

## NT 18: Lost and Found — Luke 12–17

Monte F. Shelley, 22 May 2011

### Quotes

- Friends are God's life preservers. (Ziggy)

#### 1. Jesus heals on Sabbath (Lk 14:1–6) L17

<sup>1</sup> As he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him. ...

When a rabbi passed through a village, the leaders invited the guest to eat so they could investigate his views. (MEE 309)

<sup>2</sup> There was a certain man before him which had the dropsy. <sup>3</sup> And Jesus ... spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? <sup>4</sup> And they held their peace. And he ... healed him, ... <sup>5</sup> And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? <sup>6</sup> And they could not answer him again to these things.

#### 2. Parable of Chief Seats (Lk 14:7–14) L17

**Who:** Lawyers and Pharisees who invited him to dinner

**Where:** House of a chief Pharisee (v. 1)

**Why:** Jesus saw "how they chose out the chief rooms."

<sup>2</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees ... <sup>6</sup> love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, (Mt 23:2, 6)

<sup>7</sup> <When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable:> <sup>8</sup> When thou art <invited> ... to a wedding, sit not down in the <place of honor>; lest a more honourable man than thou be <invited> of him; <sup>9</sup> And he that <invited> thee and him ... say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. <sup>10</sup> But when thou art <invited>, ... sit down in the lowest <place>; that when <your host> cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then <you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests.> <sup>11</sup> For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.

<sup>6</sup> Put not forth thyself in the presence of the king, and stand not in the place of great men: <sup>7</sup> For better it is that it be said unto thee, Come up hither; than that thou shouldest be put lower in the presence of the prince whom thine eyes have seen. (Prov 25:6–7)

<sup>12</sup> Then said he also to <his host>, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, ... lest they also <invite> thee again, and <you will be repaid.> <sup>13</sup> But ... call the poor, the <crippled>, the lame, the blind: <sup>14</sup> And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot <repay> thee: for thou shalt be <repaid> at the resurrection. ...

#### 3. Parable of Wedding banquet (Lk 14:15–24; Mt 22:1–14) L17

**Who:** Lawyers and Pharisees who invited him to dinner

**Where:** In the house of a chief Pharisee (v. 1)

**Why:** They asked about eating in the kingdom of God. Jesus says in effect, Guess who's coming to dinner!

<sup>15</sup> When <one of those at the table> with him heard <this>, he said ... Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God.

The man wants Jesus to relate his statements to the coming kingdom of God which would include a great banquet with the Messiah. They believed any Gentiles at the banquet would be destroyed. Many believed that the lame, blind, and disabled would not be present at the banquet. Therefore, they expect Jesus to say something like, 'If we keep the law strictly, we will be worthy to sit with the Messiah at his banquet.' (MEE 310–11)

<sup>16</sup> Then said he unto him, A certain man <was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.>: <sup>17</sup> And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were <invited>, Come; for all things are now ready.

Mt 22:<sup>2</sup> The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, <who prepared a wedding banquet> for his son.

Two invitations: (1) announces date and RSVP, and (2) says come, the food is ready. It was OK to decline first, but to decline the second broke a promise and insulted the host.

<sup>18</sup> They all ... began to make excuse. The first said ... , I have bought a piece of ground, and I must ... go ... see it: ... <sup>19</sup> Another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: ...

<sup>20</sup> Another said, I have married a wife, and ... I cannot come.

People do not buy property until after a long inspection period!

People "test drive" oxen before buying.

He would have known in time to decline first invitation.

This would be like us saying, I have to mow the lawn or feed the cat. These implausible excuses are deliberate public insults. Since all of the guests make excuses it appears that the guests want to shut down the banquet and humiliate the host.

Mt 22:<sup>5</sup> But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: <sup>6</sup> And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. <sup>7</sup> But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Jerusalem destroyed 70 AD.

<sup>21</sup> ... Then the master ... being angry said ... Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in ... the poor, and the maimed, and the [lame], and the blind. <sup>22</sup> And the servant said, Lord, it is done ... and yet there is room. <sup>23</sup> And the lord said ... , Go out into the highways and [hedged pathways], and compel [or GR urge] them to come in, that my house may be filled. <sup>24</sup> For ... none of those men which were <invited> shall taste of my supper.

The Gentiles or people of the land on the major roads or near the hedges of the villages also enter the banquet.

