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Luke 15



Gospel of Luke - Steve Gregg

In Luke 15, Steve Gregg discusses how Jesus welcomed sinners and why repentance is essential. He emphasizes that even if someone has strayed from the path of righteousness, they can still be saved if they return to God. Gregg also highlights the importance of shepherding a Christian congregation and cultivating disciples. He concludes by emphasizing the importance of true repentance and the joy that comes with being forgiven and reconciled with God.

Transcript

All right, we come to a very refreshing chapter now. I think some of the favorite material in the Gospels is in this chapter. One of the favorite parables, certainly, the parable of the prodigal son.

But the parable of the prodigal son is actually one of three parables on the same subject. It's just the longest one. There are three parables making the same point.

And the point is that when somebody has lost something, they're very happy to get it back. And the parable is given because of criticism that Jesus received because of the quality of his followers who, in many cases, were people with sinful pasts. People that the scribes and Pharisees would be shunning.

Jesus was welcoming. And Jesus' point is going to be, well, these are people who admittedly were lost. But they were lost to God.

And what these parables tell us is that when people are lost, we shouldn't be thinking in terms of they don't deserve to be found because they're evil. We should be thinking God deserves to get back what he lost. And so we read of a shepherd who lost a sheep and he gets his sheep back.

A woman who lost a coin, she gets her coin back. A man who lost his son, he gets his son back. In every case, the person who receives back what they lost is rejoicing because they got back what belongs to them.

And the Pharisees and maybe many religious people, they look on sinners and they say, they don't deserve to be saved. They're not good people like us. I know that when I hear people objecting to even the suggestion of the universal reconciliation view, which may or may not be true depending on how you interpret scripture, but just the very suggestion of it, that God might save everybody.

They say, what, even Adolf Hitler? I recently read something on our forum from someone who wrote, well, you know, if Adolf Hitler ended up in heaven, even after someone suggested, even after 87 years of burning in hell, if he repented and came to heaven and was there, it'd be unjust to his victims for them to have to walk around in heaven and see him there because he killed them and so forth. I thought, well, okay, this person is thinking of salvation as something that somebody deserves and someone else doesn't deserve. Like Hitler's victims deserve salvation, but he doesn't.

Or I, the critic, deserve salvation, but Hitler doesn't. Salvation isn't about deserving. As a matter of fact, if any of Hitler's victims are indeed in heaven, they would be delighted to see him there because anyone in heaven would have the same mind as Christ.

And when Christ was killed, he didn't say, get them, God. He said, father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.

When Stephen was stoned to death, certainly he was treated as brutally by the Jews as many of Hitler's victims were treated by him. Yet he said, father, don't lay this sin on their charge. The spirit of Christ does not look for vengeance.

The spirit of Christ looks for reconciliation. And I'll tell you this, I've had many people betray me in my life and some of them have never apologized. And some of them I consider to be very unreliable friends and betrayers, but I want to see all of them in heaven.

I'd be disappointed if any of them aren't there. The idea is not some people deserve to go to heaven and others don't. And there's some kind of great injustice if bad people who've done bad things end up saved.

Well, salvation isn't about giving them justice. It's about God getting justice. God deserves to have them as his followers.

He made them for that. He owns them. They've wandered off from him.

And for him to get them back is right. He saves them for him. People are not primarily saved for themselves.

They're saved for him. And therefore, when the Pharisees object to these sinners getting saved and coming to Christ, they're thinking in terms of, well, the sinners don't deserve that. And Jesus turns it around and says, but doesn't God deserve it? Shouldn't God be

able to rejoice in the recovery of what was lost to him? This is how Jesus turns the whole mentality around about sinners being forgiven.

People who object to sinners being forgiven, they somehow feel that they are better. They feel, I'm not as bad a sinner as that is. Of course, it's no injustice that God forgave me.

I'm a reasonably good person, but that person's not a reasonably good person at all. It's wrong for God to forgive them. But see, the gospel teaches us that God took the sins of the world and put them on Jesus, and justice was done in the penalty of against sin being exacted against him on our behalf.

There is no injustice if God, in fact, would simply ignore the sins of the whole world and let them all go to heaven. I'm not saying that is a scenario that we would expect, but if it were so, there'd be no injustice because all their sins were put on Jesus, and he suffered the penalty. Justice has been served, and that's the only reason you can be saved, because even one of your sins would have canceled out your qualification for salvation, if not for what Jesus did.

People who think, well, it's reasonable that God would forgive me, but not reasonable that he'd forgive Hitler. Well, the assumption is that Hitler is worse than me by several degrees of magnitude, but which degree of magnitude crosses that line? You know, I mean, where are you going to draw the line? Someone who commits a million sins can be forgiven, but one who commits 10 million cannot? You know, where do you draw the line? God doesn't draw that line anywhere. Anyone can be forgiven if they repent.

Anyone who returns to him can be saved, and that was the policy Jesus had, but the Pharisees did not. After all, if you're knocking yourself out to be righteous like the Pharisees were, and not enjoying it like they probably weren't, that is to say they paid that as a price for the reputation they wanted, but they had to abstain from things they really probably preferred to do, and it was a sacrifice for them to be righteous. When you make sacrifice to be righteous, and then somebody else who doesn't make those sacrifices gets in merely by grace and never made those sacrifices, you may tend to be jealous of them, like the men who worked all day and earned a penny or a denarius, and they were jealous of the people who worked one hour and got a denarius.

