

## STUDY GUIDE

NEW VISION  
THE MIDDLE  
PARABLE OF  
THE LOST SON  
LUKE 15:11-32  
11/05/2017



# NEW VISION

## MAIN POINT

The Father's door is always open and the Father's message is always "welcome."

## INTRODUCE

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What's the latest picture you put up on Instagram or another social network?**

**Why do you think pictures mean so much to us?**

**Why do you think Jesus used these word pictures in His teaching?**

We live in the age of the snapshot—we're always taking photos, not just of significant moments, but of everyday things, too. Jesus loved pictures—specifically, word pictures. We call these word pictures parables. A parable is a simple story that answers a difficult question. And in the parable of the prodigal son, we have a really difficult question being asked: How does God really look at the lost?

## READ AND REBUILD THE STORY READ LUKE 15:11-32

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER TELL THE STORY (LUKE 15:11-32) DO AS BEST YOU CAN, DO NOT STOP AND TEACH, TRY NOT TO MAKE POINTS (COMMENTARY), JUST TELL THE STORY.**

**REBUILD THE STORY AS A GROUP: CHRONOLOGICALLY REBUILD THE STORY FROM MEMORY. ASK QUESTIONS IF NECESSARY. LIKE – "WHAT HAPPENED FIRST?", "WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?", "DID WE LEAVE OUT ANYTHING?" FINALLY, HAVE PARTICIPANTS LOOK AT THEIR BIBLES AND SEE IF ANYTHING WAS ADDED OR LEFT OUT OF THE STORY AS THEY GO THROUGH IT ONE MORE TIME**

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:11-16.**

This parable begins with a son who is from a good family, a good home—it seems like he's had every opportunity in life, hasn't he? But there's something very wrong.

**What is this son really saying to his father?**

**Imagine you were the father in this story: how would you feel if your son tells you, “I want my share of the inheritance?”**

Here, this son is saying to his dad, “give me the share of the property that belongs to me.” But, there’s a catch—in order to inherit something, someone has to die. What this son does is horrible. He is telling his dad, “I wish you were dead I’d rather have your riches than a relationship with you.” This son’s actions are a terrible insult. He not only dishonors his father, but he disgraces and disowns him, too. A father in that culture would have slapped his son across the face, kicked him out of the house and called the entire community together to tell them, “This man is no longer my son; he is no longer welcome in my home or in this community.”

**What does the father in the parable do instead?**

**What does this teach us about God the Father?**

Although the son is dishonoring, we see a father who responds with love. The father says, in essence, “Even though you love my stuff more than me, I love you more than my stuff.” He is a father full of grace, even though he knows things aren’t going to go well for his son.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:16-24.**

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The boy has gone from the penthouse to the pigpen—he squandered his inheritance, every penny. He’s learning the hard way that the world will take everything you have and give you nothing that you need.

**Why is it important for us to understand this?**

**Can you think of a time in your life when this truth about the world really hit home for you?**

This boy had lost everything except one thing: the love of his father. And so he realizes, “I have to go home.” He knows the door will be open.

**What is different about the younger son now? Is he coming back only because he’s broke?**

**What does the father do when he sees his son coming? Why does this matter?**

In ancient Hebrew culture, it was considered completely undignified for men to run anywhere. They wore long-flowing robes, and to run anywhere they’d have to hike up their robes, showing their undergarments. But the father doesn’t care about being dignified—his love for his son is stronger than any concern about propriety.

**Look at verse 20. What are we seeing here in the father’s response to his son?**

**Have you ever had a moment when you felt like this younger son? Overwhelmed by the grace, love, and forgiveness that someone else showed to you?**

In this verse, we see the beauty of a father’s love and the power of a father’s grace and the joy of a son’s return. This is how God the Father treats everyone who decides to come home. When the lost are found, God rejoices and celebrates. But that doesn’t mean everyone shares in His joy.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:25-32.**

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**Why is the older son so angry? Does his anger surprise you?**

**What does his interaction with his father reveal about how he sees himself?**

This son is just as lost as his younger brother—he just doesn't realize it. Where his younger brother was unrighteous, this son is self-righteous.

**How does an attitude of self-righteousness affect our relationship with God?**

What self-righteous people tend to do is look at the unrighteous and wonder how they could possibly get right with God. But they look at themselves and fail to see why they need to get right with God.

**How are we doing as a church at welcoming "younger brothers" into our community? Where can we grow in this area?**

## APPLY

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**General Questions** to ask after each story. These questions may lead to follow up questions that you ask as you dig deeper into the groups/individuals response to the initial questions.

Where do you see yourself in this story?

What do we learn about Jesus/God in this story?

What do we learn about man in this story?

What is Jesus teaching you personally through this story?

What application/adjustment do you need to make in your life due to the truth discovered in this story?