It was necessary to "compel" or strongly urge them to come because they would not believe a rich man/king would really want someone like them to com.

Mt 22:<sup>11</sup> And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: <sup>12</sup> And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup> Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>14</sup> For many are called, but few are chosen {JST wherefore all do not have on the wedding garment.}

The wealthy host provided the wedding garments for his guests. The man did not lack the garment, but willfully refused to put it on. Ancient banquets were held at night in brilliantly lighted rooms. Those who were excluded were cast into 'outer darkness.' (Pigs 84–85)

#### 4. Jesus welcomes and eats with sinners (Lk 15:1–2)

<sup>1</sup> Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth <or *welcomes*> sinners, and eateth with them.

Murmured like Israelites murmured against Moses.

Receiveth → GR to welcome into fellowship

Eating with → accepting and affirming one's value.

Pharisees believed that eating with sinners defiled a Jew.

The Babylonian Talmud makes clear that rabbis did not eat with the *'am-ha'arets* (the people of the land) who did not keep the law in a precise fashion. (Find)

Jesus responds to their murmuring with three parables that involve the religious (Pharisees), the irreligious (sinners), and Jesus. All three of these parties (the 'found,' the 'lost,' and Jesus) appear in each of the three parables. (Cross 27)

What follows are the three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the two lost sons (the Prodigal Son). Thus ... Luke understood them to be three parts of a single parable. The shepherd pays a price to find and restore a lost sheep. The woman does the same for her coin. In these two stories it is clear that Jesus is the good shepherd and he is the good woman. Is he also the good father in the third story and does he also pay a price to find and restore his son? (Find)

#### 5. Parable of the Lost Sheep (Lk 15:1–7; Mt 18:12–14)

**Who:** Pharisees and scribes

**Where:** Galilee

**Why:** They murmured because Jesus received sinners and ate with them.

<sup>3</sup> And he spake this parable unto them, saying, <sup>4</sup> What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine {and go into} the wilderness { } after that which is lost, until he find it?

{JST} → 99 not in wilderness.

*if he lose one of them* → Jews would have said 'if one was lost' to avoid taking responsibility. (Cross 30)

Matt 18:12 How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the [99], and goeth into <on> the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?

Shocking because: (1) he leaves 99 to search for one, and (2) leaves 99 on the mountains, not in the sheepfold. (Sense 134)

By the time of Christ, shepherds were considered unclean by the rabbis, who referred to such people as 'the people of the land' and avoided them. ... Shepherds ... are poor men, clothed in simple dress, who wander in privation over the countryside. No educated man would spend his days tramping over the wilderness for any purpose. (Cross 30)

The 99 were left perhaps with another shepherd or in a cave. It is the willingness to go after the one that gives the 99 their real security. If one is left behind, the others know they too are of little value and will be left behind. It may take a day or more of climbing over rugged wilderness to find a lost sheep. (Cross 31)

The military motto: "leave no man behind" gives security to all.

<sup>5</sup> And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. ...

This parable is a rewrite of Psalm 23.

Ps 23:3 He restoreth my soul [or HEB he brings me back]: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness.

In the parable of the Good Shepherd, Jesus invokes Psalm 23, which also has a lost sheep and a good shepherd. Verse 3, "*He restores my soul*," has come to mean: I was downcast, and the Lord restored my spirits. That understanding is, no doubt, a part of the psalmist's intention. But the Hebrew words literally mean, "*He brings me back*," or "*He causes me to repent*." Clearly, the psalmist is lost, and God, the good shepherd, brings him back to paths of righteousness. (Find)

<sup>7</sup> Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine <righteous persons who do not need to repent.>

99 = self-righteous who needed no repentance (Pigs 165)

**The "righteous who need no repentance" do not exist.**

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa 53:6)

For *there is* not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (Eccl 7:20)

The shepherd: (a) accepts responsibility for the loss, (b) searches without counting the cost, (c) rejoices in the burden of restoration, and (d) rejoices with the community at the success of restoration. (Cross 33)

The sinner who repented did so by being found and carried back (restoreth my soul).

#### 6. Parable of the Lost Coin (Lk 15:8–10)

**Who:** Pharisees and scribes who murmured before lost sheep. Sheep wander off, but coins are misplaced.

<sup>8</sup> What woman having ten <silver coins>, if she lose one ..., doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find *it*? <sup>9</sup> And when she hath found *it*, she calleth *her* friends and *her* neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. <sup>10</sup> Likewise, ... there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

<sup>a</sup> GR *drachma* (a silver coin equal to the Roman *denarius*—a workman's daily wage).

