

# The Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32)

## A Small Group Outline



### 1. Praise *(Purpose: To worship God)*

- What are you thankful for this week? *(let the group's secretary write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Song Service
  - Sing a few songs of praise to God

### 2. Pray *(Purpose: To carry each others' burdens and to seek the Lord)*

- What challenges did you have this week? *(write these down in an A4 hardcover or some notebook)*
- Go into a season of prayer

### 3. Review *(Purpose: To learn accountability)*

- Tell us how it went with what you promised to do in last week's meeting? *(e.g. Who did your share your faith with this past week? Who did you minister to? How did actioning your I WILL STATEMENT go?)*
- Where people have failed to fulfil what they said they would, do not be harsh with them but gently encourage them to try again in the coming week. Give them more support by phoning or joining them in the week.

### 4. Give *(Purpose: To be good stewards of our monies)*

- This is the time to return tithes and offerings. If done electronically, kindly ensure that you get the bank account details of your local church from your treasurer. Don't forget to complete an envelope and to send the breakdown to him/her.

### 5. Discover *(Purpose: To learn to listen to God, and be obedient to His Word)*

- **Notes for the facilitator**

- Read *Christ's Object Lessons (COL)*, pp. 198-211
- "In the **parable of the prodigal son is presented the Lord's dealing with those who have once known the Father's love**, but who have allowed the tempter to lead them captive at his will" (COL 198).
- "[The] younger son had **become weary of the restraint of his father's house**. He thought that his liberty was restricted. **His father's love and care for him were misinterpreted**, and he determined to follow the dictates of his own inclination. **The youth acknowledges no obligation to his father, and expresses no gratitude; yet he claims the privilege of a child in sharing his father's goods**. The inheritance that would fall to him at his father's death he desires to receive now. He is bent on present enjoyment, and cares not for the future" (COL 199).
- "The wealth which he has selfishly claimed from his father he squanders upon harlots. The treasure of his young manhood is wasted. **The precious years of life, the strength of intellect, the bright visions of youth, the spiritual aspirations—all are consumed in the fires of lust**" (COL 199).
- "A great famine arises, he begins to be in want, and he joins himself to a citizen of the country, who sends him into the field to feed swine....**The glitter and tinsel that enticed him have disappeared**, and he feels the burden of his chain.... Now, with money spent, with hunger unsatisfied, with pride humbled, with his moral nature dwarfed, with his will weak and untrustworthy, with his finer feelings seemingly dead, he is the most wretched of mortals" (COL 200).
- "**What a picture here of the sinner's state! Although surrounded with the blessings of His love, there is nothing that the sinner, bent on self-indulgence and sinful pleasure, desires so much as separation from God**. Like the ungrateful son, he claims the good

things of God as his by right. He takes them as a matter of course, and makes no return of gratitude, renders no service of love. **[He seeks] happiness in forgetfulness of God**" (COL 200).

- **"Whatever the appearance may be, every life centered in self is squandered.** Whoever attempts to live apart from God is wasting his substance. He is squandering the precious years, squandering the powers of mind and heart and soul, and working to make himself bankrupt for eternity." (COL 200).
- **"The love of God still yearns over the one who has chosen to separate from Him, and He sets in operation influences to bring him back to the Father's house.** The prodigal son in his wretchedness "came to himself." The deceptive power that Satan had exercised over him was broken.... Miserable as he was, **the prodigal found hope in the conviction of his father's love.** It was that love which was drawing him toward home" Romans 2:4; Jeremiah 31:3 (COL 202).
- **"Little did the ... thoughtless youth, as he went out from his father's gate, dream of the ache and longing left in that father's heart.** When he danced and feasted with his wild companions, little did he think of the shadow that had fallen on his home. And now as with weary and painful steps he pursues the homeward way, he knows not that one is watching for his return. But while he is yet 'a great way off' the father discerns his form. **Love is of quick sight.** Not even the degradation of the years of sin can conceal the son from the father's eyes. He 'had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck" in a long, clinging, tender embrace"' (COL 203)
- **"In his restless youth the prodigal looked upon his father as stern and severe. How different his conception of him now!** So those who are deceived by Satan look upon God as hard and exacting. They regard Him as watching to denounce and condemn, as unwilling to receive the sinner so long as there is a legal excuse for not helping him. His law they regard as a restriction upon men's happiness, a burdensome yoke from which they are glad to escape. But he whose eyes have been opened by the love of Christ will behold God as full of compassion. He does not appear as a tyrannical, relentless being, but as a father longing to embrace his repenting son" (COL 204).
- **"Do not listen to the enemy's suggestion to stay away from Christ until you have made yourself better; until you are good enough to come to God. If you wait until then, you will never come.** When Satan points to your filthy garments, repeat the promise of Jesus, 'Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.' John 6:37. Tell the enemy that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin" (COL 205).
- **"If you take even one step toward Him in repentance, He will hasten to enfold you in His arms of infinite love.** His ear is open to the cry of the contrite soul. The very first reaching out of the heart after God is known to Him. **Never a prayer is offered, however faltering, never a tear is shed, however secret, never a sincere desire after God is cherished, however feeble, but the Spirit of God goes forth to meet it.** Even before the prayer is uttered or the yearning of the heart made known, grace from Christ goes forth to meet the grace that is working upon the human soul" (COL 206).
- A new element is introduced into the story, the elder brother. The festivities make him angry and excites his jealousy. "The favor shown the prodigal he regards as an insult to himself. When the father comes out to remonstrate with him, the pride and malignity of his nature are revealed. He dwells upon his own life in his father's house as a round of [unreturned] service, and then places in mean contrast the favor shown to the son just returned. **He makes it plain that his own service has been that of a servant rather than a son. When he should have found an abiding joy in his father's presence, his mind has rested upon the profit to accrue from his circumspect life.** His words show that it is for this he has foregone the pleasures of sin. Now if this brother is to share in the father's gifts, the elder son counts that he himself has been wronged. He grudges his brother the favor shown him" (COL 207).

