

Daily Discipleship

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Prayers of Discipleship *To Dwell in God's Grace*

Focus Question: *What does it mean to dwell in God's grace?*

word of life

Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.' Luke 15:32 (NRSV)

Read Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

This familiar and beloved parable of the Prodigal Son is one of three stories told by Jesus in Luke 15 of the lost being found. In each parable, the focus at first appears to be on that which is lost – a lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7), a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10), and a lost son (Luke 15:11-32). The names given to each of the parables reflect this emphasis.

But as the stories are told, the primary character is not the lost but rather the one who diligently, tirelessly searches for the lost and whose actions bring restoration and inclusion. Set Luke's gospel in the context of the Pharisees' grumbling that Jesus would associate and eat with outcast tax collectors and "sinners" (Luke 15:1-2), the parables become vivid, rich illustrations of a patient, loving God who acts to bring reconciliation and re-establish a relationship.

1. *With which of these three parables do you do you most closely identify? Why?*
2. *How do these parables answer the "grumbling" of the Pharisees?*
3. *What message do the parables convey to those who are outcast or excluded?*
4. *What message is there for those who are "included"?*

The rich treasure of insights found in the familiar story of the prodigal son resonates with our life experience – the "wandering" away from the loving care of the father; the prodigal "coming to himself" in vs. 17 (a medical phrase suggesting a return to his right mind); the words of repentance and contrition, carefully spoken and rehearsed; the anger and resentment of the obedient elder son. We see ourselves and our "lostness" clearly in story.

In even sharper detail, however, the attributes of the loving father are evident – waiting patiently for the prodigal to return; taking the initiative to meet and welcome the lost one; offering forgiveness and reconciliation even before the words of repentance are spoken; extending an invitation of grace to the elder brother (who is also "lost" in his anger and resentment). It is the father who acts to "find," forgive, and restore. These attributes also resonate with our experience of God in our lives.

Note the common reaction of the primary characters – the shepherd, the woman, and the father – at the conclusion of each of the three parables in Luke 15. Each rejoices and celebrates! The father, in inviting the outraged elder son to the celebration, says to him, "We had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found" (Luke 15:32). The words of Jesus at the end of the first two parables (the searching shepherd and the diligent woman) are not spoken but are clearly evident: "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). The invitation to rejoice is given. The question remains: "How will we respond?"

5. *Imagine what the response of the elder brother might be, and what the result of the response would be to his relationships with the father and his other brother.*

word among us

During the season of Lent, we are encouraged to repent by changing our ways and returning to the ways of God. Sometimes it feels like Ash Wednesday was a long time ago and Easter is still far away. Change takes time. New habits of prayer, Bible study, or service can take a while to take hold in our lives. Nevertheless, we are called to change our ways and allow the Holy Spirit to shape us to be faithful disciples of Jesus

1. *What does it mean to change our ways?*
2. *How is God to be involved in changing our lives?*

This story of the prodigal son in Luke is an example of someone who chases after a wild life, but finally chooses to come home and is welcomed by a loving parent. The other son stayed home and resented the welcoming party for his brother. Consistently, the father extended his love to both sons. Ultimately it is a story of grace.

3. *Where do you find yourself in this story?*
4. *What surprised you about the story?*
5. *What, if anything, troubles you about the story?*

Grace upon grace! The father graciously extends love and forgiveness to his wayward son, welcoming him by throwing a great party. And the same love and welcome is extended to the “obedient” son who is invited to lay aside his anger and change his resentful ways. Through this parable by Jesus, we catch a glimpse of God’s generous and gracious love.

All three parables in Luke 15 deal with a ‘lost’ theme. A sheep, a coin, and a son are lost only to be found with a spirit of great rejoicing. Most people can relate to the joy of finding something once believed to be lost.

6. *What is like for you to find something lost?*
7. *How might someone become “lost” today?*
8. *What can a parent do when their son or daughter chooses to go to the “far country”?*

“I once was lost, but now I’m found,” we sing. Through God’s persistent, patient love, we are welcomed, restored, and reconciled to God and to one another. No matter how far we have strayed, our loving God welcomes us home. And God invites us – ALL of us – to the celebration.

9. *What does it mean to dwell in God’s grace?*

AMAZING GRACE, INDEED!

Prayer

Good and gracious God, when we are lost, bring us home to you. When we are resentful, bring us home to you. In all of life, bring us home to you. And when our life is ended, bring us home to you to eternally dwell in your grace and love. Amen.

Dig Deeper

Luke 15

last word

Prayerfully ponder
those times you have wandered
but have come home to God’s
joy-filled welcome.



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Written by John and Robin McCullough-Bade

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