Middle Eastern peasant women occasionally carry their worldly wealth in gold or silver coins fastened to a chain around their necks. This jewelry is referred to as 'the women's bank.' ... If divorced or widowed, this wealth will help sustain her. Some suggest the parable refers to this custom, but there is a more likely alternative. Peasant women carry any cash held for daily expenses in a tightly knotted rag. Each coin represented a day's wages for a laborer and might provide for the family for 1 or 2 weeks. If the coin fell out, she would be filled with shame and remorse for not being more careful. Ancient village homes often had cracks in the floors. Windows were small slits about 7 feet up the black walls. Even in the day, the woman would have needed a lamp to find a coin. Her remorse and desperation stem from her undeniable responsibility for its loss. Coins do not wander like sheep. The woman rejoiced with her female friends as the shepherd did with his male friends. The shepherd told his friends, "I have found my sheep which was lost." (Cross 34–36)

Women wore headdresses with coins that were part of their marriage dowry. The loss of a coin would be like a woman losing a wedding ring. (Wight, 99–100, 128; Pigs 166)

## 7. Parable of the Lost Son(s) (Lk 15:11–32)

**Who:** Pharisees and scribes who murmured before lost sheep.  
**Sheep wander off and coins are misplaced, but this son rebels.**

<sup>11</sup> And he said, A certain man had two sons: <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods [GR property] that falleth to me.

According to their law, the older son would get two thirds and the younger son would get one third of the inheritance when the father died. A father might give his heirs the legal right of *possession*, but not the right of *disposition*. Thus father retained control over it until he died. The younger son wants both, but he avoids the word “inheritance.” To accept one’s “inheritance” involves accepting leadership in the family clan. The recipient is duty bound to administer property and help solve family quarrels. He must defend family honor. He pledges to increase the clan’s wealth and represent them nobly at village functions. The son wants the money not the responsibility. (Cross 42–43)

To ask for inheritance before his father was dead means, ‘I wish you were dead.’ This request does not break the law; it breaks his father’s heart and his relationship with his father. The older son and the community would have heard of this unthinkable request. In a village quarrel, the two parties never make up directly. To do so, one would lose face. A mediator starts quickly, works out a win-win solution and arranges a public meeting for the two people to shake hands, embrace, and kiss in token of reconciliation. The older son is expected to be the mediator, but he refuses to do so. His relationships with his father and brother are not good. His arrogance may have contributed to his brother’s rebellion. (Cross 42, 45–46)

And he divided unto them his living <or property>.

The estate is substantial and the father is respected in the community. The father’s expected response to the younger son’s request is refusal and punishment. However, the father grants both the inheritance and the right to sell, knowing that this will shame the family before the community. The older son also received his share under the normal rules allowing the father to control the remaining property until death. (Cross 47)

<sup>13</sup> And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, *Gathered all* → sell what could not be carried.

The Greek phrase can mean “turn everything into cash” (Bauer)

The father’s wealth was not in money or stocks; it was in land, animals, houses, and possessions. The Prodigal sells quickly (“*not many days after*”). Anger in the village rises against him because he has shamed his father and his extended family by offering a large part of the family farm for sale with a healthy father still farming it. He has to conclude the sale and get out of town as quickly as possible. (Find)

and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance [GR property] with riotous living.

*took his journey*: The Greek word for means ‘traveled away from his own people.’

*into a far country*: It was among the Gentiles because they ate pork and used pigs as sacrificial animals.

*Wasted* → GR scatter, disperse, waste, squander.

**Prodigal** = spends money extravagantly and wastefully (SOED)

*Riotous/wild/loose living* → spendthrift or extravagant living.

The Greek adjective in this phrase, however, does not imply immorality. Later, the older brother accuses him of spending his

money on harlots. But how could he know how his brother spent his money? If the prodigal son followed the traditions, his money would have been used to establish a reputation for generosity by holding banquets and giving expensive gifts. Generosity is a supreme virtue, coveted by all. But he eats the fruit of an unwatered tree. (Cross 53)

By leaving home, the son cuts himself off from his family and loses his real security. His family is his social security, his insurance, his old-age pension, his assurance of marriage, and his physical and emotional well-being. When the son leaves, custom would not allow the estranged father to bid him goodbye. The older son would be responsible to plead with him to stay and to invoke God’s blessings if he left. The older son’s attitude may have prevented this. (Cross 43–44, 46, 53)

The father granted the son freedom/agency to reject his love and turn away from him. The father hopes for his return and did not disown him. If the father had disowned him, there would have been no possibility of reconciliation. (Cross 47)

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

**Why doesn’t he go home?**

(1) He would have endure his brother’s scorn, eat his bread, and be indebted to them. His estrangement from his brother keeps him from fellowship with his father.

