

Jesus: A Life: Week 11 Lost Sheep, Lost Coin, Lost Son.

Big Idea: Jesus loves to seek and save the lost.

Read the Bible: Luke 15

STUDY

*** Before interacting with this guide, all leaders should study the referenced texts using the HEAR Method. It's also important to encourage your group members to read the text using the HEAR Method. ***

H: Highlight, or take note of, things in the passage that stick out to you as you read.

E: Explain what the passage means by asking simple questions of the text:

- Why was this written?
- To whom was it originally written?
- · How does it fit with the verses before and after it?
- Why did the Holy Spirit include this passage in the book?
- What is He intending to communicate through this text?

A: Appy the text to your life. What does God want you to learn from this text?

R: Respond to God in prayer.



15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

³ So he told them this parable: ⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' ⁷ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

The Parable of the Lost Coin

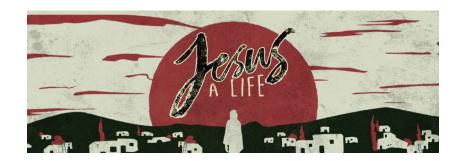
⁸ "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹ And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' ¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

¹¹ And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

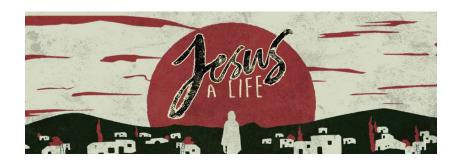
¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." ' ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.



²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" ¹

¹ <u>The Holy Bible: English Standard Version</u> (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 15:1–32.



Summary

Jesus has earned a reputation as a different kind of teacher at this point Luke. He's so full of grace that he isn't just drawing the religious people, he is drawing the sinners, those who the rest of the world looks down their nose at. The religious people in Jesus' circles don't like this. They find themselves flabbergasted that Jesus would allow such people in his company.

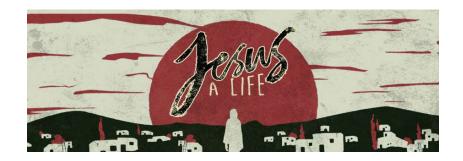
In order to help those in the religious community smirking at the sinners understand the gospel Jesus tells three stories. The point of these stories is to help the hearers understand the true nature of the gospel: Jesus has come to save sinners, and every time a sinner is saved heaven rejoices.

First, Jesus tells us the story of a lost sheep. A shepherd has 100 sheep and lost 1 of them. No big deal, right? There are 99 more. Just leave the sheep and go on about your business. No. The Shepherd leaves the 99 sheep and goes after the one. When the shepherd finds the one, he throws an enormous party and invites everyone to join in. The point: Jesus cares about the lost sheep. Jesus is willing to do whatever it takes, even stuff that doesn't make sense, to go and catch the one sheep, and when he does heaven goes wild.

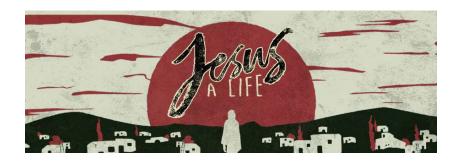
Secondly, Jesus tells us a story about a widow who has ten coins and she's misplaced one. What does she do? She moves the furniture. She sweeps the house. She scours every inch. She isn't willing to give up until she finds the coin. When she finds the coin, she calls up all her friends in celebration. What was lost has been found. The point: Jesus isn't willing to accept the loss of a sinner who belongs to him. He goes to great lengths to find what was lost and when he does, he can't help but celebrate because what was once lost is found.

Finally, Jesus tells us the story of the prodigal son. We all know this one. The son goes out and squanders all his Father's money in wild living. The father is heartbroken at his son's desertion and abandonment. He spends every day looking at the horizon hoping that he will return. Until one day he notices a little speck on the edge of the sky. The speck gets larger and larger as a man approach. All of a sudden, the father realizes that his son is coming home. What does he do? You might think that he meets him and chastises him. That he rebukes him for his stupidity. He doesn't. Instead, he runs to his son. He dresses him with the best clothes. He feeds him the best food. He welcomes him into the family. What was lost is now found. Heaven rejoices.