**Extra Questions:**

**Which of the brothers do you identify with the most? Why?**

**Do we rejoice when the lost are found? Why or why not?**

**How might God want to change us in light of His amazing love for the lost as seen in this parable?**

## PRAY

Thank God for His grace that He gives to older and younger sons alike. Pray that His grace would transform your life and would lead you to share His grace with others.

## COMMENTARY

### LUKE 15:11-32

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15:11-12. Jesus turned to the family setting for his concluding parable to illustrate why He associated with sinners. The story was told succinctly with only the points Jesus wanted to make elaborated. A younger son demanded his share of the estate and got it. There is no indication of why he wanted it or why the father so quickly gave it to him. Later we will see the older brother's attitude and surmise sibling rivalry here, as in the Old Testament stories of Jacob and Esau and of Joseph and his brothers. The younger brother's portion was only a third of the estate if the

entire estate were divided. By law, the older brother got a double portion (Deut. 21:17). Although this well-known parable (vv. 11-32) is usually called the parable of the prodigal son, the other son and the father are also important characters. It was unusual, but not unheard of, for a father to settle his estate before his death. Since the older son got a double portion of his father's estate, the younger son's share would have been one-third of the estate.

15:13-16. The younger son had no intention of returning to his family. It is impossible to know whether his foolish living included "prostitutes" (v. 30), or if that was just an angry accusation made by the older brother. The irony of the penniless younger son's new job was that pigs were unclean animals to Jews (Lev. 11:7). He was at rock bottom in his new life.

15:17-19. It took extreme poverty and hunger to prompt the younger son to come to his senses and realize that, in spite of all he had done, the correct course of action was to return and become one of his father's hired hands. To do so, however, it would be necessary to confess that he had sinned greatly and was not worthy to be called his son. This is a vivid picture of a person "hitting bottom" and finally realizing the magnitude of his sin. The younger brother came to his senses: The day laborers on his dad's farm had enough to eat. Note how this ties the story back to the beginning of the chapter and the theme of sinners. No longer are we using animals or objects to talk about the lost. Now we have gotten down to basic facts. People are lost. People need to realize their lost condition and admit it. The younger son's first step is saying, "I am a sinner."

What is a sinner? An unworthy person. One who deserves nothing. Yet a sinner wants something. So the sinner searches for someone who loves the unworthy, who is willing to help the undeserving. The sinful younger brother had forfeited his position as son. He had no more claims on his father, so he applied for a new job—day laborer. Humans have the capacity to change. We do not have to remain in the pigpen. We do not have to continue to live as sinners. We can become responsible for our lives. We can quit our riotous living. We can come home.

15:20-23. Focus shifts from son to father. That the father saw his son coming from a long way off indicates that he habitually looked for his return. Perhaps the normal parental reaction to the younger son's return would be anger or at least deep disappointment, but this father's response displayed: (1) compassion, (2) love (threw his arms around his neck and kissed him), (3) celebration (a feast), and (4) joyful restoration of status for his son (a robe of distinction, signet ring of family authority, sandals worn by a son, in contrast to barefoot slaves). Even the joyful welcome did not deter the son from his determined course. He repeated the plea he had rehearsed. Somehow the last line never came out; the job application as a day laborer was never made.

15:24. This is the point at which the parable ties in to the two previous stories about God's joy in saving the lost. The father's celebratory attitude depicts the way in which God the Father receives repentant sinners. This contrasts with the contempt the Pharisees and scribes displayed for sinners who came to Jesus (v. 2). How could the father act like this? Did he not know what the son had done? Of course, but the son had been given up for dead. This was resurrection time. He was lost. We found the precious treasure for which we have hunted. The lost sheep is back. Certainly a lost and found son is worth much more than a coin or a sheep. What a picture of the Father in heaven. How He does celebrate when the lost are found, when sinners repent. What compassion and love He shows. Why does Jesus associate with sinners? Because heaven loves them and waits patiently for them to return and repent so the celebration can begin. Heaven's citizens are repentant sinners.

15:25-30. Instead of the story ending on a note of joy and celebration, as might be expected, the spotlight shifts to the older brother. Unlike the father's positive attitude, the older brother (1) was surprised at the return of his sinning brother, (2) was offended and jealous at the father's celebration, (3) became angry at the father's forgiving love, (4) declared his own self-righteousness, and (5) focused on his brother's sinfulness rather than his newfound repentance. Jesus' representation of the religious leaders in the character of the older brother was a scathing rebuke of their self-righteousness.

15:31-32. The rebuke of the religious leaders continues. They did not understand (1) the opportunity for a close relationship with God, (2) the generosity of His grace, (3) His joy at the salvation of sinners, or (4) the profound transformation of conversion. Perhaps most crucial of all, however, is the reminder of kinship to the sinners intended in the phrase this brother of yours. The religious leaders refused to accept their Jewish brethren, the "sinners," as the older brother in this story.