

The Lost Younger Son | When a Son Forgets He's a Son | Luke 15:11-24

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[0 : 00] Oh, this is a Frobragh tune, isn't it? This is, what, third day? Oh, sorry. Just enjoying! The music. That's like nostalgic all of a sudden. You know, when you get a tune, you're like, oh, I remember. I remember where I was when I first heard that tune, right? I won't tell you where I was. I might get stoned. No, it wasn't the pub because that's a Christian tune.

But it was the city that we do not speak of. Wow. Anyway, let's talk about being compassionate and welcoming lost children home, Luke chapter 15.

So, Luke is in this chapter. We've been in this chapter like four weeks. I think we've probably got another two weeks in this chapter, maybe. I was just kind of thinking last night that maybe we're going to be here for another two weeks. And so, in this chapter, Jesus is addressing two groups of people. You'll see in verse one and verse two, you've got the tax collectors and the sinners group one. So, these are a group of people who knew that they were lost, right? So, in that, you've got, you know, the tax collectors who are hated amongst the Jews because they had gone to the Romans and sold themselves to the Romans and were allowing the Romans to persecute their own people.

You had sinners. That group extended from everyone, from prostitutes to people who were sick. Sinners, right? In the mind of Pharisees and scribes. That's group one. They knew that they were lost. And then group two, the group who didn't think that they were lost. And they were the religious guys, the super religious guys, the Pharisees and the scribes. And turns out that in verses one and two, the Pharisees and the scribes, group two, were grumbling about how Jesus was accepting group one, right? And so, he then launches into this parable. And we've made a point of saying this is one parable in four settings, okay? One parable, four scenes. One parable, four stories. He's telling us one main point of what does it mean to be lost? And then the assumption is, what does it mean to be lost?

Are we lost? How lost are we? How do we reach those people who are lost? And we see each time we have a group of lost people, they get lost a different way. And the way to restore them or to have them found is a different way. So, for example, this morning or a few weeks ago, we saw the parable of the story of the lost sheep. And the shepherd goes after the sheep. This morning, we see the story of the younger son. The father does not go looking for the lost son. He waits until the lost son returns.

[3 : 20] Okay? Lostness is different. And how the person who is seeking the lost goes after the lost to be found is completely different, all right? And so that's kind of the learning for us as a church, is that we all experience lostness in various different ways. Even as saved people, we can still be challenged to be lost. And then we all have people that we know who are lost. But going after them so that they may be found is a different way that we do that. And so this is what Jesus is now doing. So let's just bow our hearts real quickly. Ask God to help us. This is a super challenging passage. I'm going to try and not talk until two o'clock. We need help. Father, thank you for your word. Lord, we want to come to it with anticipation, Lord, that you are going to do something with us this morning.

Lord, we pray that it will be your spirit that speaks to us. Lord, we pray, Lord, for our minds to just be focused on what he is saying and our hearts ready to receive. Lord, we pray that this word would be the implanted word, the seed that takes root in our lives. Lord, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So this third story is not just about lost people, but about a lost son.

And you'll notice that as we've been moving through this chapter, the value of that which is lost has been increasing. So we started with a lost sheep, just one in a hundred, right? Moderate value. I

mean, I don't know how much sheep fetch these days, but moderate value. And then we moved to the lost coin and we noticed that that was one in ten. More value. And we talked about it being the headdress, the dowry that the woman would wear waiting for marriage. And then this morning we come to the lost son, one in two, priceless. And so this is a story about what happens. And make note of this.

This is a story about what happens when a son no longer believes he is a son. Do you get that? So each time we've been looking at this lostness, the sheep is lost, but experiences a loss of belonging, no longer in the flock. The issue is for those people who want to go and find that sheep, let's just say the church, because that is our job. The issue for the church is to bring that person back into a sense of belonging.

[6 : 07] That's how we go and find those people. The lost coin was lost through no fault of its own. It was found lost, right? And there was a restoration of the value on that coin. The coin had lost its value. It was lost, experienced a sense of loss of value. This morning we come to the lost son, the lost younger son. And the lost younger son is lost, but he is experiencing a loss of identity.

