and horrific nature of sin in the lives of two people by the revealed Word of God. One is here in this portrayal of the younger brother and the other one is Nebuchadnezzar who ends up feeding like an animal for seven years in a field. Both have this similar statement of here 'but when he came to himself' and in Daniel 4:34 where it says 'my reason returned to me.' These statements tell you a couple of things. One is that sin never makes sense. We try and rationalize it but it's senseless. Secondly, when God begins to save someone He starts bringing them to their senses. Here this younger son has come to his senses.

Now he looks back to once where he was a son and to his father where he sees what his father does for his indentured servants, how he treats his hired servants. His father is a gracious, compassionate and generous father. The servants have something to eat, to wear and they are all taken care of. He thinks that maybe he can *work* his way back to becoming a worker. He figures there is no room for him to be a son.

I am very much indebted to Dr. Ferguson and Dr. Berry for their writing on this prodigal son because I think we have a hard time really understanding this. To really understand this we have to get back to this culture. It's hard for us to really understand the shame that this young man has brought on his father and his family. He realizes he has no right to be a son but maybe he could work his way back to erase enough shame to being a worker. So he rehearses his

speech in Luke 15:18–19. This scandalous repentance is now followed by a scandalous response to the Scribes and Pharisees.

Luke 15:20–24 says [20] *And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. [21] And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'* [22] *But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. [23] And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. [24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'* And they began to celebrate.

Here we are back to lost, found and party time when one sinner is repentant and returns but this is a scandalous response. In this first century what generally would have happened here is that the son would come back, be put in the middle of the city, would have been beaten, shamed, ostracized, set apart, put outside and would have become an example who would teach everyone else a lesson about not shaming your family, and especially not your father. Instead of him being shamed, which he would have expected but hopefully in the process he could at least be a worker, his father is looking for him and sees him coming.

The father runs to him. Older men have enough sense not to jog but would have walked with dignity, fully robed as a sign of position, modesty and honor but this man ran, with legs exposed just going for his son. His son doesn't even get a chance to do his rehearsed speech. His father's compassion envelopes him. His father's arms smother him. His father's kisses and affection cover and embrace him. You can almost hear the townspeople sounding scandalized. This boy ought to be dealt with but the father took the shame for the son and brought him back to the family. How do I know?

You will notice that he will eventually get to his speech but leaves the part about being one of his workers out and the reason why is because his father has already taken that off the page. When the father embraces him he says five things to him. The first thing the father says is 'bring the best robe and put it on him.' You can hear the echo of Jacob and Joseph here when Jacob had a robe made for Joseph. The robe was a sign of honor as well as a sign of modesty. Cover my son with one of the family robes, one of the best robes.

Secondly, the father said to bring the signet ring and put it on his finger which is the ring of inheritance, of authority. Thirdly, the father said 'put the shoes on his feet.' Workers were not allowed shoes but the family wore shoes. Fourthly, his father said 'to bring the fattened calf.' It was not the fat calf but the fattened one and this is the one that was prepared for this moment, for a moment of celebration. So they have the party.

The fifth thing is the son receives everything as passive. The father is the actor, not the son. The son that was going to work his way back doesn't even get a chance. Bring the robe and the father puts the robe upon him. Bring the ring and put it on his finger. Bring the shoes and put them on his feet. Bring the calf and kill it. It is not what the son does but what the father for him and to him. Sonship is declared.

The son still continues with his repentance, where it literally means 'I have piled up my sins all the way to heaven against God in heaven and I've sinned against you father.' This is repentance by those who are found. Then they have the party but it's not over. By this time, the Scribes and Pharisees are so scandalized you can just hear them saying 'Are you kidding me, someone has to bring some sense to this story!!' Okay, He is about to show up so let's look at what happens next.

Luke 15:25–32 says [25] “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. [26] And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. [27] And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ [28] But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, [29] but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served (slaved for – NIV) you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. [30] But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ [31] And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. [32] It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

Both sons come from the fields but the younger one saw being in the family as slavery and now we see how the older brother looks at this. Notice that the father does for the older son what he did for the younger son which was he came out to him, but there was no repentance here. It was instruction. There was no joy for being in the family for the older brother either. It was slavery for him as well. When the father says ‘your brother was dead’ it is saying he was lost. We are not simply sin sick lost but we’re sin sick dead lost. It is likely that when the younger brother left they had a ceremony for his death but now he is found.

