



THE LOOKOUT

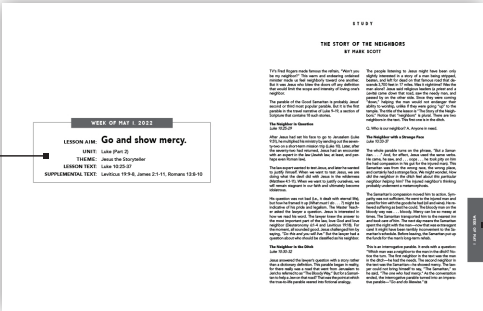
MAY 2022

Unit: LUKE (Part 2) Theme: Jesus the Storyteller

Overview: Bible scholar Kenneth Bailey described Jesus as a metaphoric theologian. Beyond that, Jesus was a storyteller without equal. In this second month of lessons from Luke, we focus on Jesus’ parables from the travel narrative section of the Gospel (chapters 9–19). Jesus’ stories begin in reality but move to fictional analogy as they subvert our ideas of neighbors, riches, God, and prayer.

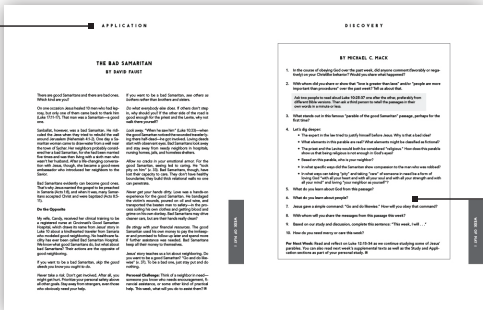
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Vertical tabs on the right side of the lesson page indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

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WEEK OF MAY 22, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Turn back to the Father,
who's longing to restore
you with joy.**

UNIT: Luke (Part 2)

THEME: Jesus the Storyteller

LESSON TEXT: Luke 15:11-32

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Luke 15:1-10; Ephesians 2:1-5; Psalm 32

STUDY

THE STORY OF THE RUNNING FATHER

BY MARK SCOTT

The fourth parable of this lesson series is the third parable in this famous chapter. Scholars speak of “end stress” in narratives. They mean either that the essential point of a story comes at the end (as in a “punchy ending”) or that when stories occur in a series, the accent of significance falls on the last one. The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin clearly set up the parable of the lost son(s). And all three parables connect back to the criticism of the religious elite in Luke 15:1-2.

Even today, in several places in the Middle East, men do not run. It is considered undignified. But this compassionate father ran to the prodigal and “went out” to the elder brother. The reason? Because, as the title of a book by Helmut Thielicke implies, *The Waiting Father* loved both sons.

Lost from Home

Luke 15:11-24

One could argue that all the stories in Luke 15 constitute just one parable—singular (v. 3). So Jesus just “continued” as he told them. A man had two sons—both times Jesus started stories this way it did not end well for the Pharisees (Matthew 21:28-32). The younger (it’s unusual for a Jewish story about two boys not to start with the firstborn) in essence told his dad to drop dead. Dad did not die, but he did grant the younger son’s rebellious request. The inheritance was *divided*.

Soon the rebellious son *got together* his assets (meaning he traded his physical inheritance, such as cows and sheep, for cash) and headed to a *distant country* (Gentile territory?). There he *squandered* (this is the real meaning of “prodigal”) his inheritance in *wild living*. After “prodigalizing,” a famine hit the land (Jesus’ way of hinting that someone is outside the will of God; cf. Ruth 1:1). The situation got so dire that the young man hired himself out to a pig farmer who sent the boy into the fields to feed pigs (Leviticus 11:7). A very sad line is, “*But no one gave him anything.*”

The young son had an “Aha” moment when he came to himself (better than *came to his senses*). He remembered the home from which he was lost. In particular, he remembered the food that even his father’s *hired servants* had. He mentally prepared his speech and headed home.

He was hopeful his dad would make him a hired servant (so that he could earn the squandered money back?).

The description of the boy’s father in the latter part of verse 20 is one of the most beautiful pictures of God’s love in the Bible. The father saw, ran, felt, hugged, and kissed this boy who had left home. The boy managed to recite only the first part of his speech before he heard his father barking orders to prepare a party. Clothing, jewelry, and sandals were quickly brought out; meanwhile, the smell of steak got stronger and stronger. The running father’s apologetic for the party was that his son had been *lost* and *was dead* but that he had been *found* and *was alive*.

Lost at Home

Luke 15:25-32

The elder brother who received (or would receive) the lion’s share of the inheritance had been strangely absent from the party. (Tradition in Jesus’ day would have had the elder brother serving as master of ceremonies for any family party.) He had been *in the field*. He heard the celebration and asked a servant what was going on. The servant brought the elder brother up to speed.

