



## — The Older Brother: Walking Dead —

### Luke 15 Small Group Plan

In my Bible the three parables in Luke 15 have these three headings —

- ◇ *The Parable of the Lost Sheep*
- ◇ *The Parable of the Lost Coin*
- ◇ *The Parable of the Lost Son*

Of course, these headings have been supplied by the publishing company and, like all the chapter and verse divisions, they do not exist in the original manuscripts. And so, I find myself wondering what we should call the third parable in Luke 15? We could leave it as *The Parable of the Lost Son*. Or, we could just as easily call it *The Parable of the Loving Father*.

Often we assume that the parable ends with the wayward son returning home. But there is a second part of the parable that we need to understand if we want to understand Jesus' whole teaching in this passage. It's a kind of parable within a parable. We could call it *The Parable of the Older Brother*.

### OPEN IT / INTRODUCE IT ...

- How do you usually feel about those who fail?
- Notice how the “older brother” felt about his “younger brother’s” failure.

### LOOK AT IT / STUDY IT ...

## — HE HEARD THE CELEBRATION —

### Luke 15:22-26

<sup>22</sup> “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. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. <sup>25</sup> “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

- Why did the father immediately plan a celebration when his son returned home?
- What had the younger son expected?
- How else could the older brother have responded to his brother returning home?

## — HE REFUSED TO JOIN IN —

**Luke 15:27-28**

<sup>27</sup> *‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’* <sup>28</sup> *“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.”*

- How could the older brother be so angry when his father was so happy?
- Was he angry with his younger brother, with his father, or with both? Explain.
- Picture in your mind the face of the father and the face of the older brother. How do they look? How are they different?
- What is better/healthier for the human heart, anger or forgiveness? Explain.

## — HE CHOSE SELF-PITY —

**Luke 15:29-30**

<sup>29</sup> *But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.’* <sup>30</sup> *But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!”*

- Look at the older brother’s description of his life on the farm. Why does he describe his work as “slaving for you”? What does he mean?
- How has the older son pictured his work for his father, his relationship with his father, and his significance to his father? How did he miss the picture?

## — HE STRUGGLED TO UNDERSTAND GRACE —

**Luke 15:31-32**

<sup>31</sup> *“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.’* <sup>32</sup> *But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”*

- Notice that the father says, “we had to celebrate” – “WE.” Why did the father want his oldest son to be happy?
- The story ends with the father explaining to his older son why he had to celebrate. How do you think the story ended? Did the older son soften and come inside, or did he stiffen and remain outside? Explain.
- What is the most obvious difference between the father and the older son??

### **USE IT / APPLY IT ...**

- Why do we sometimes become angry when a person doesn’t have to face the consequences they seem to deserve?
- How can a religious joy over time become a religious chore and eventually become a religious burden?
- Obviously, in this story, the father represents God. What can we do to conform our heart to God’s heart?
- How can this group support you in prayer this week?.