

January 11, 2026

“Repentance and Faith”
Lesson 1

Luke 15:11-24
Acts 2:38-39

Intro

Today's lesson is from Luke 15, which shows God's heart toward those who are currently disconnected from Him. In this chapter, Jesus tells three parables about “lost” things: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. These parables are stories told to make a spiritual point. They aren't historical, but they do present a situation that would have been seen as typical or normal to the hearers. The goal was to use the story and the figurative language used in it to develop a spiritual message.

Read Luke 15:11-24

1. vs. 11: This parable begins with an unnamed man: “There was a man”

This method signals that the story is a parable, not historical fact

This allows listeners to put themselves into the story as one of the characters

This story is usually called “The Prodigal Son”, but there are three characters here

A father and his two sons

2. vs. 12: The younger of the two sons asks for his share of the father's estate

Then, like now, an inheritance is passed along only after the death of the individual

In Jewish culture, the oldest son inherited a double portion, so 2/3 of the estate

The younger son here is asking for his 1/3 before the father has died

There are some references to doing this in non-Biblical Jewish writings

To the Pharisees listening to this, the son is rebellious and deserving of death

See Deut. 21:18-21

But the father doesn't do things that way; he gives the son his share of the estate

This action would have been seen as unusual and unexpected

3. vs. 13: This younger son collects all this wealth and possessions and moves far away from home

The verse says he “squandered his wealth in wild living”

We would say he “blew his money”

What he spent it on isn't detailed here, but is suggested later in the parable

4. vs. 14: Because he spent without care, he wasn't ready for difficult times

A famine arises, and he has spent all his money

He is in need—he is hungry and broke

5. vs. 15: The son gets a job working for a pig farmer, feeding the pigs

This person must be a Gentile, because Jews don't eat pork / don't raise pigs

Pigs are “unclean” according to the Law of Moses (Lev. 11:7, Deut. 14:8)

6. vs. 16: He is so hungry that the pig food looks appealing to him
Jews felt Gentiles were unclean and wouldn't eat with them or associate with them
This Jewish son has gotten so desperate that even pig *food* has become appealing

7. vs. 17: The son has gotten to his lowest point
Here he "came to his senses"—he realizes he has made a serious mistake
He has examined his life and his choices, and comes to a new realization
His father's servants always have enough to eat, while he is currently starving

8. vs. 18: He decides to return to his father's house
He knows he has done wrong, and rehearses what to say
Here is confession and repentance
"I have sinned against heaven and against you"
All sin is ultimately against God, even though it affects others as well
The son has broken the commandment about honoring one's father and mother as well

9. vs. 19: The son recognizes the extent of his sin
He is no longer worthy of being called a son of this father
His father is not legally obligated to provide for him, having given him 1/3 of the estate
He has tarnished his father's reputation by his wasteful spending
So he chooses to ask for a job as a servant
He doesn't ask to be taken back into the house as a son
The status of servant is a step up from being a starving feeder of pigs

10. vs. 20: He doesn't just say to himself that he's sorry—he takes action
He heads back to his father's house
What he doesn't know, doesn't expect, is that his father has been watching for him
He sees the son "while he was still a long way off"
He is eagerly looking for his son, and likely has been every day since he left
The father is "filled with compassion"—he loves his son and wants the best for him
He runs to his son and hugs and kisses him
To a Jewish audience, seeing a family patriarch running anywhere might seem wrong
It would be both unusual and likely undignified
This shows the depth of the father's love for his child
He doesn't care about how his actions appear to others
He is "over the moon" that his child has returned

11. vs. 21: The son here makes the confession to his father
It is very much the same words as he thought in vs. 18
He very likely rehearsed what he would say many times on the way home

12. vs. 22: The father's reaction here is not at all what the son expected
He doesn't let his son finish—the son was going to ask to be a servant
Instead, the father calls for "the best robe"—a sign of sonship, not servanthood
The ring was usually a symbol of authority
The father shows his total acceptance of his son by giving him these two items

13. vs. 23: Killing the “fatted calf” indicates a celebration is about to happen

A fatted calf was reserved for significant events, such as a boy reaching adulthood

When the son left, the whole community was aware of this development

It would have been a negative mark on this father

By throwing this celebration, the father is showing that his son has changed

He is letting the community know that things have changed from the previous situation

He invites his neighbors to come celebrate with him

14. vs. 24: The father’s words here echo those of the finder of the lost sheep and the lost coin (vs. 6, 9)

The son wasn’t really dead, but the way he left made the father feel like he was dead

The son’s return is like a rebirth, a return from the dead

Like the sheep and the coin, “he was lost and is found”

Read Acts 2:38-39

These two verses are Peter’s response to the crowd’s question of “What do we do?” after he gave a message on the Day of Pentecost.

15. vs. 38: He first tells them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ”

These two things carry implications of things not mentioned

Faith must be present to repent, but it’s not mentioned

Baptism is essential to the process of salvation and reconciliation

The Jews Peter talks to here already knew about water purification

There are at least 6 instances of baptism in the book of Acts

Baptism will be discussed and filled out more fully in later passages

See Gal. 3:27, Col. 2:12, and 1 Peter 3:21 among others

Peter says this baptism is necessary “for the forgiveness of your sins”

We are forgiven because of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross

He paid our debt for sin, and cleared our names because of our sin

When we are forgiven, we are also given “the gift of the Holy Spirit”

The Holy Spirit lives inside us, guiding and directing us in holiness

He helps us to grow in love, joy, and peace

He assists us in prayer

16: vs. 39: This situation is not just for some—it is available to all

“for all who are far off”, meaning far away from God

God is the creator of all life, of all peoples

Therefore, he wants all to come to Him and be close to Him

Application: The two passages of today’s lesson have a common message: God’s love for and inclusion of those who were once far off. Jesus’ parable shows the joy of the father upon the return of the one who had gone far away. In Jesus’ day, the prodigal son represents the tax collectors and sinners who came to hear Jesus. The older brother (see 15:25-30) represents the attitude of Jesus’s opponents, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. The passage in Acts 2 shows

that Jews who have been far away should repent and return to the Father—He welcomes them. But that passage also says that Gentiles, who have always been far away from God, are welcome to come to God as well.

In many churches, there are people who are coming back after being gone from it for a long time, and people who come in for the very first time. God greets each one with a welcoming embrace. Those who have remained in the church without leaving are invited to join God in welcoming all who repent with open arms as well. When we see the prodigal return, or the unbeliever come to faith, we are to offer them a seat at the table and welcome them home as our brother or sister in Christ.

Prayer: Father God, we are grateful for Your boundless grace and mercy. Help us seek Your forgiveness with our whole hearts and extend that grace to others, so they too may come to You in repentance. In Jesus' name, Amen.