



## WEEKLY STUDY

### WEEK 1: Prodigal - Love is Letting Go

In our new series, we are going to dive deep into the parable of the lost son in Luke 15. Parables are stories that Jesus told to simplify a spiritual truth in a way that we, as humans, can understand it. Since these stories were recorded thousands of years ago, we sometimes need help in fully understanding the cultural context of the story. In the next few weeks we will slowly walk through the verses in Luke 15 as we learn what Jesus was trying to teach us through this story of a loving father and his two sons that were both stuck in their sin, but in very different ways.

#### Background:

##### Luke 15:1-2

*Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."*

In the beginning of Luke chapter 15 we learn that Jesus is speaking to a crowd. In this crowd, there are tax collectors and those that would have been considered sinful or "unclean". Jesus had been teaching and eating with these openly sinful people. This had upset the religious leaders that were also in the crowd. They had come to pass judgement on Jesus for keeping such "unclean" company. Jesus knew this and spoke through parables to the religious leaders who couldn't see their sin, and to the "unclean" around him that already knew the weight of their sin.

Jesus shares 3 parables with the crowd. Each parable is about something that was lost, and then celebrated once it was found. The first parable (Luke 15:3-7) is about a shepherd that had 100 sheep. This shepherd chose to leave all 99 sheep to go chase after one sheep who wandered away. The next parable (Luke 15:8-10), Jesus tells about a woman who had 10 coins and lost one. She searches everywhere for the one coin and then rejoices once she finds it. Jesus clearly states at the end of each parable that this is how our Father in Heaven celebrates when one person who is lost repents of their sin and comes back to Him.

Then Jesus begins the third parable, the story of the lost son. Some call this the "Prodigal Son" parable, when it should probably more accurately be called the Prodigal God story. The definition of prodigal is to give recklessly and extravagantly, or lavishly giving everything. As we study this parable it will become clear that God, the father in the story, gives in this way to both of His sons. We will slowly work our way through the scriptures in Luke 15:11-32 together over the next few weeks as we learn what it means to be loved in this way.

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#### MONDAY: Luke 15:11-13

**11** "There was a man who had two sons. **12** The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. **13** "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

As Jesus begins the parable of the lost son in verse 11, He tells us about a father with two sons. The younger son asks for his inheritance so that he can leave and go out on his own. Today, in our western culture, we may not fully comprehend what a huge offense this was in

Jesus' time and culture. For context, the law would have dictated that *only* after the father's death would his property and assets be divided among his sons. The older son would receive the majority share, and the younger son would have received possibly around 1/3. An inheritance during this time wasn't just simply going to the bank and writing a check out a trust fund. Someone's inheritance would have been in the form of shares of the father's business, home and estate. These were assets such as livestock, land, servants, etc.... This inheritance was a portion of the family's means of generational livelihood. Traditionally in this time, after the father's death, the sons of the family would have kept their inheritance and honored their father and family name by increasing it's value to pass on to the next generation. Therefore, what the younger son is asking for is unheard of. He is basically telling the father - "I wish you were dead, I'm disowning you and I'm leaving the family forever". This would have brought generational shame and suffering on the whole family. In fact, according to the law, dishonoring your mother or father was punishable by stoning and death. We can only imagine how the people in the crowd reacted to Jesus' story. I am sure angry gasps could be heard at the younger son's request, and absolute shock when the father gave him what he requested. Instead of receiving death, the father gives the son his inheritance and allows him to leave. This situation would have left the family in financial ruin, as well as, completely disgraced in their community. The crowd must have been grumbling and arguing over what was happening.

Of course, the younger son is exercising the choice that we all have. We can choose to take what little God can give us right now in the form of blessings on earth and go our own way. We can be selfish and choose to use whatever He gives us in this moment for our own desires and pleasures. It's easy to do this in our busy lives. It's easy to forget who gives us everything that we have. It's easy to start thinking that it was owed to us, or that we somehow earned it. Just like an angry teenager, we can get to a place that we are angry with God and we want to be in control. We don't want to wait on His timing, we want it now and we think we know best. **As we begin this week, ask yourself - How are you like the younger son? Without thinking about a long time ago when you were younger (or maybe wilder), but right now, how are you like him? Are there places in your life that you are trying to go your own way? Are you yearning for God's blessings only to use them for selfish gain? Are there areas that you don't want to wait and think you know best? Confess those areas to the Lord, and pray about how you can begin to turn those over to Him.**

