

➤ **Read Luke 15:1–32.**

This passage opens with Jesus in the midst of tax collectors and sinners, eager to hear his words. The Pharisees and teachers of the law are also present, eager to find fault with his words.

*Eating*

In Jewish culture, eating together held more meaning than it does today; the status of the guests indicated the status of the host, and dining with others signaled acceptance and approval.

*Purity*

The Pharisees and teachers of the law were preoccupied with external “purity” and scorned any association with a person or thing they deemed unholy for fear it would make them impure or tarnish their reputations. In contrast, “Jesus being spotlessly pure Himself, cherished no such fear”;<sup>1</sup> thus he was more than willing to come into close contact with “sinners.”

*Tax Collectors and Sinners*

“The *tax collectors* were not highly regarded, for they both helped the hated Romans... and enriched themselves at the expense of their fellow countrymen. They were ostracized by many and regarded as outcasts by the religious.”<sup>2</sup>

“The *sinners* were the immoral or those who followed occupations that the religious regarded as incompatible with the Law.”<sup>3</sup>

1. What do the mutterings of the Pharisees reveal about their opinion of...  
...the company Jesus keeps?

...Jesus? (📖\* Lk. 7:36–39)

...themselves?

2. How do you think “tax collectors and sinners” (v. 1) would have felt...  
...in the presence of the religious leaders?

...in the presence of Jesus?

3. What themes do the three parables have in common? See how many you can find.

➤ **Read Luke 15:3-10.**

4. What qualities can be seen in the shepherd and the woman as they search for what they have lost?
5. How do the shepherd and the woman respond when they find what was lost?

*Woman*

The silver coin for which the woman was searching was “roughly equal to a full day’s pay. The Palestinian life situation presupposed by the parable is that of someone living right on the edge of extreme poverty with barely enough resources to maintain sustenance. The presence of a dirt floor in [her home] explains why the poor woman has to ‘sweep’ the floor to recover the lost coin.”<sup>4</sup>

6. By telling these parables, what do you think Jesus is trying to communicate about...  
...God?

...sinners (the “lost”)?

➤ **Read Luke 15:11-32.**

7. The younger son's share of his father's estate would have been a sizable amount of money. Compare and contrast what the son thought would result from getting his inheritance early versus what actually happened. (Consider the financial, relational, physical, and emotional results.)

8. What circumstances cause the younger son to "come to his senses" and move him to repent?

9. Reflect on a time when you have turned away from the Lord to seek something that you thought would satisfy you, but found that in the end you were deeply disappointed, impoverished, or ashamed.

10. How do you think the younger son feels as he anticipates his return home and rehearses the speech he has prepared for his father?

11. The younger son's disgraceful behavior would certainly have caused the Pharisees to place him in the category of "sinner." How do you think the Pharisees react when the younger son is joyfully welcomed home and honored by his father?

*Pig*

Without money, the younger son "had to get a job... [which] explains why he attached himself to a local citizen who sent him into his fields to feed swine. For a Jew no occupation could have been more distasteful. ... The pig was unclean... and the Jew under normal circumstances would have nothing to do with it at all. The young man must have been in desperate straits even to consider this job."<sup>6</sup>

12. What do these parables teach you about God's heart for you when you...  
...sin, stray, or get lost?

...repent and return "home" to the Father?

13. The older son is not pleased to see his younger brother or his father's joyful reception of him. Although the elder brother has "been slaving for [his father] and never disobeyed [his] orders" (v. 29), how is he just as lost (sinful) as his brother?

14. What characterizes the father's attitude toward both of his sons?

15. As you think about this parable, do you identify more with the younger son or the older son? Why?

16. What can you share about the unconditional love and seeking grace of God on your behalf?

\*📖 For further study

<sup>1</sup> Norvel Geldenhuys. *The Gospel of Luke: The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 402.

<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris. *The Gospel According to St. Luke: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 237.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Philip W. Comfort, Gen. Ed. *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*. Vol. 12 (The Gospel of Luke; Acts) (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2006), 217.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 219.

<sup>6</sup> Morris, 241.