

A Family Reunion

Teaching Tips

April 24, 2016

Bible Study Guide 8

Words You Should Know

A. Sinned ([Luke 15:18](#)) *hamartano* (Gk.)—To miss the mark, do wrong.



B. Compassion (v. 20) *splanchnizomai* (Gk.)—To be moved in the gut; to feel tenderness, sympathy, and pity.

Teacher Preparation

Unifying Principle—Back Home Again. Family relationships can easily become twisted and broken. What ingredient can keep families together? A godlike love and forgiveness, given and accepted like in the story of the prodigal son, can mend and make the difference.

A. Attach a class member list to your refrigerator or bathroom mirror and pray for each one daily.

B. Read [Luke 15](#) at least three times in three different translations.



O—Open the Lesson

A. Read Aim for Change. Pray for families that are hurting because of a lost loved one.

B. Have one person in the class read the In Focus story. Divide into groups of two or three. Ask each group, which character mirrors their attitude about a lost soul?

P—Present the Scriptures

A. Have volunteers read Focal Verses; The People, Places, and Times; Background; and In Depth.

B. Discuss the Search the Scriptures questions.

E—Explore the Meaning

A. Answer the questions in Discuss the Meaning.

B. Read Lesson in Our Society.

N—Next Steps for Application

A. Read Make It Happen and seek ways to apply it to your students' lives.

B. Close with prayer and ask if anyone is willing to share a family situation like the parable. Pray specifically for that family.

Worship Guide

For the Superintendent or Teacher

Theme: A Family Reunion

Song: “Give Me a Clean Heart”

Devotional Reading: [Luke 15:1–7](#)



Bible Background • [Luke 15:11–32](#)



Printed Text • [Luke 15:11–24](#) | Devotional Reading • [Luke 15:1–7](#)



Aim for Change



By the end of the lesson, we will: RECOGNIZE God’s compassion through the parable of the prodigal son; FEEL the need for reunion in families and connect that to our relationship with God; and SHARING God’s compassion will reconcile with a repentant prodigal.

In Focus

Sister Tate climbed into Arlene’s van fussing, “Mother’s not coming with us to the store.”

“Is she sick?”

“No!” Sister Tate folded her arms. “It’s her no-good son. He’s home. She told me she wants to spend time with him.”

“It’s horrible. He wants to turn his life over to the Lord. Hmph,” Sister Tate grunted, “after he spent all those years in that gang lifestyle.” Sister Tate waved her hands, exasperated. “He hasn’t been home in 10 years. We’ve been seeing after Mother. Now here he comes asking his 80-year-old mother to take care of him. If that was my no-good son, I’d—”

“Now, Sister Tate,” Arlene interrupted. “Maybe Mother is so glad to have her son back home and hear him say he wants to get back with the Lord, she doesn’t mind caring for him—no matter how long he’s been gone and what he’s done.”

“Humph, let’s just go to the store. I don’t want to talk about it anymore. You and Mother Gordon are ‘Ms. Goodie-Two-Shoes.’ He should have let his gangbang friends take care of him. I’m just being honest.”

Arlene refused to argue. They rode to the store in silence.

Today’s lesson tells a parable to show how compassionate God is toward repentant sinners. What posture should we take as followers of Christ toward repentant sinners?

Keep in Mind

“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry” ([Luke 15:24](#)).



Focal Verses

KJV

Luke 15:11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:



12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

NLT

Luke 15:11 To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons.



12 The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

13 A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living.

14 About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve.

15 He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs.

16 The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

17 When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger!'

18 I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you,

19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”

20 So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.

21 His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’

22 But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet.

23 And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast,

24 for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.”


The People, Places, and Times

Father. The father in this parable represents the patient, caring Heavenly Father who has unconditional love for all mankind. This father illustrates how God values people and reveals His heart for the lost. Some scholars believe embracing his son was to protect him from the shame and humiliation of the community.


Younger brother. The Jews in Jesus’ audience would have wanted to identify with the younger brother at first since Jacob, the father of Israel, was the younger of Isaac and Rebekah’s sons. However, the parable upsets that close connection, challenging everyone in the audience to consider whether they are more like the older or younger brother. Since Luke’s audience was probably a combination of Jews and Gentiles, the parable would have challenged everyone to reflect on their own behavior with regard to straying from family, community and responsibility.

Older brother. Despite remaining faithful to his father and his responsibilities as the oldest son, the older brother faces a situation similar to Esau other older brothers in Genesis, being left with the responsibility but seemingly little of the recognition from God or their parents. Some have proposed that the older brother represents any Jewish leaders who showed no grace with regard to sinners, but the parable is about more than just religious leadership. It is about love, tolerance and grace when anyone in the family or community messes up.

