**Group Session**

Small Group Study

**Overview**

*After Jesus established His authority through miraculous healings and wise teachings, you might think that everyone would embrace Jesus as Messiah—the Anointed One. As we will see in this session, not everyone did. But for those who were open, He would now reveal himself as Redeemer—the one who came to seek and save the lost.*

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**Engage**

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| **QUESTION**When you were a kid, did you ever pack a bag with the intention of running away from home? How far did you make it? What happened? |

Today we’ll explore a series of Jesus’ parables about lost things: a sheep, a coin, and a son. Some of these items were misplaced and others ran away. All of these items were valuable enough that their owners looked for them. We’ll see how Jesus used these stories to remind His listeners that they—and we—are valuable to Him too.

**Watch**

As we watch this video, consider this question:

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| **QUESTION**What does God’s grace mean to you?A person holding a photo  Description automatically generated with low confidence |

**Consider**

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| *We’ve all had the experience of desperately searching for lost keys, wallet, or phone (often when the misplaced item is right where we left it!). We’ve all probably experienced being lost as well. Even with all our technology, we sometimes find ourselves in unfamiliar surroundings. It’s a terrible feeling when you don’t know where you are. It can be more dangerous when you don’t realize you’re lost.**Even more desperate and hopeless than being physically lost is being spiritually lost—separated from God because of sin. It’s true that God is just and mighty. He’s also our Father who wants to love us as His children. Romans 5:8 tells us that God didn’t wait around for us to recognize we were lost. Instead, God showed just how much He loved us by sending Jesus to die for you and me.*  |
| **QUESTION**What would you say are characteristics of a loving father? |

**What the Bible Says**

Jesus taught that God’s love was extended to everyone. This radical grace drew huge crowds, including notorious sinners (Luke 15:1). This made the Pharisees really angry. They were like the religious police of the day, enforcing a complex set of rules, some of which were not found in Scripture. They required people to memorize and follow the rules because they thought that keeping those rules could make the people worthy and holy.

As you might imagine, many of the Pharisees didn’t like Jesus or His inclusive message. In fact, Luke 15:2 tells us that the Pharisees complained about the company that He kept. But Jesus didn’t get defensive or even offer an explanation. Instead, He told a series of parables that formed a rock-solid defense for His actions. Through these stories, He answered some of life’s biggest questions: Does God know me personally? Does He know the details of my life? And does He care?

**The Lost Sheep**

Read Luke 15:1–7.

The first parable Jesus told was about a shepherd who left ninety-nine sheep to bring home the one who was lost. The Pharisees immediately understood Jesus wasn’t just talking about a missing lamb. They were all familiar with the first words of the twenty-third Psalm, which identifies the Lord as their shepherd.

The shepherd’s search for the lost sheep shows the love and concern of God for each of us. Having a relationship with you is a top priority for God. Even with all the billions of people on the planet, God cares about you.

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| **QUESTION**Not many of us today have our own flock of sheep. Can you recall a lost item for which you launched an all-out search? |

**The Lost Coin**

Read Luke 15:8–10.

In case His audience still didn’t understand, Jesus told another story about a woman searching for a lost coin. In our culture, losing a coin means nothing. But in this woman’s case, the missing coin would have likely been equal to one day’s pay. At today’s minimum wage (and depending on where you live), that’s at least seventy-five dollars. Suddenly, you understand the search!

Both the shepherd and the woman invited others to celebrate when their lost objects were found. Jesus made it plain that heaven celebrates in the same way when even one lost person repents.

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| **QUESTION**How could we as believers or churches celebrate with others who come to relationship with Jesus? |

**The Lost Son**

Read Luke 15:11–16.

In the third parable, the younger son of a family asked for his inheritance before his father died. In that time, this action was equivalent to saying he wished his father were dead. The father knew he couldn’t force his son to stay, so the father chose to divide his property between his two sons. The younger son left home and wasted all his money on wild living. He eventually found himself broke, alone, and hungry.

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| **QUESTION**Were you like the rebellious son who had to learn things the hard way? Share about your experience. |

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| **QUESTION**If you’ve had the opportunity to raise children to adulthood, can you relate to this father’s dilemma? |

**The Prodigal Son Returns**

Read Luke 15:17–24.