Hey, how come they didn't have to make all the sacrifices I made, and they got the same thing I got? See, that kind of talk indicates that you don't really enjoy God at all, do you? You're just you're doing something you regret that you have to do. You resent doing it because you just have to do it, and those people didn't have to do it, and they got in anyway, but see, you won't resent that if you love God. If you say, I'm glad God got more out of me because he deserves more than that.

I'm glad I didn't wait until I was 90 years old and give him the dregs of my life. He

deserves better than that. I'm glad that he recovered me early on because I'd hate to think that I spent most of my life and God lost out on the use of me during that time.

He deserves to have me serve him every day of my life. I regret every day I didn't serve him. I love him.

I don't resent having to follow God. People who resent following God, like the Pharisees, I think, did, they don't love God, and Jesus said that to the Pharisees in John chapter 5. He said, I know you that you have no love of God in you. You do all these righteous things, but you're doing them because you are paying some kind of a price for a commodity you want.

You either want reputation or you want favor with God, but you don't like the price you have to pay. If you love somebody, you love to please them. So someone who really loves the Lord does not object to the idea that someone else may get saved finally who didn't serve God most of their life.

When I did, well, I'm glad I did. What else would I want to do with my life? Can you imagine? Those of you who've served God most of your lives, and many of you have, can you imagine anything better to do with your life than what you did for God? I can't even think of anything being more desirable, but the Pharisees apparently could. The Pharisees probably thought, boy, these guys, they got away with stuff, like the prodigal son's brother.

We know that when the son came back and they were celebrating his return, the brother said, I never did all those things he did, and you never did this for me. He went out and was with the prostitutes and the drunkards, and he did all those fun things I never got to do. That's what he's saying.

He doesn't say fun things, but that's what he's thinking. If you don't think it'd be fun to go out and be with the prostitutes and the drunkards, then you don't complain that you didn't get to do it. You know, when I was in the Jesus movement, I'd been saved since my childhood, but most of the people around me were getting saved out of sinful backgrounds, hippiedom, drugs, alcohol, sex, rock and roll, all the sins of my generation.

My friends were getting saved after having indulged in them, and I never had indulged in them in those days, and I felt like I had missed out. Sometimes I felt like I'd missed out, but that's before I really learned to love God. After I learned to love God, I thought, well, no, they missed out.

I mean, they got saved, thankfully, eventually, but they missed out on all those years they could have been saved. They could have been serving God. They have things to regret that I don't have to regret.

I'm fortunate to be able to serve God. The older brother was like the Pharisees. He didn't

feel fortunate.

He felt like he missed out on something, and his younger brother got to have all the fun and then got to get into all this in heaven, too, and so that's how the Pharisees were, and Jesus tells these parables. The first two just talk about how wrongheaded they are not to rejoice that God is getting back what is his, but the last parable actually focuses on the Pharisees more by making them, casting them in the role of the older brother and pointing out more of their motivations. In verse one, it says, then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to him to hear him, and the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

So Jesus spoke this parable to them, saying, what man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which was lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing, and when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance. Now, just a minute here.

Sheep are supposed to not go astray, and ninety-nine of this man's sheep don't. He's got ninety-nine sheep that are behaving well. He should be rejoicing in them.

Now, he's got one sheep that goes away, and he's upset about that, so he goes and gets it back, but he has more joy in the sheep that returns, that was lost, than he had in the ninety-nine that he didn't have to chase after. I think more joy doesn't mean the people who were obedient to him, he never had any joy in them, that he has more joy immediately upon finding a lost thing. There's more relief in it.

There's more, you know, celebration in finding something that's lost at that moment than in those that he never was worried about. Overall, I'm sure the shepherd's much happier with the sheep that don't stray. God, I'm sure, receives much more happiness in the long run, cumulatively, from the life of somebody who lives for his glory and lives in obedience to him and loves him all their life, but at the moment that a lost one is found, it's an occasion for joy, special joy, which at that moment eclipses the joy of having all these ninety-nine sheep that didn't stray.

That doesn't mean we should go off and wander off and then come back so God could be happier with us. I'm sure, really, in the long run, cumulatively, he gets a lot more pleasure and joy out of someone who serves him all their life, but the one who is found after being lost is one that at that particular moment occasions more celebration because a tragedy has been averted, because something has been recovered that was lost. And the ninety-nine that didn't stray shouldn't say, well, I guess I'm not appreciated because I never strayed.

I should go off and stray too so he'll make a big deal about me too. But, of course, a real sheep doesn't think that way and real Christians don't. We're glad too.

I am. If I heard a credible story that Adolf Hitler repented just before he died and that he's in heaven, I'd be glad. That doesn't mean I like Hitler.

I don't like him. I think he's a bad man, but I'd be glad to hear of any sinner that repents. So there's joy in heaven that, at least on the occasion of the recovery, it's a greater joy than the joy that there's been this many that didn't go astray.

But he's not saying that God is happier in the long run with people who stray and come back than with those who don't stray. That's not the point he's making. He's saying that these sinners coming to me is a cause for celebration.

