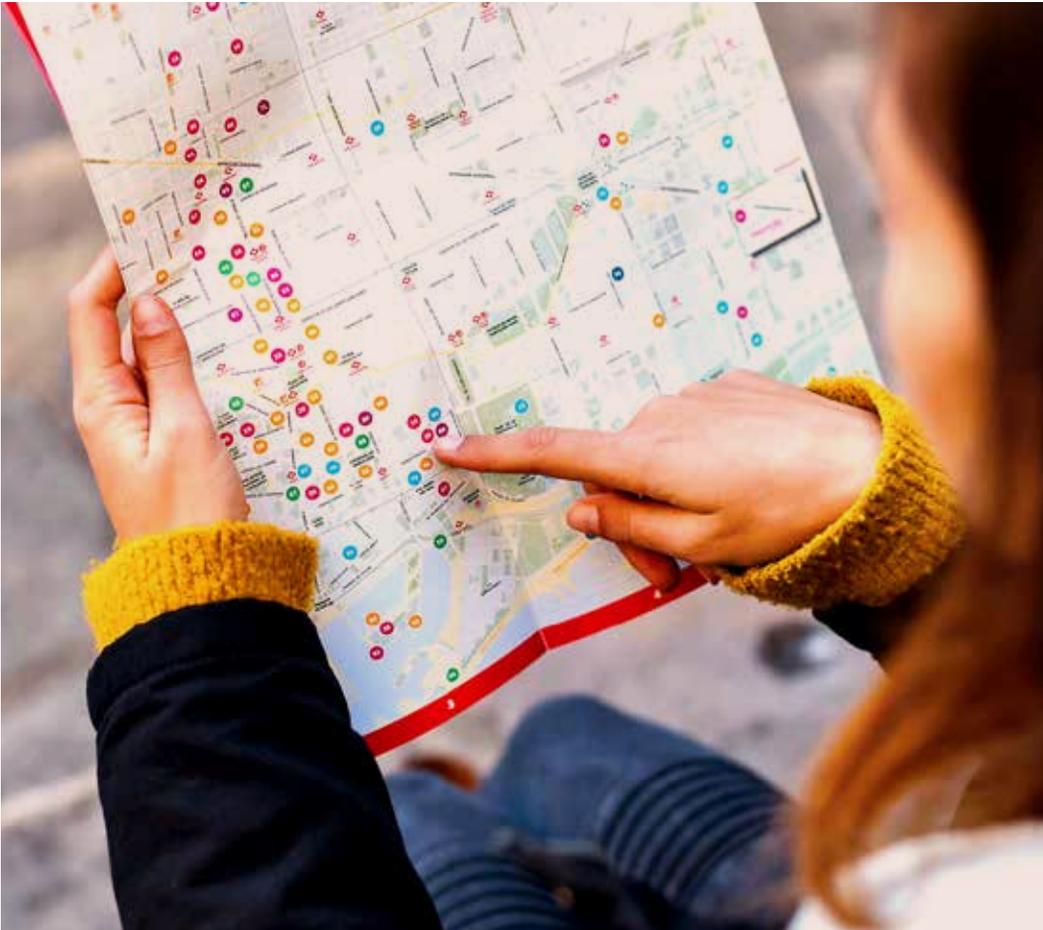


SESSION 2

Lost



QUESTION 1:

What was your most memorable experience being lost?

THE POINT

Without Christ, we are hopelessly lost.

THE PASSAGES

Luke 15:11-14,17-24

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

My brother and I often went deer hunting with our dad. On one trip when I was a teenager, we drove into the woods about an hour before sunrise. It was extremely foggy. As we exited the truck, we took different paths to hunt for the day. The problem was, I chose the wrong path. I walked confidently for twenty minutes before I realized I was lost.

I've been lost in a wholly different—and far more serious—way. And you have been too. We were born lost. Whether we realize it or not, we're lost. Just because we think we're on the right trail doesn't mean we are. We're lost when we're not where we're supposed to be.

But we don't have to stay lost.

“Lostness”—our sin and rebellion against the holy God—is a key theme in Scripture, but God's love for us is an even greater theme. Jesus told a parable that brings these two themes together. We are lost, but we can be found!

Luke 15:11-14

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

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

My father loves to tell stories of the old days when he used paper maps. The folded pamphlet would open up to reveal an entire state, and he would have to study the map for himself to choose the best route to his desired ending location. Now we have GPS. Though GPS can help eliminate wrong turns and missteps, it can't choose the right destination for us. We have to know where we want to go.