He no longer believes he is a son. And before we get into the text, I really want to highlight that. Because oftentimes we come to this story and our sole takeaway, like our only takeaway, is about how rebellious the son is, right? And he is. There's no getting away from that.

Let's just name that, all right? But there's always a story beneath the story, right? There's always a struggle beneath the sin. Jerry Bridges would talk about a sin beneath the sin, a hidden sin. And in the same way the lost sheep didn't abandon the flock, and the lost coin didn't just jump down the crack in the floorboards, there are stories behind the stories. And here, the younger son finds himself lost because he loses his identity. And without question, like there is a series of sinful acts that have led him to that place. But the fundamental problem underneath the sin is that this son believes he isn't a son. When we move on next week and talk about the older son, the older son isn't suffering from a loss of belonging or a loss of value or a loss of identity. He's suffering from a loss of security because he looks at his younger brother and he goes, I've never done any of that. And because I've never done any of that, I thought I was safe. I thought I was secure. And now, look, the father has given him all of that blessing. What about me?

And he's struggling with security. Like my whole life, I thought I could stand on the rock of good works. And all of a sudden, that's been removed. Now, what am I standing on? You see?

And next week is the hardest one for us Christians, because that's what we do all the time. Look at me, I'm in church. I'm even wearing my shirt and it's a hot sunny day. Surely God's got to favor me above that. Those people who wear flip-flops to church.

[8 : 37] Sorry if anybody's wearing flip-flops to church. I did have a quick scan down. That's our issue, isn't it? We've talked about loads of times about we live in a meritocracy. God's going to bless me. Why? Because I'm good.

Well, come next week. Or you may be too frightened to come next week. Jesus addresses that. So, we know in the story, and Joseph told us the story this morning, and basically, we could have just closed the service and we'd been done, right? But we know the story, and we see it highlighted in the text, that in verse 12, he, and we will walk through it, don't panic. In verse 12, he takes his inheritance. In verse 13, he leaves home. In verse 14, he wastes everything. And then finally, he comes to himself, and he comes up with a plan to return home, and he prepares a speech. Now, I don't know if you ever did that. I was a kid when you were in trouble. I did it all the time, right? This is what, this is exactly what I'm going to say when dad comes home. And he says this in verse 19, I am no longer worthy to be called his son. Like, that's killer, isn't it? He doesn't say, you know, in the center of his lostness, he doesn't say, I made mistakes. He doesn't say,

I need to go home. He says, I am no longer a son. And this is what rebellion does. It doesn't just break rules. It rewrites identity. Like, if you've ever walked with someone for so long, where they find themselves so far from home, spiritually, you'll know that that is a problem.

That actually, identity is the problem. Sin doesn't just make us guilty, it makes us forget who we are. And actually, that's the deeper tragedy of the younger son. He is still alive, but he no longer lives as a son. And we can all identify with that, can't we?

And so as we go through the text, keep that in mind, because this isn't the first time, and as we've seen this, Jesus is just retelling Old Testament stories. This isn't the first time in Scripture we come up with this story. The Bible repeatedly flips expectations about sons.

[10:56] The younger son is chosen over the older son. The older son gets overlooked. Grace consistently disrupts human order. Like, you think of the pattern. Isaac, the younger brother, was chosen over Ishmael, the older brother. Jacob, the younger brother, was chosen over Esau, the older brother. Joseph over his older brothers. David over his older brothers. That is not an accident. And Jesus isn't just going, hmm, let me come up with a story. This is a story that the Pharisees and scribes would go, oh, I've heard that story before. God is teaching something that the Pharisees and scribes in this story didn't understand. And that is this, that inheritance in his kingdom is never earned by position, performance, or seniority. It's received by grace.

And that's why this story is so powerful. And so the story, it's going to be on the screen for you note-takers. The story is set in three scenes. Yes. It's set in three scenes. I panic at a moment. I was on the wrong Bible study.

I've done that before. So... I actually did.

Rejection of the father is number one. The plan to survive, number two. And face-to-face with grace, number three. Right? So the outline is what's called an inverted parallelism. You're welcome. If you're not familiar with that, this is so interesting. And I'm going to proper geek you out with it. Okay? So it's called a chiasm or inverted parallelism. It's where A answers A.

