



**This Is Our Story**

# Welcome

Emmanuel Faith Church Family!

We are so glad that you have joined us on this journey! We are looking forward to exploring our own stories in light of the most important and impactful story of all: the story of God's redemptive work through his son, Jesus.

Over the next six weeks we will dive into and explore Luke 15:11-32, the story of the Prodigal Son. This story, or parable, is arguably the most famous parable that Jesus told. It's notable because it resonates with our souls; Jesus is telling OUR stories too.

We will spend focused time as a church remembering the story we are a part of and invite others into that story. We will seek to renew our vision of what it means to be human, what it means to live in the way of Jesus with the heart of Jesus, and how this is the mission of the church.

This booklet contains resources and opportunities to take notes during the weekly sermon, engage in a Life Group through study questions, hear daily devotionals from various writers (the Daily Fill), and experience sweet time with Jesus through weekly spiritual practices.

We are excited about what God will do in our lives individually and as a community through this study. We invite you to join us on this journey as we relook at our own stories and boldly invite others into the joy of the transformation that God is bringing about in each of our lives.

Grace + Peace,

**RYAN PAULSON**

*Lead Pastor*

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## Group Study Guides

At Emmanuel Faith, our mission is to live (1) in the way of Jesus with (2) the heart of Jesus (3) for the sake of the world. Therefore, we are going to break down our group studies around accomplishing this mission. To do so, we are going to follow an easy to remember structure called the DNA of Discipleship.

-  D = Discover the Way of Jesus
-  N = Nurture the Heart of Jesus
-  A = Act for the Sake of the World

First, we will try to “Discover the Way of Jesus” in the passage that you are studying. This time is dedicated to looking up at God’s wisdom through his Scriptures. We will suggest questions from the Scripture passages of the sermon that week and related passages.

Next, we want you to think about how this study time might help you to “Nurture the Heart of Jesus.” How can we develop the heart for God and people that Jesus had? We’ll use this as a time to ask ourselves the tough questions about how we might love God and love others well.

Finally, at the end of every time together, we want you to think about how this study has challenged you to “Act for the Sake of the World.” That means that every week, we are going to ask you to think about at least one step that you might take in the following week based on what you have talked about. This might be one of the most challenging things that we ask you to do in this series, but we strongly believe that it might be the most beneficial.

It is my prayer that this simple structure will help make your group time focused and fruitful.

God Bless,  
**JOSH ROSE**

*Discipleship Pastor*

## Spiritual Practices

Living in the way of Jesus, with the heart of Jesus, for the sake of the world is a journey. It is not a straight line toward our destination, but rather a winding path full of wonder, mystery, awe, and longing. It is not a journey to be mastered, but rather lived out, day by day. As surrendered followers of Jesus, we rarely get to choose our path, but we can prepare ourselves and embrace the road ahead through regularly seeking a relationship with Jesus Christ, the one we long to follow.

Spiritual practices, or disciplines, are a means by which to deepen our relationship with God and fully experience the journey that he has us on. They help us discover our deepest values, address our longing to connect with our Creator, and propel us on the journey toward wholeness and the abundance that Jesus longs for us to have through him. Spiritual practices are intentional activities that nourish our relationship with God and produce transformation in our lives.

Over the next six weeks, each Saturday, you will be guided through a different spiritual practice. Each one will be focused on Scripture and spending time experiencing God’s presence. Set aside at least 15 minutes, without distractions, where you can relax and be fully present with Jesus. Each practice is intended to lead you toward experiencing God, hearing his voice, and growing in your love and longing for him.

Remember, the Christian life is a journey, an exciting adventure of twists and turns as we daily surrender our will while learning to live in the way of Jesus with the heart of Jesus. May you be surprised and delighted by what God does in your life, your soul, and in your relationship with Jesus and with others as you seek him!

**Blessings on your Journey!**

**LYNETTE FUSON**

*Care & Counseling Director*

## Luke 15:1-32 (ESV)

### The Parable of the Lost Sheep

<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. <sup>2</sup> And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

<sup>3</sup> So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' <sup>7</sup> Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

### The Parable of the Lost Coin

<sup>8</sup> "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

### The Parable of the Prodigal Son

<sup>11</sup> And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. <sup>14</sup> And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> "But 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! <sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

<sup>20</sup> And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

<sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly 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 the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup> 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.'