However, we are told one detail here that doesn't add up with the other two stories. The older son in this story stays outside and pouts. He's mad at how his father has lavished such grace on a sinful son. Jesus' point cannot be clearer. Christ has come to save sinners and those who look down their nose now are just like the older son. They miss the heart of God that loves to save sinners because they believe they are more deserving of the grace now being lavished on the sinners coming to Christ.



These stories present us with a challenge. Will we be like the pharisees who look down our noses at sinners? Or will we understand that in these stories that we are the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son?



Leading Your Group

Community Time

Start group by asking for Prayer requests and checking in on everyone.

Bible Study

*** Have everyone in your group read assigned scripture before meeting. ***

Start Group by Reading Luke 15

<u>Major Lessons – (These are the "Lesson Points" in Class)</u>

Point No. 1 Jesus has come to seek and save the lost

Perhaps the greatest point of these stories is that Christ has not come to the healthy, but the sick. Those who have no need of a savior have no need for Jesus. Those who are righteous have no need for Jesus' righteousness. Those who think themselves found have no need to be found by Jesus.

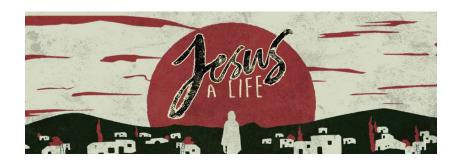
Therefore, Christ is aiming to teach us the gospel in these stories. We are all lost. No matter how good we've been. No matter how much good we've done. No matter how long we've attended church. Until Jesus finds us, we are all lost.

Thank God, Jesus is intent on seeking and saving the lost.

Point No. 2: True Christians rejoice in seeing Sinners Saved

This story is in large part a rebuke. Jesus is aiming to show the people who are frustrated by the sinner's presence that they themselves have missed the heart of God. Notice the common theme in each of these stories: when whatever is lost is found there is great rejoicing.

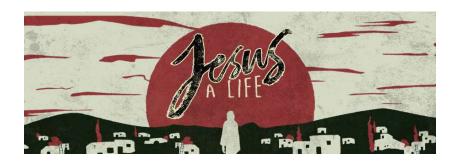
So, it is in heaven when a sinner is saved. True Christians are never amazed that God's grace could save a sinner. True Christians rejoice in how far God's grace is willing to go and they are amazed that God's grace comes to them.



Point No. 3: You cannot out sin God's Grace

Part of the shocking nature of the final parable Christ tells is how willing the father was to take back the sinful son. This reaction by the father is not what we would expect. This grace is over the top.

Jesus' message is clear: it doesn't matter how far you've run or what you've done. You can always come home. You can always be saved. You can never out sin God's grace.



Resources

Expositor's Bible Commentary

a. *The lost sheep* (15:1–7)

This section begins what Manson (*Sayings of Jesus*, p. 282) has called the "Gospel of the Outcast." The large body of material in chapters 15–19 is unique to Luke and dramatically shows Jesus' concern for the social outcasts of his day (N.B. 15:1; 16:19–25; 17:11–19; 18:1–8; 9–14; 19:1–10). The twin parables (vv. 3–7, 8–10) along with the longer one about the lost son (vv. 11–32) depend for their interpretation on vv. 1–2.

1 "Tax collectors" were among those who were ostracized because their work was considered dishonest or immoral (Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, p. 132). NIV appropriately puts "sinners" in quotation marks to show that this was not Luke's designation but the way others, i.e., the Pharisees, thought of them. For an explanation of the attitude of Pharisees to such "sinners," see comments on 5:29–30. "All" signifies either all such persons (wherever Jesus was at the time) or, generally speaking, the large proportion of them among the crowds who usually came to hear him. The imperfect periphrastic "were gathering" (cf. comment on 14:1) could indicate either the process of gathering at the time of the story or the habitual coming of "sinners" throughout Jesus' ministry.