[12:49] I know you're none the wiser, but we'll walk through this. Right? So... And then B is answered by B. C is answered by... You're getting it. Right? So A... If you look at your Bible, A is in verse 12. Okay? And A is where you see the idea of death. Like he's asking for his inheritance. Right? And this is eventually answered in verse 24 all the way at the end where death is answered by resurrection. Right? Because the father says, this is my son who was... He was dead.

He wasn't just lost. He was dead. So the beginning of our story, we have death. And at the end of our story, A is answered by A1, resurrection. This was my son. Now he's alive, resurrection. Great, isn't it? It's not the other way around. Okay? For the Christian, that's really important.

He doesn't start with resurrection and end in death. For the Christian story, it's death ends in resurrection. Amen? So then we have... After A comes... There you go. You could all go to seminary.

You're so good at this. So in B, all is lost. Right? The son has squandered his property and reckless living, it says there in verse 13. And this is eventually answered by the return of B in verse 23, where everything that he has is restored to him.

Section C follows section B. So in verse 15, we see the rejection of the father. And this is answered in verse 20 with the acceptance of the son. And then D introduces... D comes after C. Just checking.

[14:48] I know it's Sunday. It's like I'm checking out of education for a week, right? So D comes after C. And D introduces the problem and then the corresponding solution. Now, although this is a really, really common way to tell a story, I don't think it's accidental that Jesus is telling the story this way. He could just tell the story so that the climax comes in verse 24.

But the climax doesn't come in 24. The actual climax comes in verse 19. Because the climax of the story is right in the middle. It's at the peak of where the tension comes. And the climax of the story, verses 19 or 16 through 17, is actually broken into three further steps. Where in verse 16, the son realizes the danger that he is in. Sorry, four steps. The son realizes the danger he is in.

Verse 17, he is convinced or convicted about his life. Then verse 18, he confesses his sin. And then in verse 19, he brings us to the real problem. And he says, I'm no longer worthy to be called a son. And that is the bit where the Pharisees and scribes' jaws drop on the ground and are standing in astonishment because this son is this son's confession.

So that's where we're going. Is that okay? Good. Let's go back to verse 11. Let's walk through the text. So he said, and so he said, this is Jesus. He said, another story. There was a man who had two sons.

[16:26] Now just stop there because actually this story is about one, is not just about one son, but two sons. And we'll see that in conclusion next week. The older son represents something just as dangerous as the younger.

He represents not rebellion, but entitlement. He represents not recklessness, but resentment. And again, this is where the biblical pattern sharpens, because almost in every major two sons story in the Bible, the older son struggles with grace. There's a struggle of entitlement.

And so you think of, you know, Cain, he resents Abel, right? Esau despises Jacob. Joseph's brothers reject him. I mean, they sell him. That's how rejection works.

Even Israel as a nation repeatedly resists God's surprising choice of the younger. And here the older son can't rejoice.

He can't rejoice that grace has been given to his brother. Because entitlement always struggles with generosity, doesn't it? Like if you've ever spoken to anyone about, you know, what happens with, you know, parental estates and inheritance and wills and things like that, some of that stuff can be pretty messy.

[17 : 59] And the younger son here in our text says, I am no longer worthy. And the older son says what? I have always been worthy. And both are lost.

But just in different ways. And so Jesus tells this story of two sons. And we'll deal with the first son this morning. And he says, the younger of them in verse 12, And in the Hebrew version of the story, this phrase is rather wordy.

And it is so for good reason. The word property isn't really inheritance. It's the Greek word actually, *usia*, which is not the normal word we would use for inheritance.

It's the idea that in first century, and especially actually in many cultures, still to some extent in our own today, is that the idea of an inheritance is used then to look after the family or to look after the family estate.

You receive that. And as an older son, you receive twice as much, right? You receive it to keep that property going for future generations. They didn't think about themselves.

[19 : 16] They thought about their children, their future grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This isn't that word. This is really about the idea of I want money.

It's not I want inheritance, I want property. It's not that I want the responsibility of holding on to this inheritance for future generations. This is I want you to liquidate this property for me so I can go and do what I want to do.