Now, if you Pharisees have always been obedient to God and God's not celebrating right now, it's because you didn't wander off and you're not someone that was lost, that he was worried about. Of course, the Pharisees were wandered off too. They didn't recognize that and they saw themselves as righteous persons who need no repentance.

Jesus was not acknowledging that they were, in fact, of that status, but he was saying, if that is so, you can understand why God is making a big deal about the return of these sinners more than the big deal about you. Now, I want to say this too, and this is not the point of this parable. It's more of a sideline and I don't want to get off too far, but shepherding sheep is analogous to pastoring a church or watching over God's people.

And that being so, pastors are encouraged to be like shepherds. Peter says in 1 Peter 5 to the elders of the church, shepherd the flock of God, taking the oversight of it. Paul said the same thing to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20.

He said, take heed to the flock over which the Holy Spirit made you overseers, that you shepherd the flock of God. To cultivate Christians, to make disciples of a congregation is like shepherding sheep. And the reason I bring this up is because of different styles of leadership that we find in different churches.

And because of a conversation I had with a pastor once in a church I was attending. It was that conversation that leads me to bring this up here. He was trying to understand how best to disciple the flock.

And the approach he was taking was sort of what we might call, what has been called the shepherding approach, which there was a shepherding movement back in the 70s where people were encouraged to obey their pastors about everything. And the pastors were actually micromanaging the lives of everybody. And if anyone did anything significant like change jobs, get married, sell their house or do anything without the permission of the pastor, they were considered to be in rebellion because the pastor should, that should be passed by the pastor first.

And I remember in the 90s or the late 80s when we moved our school to a new location in Oregon, we were attending a church nearby. And we had some money donated to us. We purchased a piece of property in addition to the one we had to expand our school.

And the pastor of the church said, don't you think that's something you should pass by the elders of the church? I thought, why? You know, what do they have to do with it? We didn't use their money. You know, they're not running the school. I'm attending their church and our school bought a piece of property, but the pastor almost thought like, well, you're doing an end run about the, around the proper authority.

I thought, well, our school has its own board of directors. We, we make our own decisions. The fact that we attend the church doesn't make the church Lord, the leaders of the church Lord over us.

But he didn't understand that. He thought, but as pastors, we're supposed to make sure everyone's doing the right thing. You know, you need to pass these things by your elders.

I said, well, I just don't see it that way. I don't see what, that we really need to pass everything by you for, you know, when we make decisions like this. We, we ran our school for six years in another location before we were in your church, and we didn't need you then.

We don't need you anymore then, now than we did then. And he said, well, then how can a pastor shepherd his flock? And I thought of this parable just said, I said, well, the way Jesus said, if you got 99 sheep that aren't straying, go after the one that is. You should be very happy to have a church primarily made up of people who don't need your supervision, who aren't high maintenance people.

I was once an elder in a church that was like a rehab center in Santa Cruz, and they took in people with alcohol and drug problems. And they also had a church in the facility, but that was, everyone was high maintenance. Everyone needed their hand held because they were all struggling with addictions they were overcoming.

I visited Keith Green's ministry when it was in, it was North of LA, and he had like 60 something people living in community of whom almost all of them had gotten saved within the last three months out of street and drug and crime backgrounds and so forth. And it was a very high maintenance situation. These people need to be watched every moment.

They'd set up a system where no one could do anything without a buddy watching them. You know, you had to get permission to go to the literally to get out of sight of your buddy because it was so high maintenance. Now that's not my idea of a normal church.

It's not a desirable situation. I don't know why any pastor would want to have that kind of

supervision over everyone in the flock. It's just so time consuming, so labor intensive.

Jesus describes a man who's got a flock of 99 sheep that are low maintenance. They don't need his micromanagement. They're grazing just fine.

They're feeding themselves. He can concentrate on going after one that's having problems, the one that's strayed, the one that's in danger. And that presumably is a desirable way of shepherding things.

You don't micromanage the sheep that don't have to be micromanaged. Be happy that you've got so many that you don't have to micromanage. The fewer high maintenance sheep you have, the better off you are.

But some pastors want to treat the whole flock as if they're high maintenance. They want everybody to need them every moment for every decision. And I realize that churches where the pastors are quite that controlling are fewer now than they used to be because the shepherding movement died an inglorious death back in the late 70s.

But there were lots of churches that were going that way. Now there's just a few. And mostly they're not really churches that embrace that as a norm, but they're just the personality types of the pastors.

Pastors just like to control people. This is not shepherding a flock. It's controlling people.

The shepherd should be glad that he has only one sheep that needs his special attention. Gives him more time to do other things than chase after straying sheep. But anyway, that's a sideline.

That's not the point Jesus is making. But it certainly is inherent. It's almost like an assumption behind what he's saying.

He's not even bringing that point out. That's so obvious. A man with 100 sheep, he can leave 99 alone if they're behaving and go after one that's not behaving.

There are plenty of people in the church who don't need to be spoon fed by the pastor. They can feed themselves. They're behaving.

They're not in sin. They don't need all that special attention. But some pastors want to treat everyone as if they need them every hour.

And that is in fact probably an ego problem more than anything else. So Jesus gives the example of the lost sheep that's found, the owner rejoices. Now remember, I said that Jesus' teaching here is about how that which is lost and recovered is lost and recovered to God.