2 In OT times it was taken for granted that God's people did not consort with sinners (cf. Ps 1), but the Pharisees extended this beyond the biblical intent. To go so far as to "welcome" them and especially to "eat" with them, implying table fellowship, was unthinkable to the Pharisees. The parables that follow show that the return of "sinners" to God should be a cause for joy to the religious leaders, as it was to God. Furthermore, "Jesus makes the claim for himself that he is acting in God's stead, that he is God's representative" (Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, p. 132.)

3–7 For the phrase "suppose one of you" (v. 4), see comment on 14:5. There is a parallel between the expression *tis anthrōpos ex hymōn* (lit., "what man of you") and *tis gynē* ("what woman," v. 8, where the lack of the additional words "of you" may indicate that no women were present). The situation described was a common one. One hundred sheep was a normal



sized flock. A count was taken nightly. The "open country" was a safe place to leave the sheep ("wilderness" [KJV, RSV] is misleading), though they would have to be left in someone's care. The frightened, confused, and perhaps injured sheep would have to be carried (v. 5).

Two things are striking. First, in the obvious analogy to the search for the sheep, Jesus takes the initiative in seeking out lost people—a major theme in Luke (cf. 19:10). In contrast were some rabbis in the early centuries who hesitated to seek Gentile converts. But that does not invalidate Jesus' comment in Matthew 23:15 about Pharisees who were proselytizing aggressively. They were apparently trying to gain adherents to their sect, rather than compassionately seeking the lost. Second, the climax of the story is not only the return of the sheep but the triumphant rejoicing in its rescue (v. 6). Jesus is stressing, both by parable and direct statement (v. 7), that his seeking and receiving sinners pleases God.

"In heaven" (v. 7) is a customary way of referring reverently to God without saying his name (cf. v. 10 and comment on 14:11). The NIV rendering "there will be ... rejoicing" brings out the future (*estai*, "will be"), which may include the day yet future of gathering and feasting (cf. 13:29). There are none who are truly "righteous" (cf. Rom 3:10); the "righteous persons" referred to in v. 7 are devout people (cf. 1:6), or those who seem so (Matt 6:1), who have no gross, open sins to repent of.

b. *The lost coin* (15:8–10)

8–10 This parable is clearly linked to the preceding one, and the opening words are comparable (see comment on "suppose" at v. 4). The "coins" (v. 8) are *drachmas* (see NIV mg. on their value). They may have formed part of the woman's headdress, which, being part of her dowry, she constantly wore (Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, p. 134; cf. Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, p. 603). Whether or not that is the case here, the mention of ten coins implies that they were all she had. "A lamp" was needed because the house would have had at best a few small windows or only a low doorway. She would "sweep" the hard earthen floor to find the coin by the sound of its clinking. As in v. 6, the extent of joy expressed is striking (v. 9). Considering the neighborly feelings in a small village, this is understandable, especially if the coin represented a tenth of the woman's sayings. Moreover, Jesus' final comment (v. 10) reinforces the point. "In the presence of the angels of God" is, like "in heaven" (v. 7), a reverential reference to God. This parable, like that of the lost sheep, justifies Jesus welcome of sinners (v. 2).

c. *The lost son* (15:11–32)



The great parable of the lost son speaks even more eloquently than its predecessors to the situation set forth in vv. 1–2. The first part (vv. 11–24) conveys the same sense of joy on the lost being found the other two parables have; in contrast, the second part deals with the sour attitude of the elder brother. Like the Pharisees, he could not comprehend the meaning of forgiveness. The positions of the two sons would, in a structural analysis, be considered binary opposites, the lost son rises and the elder brother falls in moral state. The central figure, the father, remains constant in his love for both. As in v. 2 (cf. comment), by telling the story Jesus identifies himself with God in his loving attitude to the lost. He represents God in his mission, the accomplishment of which should elicit joy from those who share the Father's compassion. The parable is one of the world's supreme masterpieces of storytelling. Its details are vivid; they reflect actual customs and legal procedures and build up the story's emotional and spiritual impact. But the expositor must resist the tendency to allegorize the wealth of detail that gives the story its remarkable verisimilitude. The main point of the parable—that God glady receives repentant sinners—must not be obscured.

