

SERMON STUDY GUIDE

HIDDEN PLAIN SIGHT UNCOVERING THE KINGDOM

"Healing of Prodigal Hearts"

March 23, 2025

Scripture Passages: Luke 15:11-32

INTRO

What's the most valuable thing you've ever lost? Maybe it was something small but important, like a passport. You search everywhere, hoping it will turn up, only to realize it's truly gone—canceled, separated, useless to you.

Jesus tells three parables about lost things being found and the celebration that follows. But He is speaking of a specific kind of "lost"—a separation so complete that it means destruction. The Greek word "apollumi" doesn't just mean misplaced; it means ruined, perished, utterly cut off.

STUDY & REFLECTION

The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)

"There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them." (Luke 15:11-12)

This request was scandalous. The younger son was essentially saying, "I wish you were dead." He was not just being reckless—he was cutting himself off from his family, his inheritance, and his identity.

He took his share, left for a distant country, and squandered everything in wild living. Soon, famine hit, and he found himself feeding pigs—unclean animals for a Jew. He had lost everything, including his sense of belonging. He was "apollumi."

The Father's Response

In his desperation, the son decided to return home, not as a son but as a servant. But before he could even arrive:

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." (Luke 15:20)

The father didn't wait for an apology. He ran to him—breaking cultural norms—and restored him immediately. The best robe, a ring, sandals, and a feast. The father was not just welcoming his son back; he was restoring his identity.

"For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (Luke 15:24)

Application

Which Lost Son Are You?

The younger son was outwardly lost—his rebellion was loud and obvious. But Jesus doesn't end the story there. The older brother was just as lost, though in a different way.

"Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends." (Luke 15:29)

He had done everything "right" but had no relationship with the father. His obedience was transactional—he was counting what he "deserved." The sins we don't struggle with are always the worst ones in our eyes. But Jesus came for both types of lostness.

God's Reckless Grace

The father threw a party, breaking every expectation. The religious leaders of Jesus' day expected a "cutting off" ceremony—a permanent rejection of the younger son. Instead, the father ran, embraced him, and restored him.

Jesus does the same for us. No matter how far we have gone, no matter our reasons for returning, He is waiting to restore us. As Spurgeon said, "Slow are the steps of repentance, but fast are the feet of forgiveness."

- How does the father's response challenge our ideas of forgiveness and grace?
- What does this parable reveal about God's love for those who stray and for those who stay?

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- In what ways have you experienced being lost? How did you return?
- Do you relate more to the younger or the older brother? Why?
- How can we ensure we have a real relationship with the Father rather than just religious performance?

REFLECTION & PRAYER

- Ask God to reveal which kind of lostness you are most prone to.
- Pray for a heart of mercy toward those who are lost differently than you.
- Celebrate the lost being found—both in your life and in the lives of others.

PARTICIPATE IN THE SEARCH & RESCUE

Jesus came to "seek and save the lost." We are invited to do the same.

- Identify someone to pray for.
- Invite someone to church.
- Celebrate the lost being found, just like the Father does.