It's God's loss and it's God's gain when it's found. We usually think of how much sinner

gains by being found because they're on the road to destruction and now they're on the road to eternal life. That's good for you.

That's good for you to be found like that. But sometimes we think only in those terms and the Bible doesn't even speak primarily in those terms. That's a secondary issue.

This sheep was no doubt better off after his master found it. But it's not a given that the sheep was better off. He could have been coming to dinner that night.

In other words, the sheep that was spared from being eaten by wolves may well have been eaten by the shepherd at a later date. It's not that the sheep was rescued from some pitiful condition. It's the shepherd recovered something of value to him.

And that's a paradigm shift in the way most Christians think about salvation. Certainly different than the Pharisees did because we think of the benefit to the person. And it's not fair that that person could sin so long and get the same benefit of salvation that I have because I didn't do all those bad things.

Well, salvation is not really primarily about the benefit they receive. It's about whether God has all that he deserves, whether God is still missing something that he should have, whether he recovers something. Then he rejoices to have found it.

Not because the poor little sheep is now safer. It may well be safer, but it may not be any safer. But the shepherd is less impoverished when 1% of his assets are recovered from having been taken from him.

Now, verse 8 has another shorter parable of the same type. Or what woman having 10 silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the peace which I lost. Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

The same conclusion he gave in verse 7 of the other parable. There's joy in heaven when one sinner repents. Now, in this case, it's a woman and she lost a coin.

It's very clear that the refinding of the coin didn't benefit the coin. The idea of recovering these things is not the benefit to the thing recovered, but to the one recovering it. A coin was not in danger of any harm by being lost.

The woman was in danger of being poorer for not having it. And therefore, the recovery of it is a boon to her wealth. It's not particularly having an impact on the benefit to the coin.

The point here, again, is that people belong to God. He made them. They are His.

Those that are straying and sinning and alienated from Him are lost to Him. That's a value. People are a value to Him.

And He wants to recover them. And therefore, He rejoices when He can. This coin and sheep are basically two stories almost exactly alike.

The difference only is the thing that is lost. One thing, however, we can see that the sheep got lost by its own wandering. The coin didn't have anything to do with its getting lost.

This is kind of important because lots of people will say that things that are lost are found only by God doing it. You can't come to God if you're a lost person unless God has chosen you and has found you and regenerates you and brings you back. It's all God.

It's nothing of you. And sometimes they'll point to the coin. The coin did nothing to be found.

It was lost. It did nothing to be lost. It did nothing to be found.

But it was found entirely by the woman's efforts. And so sinners are found entirely by God's efforts and they can do nothing to bring themselves back to God. Likewise, the sheep didn't do anything to bring itself back to the shepherd.

The shepherd went out to where it was and found it. Well, if Jesus is trying to emphasize the role of man and the role of God in the finding of the lost person, then one could argue a Calvinist point from these particular parables, but not from the next one. The next one, the father didn't go out and find his son.

The son came to his senses when he was away from his father and returned to his father. So you can't really argue one way or the other from these parables about the Calvinist doctrine of whether a person can return to God or not. That's not in the purview of what Jesus is discussing really.

He's not talking about who it is that finds them. He's talking about the fact that they are found is something that brings joy to God. So this next parable is much more elaborate, much more detailed, but it's just a more elaborate way of making the same point as the previous two parables.

Then he said, a certain man had two sons and the younger of them said to his father, father, give me a portion of goods that falls to me or the portion of goods that falls to me. He's going to take his whole inheritance, not part of it. So he divided to them his livelihood.

Now this is an outrageous request on the part of the son. This is not something that happened once in a while and Jesus knew of a case or was presenting a fairly typical

case of a son who might do this. This is unheard of.

The sons do not divide the father's inheritance until the father is dead. Then they can divide the inheritance. That was customary in Israel.

It's customary throughout the world. It was no less so in Jesus' day than it is now. If I go to my dad and say, you know all that stuff you're gonna leave me when you die, just give it to me now.

That'd be very rude. He'd be saying, I can't wait for you to die. All I want is your stuff.

And that's essentially, you know, the rudeness of this son. A person's listening to this parable in the original audience would think, that's audacious. This son's a total jerk.

No one would do that. That's such an insult to the father. And yet, that's how Jesus frames the parable.

The guy wants his inheritance now. Dad's not dead yet, but he wants it now anyway. He's not gonna wait for his dad to die.

And so the father, despite the audacity of his son, accommodates him and goes ahead. He divides it up and gives the son his portion. Now the other son, we don't read of him being given a portion, but of course, by rights, all that's left is his.

The younger brother takes all that he's got coming to him on this occasion. The rest of the estate is, at least after his father's death, is going to go to the older son. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions in prodigal living.

This prodigal son, what does the word prodigal mean? Do most people even know? It means wasteful. Prodigality is wastefulness. And so the Bible doesn't call this the prodigal son, but we call it the prodigal son.

And we need to understand that prodigal means wasteful. It's because he took all that his father gave him and wasted it. And so he wasted his possessions with prodigal or wasteful living.

But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in the land and he began to be in want. Now he'd spent all of what? All the inheritance he was ever going to get from his dad. He had wasted his future.