11–12 The "share of the estate" (v. 12) that a younger son would receive on the death of the father would be one-third, because the older (or oldest) son received two-thirds, a "double portion"—i.e., twice as much as all other sons (Deut 21:17). If the property were given, as in this case, while the father lived, the heirs would have use of it (cf. v. 31); but if they sold it, they could not normally transfer it as long as the father lived. The father also would receive any accrued interest (see Jeremiah *Parables of Jesus*, pp. 128–29). The son may have been asking (v. 12) for immediate total ownership, but the parable does not specify the exact terms of the settlement. The property was "divided"; so the elder son was made aware of his share (of v. 31).

13–16 NIV captures the vivid wording of the account, including "squandered his wealth" and "wild living" (v. 13). The famine made employment and food even harder than usual to get. The "distant country" was apparently outside strictly Jewish territory and the wayward son found himself with the demeaning job of feeding pigs (v. 15), unclean animals for the Jews. He would even have eaten "pods" (v. 16), which were seeds of the carob tree, common around the Mediterranean and used for pigs' food. He had fallen so low and had become so insignificant that "no one gave him anything"—an indication of total neglect.

17–20 "Came to his senses" (*eis eauton elthōn*, lit., "came to himself," v. 17) was a common idiom, which in this Jewish story may carry the Semitic idea of repentance (Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, p. 130; cf. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, pp. 171–73). Certainly repentance lies at the heart of the words the son prepared to tell his father. The motivation for his return was hunger, but it



was specifically to his "father" (v. 18) that he wanted to return. The words "against heaven" (*eis ton ouranon*) can mean "to heaven," meaning that his sins were so many as to reach to heaven; more probably the meaning is that his sins were ultimately against God—veiled in the word "heaven" (cf. Ps 51:4). Assuming this latter meaning, we see that the parable is far more than an allegory, with the father representing God, for the father and God have distinct roles. The father in the story does, of course, portray the characteristics and attitudes of a loving heavenly Father. This does not mean that God is heavenly Father to everyone (note John 1:12; 8:42–44). Yet the Jews knew God's loving care was like that of a father (Ps 103:13). The son knew he had no right to return as a son (v. 19), having taken and squandered his inheritance. He therefore planned to earn his room and board.

The description of his return and welcome is as vivid as that of his departure, with several beautiful touches. Because his father saw him "while he was still a long way off" (v. 20) has led many to assume that the father was waiting for him, perhaps daily searching the distant road hoping for his appearance. This prompted the title of H. Thielicke's book of Jesus' parables, *The Waiting Father* (New York: Harper, 1959). The father's "compassion" assumes some knowledge of the son's pitiable condition, perhaps from reports. Some have pointed out that a father in that culture would not normally run as he did, which, along with his warm embrace and kissing, adds to the impact of the story. Clearly Jesus used every literary means to heighten the contrast between the father's attitude and that of the elder brother (and of the Pharisees, cf. vv. 1–2).

21–24 The son's speech was never completed (v. 21). Instead the father more than reversed the unspoken part about becoming a "hired man" (v. 19). The robe, ring, and sandals (v. 22) signified more than sonship (Jeremiah *Parables of Jesus*, p. 130); the robe was a ceremonial one such as a guest of honor would be given, the ring signified authority, and the sandals were those only a free man would wear. Marshall (*Gospel of Luke*, p. 610) doubts Manson's assertion that the robe was "a symbol of the New Age." The calf was apparently being "fattened" for some special occasion (v. 23); people in first-century Palestine did not regularly eat meat. Note the parallel between "dead" and "alive" and "lost" and "found" (v. 24)—terms that also apply to one's state before and after conversion to Christ (Eph 2:1–5). As in the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, it was time to "celebrate."

