

• A parable which focuses on three characters – the son – the father and the elder brother

A lost son

1. Sin often begins with self-confidence

• Impatient for the money – he wants it now!

2. Sin is deceitful

3. Sin leads us into helplessness in a time of emergency

4. Recovery began when the lost son admitted his need

• A second stage – turn around

The waiting father

God wants us to see 'the riches of His grace'^{□1}. The Pharisees were angry and critical of Jesus because He was so friendly to sinners. In response to their anger at His graciousness, He told the people three parables. The third one – the parable of the lost son – really focuses on three characters. There is the lost son, the waiting father, and the elder brother. We learn something from all three. Consider first the son who ruined his life.

1. **Sin often begins with self-confidence.** The young man was quite confident that he would be able to run his own life without the help of his father. He wanted money^{□1} and independence^{□2}, and he wanted to put a distance between himself and his father (in a 'far country'). He was quite sure that he would enjoy life if he was given this kind of freedom.

In Israel, it was possible for a father to share out some of the property that would eventually come to his son. In Israel – unlike some other cultures – this did not have to wait until the father died. So the younger son is impatient for the money that would one day come to him. He wants it **now**. He is self- confident and impatient.

2. **Sin is deceitful.** When the young man broke free from his father and began living his own wicked life, he did not realise how easily sin deceives us. He thought his independence from his father would lead to happiness and pleasure, but his foolishness brought him into troubles he had never expected. Sin offers us pleasure, but it is not long before it ruins our lives. Soon the young man began to find himself in need.

3. **Sin leads us into helplessness in a time of emergency.** Famine came to the land where the prodigal had gone to seek his pleasures. Life was all right for him as long as his money was lasting, but then something unexpected happened: a famine^{□1}. Soon he was in a terrible crisis, and ended up feeding pigs and even wanting to eat the pigs' food^{□2}. Living away from his father had seemed a good idea at the time, but soon what the son did brought him pain and distress.

4. **Recovery began when the lost son admitted his need.** Two things had to happen for the lost son to recover. First, he had to 'come to himself'^{□1}. He was in such a terrible situation and it had all started from the day when he had left his father. There is a spiritual equivalent. God wishes to be our Father and asks us to come back to Him. But recovery will start when we 'come to ourselves', when we see the predicament we are in, alienated from our heavenly Father.

There was a second stage. He had to turn around and start going back home^{□1}. The father was waiting, but the son had to turn around if he was ever to get back to his father. If we are to be reconciled to God, we have to 'come to ourselves', and then turn round and start moving back to God, away from the life of wickedness.

The second character in the parable is the waiting father. In the parable, the father obviously stands for God.

□1 see Ephesians 1:7

□1 15:11-12
□2 15:13

□1 15:14

□2 15:15-16

□1 15:17-19

1. *God is eager for sinners to return to Him*

1. **God is eager for sinners to return to Him.** The father of the parable was more eager to have the son back than the son ever realised. Every day the father was looking out for his son's return. On the very day the son was making his way back, the father was looking for him and saw him coming long before he was near to the house¹.

15:20b

2. *God responds with love when we turn to Him*

2. **God responds with love when we turn to Him.** The father ran to greet his son. It is an extraordinary picture. Fathers in ancient Israel would not generally have done anything as undignified as running, but the father of the parable runs in delight to greet his returning son! He is full of love. He embraces him and kisses him.

3. *God insists on receiving us back on the basis of grace alone*

3. **God insists on receiving us back on the basis of grace alone.** In the far country the son had prepared a little speech to say to his father: *'I have sinned ... I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers'*¹. The son believed his father would welcome him back but thought he would have to come back as a slave. He thought his sonship had been sinned away, and the best he could hope for was that his father would accept him as a hired worker.

15:19

• *The father takes him back as a son and not as a slave!*

So the son starts his little prepared speech: *'I have sinned... I am no longer worthy to be called your son...'*. But he never gets to saying 'Make me like one of your hired workers'. Before he can even finish his speech the father interrupts him! He welcomes him, calls for robe to given to him, a ring to be put on his son's finger, sandals on his feet. The son is not to try to 'earn' his way back to the father. The father takes him as he is. He will come back as a son not as a slave!

• *A few simple points – God's amazing graciousness*

A parable does not try to teach everything in one attempt. We must not press this parable because of things it does not mention (the cross, the work of the Spirit). It makes only a few limited and simple points. One of them is the amazing graciousness of God in receiving back those who have wandered far from Him. It must be remembered that the parable relates to the situation in Luke 15:1–2. Jesus welcomes the worst sinner to come to get to know Him.

• *He welcomes the worst sinner to come to get to know Him*



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