

Review – Please look over your notes from this weekend or the points below before your group meets.

The pattern of the prodigal is: rebellion, ruin, repentance, reconciliation, restoration. Edwin Louis Cole

Remember – you don't have to ask every question and cover all the material.

SHARE IT – Connecting with each other

➤ *Has anyone thrown you a surprise party? If so, what for?*

GO DEEP – Connect with the Scriptures

Think of a time when someone extended "grace" to you; they could have blamed you or shamed you but they didn't. They gave you love and understanding when you deserved something else. How did it feel? The story of the Prodigal Son is the story of a father's grace which witnesses to God's grace in Jesus. But before we get started, let's back up to set the tone for the parable. Read [Luke 15:1-10](#).

What is Jesus doing, and why are the "Pharisees and teachers of the law" upset about it?

What occurred after each item was found after being lost?

In answer to their grumbling, Jesus tells three stories about people or things that are lost and then found, and about the joy that comes when one sinner repents. Inheritance laws in Israel were designed to favor the older son, giving him a double share, probably with the purpose of keeping a family's land holdings together and preserving the family farm intact. Typically, the older son would be the executor and assume the role as family head after his father's death. Read [Luke 15:11-32](#); [Numbers 27:8-11](#), [36:7-9](#); [Luke 12:13-15](#).

Why do you think that the younger son asked for his share of the father's estate ahead of time?

How does the father respond in verse 12b? If you were the father, how would you have felt?

Why do you think the father granted his request?

As parents, do you sometimes use opportunities like this to teach your child a lesson? Examples?

Look at the description of the son's adventures in verses 13-16.

What words in that paragraph describe the fact that he is really a "sinner"?

For a Jewish person, what is especially sinful and disgusting about what he does in verses 15-16?

In verses 17-20, what words and phrases describe what "repentance" is for this young man?

How do your observations describe what true repentance is?

Look at the father's reaction in verse 20.

What clues do you find that show the father has been waiting for his son's return?

What strong, emotional words do you see that describe an extravagant welcome?

What did the son do to deserve such a wonderful welcome? Why did the father welcome him like this?

Jesus' answer to the grumbling Pharisees and teachers is found in verses 25-32. In some ways the older brother in this story represents them.

Why is the older brother so upset?

What does the father say in return?

Along with verses 7 and 10, how is this an answer from Jesus to the Pharisees who opposed his welcoming of sinners?

NEXT STEPS – Applying the truth of Scripture to life

The father in the parable of the prodigal son is a picture of our Heavenly Father. God waits patiently, with loving compassion to restore us when we return to Him with humble hearts. He offers us everything in His Kingdom, restoring full relationship with joyful celebration. He doesn't even dwell on our past waywardness.

Who are you in this story - are you a prodigal, a pharisee or a servant?

- *Are you the rebellious son, lost and far from God?*
- *Are you the self-righteous pharisee, no longer capable of rejoicing when a sinner returns to God?*
- *Maybe you've hit rock-bottom, come to your senses and decided to run to God's open arms of compassion and mercy?*
- *Or are you one of the servants in the household, rejoicing with the father when a lost son finds his way home?*

Have you at different times in your life been each one?

Put yourself in the son's place. How does it feel to have the heavenly Father hugging you, enclosing you in his loving arms, even though you don't deserve it?

What does this story tell us about the father's character?

How does he show God's grace?

About the younger son's character?

What are the four elements of the son's prepared speech? (15:18-19)

In what ways do they model an appropriate apology?

The son may need to say his speech, but for the father it is irrelevant. He has already accepted the boy back. For years he has longed for this day -- hoped against hope -- and now it has come. What is necessary now is a proper celebration of the father's joy.

- ⤴ **The best robe.** He honors the son who has dishonored himself.
- ⤴ **A ring.** He lavishes on the boy a sign of his love and wealth.
- ⤴ **Sandals on his feet.** His boy is destitute, barefoot. The father is quick to clothe him and care for his needs. Sandals were the sign of a freeman as opposed to a slave.
- ⤴ **The fatted calf.** A man of the father's station would have a calf that had been specially fed in order to be ready for a special occasion such as this.

The father expresses his joy in extravagant language. Dead, lost. That's the way it had seemed from the father's perspective. But now his son for whom he had despaired of hope was now alive and found!

PRAY

Father, this story touches us at a deep level, probably because we can see ourselves in the Prodigal Son, we can see You in the father, and we marvel at your love and willingness to forgive. We are amazed at your eagerness to restore to sonship those of us who do not deserve it. Father, You truly live beyond our own sense of right and righteousness, for You move beyond judgment to forgiveness, full forgiveness that never looks back. Help us to have your love and a willingness to show mercy rather than a tendency to judgment that is Pharisee-like rather than God-like. In Jesus' name, we humbly pray. Amen.