And so this is a request that goes against every social rule that existed in the first century.

All right? The idea that a son would request the division of the state by a living father was unthinkable.

But to take that and then liquidate it, sell it. Because if you follow the story through, he doesn't have his property anymore. He sold his property.

[20 : 25] Because he then goes and spends the money in a faraway country. I'm getting ahead of myself. He doesn't have that property anymore. And so such a request in village society would only mean one thing.

And we highlighted it in the outline there. It highlights only one thing. It's that the younger son is impatient for his father's death. The father is in the way of the son's plans and the son wants to get on with it.

Like in short, he wants his father to die. Now, I will say this at this moment just to make sure that we're not leaving the older son out and painting the older son as being some kind of like hero to the story.

The older son isn't innocent in any of this. He doesn't come to his father's defense. On the contrary, the older son wants the inheritance as much as his brother does. And we'll see that next week. And so we have a father with two sons who both want him dead.

That's tragic, isn't it? And the shocking thing actually is that not that they want him dead. It's that the father grants them their wishes.

[21 : 38] The text says that he divided his property between them. Like he doesn't say, all right, we'll get some lawyers.

We'll carve up the property. You can take yours and we'll keep the rest for a later date. He divided the property between the two sons. The older son is in on this.

And again, just as a side note, the Pharisees and scribes in hearing about two brothers fighting over inheritance, again, wouldn't be lost on them because immediately they would recall the story of Jacob and Esau.

And so whilst Jesus is giving a parable as lost sinners, he's also retelling Israel's history. Both Jacob and the prodigal are the younger sons. They both receive their inheritance through dishonorable means.

Jacob deceives his father, if you remember that story. And the prodigal insults his father and so on and so on. We don't really have time to get into that. Otherwise, we will be here until two o'clock. [22 : 42] So look, moving to the second scene. So the first scene is this rejection of the father. The second scene is the somewhat longer scene.

And the second scene is the plan to survive. So I don't know whether that's true of you, but it's certainly been true of me in my life.

When you say to God, actually, I don't think your plans are going to work out for me. I think my plan is much, much better because I've thought about this.

Actually, very quickly, very quickly in my experience, the moment that you do that, you're in survival mode. And you have to, if you've done that, you have to come up with a plan.

And so we read in verse 13 that not many days later, the younger son gathered all that he had and took a journey into a far country. So he doesn't want the land. He doesn't care about the property.

[23 : 41] The son is moving around the village quickly, trying to find someone to buy his portion of the land, to sell it cheaply. And the word gathered literally means to liquidate, means to turn into cash.

Right? Right? So there's a cash savers there on the corner of Shirley High Street. Yeah?

And he's gone in there and he's like, I've got this property. What can you give to me? Give for me.

What's it called? Cash converters. Right? So he's liquidated everything that he's had.

And he's walked out with a wadge of shekels or whatever they had and denarii. And he's on his way. And the disdain of the entire village would have been considerable.

And so he leaves town before anyone realizes what he's done. And he took a journey into a far country. Now, where exactly the son went, we don't know.

[24 : 42] And I find it quite hilarious that there are commentaries that dedicate pages and pages as to where the son went.

And the great irony of this is that this is a story, not a real life event. Do you know what I'm saying? But I know someone's going to ask me afterwards.

You can infer from the text. And actually, this does lay some weight actually into what's going through this young man's mind.

You can infer from the text that Jesus is referring to an area that was well known for raising pigs.

Because the Jewish laws around pigs were that the only people keeping pigs were Gentiles.

You think about what you know about the Old Testament law. There's no way Jews are going to go, I'm going to become a pig farmer. And so you can see on this map.

[25 : 48] You can't see on this map. That is so small. I am so sorry. All right. If I had one of those things, I would show you. Maybe you will put it up later on and you can see it.

So you can see. You can't see. There's three. There's an area called Decapolis. And they're the ten cities of the Roman Empire. There's three towns.

One to the north. One in the middle. And one at the bottom. Let's just go with that. And they were all towns that were well known. That whole region was well known for pig rearing. It was where they raised pigs for the Roman Empire.