He had wasted his father's possessions, which were really still his father's until his father would die. But he had, you know, impoverished in some measure his father. Not that his father was really impoverished, but he'd taken half of the goods that his father was going to eventually leave him.

So his father was the worst off financially for this. And the son not only didn't benefit, he wasted it and didn't have any of it left. And so he began to be in want.

Of course, he ran out of money. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of the country and he sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. Now, Jesus is making this story up for impact.

And remember, the Jews don't eat pigs. So this man is in a Gentile country. He's gone to an unclean land.

He's wasted his father's good inheritance. He's now feeding pigs, unclean, filthy, despicable animals to the Jews, especially. In fact, the way pigs live would be despicable to most of us, but the Jews had a particular additional layer of revulsion about pigs because they were an unclean animal.

They weren't allowed to eat. And yet here's a guy who is feeding pigs and then eventually eating with them. I mean, Jesus is painting this picture as a boy, a Jewish boy who has sunk about as low and to such a humiliating and disgusting level as could be imagined in a fictional account.

It says, And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate. So he was actually working for a pagan in a pagan land, feeding unclean animals. This is how far he had fallen.

And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate. And no one gave him anything to eat. Now, I'm not sure how this to be understood.

I mean, if he was feeding swine, he should have gotten some kind of remuneration or maybe, I don't know. I mean, the point here is, even though he found work, there was, after all, a famine in the land. It says that in verse 14.

So no one had much. And so even the guy who had him feed his pigs probably couldn't provide much for him. Maybe he was allowed to eat a few of the pods, the pigs.

It's not really clear how this worked, but it's clear that he couldn't get any lower than he got. But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare? And I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants. Now, notice Jesus is creating a story about a sinner returning home to his father.

This is because the Pharisees were complaining that there were so many sinners in Jesus' audience who were returning home to God, coming to Jesus. And they were complaining that Jesus was receiving them without criticism. Now, in order to depict

these sinners, Jesus also has to depict repentance because Jesus said he came to call sinners to repentance.

He didn't just call sinners. He called sinners to repentance. Presumably, these people that were coming to him, if they were accepted, had repented or were in the process of repenting.

And so, in telling the story of a shameless young man who had insulted his father and wasted his father's goods and sunk to a very degraded level of uncleanness compared to the Jews that were listening to the story, he depicts this man repenting. And therefore, Jesus is able to depict repentance however he wants to. He's making the story up.

And so, we have here an excellent teaching of Jesus about what repentance is like. And we can see a number of things. First of all, the son did not repent because of his father's wrath.

He didn't think, well, I'd better get right with my dad because he's going to come out here with his armies and kill me or punish me. It was not a reflection upon the wrath of his father that induced him to repent. It was actually a reflection on the goodness of his father's house, the goodness of his father to his servants.

My father feeds his servants better than this master feeds me. I'm taking care of his pigs and this man's more stingy with me than my dad is with his servants. My dad's servants eat well.

He's reflecting on the generosity of his father, not the anger of his father. And this, like Paul said, it's the goodness of God that leads you to repentance. Paul said in Romans 2. And repentance here in this case does not come from threats of violence or damnation or anything like that.

It comes from him remembering his father's a better man than the man he's serving is. He's serving a man who doesn't care about him. And his father cares about him.

Not only does his father care about him, his father cares even about his slaves. His father is a generous man, a good man. And his house is a better place to be than here.

And so, this is what actually motivates the ideal repentance that Jesus describes. Now, look how that repentance is, how it expresses itself. He says, Father, I'm going to say this to my father.

I'm going to rise and say, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. Now, this is taking responsibility for his sins both before God, which is what heaven refers to here, and before his father. Now, true in the parable, the father represents God, but to this boy in the parable, it's just his dad.

He's wronged his dad. He's not only wronged God, he's also wronged another person. And he confesses his guilt to both.

I am guilty before God and I'm guilty before you, the one I have wronged. True repentance is first of all concerned about how God has been sinned against, and secondly, how other human beings have been wronged by our sins. That's what the penitent, the true penitent, is mainly mindful of.

Now, many people we know seem to repent, but they seem to repent only because they got into trouble. Now, this boy was in trouble and this trouble woke him up to his plight. This trouble woke him up to how different things were out in the world than in his father's house.

But when he repented, he was mindful of how much he had insulted his father, and worse than that, God. He mentions God first. I've sinned against heaven is the first concern.

I've also sinned against my dad, a second concern. How it has affected me has got to be a distant third. Yeah, I'm in bad shape too, but I can't, I deserve it.

What I've done deserves what I've gotten for me. My dad didn't deserve me doing this to him. God didn't deserve me doing this to him.

In other words, a true penitent is not mindful of the fact that, boy, I've wrecked my life. I need to get better off because I deserve better than this. True penitence says I deserve everything I've gotten, but the people I've wronged and God, they don't deserve this.

I've sinned against God. I've sinned against my dad. I'm not worthy to be called your son anymore.

I'm not even asking to be called your son. Just make me a slave. That'll be all.

I'd rather be your slave. I'd rather be a servant in heaven than a master out in the world or in hell, and so this son is not coming back reclaiming any privileges. He's not saying, Dad, I'm back.