(2) he must face the village. He broke his relationship with them also. Having broke the rules and lost his inheritance among Gentiles, the Kezuzah ceremony awaits. (Cross 54–55)

**Kezuzah**: If a Jewish boy at that time lost the family inheritance among Gentiles and dared to return home, the community would break a large pot in front of him and cry out ‘so-in-so is cut off from his people.’ The ceremony was called the *Kezuzah* (literally ‘the cutting off’). Afterwards the community would have nothing to do with the wayward person. He burns his bridges and has no way to return home. He has no more ‘rights’ to claim and no one will take him in. Village youth gangs will taunt him as will the adults now. (Cross 52–53)

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

*Joined* may mean “attached himself to” as when one washes your windshield at a stoplight and expects to be paid. To get rid of him nicely, the citizen gives him the job of feeding swine which was especially distasteful to a Jew. (Cross 56–57)

<sup>16</sup> <He longed to fill his stomach with the pods> that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

He could not eat the pods because his stomach could not digest them. Nor could he eat the scraps of pig meat left for shepherds when a pig was butchered. When he tried begging from people on the roads, no one would give him anything. Hunger finally overcame his fear of returning home. (Cross 58)

<sup>17</sup> And when he came to <his senses>, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

There is no indication that he repented. He expresses no remorse or shame, only a desire to eat. To be reconciled with family and community, he will have to pay back the money he lost without marketable skills. To become an apprentice with a craftsman, he will need his father’s help so he could earn his own way. He thinks the issue is the lost money, not his father’s broken heart. Hence, his proposed confession. (Cross 59–61)

The best way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Hunger tends to humble people. Animal training sometimes starts with hunger followed by food when progress is made.

Some people learn only by the things they suffer.

Sheep and coins can be found, but he didn't want to be found until now.

Hunger and other afflictions us up to a remembrance of our duty to love God and neighbor. It "brings us back" to God and family. (Search for "stir up to a remembrance" in BofM)

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

This is a paraphrase of what Pharaoh said to Moses after the first nine plagues. Everyone knew that Pharaoh was not repenting, but only trying to manipulate Moses into stopping the plague. The son wanted to earn his own way with as little help as possible. (Cross 59–60)

Pharaoh to Moses to stop plagues. "I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you" (Ex 10:16)

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

His planned request implies: (a) he will live with other craftsmen in a nearby village to avoid being at home with his brother, (b) he hopes to pay his debt and redeem himself without help, (c) he expects a servant-master relationship with his father [Are we God's servants (Pharisees) or his children (Jesus)?], (d) he does not understand that the issue is a broken relationship and a broken heart, not just lost money, and (e) reconciliation is not part of his plan. (Cross 60–62)

**3 types of slaves:** *Bondsmen* (part of estate, like members of family), *Servants* (below bondsmen, part of estate), *Hired Servants* (day labors, not part of estate) (Pigs 175)

<sup>20</sup> And he arose, and came to his father.

As the prodigal returned, he expected his father to remain in the house or be subdued by the street crowd as he walked through the village. When his father learned the money had been lost among the Gentiles, the *Kezaah* ceremony would be enacted. The son would sit for some time outside the gate of the family home before being summoned to see his father. The father would be angry and the son must apologize for everything as he pleaded for job training in the next village. (Cross 66)

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.

The father breaks all the cultural rules. The Greek word for run is used for footraces in a stadium. Thus the father had compassion and raced. A man of his age *always* walked in a slow, dignified fashion. No villager over 25 ever runs. To run, the father must take the front edge of his robes in his hand, thus exposing his legs in a humiliating posture. Instead of taunting the son, the street loiters will run after him, amazed to see this respected elder shaming himself publicly. It is his 'compassion' that leads the father to race to his son. He knows what his son will face in the village. He takes upon himself the shame and humiliation due the prodigal. The conversation at the edge of the village takes place with a full circle of people listening. Soon all will be reported to every village home. The father's actions can restore the son to his home and community. No villager will now reject and despise him.