## **TUESDAY: Psalm 103**

*Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.*

*2 Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—*

*3 who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,*

*4 who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,*

*5 who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

*6 The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.*

*7 He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:*

*8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.*

*9 He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;*

*10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.*

*11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;*

*12 as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

*13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;*

*14 for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.*

*15 The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field;*

*16 the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.*

*17 But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children—*

*18 with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.*

19 *The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.*  
 20 *Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.*  
 21 *Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.*  
 22 *Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion.*  
*Praise the Lord, my soul.*

As we look closer at the father in this parable, we see the unconditional love that God has for us. This is truly a prodigal God! Just as David writes in this Psalm, God “does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us for our iniquities”. Thank goodness God does not give us what we deserve. The younger son in the story didn’t deserve to get his inheritance early, and he didn’t deserve to be allowed to leave in peace, but he did. In fact, the son deserved death for what he had done. This is the Father’s mercy & grace. God’s love & mercy is completely unconditional and greater than anything we can ever possibly imagine. The truth is that we all deserve death at some point for our brokenness and sin. However, instead of death, God sent His son to take our place on the cross. We are forgiven!! God is not angry with us like the religious leaders in the crowd would have been. He has compassion on us, just like the father in this parable. In the Psalm above, verse 14, David writes that God has compassion on us. God remembers how we were formed. He made us! God knows our weaknesses and He knows how much we need Him. God desires for us to follow Him because He knows that is the best possible life for us. **Spend time today slowly reading through the Psalm above. In your journal make a line for each verse of this Psalm...pray and let the Holy Spirit reveal the unconditional love, mercy and forgiveness that God freely offers you. Let this be a time of worship and praise for the desire that God has for you to follow Him!**

| <b>Psalm 103</b>                                                            | <b>Journal Prayers</b> (these are just examples of a few prompts to get your started...pray and let the Spirit guide you to make this your own) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.        | Write the names of God...all that you can think of. Praise His Name!!                                                                           |
| Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—                  | Write all the benefits of God’s love that you can think of                                                                                      |
| who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,                     | Thank God for the ways He’s forgiven you over and over, and for the times He has healed you                                                     |
| who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, | Remember the times that God has rescued you, lifted you up, and shown you love and compassion even when you didn’t deserve it                   |

## **WEDNESDAY:**

### **Joshua 24:17**

*15 But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”*

### **Deuteronomy 30:19**

*19 This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live*

### **John 7:17**

*17 Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.*

### **Mark 8:34**

*34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.*

In the lost son parable, God allows the younger son to leave and try to find his own way. Just as the original crowd was shocked by this, we also might be confused and shocked as well. Why would a father let his son go? Why would he allow it? How could a loving God allow the son to do something so destructive to himself and his family? If we take a closer look at our own lives, and the terrible mistakes we've inevitably made, we might be asking some of these same questions. Why God? Why did you allow me to get into that unhealthy relationship? Why did you let me take that first drink, or to pick up a drink again? Why did you let me make that terrible financial decision? Why?

Starting in the Garden of Eden and throughout the scriptures, we can see that God let's us make our own choices. This is called free will, and it is one of the foundations of our faith. God wants us to have a truly authentic relationship with Himself. The only way for a truly authentic love relationship, is to have the right to freely choose to be a part of it. God is not controlling, but rest assured that He's in control. There is a difference. God doesn't control our choices, we have the freedom to choose whether we want to follow our own desires or follow Him. We have a moral responsibility to make good Godly choices in our lives. As we get further in the story over the next few weeks, we will see that this isn't because the father doesn't care. During the time that the son is away, the father is waiting and watching. God can't wait for us to turn back to him. He desires for us to make good choices, and He is always guiding us with His Spirit if we seek His Will. We have all been lost at some point in our lives, and some of us still may feel like that today. That is okay. He is waiting for you, He forgives you and He is completely unconditionally ready to run to meet you where you are. **Take a moment to think about the big decisions and life choices on your horizon. Have you been asking, seeking and waiting on God in those choices? Ask God to make clear what His Will is...and be willing to lay down your will for His good and perfect Will. In what ways do you need to lay down your life & selfish desires to accept a life with Him?**