- **“By the elder son were represented the unrepenting Jews of Christ's day, and also the Pharisees in every age, who look with contempt upon those whom they regard as publicans and sinners.** Because they themselves have not gone to great excesses in vice, they are filled with self-righteousness. Christ met these cavilers on their own ground. Like the elder son in the parable, they had enjoyed special privileges from God. They claimed to be sons in God's house, but they had the spirit of the hireling. They were working, not from love, but from hope of reward. In their eyes, God was an exacting taskmaster. They saw Christ inviting publicans and sinners to receive freely the gift of His grace—the gift which the rabbis hoped to secure only by toil and penance—and they were offended. The prodigal's return, which filled the Father's heart with joy, only stirred them to jealousy” (COL 209)
- **“Self-righteousness not only leads men to misrepresent God, but makes them coldhearted and critical toward their brethren. The elder son, in his selfishness and jealousy, stood ready to watch his brother, to criticize every action, and to accuse him for the least deficiency.** He would detect every mistake, and make the most of every wrong act. Thus he would seek to justify his own unforgiving spirit. Many today are doing the same thing” (COL 210).
- *Read Luke 15:11-32. Preferably let one person read it. Let everyone then put down their Bibles and get the group to reconstruct the passage in their own words. This teaches the group to be careful in quotation Scripture correctly and to use it as the basis of their discussions.*
- **Discussion Questions** *(use only a few). The notes in italics after some of the questions below are for the facilitator, and not to be read out to the group.*
  - Why do you think the younger son wanted to leave home?
  - Do you think the father understood what was likely to happen when he gave the younger son his inheritance? Why do you think he gave it anyway? *(ask one question at a time)*
  - What stages did the boy go through?
  - What caused him to come to his senses?
  - What was his attitude like when he returned to his father?
  - What do you think the father did while his son was away?
  - How does the father treat the son on his return? What does that tell us about the father? *(ask one question at a time)*
  - How do you think the son's perception of the dad changed, now that he was back?
  - What is the difference between a servant and a son? How did the older son act more like a servant than a son? *(ask one question at a time)*
  - Do you think the father loved the younger son more? Why or why not?
  - Do you think the older brother was justified in his behaviour? Why or why not?
  - What did the father want for the older son?
  - Why do you think God's love for 'sinners' often makes 'good' people angry?
  - Who do you think the sons represented?
  - What do you think is the main point of Jesus' story?
- **Application Questions** *(select a few depending on your time. One has to be the I WILL STATEMENT)*
  - Which son do you identify with, if any? Why?
  - To what 'undeserving' person can you extend God's love and forgiveness this week? How?
  - What lessons did you learn from the story that you can apply to your own life?
  - I WILL STATEMENT: Formulate an I will statement in response to what you have discovered in the Word. Let the group's secretary also record these in an A4 notebook. Ensure that everyone gets a chance to give their I WILL STATEMENT. You have to be specific. E.g. "I will visit a friend this week who has recently turned his back

on God. I plan to take him out for a meal, and let him practically experience God's love through me."

**6. Share** (*Purpose: To be witnesses of our faith*)

- Do you have anyone you could share today's lesson with this week? *Be specific.*

**7. Closing prayer**

*Prepared by Shandrell Penniken / Northern Conference*