Had a horrible time out there. Glad to be home. Where's the food? Where's my room? Where's my clothes? He's not saying, well, I've repented, so I deserve all these things back again.

He says, I don't deserve it. I'm not asking for that. I was so disappointed with Jimmy Swagger when he was caught the first time in his sins, and then he wept and seemingly repented on television about how awful it was what he had done.

So far, so good, although I've never trusted his tears. He sheds those when he's preaching, too, and I frankly have never been very impressed with that particular

ministry or that particular minister, but nonetheless, I thought it was a good thing that he repented if he's repenting, but then next thing you know, his denomination has slapped a one-year moratorium on his ministry, and within a month or two, he says, no, I've repented. I deserve to have my television ministry back.

I deserve to have everything back, and he acts like, well, since I repented, no one should hold me back. I deserve everything I had before. I think, wait a minute.

That's not what repentance is like. Repentance is like, I don't deserve anything except punishment. What I did, I lost every claim to those kinds of things.

I'll be glad if I'm just not rejected anymore, if I'm forgiven. Forgiven doesn't always mean restored. A person can lose a great deal through his sins and later be forgiven, but it doesn't mean he gets it all back, and if he's truly repentant, he doesn't expect to get it all back.

He expects not to deserve that, so when you find someone who, after they've repented, they act like, okay, we got that done now. Let's get back to things the way they were. No, real repentance doesn't really anticipate any privileges.

If it's real, if you take seriously the magnitude of your own sins against God, certainly, and against people, then if you're deprived of your privileges after that, you don't think that's a bad deal. You may regret it. You may wish you hadn't done all that and lost all that, but you don't have expectations that people will give you a pass.

Repentance is fully owning your responsibility and whatever terrible consequences come from it, and that's what this man was doing. Jesus is describing true penitence. He remembers that his Father is better than the Master he's serving now.

He knows that his sins are primarily against God, and that's what he is most mindful of, and it's also hurt his Father. He needs to make some repentance to those people. He needs to confess his fault to them, and he has to recognize that he has lost permanently any claim to the privileges of sonship, and he recognizes that.

I'm not worthy to be called your son. Could you just hire me on as a servant? I'd rather feed the cows than the pigs. I'd rather feed the sheep than the pigs and be at home with my dad.

That's the motivation of true repentance as opposed to what fake repentance often looks like. So, he had this rehearsed speech. He was going to rise up and go say these words to his Father, and so in verse 20 it says, he arose and came to his Father, but when he was still a great way off, his Father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

Now, this is no doubt deliberate. Jesus says the Father saw him in the distance and ran

out to meet him. He didn't stand there on the porch and just say, well, if you come all the way down to my feet here in Grovel, you know, I'll accept you back.

He saw that his son was making some motions back home and he was glad to see him. He wasn't saying, well, you're going to really have to grovel. He instead ran out and, you know, in the Middle East, men don't run.

Old men don't run. Young men sometimes do, but it's a mark of dignity of an old man that he does not run. He moves deliberately.

He walks, you know, maybe not slowly, but he's not in haste. It's considered in the Middle East an undignified thing for an old man to run. Now, Peter and John ran to the tomb of Jesus when they heard it was empty.

I don't know if they were of an age that that would have been considered undignified, but they were throwing dignity to the wind, or if they were young enough men that that wouldn't have seemed strange, because people often ran when they're in a hurry, but old men, it's presumed, are not in a hurry, you know, and they are just stately and, you know, dignified. But here's an old man, and he runs out to meet his son. He could have just waited for his son to come, or he could have walked out there, but Jesus describes him as casting off all sense of propriety and dignity and just going out to rejoice in the recovery of his son.

Now, again, the son benefited from this, but the rejoicing of the father was not that a man who'd been feeding pigs was now going to be his servant and have a better meal. It wasn't merely the benefit to a needy man that made the father rejoice. It's his own son.

It's his family is restored. And so, again, it's the father's benefit that is here, mainly the cause of rejoicing. Sure, he wants his son to do well, but that's because it's his son, and a father's interest is in his son, in his family.

So, once again, as with the coin and with the sheep that were found, it's the recovery of something that was lost to God, and that's even what the father actually says when he starts speaking. We're not there yet, but it says when he fell on his son's neck and kissed him, he said, the son said to him, father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.

Now, he didn't finish his speech. I think it's not because he didn't intend to. I think he got interrupted.

He didn't say, just make me one of your servants. It's just when he said, I'm not worthy to be your son. That was enough.

That was a mark of true repentance. I don't deserve what I, I don't deserve the honor that I used to have. I deserve much less than that.

But the father said to his servants, bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet and bring a fatted calf here and kill it and let us eat and be merry. For this, my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and he was found.

And they began to make merry. Now at this point, the parable has gone as far as the two previous ones have. The two previous parables have a shepherd lost a sheep, a woman lost a coin.

When they found it, they went and rejoiced, told their neighbors, Hey, I found what I lost. And they all rejoiced. And that brings us to this point in the parable.

This parable has an extension added on the end of it. You know, an amplification of the lesson that's toward the Pharisees, but, but note this just because it's there. My son was lost and is found.

He's my son. That's why I'm rejoicing. Someone else's son that's lost in time.