Background

According to the Mosaic Law, after the father died, the older son inherited two thirds of his father’s land, flocks, and wealth and the younger sibling one third ([Deuteronomy 21:17](#)). The parable is framed with regard to inheritance, with the younger son squandering his and ending up destitute. However, for both Jesus’ original audience and for Luke’s community, the economic matters in the story are important but not ultimate. While the older son certainly provides a better model for how to live responsibly with your future and your family in mind, the father’s love of both sons regardless of their actions is the real essence of the parable. Parents should love children regardless of their successes and failures. Neither son is perfect. The younger is irresponsible and neglectful, while the older is strident and unforgiving. Yet, through everything, the father remains balanced, loving both and acknowledging their value as members of his family. 

At-A-Glance

1. The Openly Rebellious Son ([Luke 15:11–16](#)) 
2. The Flight Home (vv. 17–20a)
3. The Forgiving Father (vv. 20b–24)

In Depth

1. The Openly Rebellious Son ([Luke 15:11–16](#))



The younger son stood tall in the family as a bold, outspoken rebel. He got into his father's face and demanded his inheritance. If the father died, the elder brother would be in charge; obviously the younger son didn't want to wait for any of this to occur. He wanted to be his own master and move out from under his father's protective wing. He wanted freedom, arrogantly believing he could manage his money and take care of himself. This request broke the father's heart, yet he refused to argue.

Once the father's property reached the younger son, he no doubt quickly converted the inheritance of flocks and grains into spendable funds. These kinds of transactions ordinarily took several days of bargaining and negotiation. However, the careless son probably sold to the first bidder, at bargain prices. The son traveled a long way from home, intentionally breaking all family ties. He wasted his inheritance on extravagant, reckless living. He operated from an unsound mind and quickly depleted his funds.

Soon a famine hit the area. The son ended up impoverished, begging for a job. He ended up slopping pigs to feed himself, a despicable job for a Jew who labeled swine as unclean ([Leviticus 11:7](#)). His meals consisted of pods from a carob tree, food for poverty-stricken people and pigs.



2. The Flight Home (vv. 17–20a)

The rebellious son, in his demoralized state, began to change his mind about his father and repent. The father used to be the barrier between his money and a good time, but now, the son thinks of him as a fair and generous man. The son admitted he had messed up; he thought real living was doing anything and everything he pleased. He confessed that home with his father was better than living on his own. The son did not merely dwell on pleasant memories; he decided to return to his father. He rehearsed a confession, "I sinned against heaven," which revealed a heartfelt brokenness before God. He admitted, "I don't deserve anything." He'd ask his father to make him a hired servant, feeling he no longer deserved sonship.

3. The Forgiving Father (vv. 20b–24)

The father saw his son coming home and ran toward him; he refused to wait. The son admitted his guilt, but the forgiving father interrupted; his return home said enough. The father ordered the servants to bring one of his best robes, a ring, and shoes, all symbolizing restored sonship. He insisted on a kingly feast, serving a prime calf, one the father may have been saving, in hopes of his son's return.

The son returned to the father's loving arms instead of the shame and guilt that he thought would await him. Instead of condemnation, there was a celebration. The community which would have humiliated him now celebrates him. This would have been a shocking surprise to the earlier hearers of this story, and it is shocking even now. To know that we have a Heavenly Father who embraces us and removes our shame is an amazing reality that we ought to treasure. It also should motivate us to embrace others who may feel shame and guilt over wrongs they have done.

Search the Scriptures

1. List attitudes and actions for the father and the older and younger sons ([Luke 15:11–24](#)).
2. What changed the son's thinking about himself and his father (v. 17)?



Discuss the Meaning

When we displease God and others, it is easy to think you will never gain His or your family's forgiveness and favor. The truth is just the opposite: God already knows the foolish decisions we will make and His heart's desire is for us to

realize our wrong and return. Family and friends with a heart like God are willing to receive us back, reaching out with God's love.

1. Why do we receive so much love and forgiveness from God when we return after turning our back on Him?
2. How does it help when others reach out in love when we've messed up? Why should they?

Lesson in Our Society

It is easy to discard someone and treat them as an outcast. We often do it to celebrities who get into trouble with the law, or when one of the clergy has fallen into sin. This matter hits close to home when a relative is addicted to drugs or a child has gotten pregnant out of wedlock. God does not make light of our wrongs, but has nailed them all to the Cross. He can show compassion on us, so we can have compassion on those in our lives who society would treat as outcasts.

Make It Happen

Ask God to bring to mind any family member, friend, church member, or co-worker you might be holding something against. Read the Scriptures below, one each day this week, and make the verses a prayer for help with forgiveness:

[Matthew 6:14–15](#)

[Colossians 3:13](#)

[Ephesians 4:31–32](#)

[Matthew 18:21–22](#)

[2 Corinthians 2:5–8](#)



Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do.



Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned.



More Light on the Text

[Luke 15:11–24](#)

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons: 12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. 13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.



As if the two previous parables (vv. 3–10) are not enough to fully illustrate His point, Jesus proceeds to tell a story which has become one of the greatest illustrations of man's relationship with God the Father. Here Christ illustrates people's sinful nature, how we wander away from God by our acts, and how God, through His loving compassion, seeks to save us from our sin, as well as God's attitude to repentant sinners who come to Him. It also illustrates the difference between God's concern and the attitude of the murmuring religious people over the salvation of a lost soul.

The story's setting is a typical Jewish household where the children can live off their family's inheritance during their father's lifetime, while the estate remains under his control until his death. According to Jewish custom, and consistent with that of many countries (especially in Africa), at the death of the father, the children would share his inheritance among themselves. For example, among the Igbo of Nigeria, the eldest child would inherit one-half of the property, with the other half shared among the rest of the children. If there are only two children, the eldest receives

two-thirds of the inheritance. However, in ancient Israel people, the eldest received the double portion of the inheritance ([Deuteronomy 21:17](#)), while the rest shared the remaining portion among them. Although most often the eldest son probably received the double portion since it was a patrilineal society, there is evidence that daughters also received an inheritance and may have been treated equally in some families.

This knowledge will help us understand the implication of the younger child's request of the father, and the gravity of his sin. Asking his father, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me," is irregular in the Jewish custom. It shows disrespect for the father and, by implication, amounts to treating the father as if he were already dead. Neither Jewish nor Roman law permitted the father to arbitrarily dispose of his estate.

The young man asks his father to give him his own portion of his father's estate. His father complies, dividing his estate between his two sons. The younger son takes off after a few days to "a far country" with his inheritance. There he "wasted his substance with riotous living." The word here translated "wasted" is *diaskorpizo* (Gk. **dee-ah-skor-PEED-zoh**) which means to disperse or scatter abroad; used in the context of money, it means to squander. Therefore, the young man squanders his possession with "riotous" (Gk. *asotos*, **ah-SO-toce**) or loose lifestyle. The word *asotos* is found only here in the New Testament. Its noun form, *asotia*, is found three times and translated as "excess" ([Ephesians 5:18](#)) and "riot" ([Titus 1:6](#); [1 Peter 4:4](#)). Jesus' parable therefore gives a picture of a young man overwhelmed with so much wealth who does not know how to control himself. He lives extravagantly.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. 15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

After he has "spent all" (*dapanao*, **dah-pah-NAH-oh**), which means to incur expense in a good sense or to waste or squander in a negative sense, he finds himself starving. He becomes destitute in a foreign land. His situation is made worse because of "a mighty famine" that fell on that land. He is left without help, including those who helped him waste his riches. No one seems to care about him. The situation becomes so desperate that he accepts the most humiliating and repulsive type of work: taking care of swine. To this Jewish audience and many other nations, tending to swine is repugnant and degrading employment, because to them, pigs are unclean animals. Among the Egyptians, swine tenders were cut off from society—they were not allowed to marry even from the lowest class in society, and they could not worship the gods. In Jewish society, swine tenders would be treated as lepers. Jesus made use of this fact to show how desperate the young man was, to what depths of misery his riotous living had brought him. This illustrates the depravity and misery of sinners in their wrongdoing and sin.


His deplorable situation is heightened by the fact that not only does he accept this most humiliating job, but he also hungers after the pigs' food. The word "fain" is from *epithumeo* (Gk. **eh-pee-thoo-MEH-oh**), which can have a positive or negative meaning for strongly desiring something, including good deeds ([1 Timothy 3:1](#)), material goods ([Acts 20:33](#)) or a person ([Matthew 5:28](#)). This word and the clause "and no man gave unto him" suggest that he is in the field as a slave, feeding swine without food or pay. It also implies he is not even allowed to eat of the swine's food, just as slaves on sugar plantations were forbidden to eat any sugar cane on penalty of beating. How much lower could he go?

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

The turning point of the story comes when his condition brings him to his senses, and he realizes that if he continues, it would be his end. Disillusioned by his desperate condition, he acknowledges how foolishly he acted by deserting his family, and plans a way to return home. "And when he came to himself" is a figurative way of saying that he came to his senses. Talking to himself out of frustration and disgusted with himself, he compares his present unpleasant and

shameful condition to the condition of his father's "hired servants," or *misthios* (Gk. **MEESE-thee-ose**). They are paid servants, and they have "enough and to spare" while he is not even allowed to eat from the pigs' pen. The phrase "enough and to spare" is a translation of the Greek word *perisseuo* (**peh-rees-SEW-oh**), which means superfluous, to have excess. They have more than enough while he suffers in poverty.

