



# Lent

# CONNECTING FAITH AND LIFE

stories where heaven and earth meet

Adult Small Group/Study Guide  
Sheep, Coins, and Prodigal Sons | Week of March 7

## **KEY POINT**

God celebrates when the lost are found and those who were dead find life. While much has changed over the past two thousand years, quite a lot has remained the same. People want things to be fair and grumble when they are not, but usually only when it benefits them.

Jesus shows us a different, and better, way: the divine joy and celebration that comes with the restoration of the lost.

## **SCRIPTURE**

Luke 15:1-32  
(Psalm 119:167-176)

## **OPENING PRAYER**

Good and gracious God, we know that there is rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents. Sometimes we are called to repent and run back to you. At other times we are called to join in the celebration when someone else does the same. In both cases, help us to do these things with joy and faith in our hearts. In the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.

## **READ**

Luke 15:1-32

## **ABOUT THE STORY**

As Jesus continues his journey to Jerusalem and the cross, yet another controversy breaks out that requires his attention. Some Pharisees and scribes grumble because tax collectors and other “sinners” are coming to listen to Jesus. They are outraged that Jesus “welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:2). In the ancient world, sharing a meal with someone implied that you shared their values, ideas, and social position. To eat with someone was to accept them.

Jesus responds with three parables, or “teaching stories,” that describe the grace and mercy of God. The parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son (usually known as the “Prodigal Son”) are all connected by the joy that comes when the lost is found or recovered.

There are many cultural details in the third parable that can be lost on present day audiences. The son brings great shame and dishonor on his family by asking for his inheritance early. The younger son’s job of “feeding pigs” was considered to be disgusting to Jesus’ Jewish audience and shows how far he had fallen. Finally, the father would also incur shame by running to meet his son, something an adult would not do in public. Ultimately the father in this story is more concerned with love than honor.

These parables show the extravagant, crazy love that God shows to those who have been “lost.” Normally a shepherd would cut his losses and protect the ninety-nine others, but this shepherd goes in search of the one. These teaching stories also show the overwhelming joy in heaven when repentance occurs. The father in Jesus’ third parable is made to look like a fool who is seriously insulted by his youngest son, yet he is still overjoyed when the son returns. All three parables end with a party. The overjoyed father describes his motivation to his eldest son, “...we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life” (Luke 15:32). Jesus’ parables teach us that repentance of a sinner is cause for celebrating, not grumbling.



## SHARE

- Share instances of losing something very important (set of car keys or an important heirloom). What was it like? How did you feel when you found it?
- What is the danger of leaving ninety-nine sheep and searching for the lost one? What does this tell us about God?
- The elder son is the only character to state that his brother wasted his money on prostitutes (15:30). How would he know this? Do you think his accusation is accurate? Do you think the elder son changed his mind and came to the banquet? Why?

## PRAY

Holy God, your son Jesus teaches us that there is great rejoicing when a sinner repents. Take away our judgments and help us to join in your celebration. Amen.

## BLESS

Mark one another with the sign of the cross on your hand and say, "God's mercy for you is great. Amen."

## FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION AT HOME:

- Volunteer at the local animal shelter and support lost animals who are in need of a home.
- Conduct an online image search for artwork that depicts these three parables. What specific styles, mediums, or eras of artwork speak to you?
- Reread the lesson for today and write a short account of the story from the point of view of the different characters: the Pharisees and scribes, the shepherd, the woman, the father, younger son, older son, etc. How do their perspectives change the story?