In Jesus' parable, the younger son thought he knew where he wanted to go. It was a destination framed with lavish living and focused around money. The high life awaited him. Or so he thought. Far too often we make the same mistake. We have a picture in our minds of what life should look like, the destination where we want to go. Without God's perspective, we don't realize we've chosen the wrong route and the wrong destination.

The destination and plan the younger son had in mind must have felt like a slap in the face for the father. To those first hearing this parable, the son's request for "the portion of goods that falleth to me" surely was shocking. He was not entitled to any inheritance while his father still lived. This was like wishing his father were dead, so that he could have now what he thought he deserved. His father graciously filled his request and gave the younger son his share, which would be at most one-third of the estate. According

to Jewish law, the firstborn son was given a double portion of the estate, so the remaining inheritance was divided among the other children (Deut. 21:17).

DIGGING DEEPER

INHERITANCE LAWS IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Prior to the New Testament period, a man seemingly had the option of distributing his wealth to his heirs while he was still alive, but such a practice was ill-advised. Typically, at the father's death, the older son would have received two-thirds of the father's wealth and the younger son one-third, as the law prescribed. But other considerations would come into play, if the father gifted his property to a son during his (the father's) lifetime. The son would gain the right of possession (the father could not sell the property), but he would not have the right of disposal (a purchaser could take possession of the property only at the father's death). The father also derived profit or benefit gained from the property until his death.

The prodigal son demanded both the right of possession and of disposal. The wording implies he wanted to convert all property or possessions into cash and dissolve his family relationships. In his mind he could no longer live under his

father's roof. The son's request was deplorable but not unthinkable; the father decided to grant his request, though he could have refused it. The father likely calculated the expenses needed to maintain his household (which included himself, his wife, and any unmarried females) to determine the balance available for distribution. Some scholars estimate the prodigal received around 22 percent, far less than what he would have received at the father's death. That was of no consequence, though, to this impatient adventurer, who ignored any moral obligation to his father!

Having taken his share, the prodigal forfeited any claim to the father's estate, as he later recognized. The father would have deeded in a written document the remainder of the estate to the older son, to be his fully at the father's death (Luke 15:31). Also, this document would have given him legal footing to question any significant disposal of property the father might consider, like killing the fattened calf.

Steve Booth, "Inheritance Laws in the First Century," *Biblical Illustrator*, Spring 2014, 86-88.

With his portion in hand, the younger son liquidated his assets, “gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country.” He didn’t stay close to home; he put distance between himself and his father.

He got what—and where—he wanted. He squandered his inheritance on what he thought would satisfy him, but when a famine struck, he had no resources to draw on. It can happen to us too. The things we were seeking or planning on can disappear in a moment, and we find ourselves without resources to stand. Our path of choice is gone and we are lost.

Jesus’ story is pointing to a greater danger: spiritual lostness. We are lost when we choose our own path. We choose to go our own way, do our own thing apart from God. The root of this choice is sin. Culture wants to downplay sin, but behind our efforts to please ourselves is self-centeredness, a choice to do what I want rather than what God wants. And that, plain and simple, is sin. A life apart from God the Father is sin.

QUESTION 2:

Why would someone choose to live apart from God?

Luke 15:17-19

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!
18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,
19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

Those who've read J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy are familiar with the phrase: "Not all who wander are lost."¹ Nice sentiment for Hobbits, but when it comes to the whole of our lives, we don't need to just wander through life. Without intent and purpose grounded in Christ, we do more than wander; we are lost.

The younger son came to that very realization: "he came to himself." At one point, all his wants had been at his disposal, but now he realized he couldn't even meet his needs. He had reached the absolute bottom; he landed work feeding pigs, and to the Jewish crowd hearing this story from Jesus, feeding unclean, forbidden pigs was as low as a person could get. Yet, as despised as the pigs were, even they ate better than this young man.

The younger son discovered just how lost he had become. He saw himself in his current state, filthy and starving, and came to his senses. Only then did he reach the point where he could admit:

- ▶ "I perish with hunger!"
- ▶ "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee."

Coming to his senses was more than just realizing he was lost; it led him to ...

1. Change his mind, and
2. Change his direction.

He was prompted to act. When we see our sin like God sees our sin, it should cause us to come to our senses too. But is seeing our sinful, lost state enough?

Picture six birds perched on a wire. One bird decides to fly away. How many birds are left on the wire? Most of us would probably say five, but the answer is six. I said one bird *decided* to fly away. I never said it actually did.