Or for the Roman soldiers, at least, were in that area. Pork was almost like a national Roman dish.

Right? They had no problem with scoffing down some sausages and some chops.

Okay? And so the question is, why would it? If you go to Matthew chapter 8, Jesus commands the demons to go into swines. Right?

[26 : 49] After he had crossed over the Galilee into the area of the land of the Gadarenes. And the question is often, why would there be pigs in a Jewish area? Well, it wasn't a Jewish area.

It was a Gentile area. They're raising pigs for the Romans. Right? And so, actually, some of you, Paul, and Laurie's not here, but some of us went to, actually, this city here, Goressa, which is one of those cities, is Jerush.

And you can go there today. And there's areas where you can see where they used to keep all the pigs. Right? And so, I don't know why I told you all of that, only to say that this is a problem for a Jew going to an area where they raised pigs.

And the Pharisees and the scribes would certainly be sweating over this little detail. And so, the text says that in that place, he squandered his property in reckless living.

So, the issue seems to be that his inheritance had gone to Gentiles. Right? So, he liquidated his dad's property.

[28 : 04] He'd taken the money. He'd gone to a Gentile area. And he'd spent all of his inheritance and given his inheritance to Gentiles. Right? Now, there is a bigger arc of storytelling from the Old Testament about the Jewish and Gentile relationships and the big plan of God.

We're not going to get into that. We don't have time. But look, we don't understand the ramifications, really, of all of this. But in that culture, what had happened next was huge for the family.

As word had come back to the family and to the village, the elders of the village, what was happening at this time, the elders of the village would call the father and the older brother. And in front of the whole village, the assembled crowd, they would perform a ceremony.

And they would take a large pot. And the large pot would represent the younger son. And at the feet of the father would smash this pot.

And they would pronounce *kazaza*, which is literally cut off. And in some circles, they still do this today. And then from that moment on, the son would not be able to return to the village.

[29 : 13] The father and the older son would be outcasts. They would still be allowed in that place. But they certainly wouldn't be able to be drawn into the kind of the social part of the village.

And the elders and the villagers would line the main route into the village. And every time, or not every time, but oftentimes when the son or the father would be returning from the farm or whatever they were going to, the elders and the village people would turn their backs on the father, *kazaza*. It's to be cut off. Now, none of that is in the story. That's just a cultural kind of reference to what's going on at the time.

So the younger son is off squandering his money, giving his money to Gentiles, living in a pig farm. And the father, because of the actions of the younger son, has been cut off.

Now, imagine the heart of the father. Like just completely broken. Completely humiliated. And yet, we'll see that even through, even though the word is being given, and then, you know, everyone has given up on the son, the father is still waiting.

[30 : 34] He's still hoping. And still patiently longing for his return. And so, verse 14 says that when he had spent, and the idea is, again, squandered everything, a severe famine arose in the country, and he began to be in need.

And so, again, we see a retelling of the Old Testament story, right? So, particularly the story of Joseph. If he had, this young man had spent all of his money, and he can't even, he can't even glean from the fields, because there was a famine.

And so, the younger son now faces a dilemma. Without money, without the ability to return home, which is often the question, you know, why don't he just go home? He can't go home. He's cut off. He, verse 15 says that he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

And he became so hungry. Verse 16 says that he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate. And so, the pods are just literally the throwaway husks that surrounded the food.

That's the pod. It was, if you like, it was the potato peelings.

[31 : 56] Like, unless you're strange, you're not eating potato peelings, are you? Right? And so, this is what he's desiring to eat. Very, just very, very meager.

Because additionally, there was a famine. And the text implies that even he tried sitting on the road begging for food. The text implies that because Jesus says that no one gave him anything.

His despair had reached a new death. And so, in verse 17, it says that when he came to himself, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger?

And the idea of bread, you understand, is a staple food in the village. If you have bread, you know, bread with every meal, right? And you're like, the bread comes out, and you're like, oh, more bread? You know, bread for starters, bread for mains, bread for dessert, right?

And some people will absolutely love that. But bread, bread is defined, the villages would define bread as, or villages were defined as the people who eat bread.