That's great. I'm glad to hear about it, but I'm going to have a party because my son has returned. It's my son.

I've recovered a lost person from my family that I was, I felt bereaved of. So it's the father's recovery of his son that is the cause of rejoicing. Now the son had a lot to rejoice in too, because his circumstances were going to be much better in his father's house than elsewhere.

But that's not what the father's celebrating. He's celebrating the recovery of the relationship. Not, not just that his son's now going to be in better circumstances.

My son was lost. He's been found. He was dead and he's now alive.

And I, I, I can't help making this point and I make it whenever I talk about Calvinism and their, their doctrine that we can't repent unless God regenerates us. Because they say, you know, Paul said in Ephesians 2 that we are dead in trespasses and sins. It says that in Colossians 2 also that we were, we were dead in trespasses and sins.

They say, well, then you can't repent when you're dead. You can't believe when you're dead. You can't become a Christian if you're dead.

So God has to select you unconditionally and bring you to life, regenerate you, and then you can respond to him. And that's why they believe that only the elect can be saved, because God has only chosen to save some and no one else can come to him because they're spiritually dead. They can't do anything.

But we have to say they are not saying what Paul says. It's true that Paul says we were dead in trespasses and sins. He means that metaphorically because we weren't

physically dead, obviously.

But he doesn't say what limitations are upon a person who's dead in that sense. It's obviously a metaphor and certainly people who are dead in trespasses and sins aren't dead in a literal sense because people who are really dead don't do anything. They just lay there and rot.

But people who are dead in sins do lots of things every day. They make choices. They work at jobs.

They get married. They raise kids. They spend money.

They entertain themselves. Obviously being dead in sins doesn't mean you can't do anything because you're a dead person. That's pressing the metaphor obviously illogically.

Calvinists will say, well yeah, of course people who are dead in sins can do those kinds of things, but they can't do anything toward God. They can't repent or whatever. Of course my question is where are you getting that? Why do we put the limitation on that specific activity when you don't limit them from other activities? Where does it say that in the Bible? Where does it say we were dead in sins and therefore we could not repent? Actually the Bible teaches the opposite.

It teaches right here because the Father says my son was dead. When? Until he came home. Until he was found.

He was dead. He's alive now. He's back.

But didn't the son repent when he was dead and lost? Isn't it because he was dead and lost that he repented? He said I need to get out of this mess. I need to repent of all my sins and get right with my Father again. That decision was made not by the Father.

The Father didn't put that in him. Well the memory of his Father influenced that, but the man had to make his own choice. In fact the Bible specifically says Jesus said he came to himself.

Now I mean that's an unusual word. It means he came to his senses, but certainly the wording emphasizes that was this a decision he himself made. He reasoned with himself.

He came to himself and said you know self, the servants of my Father's house are better off than we are here. He's talking to himself. He's he's coming to his senses.

He's reasoning with himself and this leads to him repenting and this happens while he is lost and while he is dead metaphorically and when he comes home he's now alive and found. So I'm glad that Jesus actually had the Father say it in these words. It answers a question that is otherwise raised.

What is the state of one who's dead not physically but metaphorically? Are the Calvinists right in saying that someone who's in that state can't repent? Well Jesus answers that unambiguously. He says the Calvinists are wrong. Okay now a great celebration is made in this case as in the case of the finding of the lost sheep and the lost coin but this goes further and we have an appendix to the story.

It says in verse 25, now his older son was in the field and as he came and drew near to the house probably at the end of the day or maybe he was drawn in prematurely because he heard noise and stuff. He heard music and dancing so he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant and the servant said to him your brother has come and because he has received him safe and sound your father has killed the fatted calf but the brother was angry and would not go into the celebration. It's like the Pharisees.

They wouldn't come into the kingdom of God. They didn't like all this celebrating the tax collectors and sinners you know being accepted by the Messiah. They were too good to be associated with that kind of people and they're angry that these people are being accepted by God so they refused to go in.

He said he would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. Again the humility of the father.

He could have said my older son's a jerk. He won't well let him snooze you lose. You don't come into the party.

You don't get any of the festivities. We're having a good time in here. Instead his father actually leaves the party to go and reason with him and say come on in and Jesus is suggesting that God is inviting the Pharisees to come on in too.

You know God is celebrating the recovery of these lost children of his. Come on in and celebrate with him you Pharisees. Feel free.

God is reasoning with you. God is trying to persuade you to do this. It says his father came out and pleaded with him.

Begged him to come in. Now why would the father have to beg an obedient son to do something? Couldn't the father just say come on in son and if he's an obedient son wouldn't he come in? Why would the father have to beg him and plead with him and you know argue with him? This son who you know congratulated himself that he was such an obedient son was obviously not obedient when his father wanted him to show some some brotherly love toward his recovered brother. I'll obey.

I'll work out in the field. I'll go out and sweat in the in the in the heat of the day for you but I'm not going to love my brother if you tell me to. That's really the position that the Pharisees were kind of in.

We'll do all this hard stuff all these rules and regulations you tell us to love these people. We're not into that. Well then they're not obeying God are they? They're not obedient as they represent themselves to be.

The son said in verse 29 to his father, lo these many years I have been serving you. I never transgressed your commandment at any time. I guess this is the first time because he's not coming in.

