

## The Parables of the Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son

What is a parable?

*A short, simple story designed to communicate a spiritual truth, religious principle, or moral lesson; a figure of speech in which truth is illustrated by a comparison or example drawn from everyday experiences. A parable is often no more than an extended metaphor or simile, using figurative language in the form of a story to illustrate a particular truth. The Greek word for parable literally means "a laying by the side of" or "a casting alongside," thus "a comparison or likeness." In a parable something is placed alongside something else, in order that one may throw light on the other. A familiar custom or incident is used to illustrate some truth less familiar.*

(from Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary, Copyright © 1986)

Jesus used parables in at least two ways. Sometimes he used them to explain a principle that was readily apparent to the listener (such as The Parable of the Good Samaritan) but other times the meaning of the parable was more hidden to the listener. See **Matthew 10:13 – 17**.

Since God wants “all men to be saved and come unto the knowledge of the Truth” (**1 Timothy 2:4**), why would he want spiritual insight hidden from anyone?

---

---

Let's examine the context of these Parables by reading **Luke 15:1 – 3**.

Who are the groups of people listening to Jesus and of what type of people would be included in these groups?

---

---

In American Society today who might be included in each of these groups?

---

---

Keeping this context in mind let's read the first two parables in this chapter in **Luke 15:3 – 10**.

Who does “the man” in verse 4 and the “the woman” in verse 8 represent and how is this possibly interesting considering the society of that day?

---

Who does the lost sheep and the lost coin represent and how are these examples similar and different from each other?

---

---

How does a lost sheep react to being caught and put over the shoulders of a shepherd?

---

---

What lesson(s) is(are) there for us in this?

---

---

How could Jesus say that the ninety-nine do not need to repent in verse 7?

---

---

Other thoughts/questions about these two parables?

---

---

Again, keeping in mind the context of who is listening to the parables in verses 1 – 2, let's read The Parable of the Prodigal Son in **Luke 15:11 – 32**.

This parable is often called the parable of “The Prodigal Son” or “The Lost Son” but how does Jesus introduce this parable in verse 11?

---

---

Who does the father represent and who does each son represent in Jesus' audience?

---

---

What is so remarkable about the younger son's request in verse 12 and what is this saying about the younger son's attitude toward his father?

---

---

How are the younger son's actions representative of sin?

---

---

Considering Jesus' audience what is the significance that the younger son ends up feeding pigs?

---

---

What words indicate the turning point in the younger son's attitude and what is the significance of that description in terms of repentance?

---

---

How is this different from saying "I'm sorry"?

---

---

What do you think of the younger son's planned speech to his father?

---

What is the significance of the father going out to the younger son?

---

What is the significance of the father not letting the younger son finish his speech?

---

How were the listeners of this parable likely reacting to the parable at this point?

---

---

What is the significance of killing "the fatted calf" for the celebration?

---

---

Why is the elder son angry? What is his attitude toward his younger brother?

---

---

What is the elder son's attitude toward his father and his purpose in doing his work for his father?

---

---

How is the attitude described in **Psalm 1:1 – 2** differ from the elder son's attitude and what lesson is there for us in how we examine our walk in faith?

---

---

How is the attitude of the elder brother like the attitude of the younger son before the younger son came to his senses?

---

---

How can we be like the elder brother to both non-believers and fellow Christians?

---

*"If you are an "elder brother" you never know where you stand with God but you are very sure where others stand with God."*

Dr. Timothy Keller

How does the father interact with the elder brother?

---

How is the father's attitude the same toward the younger son and elder son?

---

How do we recognize when we are being a younger son or an elder son and what do we do to be neither?

---

---

Why does the parable end without telling us what happens?

---

---

How do you think the various members of the audience reacted to this parable?

---

In general, our churches are likely to be made up more of “elder brother” types rather than “younger brother” types yet Jesus’ “church” had a lot of the latter. What does this say about what we are doing/or should be doing in our congregations and/or as individuals?

---

---