[33 : 04] It's just a staple. And in Middle Eastern cultures, again, life itself is described as eating with bread. Right? That's life. What is life?

It's eating bread. I mean, that's why Jesus, in the Lord's Prayer, said he prayed for what? He prayed for bread. He didn't pray for steaks. He prayed for bread, not food.

And so this son says, my father's hired servants has more than enough bread. He says, rather than die, he would go home and get at least a job as a hired servant in his dad's house, however shameful that might be.

At least he would be alive. And so he says in verse 18, I will arise. And I love that. I will arise. And I will go to my father.

And I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. Recalling the words of Pharaoh to Moses after the ninth plague. Do you remember? Exodus chapter 10. Pharaoh hastily called Moses and Aaron.

[34 : 12] He said, I have sinned against the Lord God and against you. And so in that respect, Pharaoh wasn't repenting because we know the story, right? He was serving his own interests.

And actually, the term I will arise is closely related to the idea of resurrection. And so that becomes important in verse 24. So at this point, he thinks the youngest son thinks that he can accomplish resurrection on his own.

Right? It's just a plan. Like it's a spreadsheet. Like I know what I'm doing. I've got a plan. This is what I'm going to do. I will arise. I will become born again.

I will be replaced back to my father's house. But this time, it's just going to be as a servant. And then he says in verse 19, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. That's the climax of the whole story.

I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. That was his plan. He's going to go back to his dad and think that that was going to fly with his dad.

[35 : 13] And if you're a dad, and I guess probably if you're a mom too, you know that that's not going to fly. But the son's spiritual position, his understanding was so far removed.

The rebellion had so far set in. He was like, I know that I'm not going to be accepted. Maybe, just maybe, my dad will give me a job. And I just want to remind you at that point that Jesus is telling this story to the lawmakers.

And actually, the younger brother in the story, again, he doesn't really see the real issue. The real issue isn't a broken law.

And we often read this story as that. That, you know, he squandered his money. Like, how dare you? You've been given all of this, you know, shameful.

And we sometimes read the story of that. But the real issue isn't a broken law. It's a broken relationship. They don't understand, and the younger son doesn't understand at this point, that he's not breaking the law of God.

[36 : 17] Well, he is, but that's not the problem. The problem is the breaking of the father's heart. And so in those words in verse 19, we discover that real issue. That this isn't just regret.

He isn't just saying, look how far I've come. Like, look at where I am. This is identity collapse. He isn't simply saying, I made a mistake, as if behavior can be corrected and life can be resumed. He's not saying that, is he? He's not saying, you know what? I made a mistake. I'm going to go back to my dad. I'm going to explain it to my dad. I'm going to explain it. I was immature and hasty and greedy. And, you know, maybe, just maybe, things will be better.

And life will go back to normal. Well, life doesn't go back to normal, does it? I mean, if you've made life decisions that have really turned out to be really terrible life decisions, you know that life doesn't go back to normal.

But the younger son goes a little bit deeper than guilt. Into something that's far more devastating. He says, and this is key, he says, I am no longer who I was.

[37 : 27] I'm no longer who I was. I was a son. But I'm no longer a son. And in this respect, sin has not only taken his money and his dignity, it's taken his name.

He no longer speaks as a son because he no longer believes he is a son. This is what rebellion always does. It doesn't just move you away from the father. That's one thing.

It rewrites how you see yourself in relationship to him. Like, God will never accept me now because I've sinned. Like, that's nowhere in the Bible.

Jesus said in Luke chapter 19, I have come to seek and save the lost, the people who need saving. But somehow, our rebellion and the enemy gives us a completely different identity.

And once that relationship is severed with the heart of the father, shame fills that vacuum and begins to speak louder than the truth.

[38 : 37] And what was once a place he called home now becomes foreign to him. And what was once a father becomes a figure that he now needs to fear.

It's his boss. And this son doesn't understand what he has done and what it really means. He has not so far faced the fact that he has broken the father's heart.

And so with that in mind, look at how the son now comes face to face with grace. And now takes place on the road just outside the village.

Verse 20, he says, Do you love that?

Like, what has the father been doing all this time? Has he been doing the shepherd thing, going out looking for him? No. Has he been doing the woman thing, sweeping, finding out? No. What has he been doing?