The older brother of course is scandalized just like the Scribes and Pharisees and you can almost hear them say when they hear the older brother ‘finally someone has some sense as to how to look at all this.’ They would be cheering for the older brother. Yet as the father comes out and entreats him he says ‘all that I have is yours.’ So what are we to learn from all of this?

Here is the takeaway. The saving grace of God in Christ is an occasion for uncontaminated joy to sinners who repent, yet an incomprehensible ‘scandal’ to those who believe they are righteous and have no need of a Savior. All that I have I have given to you. I need a Savior. I am grateful for the Lord’s church and for true religion that comes from a relationship with Christ but I need a Savior. I’m grateful I have a God who is my Father, who takes my shame by sending another Elder Brother and this One does not look down on me. This One does not resent me. This Elder Brother goes to the cross for me. He not only takes away my sin, its guilt but takes away its shame and then rejoices.

Did you get this from the three installments? The joy does not come from the angels. It rebounds from the angels and comes from God Himself. I will rejoice over you, one by one, says the Lord. I don’t care where you are or where you’re from as you are saved one by one the joy from God Himself goes out into heaven, spills from heaven into the earth but not among those who are scandalized or who think they are righteous and don’t need a Savior. But those who also know they need a Savior join in with that party to give praise to the Lord but it comes from God. God says ‘I rejoice over you not only because I have taken away the guilt of your sin for there is therefore now no condemnation but I have taken away the shame of your sin.’

We hear this in the hymn Man of Sorrows, What a Name;
*Man of sorrows what a name
for the Son of God, who came
ruined sinners to reclaim:
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

(What did the Man of Sorrows do?)
*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
in my place condemned he stood,*

*sealed my pardon with his blood:
Hallelujah, what a Savior!*

In the story of the lost sheep there was lost one percent, praise the Lord, rejoice. In the lost coin ten percent was lost, praise the Lord, rejoice. In the lost son, what was lost was priceless, praise the Lord for each and every one of them. We rejoice. Romans 8:15 says *[15] For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship (adoption). When we cry, "Abba! Father!"* We have been redeemed. The joy of the Lord fills the earth. I will rejoice over you.

Hebrews 12:1–2 says *[1] Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, [2] looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.* He has done this to bring us home and we rejoice in Him and over Him. We cry out to the One who says 'I have held nothing back from you. I gave you everything, for I gave you My Son to save you.' Hallelujah, what a Savior! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. As you have read this you have heard that God the Father through His Son and by His Spirit is rushing out to you. Would you turn from sin and self-righteousness and come to Him? The Bible is full of tax gatherers and sinners who got saved but there are only two Pharisees that are mentioned – Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. The blindness of our self-righteousness causes us to be scandalized by the call of the Savior. There is no one so lost you can't be found. There is no one so far away in a distant country that you can't come home. There is no one in the dregs of sin that He will not robe you with His Son's righteousness and bring you to salvation. If you would like to pray with someone please call us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200 for we would be glad to pray with you about a relationship with Christ. For those whom have come to Christ, go from here to the pig troughs of this world and tell everyone there is a Savior and whether you are in the trough or under it He loves you. He has come for you. Come to Him, everyone evangelizing everybody everywhere every day and we will rejoice over each one, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

Christ the Shepherd receives and welcomes lost sinners because He came to seek them, find them, and bring them home rejoicing. All who love Him rejoice with Him and then join Him.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST COIN

Lost sinners cannot and will not repent and come to Christ as Lord and Savior unless He relentlessly seeks them, until they realize their need of Him and that He loves them.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

A Scandalous Request

A Scandalous Result

A Scandalous Repentance

A Scandalous Response

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The saving grace of God in Christ is an occasion for uncontained joy to sinners who repent; yet an incomprehensible “scandal” to those who believe they are righteous and have no need of a Savior.