



WEEKLY STUDY

God Loves Lost Things - Week Four

Here we are! The fourth week of Advent and heading into Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Pastor Angela brought a message about the older son in the parable of the prodigal son from Luke 15. In it, she pointed out how the older son's response to his brother's return was not really all that different than the younger brother's behavior. He had been prodigal, and the older son was prideful. Prideful about his place in the household. Yet the Father comes to him as well. This is good news for those of us who identify with either of the sons. And I'm guessing we all identify with one or both of the sons in Jesus' parable. Christmas is a celebration of the God who comes to us—wherever we are.

Merry Christmas!
Pastor Mark Youngman

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from your own daily reflections and consider the Group Discussion questions below. If you would like to get connected visit prov.church/smallgroups.

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: LUKE 15.25-32 (ESV)

“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,²⁹ but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

- There is a strong theme of jealousy in the older son's story. He had been out in the field doing what he was supposed to do. Always obedient. But this obedience was driven by a sense of duty and not pure love for the father. We could imagine that this son had been quite content to keep living in the narrative of his own righteousness. As for the younger brother, he had written himself out of the picture. Jesus' parable was a thinly veiled rebuke of the pharisees. They would have been on the side of the older brother. Can you imagine deeply religious people wanting to keep out lost sons who were returning? Where do you see yourself in this story? What does it have to say to the current state of the Church?
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- **Prayer Prompt: But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." (James 4.6)**
- *God, I thank you for the mercy that you show to lost people who return home. You hold that mercy for me whether I am like the younger or older son in Jesus' parable. You have made room for me at the table. Thank you! Amen.*

TUESDAY: LUKE 15.25-32 (ESV)

- "Why does this son of yours deserve anything?" the older son inquired of the father. Notice how the father doesn't disagree, instead he says, "Right, but he's alive!" Jesus has given us a clear image of what it means that he would come to any of us. The One whose birthday we celebrate this week has set the table for us (even us!) to be celebrated and delighted in. How is Christmas connected to your homecoming story?
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- **Prayer Prompt:** *To the arrogant I say, 'Boast no more,' and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horns
⁵Do not lift your horns against heaven;
do not speak so defiantly.'" (Psalm 75.4-5)*
- *Jesus, I celebrate your willingness to step into human history. You made God visible to us who could not see. Let me not become blind to the scandalous love you revealed at Christmas! Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: LUKE 15.25-32 (ESV)

- Have you ever found yourself to be on the outside looking in? Face pressed up against the window while everyone else seems to be freely celebrating? Perhaps this week provides the perfect

occasion to set down your pride and ego, yes even your right-ness. Are there any barriers that seem to be preventing you from freely celebrating what God has done in the life of the prodigals?

- **Prayer Prompt:** *For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:16-17)*
- *God, could it be that your will for me is to have a heart like yours for the lost? I accept this good gift today. Mold my heart with your merciful love. Amen.*

THURSDAY: LUKE 15.25-32 (ESV)

- For the older brother in Jesus' parable, this must have been one of those moments where everything seems to change on a dime. One minute he was (in his own mind) the favored and only faithful son. The next minute he was standing outside the party for his wayward brother who had returned home. Have you ever experienced a sudden shift in your sense of place and security? How did God show up in that disruption?

- **Prayer Prompt:** *We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.¹³ We, however, will not boast beyond proper limits, but will confine our boasting to the sphere of service God himself has assigned to us, (2 Corinthians 10:12-13)*
- *Jesus, I am ready for you to come and set things right in my heart. I want to learn to boast in your undeserved kindness towards lost things. Amen.*

FRIDAY: LUKE 15.25-32 (ESV)

- It is thought that a fattened calf would provide enough food for 35-40 people. The party thrown by the father was not for immediate family only. It's easy to imagine the impact that such a party would have on everyone in attendance. One couldn't help but notice what was happening. If any one of them had been in the position of the prodigal son, God would throw just as big of a party for them when they returned hungry and worn down. Have you ever felt celebrated beyond what you deserve?

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- **Prayer Prompt:** *Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4.8-10)*
 - *God, your love for me draws me in. In these days after Christmas, let me linger in the glow of this truth. You put on flesh so that I could find my way back home to you. Amen.*

SATURDAY: LUKE 15.25-32 (ESV)

- It is clear that the older son had been harboring some feelings towards his father prior to his brother's return. On the surface, everything probably seemed fine. The land and the livestock were taken care of. Everything was in order. The return of the younger son was the final straw, but the relationship had already become transactional. I do the work, you give me what I deserve. Are there any feelings towards God that are simmering under the surface of your heart? Present them to God and receive the restoration he desires for you too.
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- **Prayer Prompt:** *And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. (1 John 4.16-17)*
- *God, I confess that I can sometimes hold a grudge against the mercy you show to others. Help me to see that I am the others. You have a celebration prepared for me and my repentant heart. Amen.*

GROUP DISCUSSION

Read this account of a celebration in Heaven from Revelation 19.1-6:

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:

"Hallelujah!

Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,

² for true and just are his judgments.

*He has condemned the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.
He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”*

³ *And again they shouted:*

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”

⁴ *The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:*

“Amen, Hallelujah!”

⁵ *Then a voice came from the throne, saying:*

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

you who fear him,

both great and small!”

⁶ *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:*

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Pastor Angela said, “Christmas is a celebration of that love. We can get lost in the cultural elements of it. The presents and the parties and the bows and the baking.. and we should throw parties and celebrate and feast together. Those are beautiful moments of joy! But let us not forget who it’s all for. The greatest gift we’ve ever been given – Jesus. He has come to rescue us. He is our celebration!”

- *The parties we have had in this holiday season are meant to be reflections of the salvation-party thrown in heaven for each lost one who is found. How have your celebrations looked and sounded like the great multitude in heaven described in Revelation 19? How have they differed?*