The Greek word for *kissed* means either 'kissed again and again' or 'kissed tenderly.' The first meaning is most likely

since it would be the natural expression of compassion for men. Now the son sees for the first time the depth of his father's love. Without this costly demonstration of love, the callous son will never discover the suffering of his father, understand that he is its cause, or be reconciled with his father. (Cross 66–70)

"In the Near East, for an elderly gentleman to run was disgraceful. He often had long, flowing robes, and running would require him to roll up his robes, allowing people to see his naked legs. That would be humiliating. It would be outlandish behavior." (Millett in Pigs 176–177)

"The father falls on his son's neck. It should have been the other way around. Equal people kiss on the cheek. If someone is of lower status, he falls on the neck or the shoulder of his superior. If he is of even lower status, he should kiss the hand. And if he is a slave, he should kiss the feet." (Pigs 178)

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

Stunned, the son omits his offer to become a craftsman. Rather, he puts himself at the mercy of his father. He now knows there is nothing he can do to make up for what he has done. Like the lost sheep, he accepts being found and is brought back or restored by a loving father. (Cross 70)

Perhaps the son is so surprised at his father's welcome that he is saying "I am no more *worthy* to be called thy son ... so why are you treating me like one?" (Wilcox in Pigs 178)

<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:<sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

The servants and others had followed and were listening.

The father does not say, 'Go, clean up, shave, and get some decent clothes on.' Rather, he orders servants to honor him as a son by dressing him in the *best robe*. The prodigal will attend the banquet in his father's best robe. The guests will recognize the robe and treat the son respectfully, knowing that he has been fully restored to sonship. The *ring* is probably the family signet ring used to sign official documents. Sons and freemen wore *shoes* while slaves went barefoot. The father carefully heals the sons broken relationships with the servants who dress him, the family, villagers who knew of the welcome, and the elders at the banquet. Each group will accept the son out of loyalty to the father. The *fatted calf* is really a 'prime beef,' a rare village delicacy [that might feed 100 people]. The father is publically showing how joyful he is. The son does not refuse sonship, insist that he is unworthy, or demand servanthood. He accepts his father's love knowing he is unworthy. Now he has no reason to serve out of fear nor for reward. (Cross 72–73)

**Ring = family signet ring → authority and access to possessions.**

**Shoes = worn in the house by the master, not by guests who removed them on arrival. → authority, possession, freedom**

**Fatted calf: might feed 100 people → feast for family plus community members.**

<sup>25</sup> Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing.

The family is wealthy. They have property to be divided, goats and prime beef ready for a banquet, a home big enough for a crowd. They have servants, hire craftsmen, and own festive

robes. Thus the son was supervising workers in the field. When he returns, the principal guests have arrived because the music and dancing had begun. A large crowd is mingling. Young boys not old enough for the banquet are in the courtyard enjoying the music and excitement. (Cross 78–79)

<sup>26</sup> And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

The Greek word for servants can also mean “young boys” as found in Arabic bibles. This is more likely since the servants would be busy with the meal. (Cross 79–80)

<sup>27</sup> And he said . . . , Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

The boy says the father has welcomed a sinner and will be eating a meal with him. This is the complaint of the Pharisees that preceded these three parables about lost sheep, coins, and sons. The boy does not say the prodigal ‘returned’ which also means repented. The Greek word (hygiaínō) for *safe and sound* means good health (hygiene). Every time the word is found in the Greek Old Testament it is a translation of *shalom* which means good health, safety, prosperity, peace, friendship, and reconciliation. (Cross 80–81)

Is the banquet in honor of the Prodigal or in honor of the father? Is it a celebration of the Prodigal’s successful efforts at reaching home (on his own), or is it rather a celebration of the success of the father’s costly efforts at creating *shalom*? Will the guests congratulate the Prodigal or the father? (Find)

<sup>28</sup> And he was angry, and would not go in:

Older son = Pharisees who murmured that Jesus ate with sinners! They demanded justice and reward for righteousness. They could not understand why Jesus would welcome sinners.