[39 : 41] Waiting. That's harder than going looking, isn't it? Now, I think the only, like, the question is, like, do you think that the father was watching out for him?

Like, that's the only conclusion, isn't it? That every morning his father would walk to the little hill outside his village and look for his son in the hope that his son would return.

Like, I wish my prayer life was like that. Do you know what I'm saying? Like, you can pray and then you can pray with anticipation. And praying with anticipation is a lot harder than just praying.

Every morning he had gone out. Every afternoon he had come back empty. Empty arms, empty heart. But this morning, this morning was different. As he looks out and there in the distance is this unmistakable figure of his son.

And it says that he felt compassion. He didn't say, oh, goody, I've got an extra hired servant coming my way. He felt compassion.

[40 : 57] And he ran. And he embraced him. And he kissed him. Just as a side note, I know time has already gone.

One of the convictions that I've had for the last couple of years is how ready we are. How ready I am. How ready we are as a church to welcome in the lost.

It comes from the book of Judges. Buy me a coffee one day. I'll explain it. The Lord gave me a real, real conviction about how ready we are. And here, I feel that same conviction.

This man, this father, he ran and embraced and he kissed him. If his father was just sat on the veranda drinking his olive juice, he wasn't, that's what they drink.

He wasn't ready. He wouldn't have been ready to go out and meet his son. Right? He was praying with anticipation that God was going to do something. Right?

[42 : 03] Like I explained this to my friend a few years ago. I was asked to pray at this big thing. And I said, look, my conviction is if we're going to pray as a people of God, we should at least stand and anticipate that God is going to do something.

Like we say, oh, Lord, would you be present here? And we sit down and we're like, oh, just be present here. Like if I'm at a bus stop or a train station, what am I doing? I'm standing, I'm waiting for the bus.

Why? Because I'm anticipating the bus is going to arrive. Like simple, isn't it? My conviction is as a person, as a church, how ready are we to receive the lost?

You can just think about that and go and think about that this afternoon. But also, can I suggest that this action by the father absolutely ruined the son.

This is so far from what the son expected. Having pronounced Kazaza over him, he's probably expecting to have to walk along the road of shame himself. To take a deep breath as he knocks on the door.

[43 : 17] I wait, no one's home. And wait there for several hours or whatever it may be. Maybe he's expecting the villagers to come out of their house one by one, lining the road, turning their backs on him, a long and lonely walk.

He didn't expect to see his father running to him. The word running means running in the Greek. And actually, there's a competitive element. It means he raced towards him as if he wanted to be first. And that wasn't done.

Like in the Middle East. Like you don't run anywhere. Especially if men don't run anywhere. It's slow and dignified. Thank you very much. That's the way it should be. You ain't running from anything.

But the father raises up his roads to bare his legs. He runs down the road. Humiliation isn't on his mind. Reconciliation is on his mind. And now the father races down the road regardless of the cost and embraces him and kisses him.

[44 : 31] And the Greek is, you'll love this, the Greek is that he kisses him and he kisses him and he kisses him again and again and again and again and again until his son says, That's enough, Dad!

And then he turns, still clinging on to him, and notice that now the son isn't walking alone. He's walking with his father back to his house. Isn't that what Jesus does for us?

He bears our guilt and our shame. Bearing the shame and humiliation of back's turn, being cut off, shunned himself. And then he arrives at the house.

And look, the son, would you notice the son is rendered absolutely speechless. Verse 21, the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

And do you notice that what he eventually said wasn't what he planned to say? The son is so distraught by this overwhelming display of love that he's rendered speechless with his mouth quivering because grace is amazing.

[45 : 45] And feeling so low. And yet at the same time, so high, this paradox elevated to the clouds. The compassion of the father traumatizes him to the point where he just puts himself at the mercy of the father.

And accepts to be found just as he is without excuse. And instead of negotiating the son's identity, the end of the story tells us that he restores it.

The father didn't say, well, you know, you can work part time. Or you've got to prove yourself. He's restored. Verse 24, for, look at this, for this my son. Do you love that? He didn't say this was my son, past tense.