After assessing the situation and recognizing the consequences of his actions, the prodigal son came to his senses. He realized that by leaving home, he’d also left the blessings and protection of a father who loved him. So he devised a plan to return home and simply ask to live like one of the servants.

But his father was watching for him! His father ran to greet him and welcome him home as a son—not as a servant. Like the story of the lost sheep and the lost coin, this story also includes a grand celebration. The lost son had returned home!

In the same way, the Lord desires to restore us to our full stature as His children when we return to Him. Difficult consequences often help us come to our senses when we’re hopelessly lost. But it’s important to note that the father anticipated his son’s return and moved toward him, even before the son actually made it home. God does that for us, too!

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| **QUESTION**Looking back at your own faith journey, what evidence do you see of God the Father moving toward you, even when you were “still a long way off”? |

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| **QUESTION**At the same time, we often want to save the people we love from their own tough circumstances. How do you decide when to intervene and when to allow others to face the results of their own choices? |

**The Older Son**

Read Luke 15:25–32.

Rather than celebrate his lost brother’s return, the older son viewed his father’s celebration for his brother as a slap in the face. The older brother had missed the point. As a son, he had enjoyed all the blessings of home all along. As a partner in his father’s work, he also had the chance to welcome his brother back.

Sadly, he missed the opportunity to celebrate. For those of us who stay with the Father, we should jump at the chance to celebrate as heaven does when a lost one comes home. Their homecoming should kick off a crazy, wild, excited party with laughing, shouting, and tears of joy! It’s interesting to wonder if the Pharisees and religious leaders who were just complaining about Jesus reaching out to sinful people caught the connection.

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| **QUESTION**Often, prodigals don’t fear whether God will love and forgive them. Instead, they worry about whether others in the church will love and forgive them. Discuss how you can welcome those who are trying to come home to their faith. |

**Reflect**

God goes after all who are lost. His heart’s desire is to see you restored to Him through a relationship with Jesus. And just like the father in the story, God watches and waits for the moment you decide to return to His presence, His love, and His blessings.

When you make the decision to come home—to return to your Heavenly Father—He will run to meet you. No matter what you have done or how far you have gone, He’s there with open arms!

**Listen to God**

The goal of ***Listen*** is not only to gain an understanding of God’s Word, but also to pause and listen to what God our Creator might want to say to us about what we have read and shared. Be silent for a few moments and reflect on the following questions. Choose the one that most resonates with what God is saying to you now. Then complete the others during Day 1 of your devotion time this week.

**Personal Reflection Questions**

*Record your answers to the following questions in the space provided or in your personal journal.*

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| **QUESTION**In the parables about the sheep and coin, the lost object did nothing in order to be found. Instead, they were sought out. In what ways have you experienced God seeking you out? |

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| **QUESTION**People sometimes have a difficult time relating to God as their Heavenly Father because their earthly father was a poor example. Whether it’s good or bad, write about how you feel your relationship with your earthly father has affected your view of your Heavenly Father. |

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| **QUESTION**Look over your response above. Ask the Lord to show you any area where you may need to receive healing or truth. |

If this is an especially difficult task due to a strained relationship, abandonment, or any type of current or past abuse, share your thoughts with a trusted, godly friend or mentor. Your Heavenly Father wants you to relate to Him in a healthy, personal way. His healing is available to you!

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| **QUESTION**Make a list of people you personally know who are new to faith. Brainstorm ways that you can encourage them. Maybe you can send them a card, text, or email. Invite them to grab coffee and chat. Regardless, determine to take action this week to be a good “big brother” or “big sister” and celebrate what God is doing in their lives! |
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**Prayer Requests**

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| Note any requests from the group and remember to pray for them during the week. |

Before next time, continue to listen with the personal devotions.

**Did You Know?**

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| *The father in the Parable of the Lost (Prodigal) Son divided his wealth between his sons. But to Jesus’ first-century audience, it likely wasn’t assumed to be an even division. Commentators note that in Bible-times, the norm was for each son to receive a portion of the inheritance, except for the firstborn son. He would instead receive a double portion (e.g., Deuteronomy 21:17). So, in the case of this parable, it’s likely that the oldest son received two-thirds of his father’s wealth and the younger squandered away one-third. Unfortunately for daughters, the sons took everything, and they usually had to find a husband to share in inheritance benefits. But if a family had no sons, daughters would receive the portions (e.g., Numbers 27:6–11).* |