25–32 It seems strange that the older son was not there when the celebration began (v. 25). Jesus' parables, however, are a fictional way of teaching enduring truth; and we may imagine that the celebration began so quickly that the older son was not aware of it (vv. 26–27). Or, more likely in view of the dialogue in vv. 26–31, his absence showed his distant relationship with his family. Verse 28 contrasts the older son with the father. The son became angry; but the father "went out," as he had for the younger brother, and "pleaded" rather than scolded. The



older son's abrupt beginning—"Look!" (v. 29)—betrays a disrespectful attitude toward his father. Likewise, "slaving" is hardly descriptive of a warm family relationship. "You never gave me," whether true or not, shows a long smoldering discontent. "This son of yours" (ho huios sou houtos, v. 30) avoids acknowledging that the prodigal is his own brother, a disclaimer the father corrects by the words "this brother of yours" (v. 32). The older brother's charges include sharp criticism of both father and brother. The story has made no mention of hiring prostitutes (v. 30).

The father's response is nevertheless tender: "My son" (or "child," teknon) is followed by words of affirmation, not weakness (v. 31). "We had to celebrate" (euphranthenai ... edei) is literally "It was necessary to celebrate"; no personal subject is mentioned. This allows the implication that the elder brother should have joined in the celebration. The words "had to" (edei) introduce once more the necessity and urgency so prominent in Luke (see comment on 4:43).

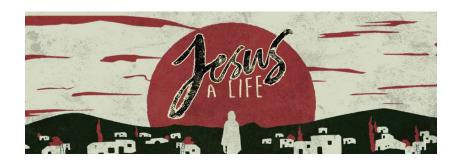
Notes

11–32 Two issues, one literary and one theological, are often raised concerning this parable. Because the first part of the parable revolves around the younger brother and the latter around the older (and also for other reasons), some have found the parable's literary structure complex—i.e., originally consisting of two independent stories. If so, the resultant unit is well edited; for the older son appears from the very beginning, the two parts complement each other, and the latter part fits as well as the former into the context of vv. 1–2. But this view cannot be sustained (cf. Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, p. 605).

The theological issue centers in the absence of any hint of anything more than repentance and returning to God as Father being involved in salvation. (God's fatherhood is discussed in the comment on v. 18.) It must, however, be kept in mind that this is a parable and thus is intended to portray only one aspect of the gospel—God's willingness to receive "sinners" and his joy over their return. Elsewhere in Luke's presentation of Christ as Savior, the Cross has its place (see Hanson, Sayings of Jesus, p 286; cf. Marshall, Luke: Historian and Theologian, pp. 170–75).

16 Χορτασθῆναι (*chortasthēnai*, "to feed on") has more MS support than γεμίσαι τὴν κοιλίαν (*gemisai tēn koilian*, "to fill the stomach"). NIV appears to have followed the latter but may simply be using a contemporary idiom to express the general idea of both verbs.²

² Walter L. Liefeld, <u>"Luke,"</u> in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 980–985.



Teacher's Bible Commentary

The passage.—Chapter 15, consists of three parables, the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. The last two are found only in Luke. Verses 1–2 should be considered the introduction to each one of the parables. They were told in response to the indignation of religious leaders who were scandalized by Jesus' association with tax collectors and sinners.

Special points.—The inclusion of Israel's rejected people in the kingdom of God was made concretely visible when Jesus received them in table fellowship. In so doing, he extended to them the grace of God. The joyous fellowship between Jesus and the tax collectors and sinners offended the scribes and Pharisees (15:2). They believed that close association with such people caused a religious person to become ritually impure.

The joy of the shepherd who finds his lost sheep (v. 5) is a picture of God's joy over sinners attracted to Jesus. So also is the joy of the woman (vv. 9-10) and the Father (vv. 22-24) when they found something precious to them. "In heaven" (v. 7) is a common phrase used by Jewish people to avoid mentioning God's name, for which they had great reverence.