But this, my son, present tense. And this is obviously the gospel moment, isn't it? Because grace does not meet us halfway up the moral ladder.

[47 : 03] It meets us in the place where our identity has collapsed and restores what we no longer believe is possible. And then as if that isn't enough, let's just close out the story.

Verse 22, the father said to his servants, and there's irony there, right? He said to his servants, quick, bring the best robe. That would have been the father's robe, his own robe.

Put it on him, signifying sonship restored. Put a ring on his hand, most likely the signet ring of the house. And shoes on his feet. You see how far the son had gone? Servants don't wear shoes.

Sons wear shoes. And bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let us eat and celebrate. For this, my son, was dead and is alive again.

Bringing back the idea of resurrection for verse 18. He was lost and is found. And they began to celebrate. And again, we learn that God not only seeks for the lost, but he rejoices when they are found.

[48 : 10] And the contrast of the grumbling Pharisees and scribes. This is the third time. Each story, verse 7, verse 10, verse 32.

And then here, so four times in total. Ends in the same way with divine joy. And then notice the rejoicing is public.

There's something in the nature of joy that is meant to overflow to others. And that's why worship should be such a profound experience, right? When we were singing gospel-centered songs together, there is something powerful about collective joy.

And so, this story is cut off at this point in verse 24. As Jesus then goes on to tell us another story in verse 25.

Don't panic. We're leaving that till next week. Let's pray. Father, thank you for your word. Lord, thank you that we were once lost, but now found.

[49 : 20] Thank you, Lord, that you show us that lostness is maybe just different from each one. And how you go after is different from each one.

And how you've called us to go after is different from each one. Lord, we want to thank you for your generous heart to us, Lord. Your joy over us. Lord, thank you that you have poured grace on us.

And Lord, we want to pray for all of the lost younger sons this morning. The lost younger sons and daughters. Lord, we can say that it breaks our heart, Lord, but we know that it breaks yours more.

And so, we pray this morning that you would bring them home. Give us patience while you do that work.

Lord, sometimes that work can be, well, sometimes it's a secret work that we don't know about.

[50 : 29] Lord, sometimes there is a work that is being done in the dark and broken places. Lord, we pray that that work would continue, Lord, that we would give you.

Just we would acknowledge your authority and sovereignty over that. Give us the patience and the faith to know that you are the one who's going out and seeking and saving the lost.

Lord, we pray that we would be so caught up with the things of this world.

Lord, we pray that we wouldn't be ready. That when they do return home, that we wouldn't have a celebration. We pray, Lord, that there would be.

Lord, we pray that it would be joyous and overflowing and divine and public. And so, Lord, we pray for all of the lost youngers.

[51 : 36] And Lord, we pray, Lord, for the parts of our hearts that are also lost youngers. The parts of our hearts that think that we can go our own way, do our own thing, come up with our own plan.

Maybe we've lost a little bit of our own identity. We don't really know who we are. And we say again by faith that we are your children. We are your sons and daughters. And you've made us so.

We're no longer slaves, Paul says, but we are sons. So, Lord, we thank you, Lord, for that. And we pray that each and every day we'd learn to live in that reality. That your grace isn't something to be abused, Lord, but it is something to be wondered at.

And so, Lord, we thank you again, Lord, for the work you've done here and done with us and doing with us. And we pray, Lord, as Joseph prayed this morning, Lord, for a revival, Lord, not only of this city, Lord, and in our families, but also in our own hearts, Lord.

Lord, that revival where, you know, the son said, I will arise, Lord, we pray we would be able to say I will arise, but in your strength. Because you have risen us.

[52 : 46] You have raised us. And so, Lord, as we sing this last song, we pray that our joy may abound, Lord, knowing that we may not see the outcome of your work, but we want to see your work.

And we want to be reminded of the small things that you're doing, however difficult and however sometimes unknown they are. Lord, we we place our trust and faith in you that you are still working. Lord, and that you will bring about a verse 24 that says, this is my son. He was dead and now is alive. Lord, we pray that over our loved ones.

We pray that over the people of this city. Lord, that people would come to know the fact that they they can be alive in you. Lord, we ask this in Jesus name.

Amen. Amen.