The thought of this spurs him to a decision. Instead of continuing in this despicable situation, he decides to return home and plead for the lowest place in his father's household. He rehearses how he is going to plead with his father. From this plea, we see a sense of remorse, repentance, faith, and action working together. He feels sorry for his action and repents. He has faith that his father would not reject his confession nor his plea. Hence, he says that he would go to his father and would confess to him saying, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee." He realizes that his sin is both vertical (against heaven) and horizontal (against his father) in nature.

He doesn't say he sinned only against his father. He first says, "I have sinned against heaven." This reference to heaven is a substitute for God. God's residence is heaven, so to sin against heaven is to sin against Him ([Psalm 51:4](#)). This is the proper perspective on sin. All sin, no matter to whom it is against, is sin against God, for all sin is disobedience of God's law. Next the son acknowledges that what he did offended his father as well. The son's sadness over his sin is seen in the abdication of his rights as a son. He believes he is no longer "worthy" (Gk. *axios*, **AK-see-ose**), which conveys weight or value; it also has the secondary sense of what is congruous or befitting. The son is saying he is not fit to be a son because of his past sin. 

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

After his resolve to return home and rehearsing how he would approach his father, the prodigal son acts. He begins his journey home. As he gets near, his father sees him while he is still afar off, runs to him, embraces, and kisses him. The word "fell" translates the Greek verb *epiipto* (**eh-pee-PEEP-tow**), which means to seize, embrace, to press or fall upon someone. Used metaphorically, it means to take possession of someone. It is used, for example, for the Holy Spirit in His inspiration and impulse. The word translated "kissed" here is *kataphileo* (**kah-tah-fee-LEH-oh**), which literally means to kiss in greeting or farewell.

A few important facts should be noted here about the father. Although his son deserted the home, the father's love for him never wavered. He never stopped hoping and looking out for the return of his lost son, which is why he is able to recognize him afar off. He is driven by loving "compassion" (Gk. *splagchnizomai*, **splankh-NEED-oh-my**), which literally means to be moved to one's bowels, seen as the seat of love and emotion. He runs immediately to meet him, affectionately hugging and kissing him. This clearly demonstrates God's extravagant love for the repentant sinner. He always yearns, and lovingly awaits, for the return of the wayward.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. 22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

The son repeats his rehearsed speech before his father and throws himself at his mercy. The father's response is more than expected; he says to bring forth the best robe (Gk. *stole*, **sto-LAY**). This word can refer to a garment worn by kings, priests, and people of rank. This would have been the father's robe since it was the best robe in the house. He receives a ring, which more than likely was a family signet ring. This ring symbolizes his reinstatement as a son. He puts shoes on his feet. Only servants walked around without shoes. By putting shoes on his feet, the father receives his son back as true family, not a hired hand.

Next the father calls for a fatted calf for them to kill and eat. For the father, it is time to be merry (Gk. *euphraino*, **ew-FRAY-no**). This word connotes being joyful and is often used for the merriment of a feast. This feast would include not just the immediate family; a fatted calf would have been enough to feed the whole village. The context shows that this family is well off and so this party would have included family, servants, neighbors, and friends.

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

The father gives the reason for the occasion: the reunion with his son. He was dead (Gk. *nekros*, **nek-ROCE**)—this word can mean dead in a physical or spiritual sense—but now his son is alive again (Gk. *anazao*, **ah-nad-ZAH-oh**). This word, found only in the New Testament, means to live again but also can mean being restored to a correct life. This is what happened to the prodigal son and what happens to all those who reunite with their heavenly Father. They are lost (Gk. *apollumi*, **ah-POE-loo-me**)—not in location, but destroyed or made of no use. Those without Christ are damaged and lack hope of being restored. Only God can restore them. The son was lost and was now found (Gk. *heurisko*, **hew-REES-koe**), which carries the usual meaning of discover or find; here it signifies how the lost person who is destroyed gets restored. They are found by God and put in right relationship with Him.

Say It Correctly

Riotous. **RY**-uh-tus.

Fain. **FAYN**.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

The Father's Gift
([Matthew 7:7–12](#))



TUESDAY

Called into Family
([2 Timothy 1:3–10](#))



WEDNESDAY

The Generosity of God
([2 Corinthians 9:6–11](#))



THURSDAY

Eternal Family
([Romans 5:12–21](#))



FRIDAY

Journeying from Family
([Acts 20:17–24](#))



SATURDAY

The Lost Brought Home
([Luke 15:1–7](#))



SUNDAY

A Family Reunion
([Luke 15:11–24](#))

