

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Luke 15:11-24

New International Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, April 24, 2016

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The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, April 24, 2016**, is from **Luke 15:11-24**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

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Luke 15:11-24

(Luke 15:11) Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons.

In Jesus' first two parables in Luke 15, the owner of a lost sheep and the owner of a lost coin search until they find what was lost, and then they rejoice with their neighbors. These parables reveal that God searches for those who belong to Him, and God always finds His lost ones. The first two parables in Luke 15 form a necessary background to the Parable of the Prodigal (or Lost) Son (or sons). The focus of this International Bible Lesson and Commentary is on the first lost son in the parable.

(Luke 15:12) The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

The perfect father in this parable represents our perfect heavenly Father. In his heart and mind, the younger son had left his father before he asked for his inheritance and left home. By law, at his father's death, his older brother would have received twice as much as him (if there were only two sons in the family). Rather than wait for his father to die, the son asked his father for his inheritance early and planned to leave home and never see his father again. Separation from his father began well before he ever physically left

home and went to a far country. Even though he knew how his son felt about him, this loving father gave his son what he wanted and blessed him with an early inheritance.

(Luke 15:13) “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

As true children of God the Father, some turn their back on God and misuse their gifts from God – spiritual, mental and physical – to live apart from God, even though they might not change their physical location. They squander or waste their lives and their gifts in doing what they want rather than living within the circle of God’s love and developing their spiritual gifts from God in obedience to God. When they turn their back on God, they become lost and susceptible to falling into many temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

(Luke 15:14) After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

There eventually comes a time when some who have walked away from God find themselves in need and far away from God and God’s help. Rather than go back to God immediately, they try to make do and save themselves in their situation by relying on themselves or others like themselves. Having lost many of their mental and physical advantages and gifts, they are less able to think clearly and help themselves, and others are less attracted to helping them.

(Luke 15:15) So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

Many lost children of God seek the world’s help (or the devil’s help) before they will return to God the Father. They will do the lowest and dirtiest jobs or try the most despicable and dishonorable solutions to solve their problems before returning to God their Father. All during this time, God the Father has been watching what they have been doing, but God helps in His own way and time and for reasons often known only to God. He sometimes waits until His children go from bad to worse before intervening, and because they are His children in many ways God keeps them from going from worse to worse. For a child of God, this seeming abandonment by God and suffering without God is part of the discipline of God for His children in order to bring them back to Him.

(Luke 15:16) He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

After God's children leave Him, they sometimes think that what the world has to offer will satisfy them, and they keep looking to the world for happiness and satisfaction. What they would never have done or wanted to do before, they suddenly feel the need to do and want to do and eventually find themselves doing. Many have fallen so low in the eyes of the world and their former worldly friends that they will not receive help from anyone – even the devil will abandon them rather than waste his time. As long as they stay away from God, the devil will let them slide lower and lower without interference.

(Luke 15:17) “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!

Sometimes the children of God have fallen so far into a dark pit morally, mentally, and spiritually that all they can do is look up and hope to see light again: that is the beginning their coming to themselves. Just as the man possessed by demons in the land of the Gerasenes could not come into his right mind until Jesus cast out his demons, only by the grace of God, the truth of God, and the work of Jesus through the Holy Spirit will a disobedient and rebellious child of God “come to his senses.” He may remember the Word of God he has been taught, or he may read or hear truths from the Bible and understand them for the first time as the Holy Spirit shines the light.

(Luke 15:18) I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

The lost son had a loving father to go back to, just as the true child of God has a loving Father to return to; One who will receive them because He has brought them to their senses. A returning child of God will usually struggle as he goes back to God, and the devil will try to restrain him. He must acknowledge his sins against God, others he has harmed, and himself. He must trust that his heavenly Father will forgive him and meet his real needs, even as the world and the devil try to convince him otherwise.

(Luke 15:19) I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’

Those children of God who have walked away from God have squandered a part of their lives. They know they are no longer worthy to be called a child of God, because they have not behaved as a child of God and they have dishonored their heavenly Father. But they remember enough about God their Father, or learn enough from the Bible about God their Father, that they would love to be like one of God's servants, if they only could. They know it would be so much better to be a servant of God than live in the world apart from God and in the devil's domain.

(Luke 15:20) So he got up and went to his father. “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.

As the child of God begins trudging back to God, the road is painful and shameful (imagine this lost son with bloody, bare sore feet, rags for clothing, an empty stomach, and knowing the great distance back to his father’s home). In returning, the child of God usually has a consciousness of painful struggle. But the repentant child of God makes the journey no matter the doubts and suffering involved, because he has a measure of faith in his heavenly Father. But that painful struggle is surprisingly cut short! From His heavenly throne, God sees His child turn around and begin coming back to Him. And while His child is still a long way off, the Spirit of God comes to His child and fills him with the love, joy, and peace of His presence. The Father assures him that everything is now alright between them. God receives His returning children before His children expect Him to, and God does so in loving unexpected ways that leads to rejoicing.

(Luke 15:21) “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

God’s loving embrace of His returning children fills them with such love and knowledge of acceptance by Him that they express their thoughts in prayerful words of repentance and faith to Him. The true faith in the God they once knew (or learned of in the Bible for the first time) moves them to go to God and repent of their sins, and God’s gracious acceptance of them increases their faith and they know they are safe in God’s family.

(Luke 15:22) “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

As with the other parables in Luke 15, after the lost is found there is a great celebration by the owner or father (God). God always gives His children the best, and in faith they receive God’s gifts. Not mentioned here, but God washes His child to cleanse him. He clothes His child. He makes His child look like His child again. God goes beyond meeting the needs that His child thinks he has, for God knows the real needs of every child in His family. God gives His children more than they think they need; such as, a special ring for their finger (a visible sign and seal that they are a child of God). God gives His children what they need to stay close to him; such as, special sandals for their feet to follow Him more easily and be with Him always.

(Luke 15:23) Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.

Whereas God's rebellious children were once empty and starving, God fills them with the loving presence of His Holy Spirit – the best gift God has to give His children, and His Spirit gives them joy and peace and begins the healing of their minds, bodies, and spirits. In this life, all the physical and mental consequences of committing sins may not be reversed, but someday all of God's children will receive resurrected and glorified human bodies and minds.

(Luke 15:24) For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

The definition of "dead" includes separation: at death the spiritual part of a person separates from their physical part and each part goes where God sends it. If a child of God separates himself from God, he chooses spiritual death and he suffers the consequences of spiritual death in the world. He may be physically alive, but "dead" spiritually in the sense of living separated from his heavenly Father. In the world, he now becomes a slave or a pawn of the world's system, his out-of-control emotions, and the spiritual forces of darkness. A spiritually "dead" child of God comes to life again when by God's gracious Spirit he turns back to God in faith: he comes "alive again." The sequence is this: the child of God was alive with God in faith; when he departed from God he died spiritually (he was dead, separated from God), after he came back to God in faith he is "alive again" (with God again). Whenever a lost child returns to God, God the Father embraces him as His very own and declares for all to hear "this child of mine": the two are united once again. When God's lost child returns, there is a great celebration. Jesus said, "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:10). God rejoices in the presence of the angels of God every time "one" sinner repents.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. When do you think the lost son really left his father?
2. How does God the Father treat some of His lost children compared to the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin in Luke 15?
3. In what ways do the three parables in Luke 15 give you assurance as a child of God?
4. In what ways do you think the father disciplined his son?
5. From your study of this parable, how important can a Christian home and regular Sunday school attendance be in the life of a child of God?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.
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