### **THURSDAY: 1 Samuel 8:6-10; 19-21**

*6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the Lord.*

*7 And the Lord told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. 8 As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. 9 Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."*

*10 Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who were asking him for a king.*

*19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. 20 Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." 21 When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord. 22 The Lord answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the Israelites, "Everyone go back to your own town." God loves us enough to let go. He allows us to find our way.*

The Israelites in 1 Samuel give us a perfect example of God loving us enough to let go. During this time, Israel was begging for an earthly King like the other nations surrounding them had. At this time, Israel was ruled by God and not by an earthly King. God would use prophets called “judges” for a specific time and purpose when needed, however, they did not have an earthly ruling authoritarian King. When Samuel warned the people about all the terrible things that would come from having this type of earthly ruling King, they didn’t listen. They kept asking God for a king. They thought they knew best, and they wanted what “everyone else” had. This might sound familiar. How many times have we all begged God for what seems like something we NEED because everyone else has it? We can probably all relate to this thought process. God knew they were rejecting Him as their king and were making a choice to go their own way. God knew what was best, and He graciously tried to warn them. However, just like us, they have free will. They made their choice to be in control of themselves and as it says in verse 22 - “God loves us enough to let go. He allows us to find our way.” This led to some really terrible consequences with these earthly kings throughout the Bible. Some might say that we are still experiencing some of these consequences to this very day. However, as we talked about yesterday, God gives us a choice. We have free will to make our own decisions.

- 1. Think about a time that you went against God’s Will...maybe you knew it or maybe you were blinded by your own selfish desires. Ask God for His forgiveness today if you haven’t already, and lay it at His feet. He can redeem anything.**
- 2. Now think about those big life decisions on your horizon right now. Think about the things you have been praying for over and over. Pray and ask God NOT to give you a King if you don’t need it. Ask God to make your heart’s desires the same as His desires. Ask for His Will to be done and not your own in this situation.**

## **FRIDAY:**

### **Psalm 46:10**

*“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”*

### **Colossians 3:13**

*Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

### **Romans 8:28**

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Just as God let the younger son go in the parable, and let his people go in Samuel, sometimes we also need to love others and situations enough to let them go. Let’s be clear, this is not “cancel culture” where we toss away friendships and relationships in anger or bitterness. Letting go should always be under God’s authority and for the betterment of the relationship or situation. We all need to first ask ourselves the tough question - “What is my goal or motivation for letting this go?” This should not be because you are running from conflict, casting judgement on someone, or seeking vengeance. Instead, what we need to do sometimes is let go of our seat of control in a relationship. We need to give the situation or relationship over to the Lord. There are times when we have tried so hard to manage and control a situation or another person when we don’t have the capability or the authority to change someone’s heart. We truly need to let go and lay it all at Jesus’ feet. He is the only one who can redeem the unredeemable. He is the only one that can salvage the most broken of relationships. Let go of the control, and let it go to God. Sometimes this means letting go and getting counseling in abusive or toxic situations. Sometimes this means getting therapy for yourself, and healing those broken places in own life first. Each situation will look different, and only God knows

exactly what you need. Giving it over to God means that you are surrendering it to Him. Through His strength you can forgive, and through His strength you can learn to love in the way that He loves you. It's important to remember that love and forgiveness are freely given, however, trust and respect are earned over time. Letting go doesn't mean forgetting and welcoming back immediately. On the other hand, it also doesn't mean a closed door forever. Just like the father in the parable, who was waiting and watching for the son to come home, we can leave the door open for God to work. Sometimes the door needs to have guardrails and boundaries for your protection, and this is very important. This should always be done with the assistance of Godly counsel or a therapist in certain situations. Just as these verses in Psalm say, we can "be still and know". We can have peace, let go, and trust God to work all things for our good.

**Pray and ask yourself if you have a situation or a relationship in your life that you have been trying to control. Is there someone or something that you are trying to change on your own? Do you need to let go, and let God work things out for your good? Do you need Godly counsel or therapy in this area? Pray over these answers, make a call if God is asking you to seek help, and let it go to Jesus' this week!**