Everything left in the house is legally the property of the older son. Although the father still maintains authority, the remaining wealth is pledged to the older son. In a sense, he is paying for this banquet because he will receive less when his father dies. At such a banquet the father sits with the guests. The older son often stands and serves the meal as a ‘head waiter.’ Unlike the servants, he talks with the seated guests. This in effect says, ‘you guests are so great that our son is your servant.’ But can he serve his brother? Reconciliation and restoration without a penalty is too much for him to accept. For certain types of people, grace is not only amazing, it is also infuriating. In any social situation, the male members of the family must come and shake hands with the guests even if they do not stay. Failure to do so is a personal insult to the guests and to the father. Staying outside is an intentional public insult to his father. (Cross 81–82)

therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

Soon word of this insult reaches his father and the guests. Because it is in public, this rebellion of the older son is more serious than the earlier rebellion of the prodigal. Everyone assumes the older son will be punished immediately or ignored until after the guests are gone. Punishment would create more bitterness and estrangement. Again the father endures shame to reconcile. He deliberately left his guests, humiliated himself before all, and went out to the courtyard to try to reconcile his older son. The father loves both of his sons. He goes out to *entreat* not to command, punish or condemn. (Cross 83–84)

<sup>29</sup> And he . . . said to *his* father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a <young goat>, that I might make merry

with my friends: <sup>30</sup> But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

Goats plentiful compared to beef cattle.

“at any time” = slight exaggeration of his own righteousness?

Thy son, not my brother.

How does he know what his brother did?

This speech was probably heard by a crowd in the courtyard. His speech and actions indicate: (a) The older son refuses to participate in reconciling his brother. (b) He rebels against his father and rudely talks to him without using a customary title. (c) He proudly says he keeps the law like the Pharisees, but breaks a relationship. (d) He accuses his father of favoritism. (e) He separates himself from his family, (f) He resents not having full control over his father’s property yet, (g) He despises his brother, refuses to welcome him, accuses him of living with harlots, and refers to him as ‘thy son.’ (h) He says the son spent his father’s “living,” thus refusing to accept the father’s right to give it freely. (i) He feels unfairly treated and demands justice. (j) His unwillingness to reconcile with his brother forces him to break his relationship with his father. (k) He says the banquet honors the son instead of the father’s success in creating *shalom* or peace as the young boy told him. (l) He feels his envy, pride, anger, and hate are all justified by the facts, the law, and the customs of the time. (Cross 84–86)

In the Middle East ‘everybody knows’ that to be polite to your father is much more important than to obey him. (Cross 17)

<sup>31</sup> And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. <sup>32</sup> It was [necessary] that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

Other fathers in the village would have said, ‘Enough! Lock him up! I will deal with him later!’ However, the father overlooks the rudeness, bitterness, arrogance, and false accusations. He calls him son and gently corrects only one point by referring to ‘thy brother’ The rest of his response is a defense of joy. When the lost sheep was found, the shepherd did not have to explain his joy. When the lost coin was found, the woman did not have to explain her joy. However, in this parable, the father has to explain his joy. When the Pharisees murmured about Jesus eating with sinners, he told these 3 parables to explain his joy. The story of the prodigal son is unfinished. In the banquet hall, the guests wait to see if the son will humbly enter the house. Jesus leaves the story unfinished because he like the father is talking to self-righteous Pharisees who like the son refuse to eat with sinners. He invites them to the banquet, but what will they do? (Cross 86–87)

This parable shows two types of sin: the sin of the law-breaker and the sin of the law-keeper. One breaks a relationship while failing to meet expectations of family and society; the other while meeting those same expectations. (Cross 87–88)

If the older son accepts the love now offered to him, he will be obliged to treat the Prodigal with the same loving acceptance with which the father welcomed the pig herder. The older son will need to be “*conformed to the image*” of that compassionate father who comes to both kinds of sinners in the form of a suffering servant, offering undeserved, costly love. Is he willing? We are not told. By this point the audience is on the stage and must decide for itself. (Find)

The Pharisees complain, *“This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”* This story in effect says, *“Indeed, I do eat with sinners. But it is much worse than you imagine! I not only eat with them, I run down the road, shower them with kisses, and drag them in that I might eat with them!”* Jesus is clearly talking about himself. By the end of the story, the father does what Jesus does: he eats with a sinner. (Find)

What was lost	How lost	How found	% of lost
Sheep	Ignorance	Shepherd searched	1/100
Coin	Neglect	Diligent effort	1/10
Prodigal son	Rebellion	Repentance	1/2
Elder son	Pride	Humility	1/2

(Pigs 185; Ogden, 362)

Actor	Lost sheep	Lost Coin	Lost son
Jesus	The shepherd	The woman	The father
Sinners	Lost sheep	Lost coin	Lost son
Pharisees	The 99	The 9	The older son

(Cross 36)

## Conclusion

### How have these parables of Jesus influenced you or your acquaintances?

“For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD.” (Isa 55:8)

Elona related this scripture to forgiving wicked (e.g., child abuser) as illustrated in prodigal son. The natural response is to shun and punish, not to treat them in ways that invite and entice them to come unto Christ.