Instead of rejoicing, the older son pouted. He gave full vent to his anger and *refused to go in*. But the running father (again, because he loved both boys) *went out* to the son and *pleaded* with him to join the party. The grumpy son did three things. First, he complained that his father had not regarded his hard work through the years. (It is fascinating that he viewed himself as something like a slave even though he was a son.) Second, he accused his father of not noticing his hard work ethic and complained that he had not been rewarded with as much as a goat. Finally, he lied about his brother. Had his younger sibling squandered his inheritance? Yes. Had he spent the inheritance on *prostitutes*? Jesus never said that in the original story. The younger son might have done that, but the elder brother would have no way of knowing it.

The running father made his final appeal. He called him *son* (even though the boy viewed himself as a slave). He told the boy that *everything* he had was his. But his apologetic remained the same. The younger brother was *dead and lost*, but now he was *alive and found*. Did the elder brother finally go to the party? Would you? **L**

APPLICATION

NEVER FORGET WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE LOST

BY DAVID FAUST

Sometimes the far country seemed like a bad dream. He was older and wiser now, but he still remembered the dark season. His stomach churned when he recalled the bitter taste and sickening texture of the pods he ate with the pigs. His senses recoiled when he thought about the hangover headaches and the smell of sour wine that lingered after long nights of partying in the far country. How empty his soul had felt back then! Separated by choice from his father's domain, he tried to live it up, but instead he sank to new lows.

He still remembered the moment when he came to his senses. "Hired workers in my father's house have it better than this," he reasoned. Arriving back home, ashamed and apprehensive, he was astonished when his father embraced him again as a full-fledged member of the family. Even his older brother's negative attitude didn't dampen the homecoming celebration. The table was spread and his father's joy was unrestrained. Relieved, the happy patriarch kept repeating, "My son was dead, but he's alive again!" Music filled the air and dancing filled the house, along with joyful hugs and tears. His redemption story could be summarized by the nickname "P. S."—Prodigal Son.

But now the memories were fading—and so was the amazement. As time passed, P. S. grew accustomed to the comforts he enjoyed every day in his father's house. He took for granted the hearty meals, the ring on his finger, and the robe on his back. The party ended a long time ago. Now what? Many years had passed since P. S. came back home. What would the postscript be?

Have We Forgotten?

The truth is, we all have been prodigal sons and daughters. Have you ever wandered from God and squandered your resources, wondering if the Father

would welcome you back? In a sense, it's every Christian's story. We sing, "I once was lost, but now am found," because even if it's a distant memory, we treasure the story of redemption.

As time passes, though, it's tempting to forget the prodigals and become like the grumpy older brother. Despite occasional conflicts with our brothers and sisters, it's pretty pleasant here in the Father's house. The table is spread. Familiar friends greet us. It's easy to become so comfortable and complacent that we forget what it was like in the far country. Worse, we forget that many of our neighbors are living there right now.

Welcome Home

Maybe you became a Christian after your own rebellious season in the far country. Or perhaps you never strayed very far away. Either way, we should never take for granted the blessings found in the Father's house. And we should keep praying and searching for those who have wandered away, and we should do whatever we can to bring them home.

God's welcome party isn't over. Will we joyfully join the festivities, or will we become resentful and demanding like the pouting older brother? Will we come to our senses and rediscover God's abounding love for lost people? When we do, our worship services will become homecoming celebrations again. Every baptism, every prayer, every song of praise will remind us of the Father who runs with open arms to welcome his beloved children back home.

Personal Challenge: How is your life different today because the heavenly Father welcomed you back to his family? What can you do to make your church a welcoming home for prodigal sons and daughters? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you see God provide for you over the past week?
2. In what specific way did you *actively* await Christ's return last week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Luke 15:11-32** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to spend about a minute retelling this famous parable.

3. What are the most surprising elements in this parable . . . and why?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - Verse 11 says "Jesus continued." The passage we're studying is the last of three parables all dealing with things or people who are "lost." What does this indicate about how Jesus cares about people who are far from God?
 - Why would the father in the parable grant his younger son's inheritance request and allow him to leave?
 - If the father in this parable represents God the Father, and the younger son represents repentant sinners, who might the older son represent?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
 - What do you learn about his grace?
 - His respect for our life decisions?
 - His desire for relationship with us?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What do you learn about the appropriate motive for obeying God from this passage (especially vv. 29-32)?
8. With whom will you share this parable and God's desire for a renewed relationship with us?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. Who in your life is still "a long way off" from God and/or you? How can we pray for this person and for you?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Luke 18:1-14** as we continue studying some of Jesus' parables. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