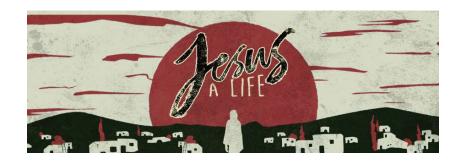
The "silver coins" (v. 8) were drachmas, each one of which was worth about 30 cents. One drachma was a day's wage for a working man. The "lamp" (v. 8) was necessary because the small hut was poorly lighted. By sweeping the clay floor, the coin was eventually recovered.

The depth of misery into which the prodigal sank after leaving home is graphically described in verses 15–16. No Jew would have had anything to do with swine if he could possibly help it. They were considered unclean. But the prodigal was reduced to such desperate straits that he found it necessary to tend pigs. The husks were pods of the carob tree, used for animal fodder.

The son's restored status is symbolized by the robe, the ring, and the shoes (v. 22). Such a robe was given to honored guests who arrived after a long trip, dusty and travel-worn. The ring and shoes say that he was received as an heir and a son. Slaves went barefoot.

The parable of the prodigal son really should be called the parable of the elder brother. The resentment and cheerlessness of the older son at the joyous reception of the returning prodigal typified that of the religious leaders.

Truth for today.—A joyless, self-righteous approach to religion is often taken by people who claim to be following Jesus. Self-righteous legalism is expressed by contempt for the people who do not live up to a certain prescribed code of conduct. It is strange that people erect in Jesus' name the very kind of institution that he challenged.



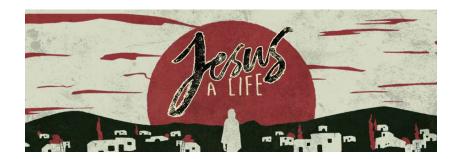
The truth of the matter is that the kinds of people whom Jesus received would probably not be welcome in the average church today. Unless they cut their hair in a prescribed manner, dress in a certain way, and move in decent, respectable circles, religious people feel uncomfortable around others. Perhaps this is why more sinners are not being transformed in our society.³

THE BIBLE PANORAMA

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

V 1–7: LOSTNESS: THE SEEKING SHEPHERD The Pharisees and the scribes criticise Jesus because of His association with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus responds in parables by giving three illustrations of how important it is to seek what is lost. The first concerns the sheep that has strayed and the shepherd who goes to seek it. Jesus says that in heaven, one sinner will produce more rejoicing than the ninety-nine who have already come to repentance. Jesus Himself is the seeking Shepherd giving His life for the sheep. V 8–10: LOSTNESS: THE SWEEPING **SEEKER** Similarly, a woman with ten coins will go to great lengths to find just one of the ten that is lost, lighting her lamp and sweeping around her house to find it. She, too, rejoices with her neighbours when the coin is found. The sweeping seeker is seen by some as a picture of the Holy Spirit, who enlightens and reaches us when we are unable to reach out to Him. V 11–32: LOSTNESS: THE FORGIVING FATHER The third illustration is of a son who follows a selfish and sinful lifestyle, who takes all the money he can from his father. At the end of the period in which he has wasted everything in a profligate lifestyle, he comes back to his father for forgiveness. He finds ready restoration and joy in the heart of his father who runs to welcome him and treats him with great love and generosity. God the Father is like this to sinners who repent and come to Him. The son's father seeks to bring his older son into the blessing of forgiving his wayward brother. The older son is obviously jealous at his brother's return and

³ Malcolm O. Tolbert, <u>"Luke,"</u> in *The Teacher's Bible Commentary*, ed. H. Franklin Paschall and Herschel H. Hobbs (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1972), 653–654.



undeserved welcome. This second son, in some ways, seems harder to win than the first! May churches and Christians beware!⁴

⁴ Gerard Chrispin, <u>The Bible Panorama: Enjoying the Whole Bible with a Chapter-by-Chapter</u> <u>Guide</u> (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 2005), 438–439.