Coming to our senses and acknowledging our lost, sinful state is important, but it is not enough. *Deciding* to do something is not the same as actually *doing* it. Too many people know they're sinners, but they do nothing about it. When we see our sin as God sees it, it should cause us to turn around and go in a new direction—toward God.

A lot of people know what it means to be spiritually lost, but they don't know what it means to be found. The prodigal son knew he was lost, and he was about to discover what it means to be found.

QUESTION 3:

How did you come to your senses spiritually?

Luke 15:20-24

20 And he arose, and came to his father. 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.

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

22 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:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

The young man in Jesus' parable was truly in a humbled state. He embraced that and decided to return to the father he had abandoned. He could not imagine being accepted as a son again, but he knew that, even if he were nothing more than a hired worker in his father's employ, he would be treated decently.

The father had other plans, however. The father saw him from a distance, as if he had been eagerly watching for his son. He was filled with compassion. His love for his prodigal son was so intense, he shed all fatherly dignity and ran to his son. For the wayward son, the shock of his father's action could only be surpassed by his

words. Because the son he thought was dead had come home, the father made it a celebration. He called for the fanciest robe, a ring, and sandals. His dress was to reflect he was a son of his father. The father also called for a feast. This was to be a celebration.

When we awaken from our sin and return to our Father, He is ready to welcome us with open arms. His welcome has nothing to do with any wealth, abilities, or accomplishments we claim as assets. Any righteous acts on our part “are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). We are as destitute as the prodigal son. At the same time, no amount of rebellion or sin in “a far country” diminishes the love and embrace of our heavenly Father.

But it doesn’t stop there. Just as the father did more than just let his wayward son back in the house, God the Father does more than just save us from death. He saves us for life—a full, rich, abundant life (John 10:10).

QUESTION 4:

What does this parable teach us about the heart of God?

Surely the younger son wouldn’t just sit outside, thankful for His Father’s acceptance, but make no steps to enjoy all his father had for him. Yet too many Christians do that; they’re thankful God saved them many years ago, but they do nothing to embrace and grow in their relationship with the Father. They’ve allowed the abundant life in Christ to be clouded by the thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Often times the enemy seeks to get our eyes off Christ, or he attempts to cloud our vision of what life really should be.

Salvation is a one-time occurrence but it is also a daily experience. We are called to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12). We are not working to gain salvation, but similar to a person who works out to strengthen his muscles, we are working to grow in the salvation we have in Christ.

It's a call to grow in Christ and move ever deeper into the abundant life in Christ.

The “far country” will still call to us. In those moments, we would be wise to remind ourselves just how lost we once were, and what we gained when Christ found us and saved us. Let's continue to work out the salvation we have in Christ, choosing to live each day for the kingdom of God.

The Father is waiting for us to come to Him and live the abundant life in Christ. He desires to put a robe on our backs, place rings on our fingers, and hold a feast in our honor. He wants to celebrate with us that we once were lost but now we are found.

QUESTION 5:

How can our group facilitate and celebrate people turning to God?

ENGAGE

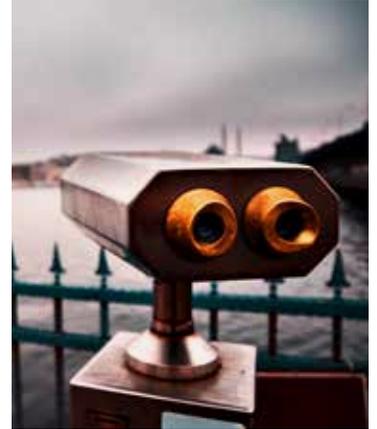
In the space below, draw a “map” that reflects how you wandered from God, the point where He found you, and what the journey has looked like since then.

LIVE IT OUT

The abundant love and grace of our Father are shocking. To move from “lost” to “found” is amazing. How will you let that truth be seen in your life?

- ▶ **Seek God.** Perhaps you need to “come home” to God. Confess to God any destructive behaviors or thoughts and come to Christ.
- ▶ **Forgive.** When was the last time you ran with reckless abandon to forgive someone? Maybe it’s time to forgive even if it seems strange and shocking to everyone else around. Remember to forgive others as God forgives.
- ▶ **Reach out.** Reach out to someone who is lost and at rock bottom. Point them to the loving, restoring arms of God. Let them see the love of the Father in you.

“Lost” doesn’t have to define our lives. A loving Father is waiting.



END NOTES

1 J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: One Volume* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002), 215.