And yet you never gave me a young goat that I might make merry with my friends as you never really celebrated my obedience with you. We never had a party because I was a loyal and good dutiful son. He's complaining because he said as soon as this son of yours came.

He doesn't say my brother. He says this son of yours. Even now he's saying you might accept him but I don't.

He's your son. You can call him that if you want to. He's not my brother.

When this son of yours came who has devoured your livelihood with harlots you killed the fatted calf for him. Now by the way the Bible doesn't say Jesus in his telling us or did not say that the young man had spent time with harlots. Just said he wasted his money.

He might have wasted the money on just careless investments and you know more or less you know having good times. We don't know that he was sexually immoral he might have been. That's one way you can waste money with harlots but it's interesting that we don't read that any harlotry had been involved in and if it had how would this son have known it.

It sounds like this son is just assuming if I were him if I went away for our country I'd certainly be getting drunk and going to harlots so I'm sure he must have done it too. He's assuming that this son is doing those things but how does he make that assumption. He must assume that that's what anyone would do himself included.

That's what he misses out on. He doesn't get to have all that immoral fun and he's angry that he didn't. He says when your son comes and he's devoured your livelihood with harlots you killed the fatted calf for him and the father said to him son you are always with me and all that I have is yours.

Now I don't need to kill a goat for you. You own all these goats. All this inheritance is yours.

Your brother's already taken his share and it's gone. Everything I have is yours now. What do you need me to pull a goat out for you and slay it.

You can do that anytime you want to. You've had the privilege of being with me all this

time. The idea he's saying here is your brother should be pitied for any time he spent if he was with harlots or if he was drunk or if he was defiling himself with sinful living.

He didn't enjoy the comforts of our household. He was missing out. You weren't missing out.

You've been here all the time. You've got everything but obviously being with his father didn't please the older brother and apparently feeling that they were doing the things that pleased God didn't please the Pharisees that much. They didn't rejoice that they were God's people.

They apparently had the same kind of resentment towards sinners that this brother had toward the younger brother. Namely that those sinners get to do things I don't allow myself to do. I sure miss it.

I wish I could but I don't dare and that's apparently how this brother was thinking and Jesus is writing the story of the Pharisees in this brother's character. He said son you are always with me and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad for your brother was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found and so we don't read of what the brother did after this. Did the older brother see the reasonableness of his father's statement saying all right I'll go in too or do you remain absent. The story leaves that undecided because the Pharisees are at that point of decision.

Jesus is saying you should be coming in here too. You should be joining us here in this celebration. These are your brothers your fellow Jews who've gone off and left and lived you know contrary to the law of God.

Now they're coming back to be right with God like you claim to be. You should be joining us here will you and that it essentially ends with that invitation with that reasoning and with the unanswered question did the brother go in or didn't he. Well each of those Pharisees would have to answer that for himself because he's the older brother.

So Jesus in all these parables is making the very same point. There's cause to rejoice for sinners being saved and of course the application to any of us who maybe have lived for God. I know some people here have lived pretty moral lives and have lived for God much of their lives.

Others have come out maybe more colorful backgrounds but those of us who've really never gone out and done all those things that sinners do for fun you know do we resent them coming in and having the same privileges we have. I certainly don't. I truly feel sorry like frankly for some people I'm thinking of right now in my family who are wasting much of their youth doing worldly things.

I really believe the time will come when they turn to God and where they want to serve God but they're going to look back on the best years of their lives and say those were squandered. Those were years I could have produced fruit for God. Those are years I could have been building Christ-like character.

Those are years I could have been improving the world for Christ. I could have been doing something producing fruit and I did nothing but waste decades of my life. That's got to hurt.

When you come to God truly after a wasting of your life it's gotta hurt. Say whoa was I ever stupid? Boy did I waste it all. Now if someone gets saved after a life like that and they don't feel like that I don't know if they've really repented because they may think of it as repentance because they're maybe doing the thing they have to do to make sure they got fire insurance after they die but really I think any true repentance is going to say oh have I ever wasted everything.

Anyone who truly repents after life of sin is going to have huge huge regrets about that life. They'll get over it more or less. I mean they'll rejoice in their salvation.

This boy seemed to be able to do it. He was truly repentant but he was dancing before the day was over. There was dancing and music and he accepted the grace of his father but I imagine that on the occasions where he remembered his sinful past it still was a bit of a sting.

I know that I have some sins in my past that still sting when I remember them. I accept the grace of God. I rejoice in my salvation but when I think of stupid or bad things I did in the past it hurts.

I wish I hadn't done it and I'm sure if I had spent my whole life for many years doing those kinds of things it'd really be I'd have that you know perhaps maybe even more intensely I don't know but the point here is the attitude we have towards sinners coming back to God is very much determined by the attitude we have towards sin and toward our relationship with God. Do I wish I could have gotten away with that too? If so then I'm not really a very good person after all. I love what God hates and I've just stuck with God because of legalism or because of fear or something like that but if you love God then you should say wow God I'm glad you're getting all these lost sons back.

Glad you found this lost coin. Glad your sheep was found. The Pharisees didn't have that attitude.

They didn't love God and therefore they couldn't rejoice in what Jesus was doing in bringing all these sinners to repentance sadly.