### READ PRESIDENT HINCKLEY QUOTE

While eating with Pharisees, Jesus told a parable of people who had accepted an invitation to come to a wedding banquet and then refused to come when the time arrived. The social outcasts took their places. Later the Pharisees murmured when they saw Jesus eating with sinners. In response to their murmuring, Jesus told them this story that ends with an older “righteous” brother who murmured when he saw his father eating with a sinner. The older son refused to come in because his brother was welcomed without punishment and recompense. The Pharisees like the older brother resented Jesus welcoming sinners! Readers like the Pharisees want to point out that he had lost his inheritance and was less than elder brother. Like the father in the story, Jesus invites the Pharisees to come into the banquet and rejoice that the lost has been found. We are not told if the son or the Pharisees accept the invitation.

**Morals of the story:** (1) arise and go to father no matter how sinful, (2) remember we are all beggars, and (3) rejoice when others return.

When the Lord invites us to enter his house on earth (e.g., temple or church) or in heaven, will we be like the older brother and refuse to enter because someone else was a guest?

**Returning missionary:** Some time ago, a friend told me his son was returning home early from his mission ... disfellowshipped. They had expected the whole family to meet him at the airport at the end of his mission and have a joyous celebration. Now, he was very sad and disappointed in his son and only he and his wife would be at the airport for a very sad reunion and the long drive home. How could his son have done this? He was an embarrassment to his Church, his family, and himself? For some reason, I felt prompted to ask, “What if you treated him like the prodigal son’s dad did and had a big celebration as you had planned? By his quiet and thoughtful response, I could sense that the Spirit was working on him, so I left. I later found out that the whole family did meet the returning son and they did have a joyous celebration much to the surprise of the son. After others went to bed, the father and the son had a very different conversation that what the father had expected when we had talked. The son returned to full fellowship, married in the temple, and has a close bond with his family.

When we treat returning prodigals as the father in the story did, we invite and entice them to return and stay close to the family. When we give into our natural man tendencies and shun or punish them like self-righteous Pharisees, we drive them away from us, the church, and the Lord.

## Quotes

**Gordon B. Hinckley:** I ask you to read that story [of the prodigal son]. Every parent ought to read it again and again. It is large enough to encompass every household, and enough larger than that to encompass all mankind, for are we not all prodigal sons and daughters who need to repent and partake of the forgiving mercy of our Heavenly Father and then follow His example? (“Of You It Is Required to Forgive,” *Ensign*, June 1991, 5).

**Neal A. Maxwell:** Like the prodigal son, we too can go to 'a far country,' which may be no farther away than a vile rock concert. The distance to 'a far country' is not to be measured by miles but by how far our hearts and minds are from Jesus! (see Mosiah 5:13). Fidelity, not geography, really determines the distance! (*Ensign*, Nov 2000, 47)

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- Pinegar= Pinegar and Allen, *Teachings and Commentaries on the New Testament*
- DNTC = Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*
- KJV King James Version of the Bible.
- NIV = New International Version of the Bible
- TPJS = *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*
- SOED = Shorter Oxford English Dictionary
- OED = Oxford English Dictionary
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- SOSL = Trumbull, *Studies in Oriental Social Life*.
- EJ = *Encyclopedia Judaica*
- Rona= Daniel Rona, [www.israelrevealed.com/comp-sup-r.htm](http://www.israelrevealed.com/comp-sup-r.htm).
- DBlog= Donna Nielsen Blog, [donna-connections.blogspot.com/](http://donna-connections.blogspot.com/)
- DBI = *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*
- MM = Meridian Magazine, Gospel Doctrine, [www.ldsmag.com](http://www.ldsmag.com)
- [beardall2000.com/gospdoct.shtml](http://beardall2000.com/gospdoct.shtml); [www.gospeldoctrine.com/](http://www.gospeldoctrine.com/)
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