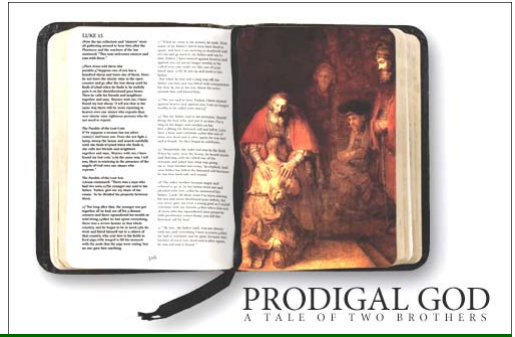


Jesus challenges his listeners' fundamental assumptions about God, sin, and salvation. He gives them an entirely new way of thinking about God, themselves, and the whole world. This week we look at the first two of these parables. There are three sets of characters: 1) the unwilling listeners, 2) the lost things, and 3) the joyful seekers.



**Luke 15:1-10** Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

## Reflections

*One son kept the rules religiously. One son broke them all. One father loved them both beyond anything they could ever imagine. There are two ways to be your own Savior and Lord. One is by breaking all the moral laws and setting your own course, and one is by keeping all the moral laws and being very, very good. Both need a Savior.*

— Timothy Keller, author of *The Prodigal God*

As we begin our Lenten study, let's first consider the audience that Jesus faced as he shared a series of three parables documented in Luke chapter 15.

Gathered around Jesus were tax collectors and "sinners," those who were not making an effort to follow the religious rules of Jesus' day. What comes to mind is a wild living, partying crowd. How interesting that these people were drawn to Jesus. He was not your typical religious person. He hung out with sinners! Something about him was radical and fresh. His words announce a truth and hope that penetrates the thinking of people who know they are lost. They gathered close so they could hear him clearly. Would he be the One with the answers they sought?

The other half of his audience was the Pharisees and teachers of the law, those who intentionally practiced the Jewish laws of the Bible and were proud of it. They had studied for years, unlike the unknowledgeable "sinners," and knew how to live by their religious rules. They

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did not come not looking for answers to the problems of their life, but more likely to justify why they opposed Jesus. We imagine them hanging toward the back of the crowd so they could carry on with their murmuring. They had a lot to say about Jesus, but not so much to his face.

So Jesus begins to speak to all of them about "lost" things—a sheep, a coin. He

describes images of an owner who looks high and low, turns everything upside down, to find that which is lost. Then, when the item is found, the searcher invites others to shares in the celebration. Loss can be followed by rejoicing.

Parables are effective because people can relate to them. While they are simple stories of human life, they have a transcendent quality to convey deep spiritual truths. They are as true for us as they were for the crowd surrounding Jesus.

In these first two parables, Jesus is quite clear about the deeper meaning. He is conveying the abiding and abundant love of God and the great value that God places on each of our lives.

Jesus sets the stage for the next *lost and found* story about a father and two sons; about Jesus and the two crowds in his audience; about those who seek a Savior and those who think they can save themselves. And this story will have a chilling twist, because the father seeks what is lost, but the sons will have to make a choice.

—Karen Heist

### Series Resource:

The Prodigal God, Timothy Keller, Zondervan, 2008.

## Readings

### Sunday, February 21

Luke 15:1-2

Describe the various motivations of the people in Jesus' audience. How have you seen religious and irreligious lifestyles lead to spiritual emptiness?

### Monday, February 22

Luke 15:8-10

When have you lost something important then searched for it diligently? Why did you search? What does this parable teach us about the God's motivation in relationship to us?

### Tuesday, February 23

Luke 15:3-7

Theologian Kenneth Bailey writes *"Yet, even though the shepherd is blamed, the sheep are not assumed innocent. It is the nature of sheep to wander off and/or lag behind. Without this assumption, the lost sheep could hardly provide a symbol for repentance."* As one of Jesus' "sheep," in what ways do you wander off or lag behind?

### Wednesday, February 24

Jeremiah 23:1-6

Who were the "bad shepherds" that scattered the sheep? Who is the "good shepherd" that brings the lost sheep home? Why do you think many churches today are not attracting the broken and marginalized with Jesus' message of grace?

### Thursday, February 25

Psalms 23

Jesus, the Good Shepherd, restores us to a righteous life with God. Have you fully embraced this truth? Pray with gratitude and hope about your answer.

### Friday, February 26

Job 28:9-15; Proverbs 2:1-6

How does the way you live demonstrate what you are seeking in this life?

### Saturday, February 27

Psalms 139:1-6

What comfort does it give you to be so well understood by God? Reflect on a phrase from this psalm for a few moments of quiet.

***Don't have a Bible? Access these scriptures at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).***