<sup>28</sup> But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

<sup>31</sup> And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

## Luke 15:1-32 (The Message)

### The Story of the Lost Sheep

<sup>15:1-3</sup> By this time a lot of men and women of questionable reputation were hanging around Jesus, listening intently. The Pharisees and religion scholars were not pleased, not at all pleased. They growled, “He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends.” Their grumbling triggered this story.

<sup>4-7</sup> “Suppose one of you had a hundred sheep and lost one. Wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the lost one until you found it? When found, you can be sure you would put it across your shoulders, rejoicing, and when you got home call in your friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Celebrate with me! I’ve found my lost sheep!’ Count on it—there’s more joy in heaven over one sinner’s rescued life than over ninety-nine good people in no need of rescue.

### The Story of the Lost Coin

<sup>8-10</sup> “Or imagine a woman who has ten coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and scour the house, looking in every nook and cranny until she finds it? And when she finds it you can be sure she’ll call her friends and neighbors: ‘Celebrate with me! I found my lost coin!’ Count on it—that’s the kind of party God’s angels throw every time one lost soul turns to God.”

### The Story of the Lost Son

<sup>11-12</sup> Then he said, “There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, ‘Father, I want right now what’s coming to me.’

<sup>12-16</sup> “So the father divided the property between them. It wasn’t long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to feel it. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corn-cobs in the pig slop, but no

one would give him any.

<sup>17-20</sup> “That brought him to his senses. He said, ‘All those farmhands working for my father sit down to three meals a day, and here I am starving to death. I’m going back to my father. I’ll say to him, Father, I’ve sinned against God, I’ve sinned before you; I don’t deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.’ He got right up and went home to his father.

<sup>20-21</sup> “When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: ‘Father, I’ve sinned against God, I’ve sinned before you; I don’t deserve to be called your son ever again.’

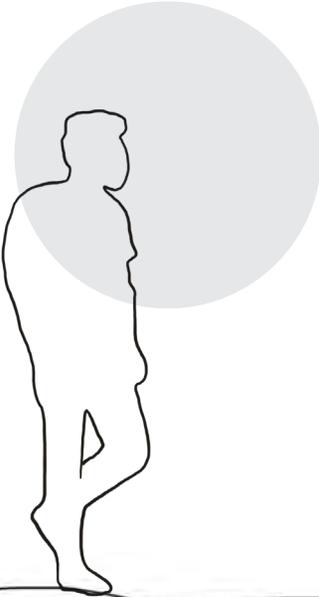
<sup>22-24</sup> “But the father wasn’t listening. He was calling to the servants, ‘Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a prize-winning heifer and roast it. We’re going to feast! We’re going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!’ And they began to have a wonderful time.

<sup>25-27</sup> “All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day’s work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard the music and dancing. Calling over one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. He told him, ‘Your brother came home. Your father has ordered a feast—barbecued beef!—because he has him home safe and sound.’

<sup>28-30</sup> “The older brother stomped off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and tried to talk to him, but he wouldn’t listen. The son said, ‘Look how many years I’ve stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!’

<sup>31-32</sup> “His father said, ‘Son, you don’t understand. You’re with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours—but this is a wonderful time,

WEEK  
**No 1**



## **Treated Like Friends**

*“Just so, I tell you,  
there is joy before the angels of God  
over one sinner who repents.”*

**Luke 15:10**

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# Group Study

Treated Like Friends :: Luke 15:1-10

What is your favorite story, book or movie?  
Why does that story grasp you?



## DISCOVER THE WAY OF JESUS

Read verses 1-2. How would you describe the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes at the beginning of our passage?  
When have you had a similar attitude?

Now, read verses 3-10 and compare the two stories. What key words and phrases are repeated?

How would you summarize the reason that Jesus told these two parables?

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## NURTURE THE HEART OF JESUS

How do you think this was received by the different groups of people listening to him? How would you feel if you were listening?

How can we become people who stop grumbling and nurture Jesus' heart of optimism and hope for people?  
How can we rejoice in repentance?

Maybe the first step is to remember that none of us can brag about being perfect. Spend some time reading Psalm 51 together (take turns reading a verse or two) and make this your prayer.

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## ACT FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

Because of what God has been saying to you this week, what is one step of faith that you'd like to take?

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## The Challenge

MONDAY, JANUARY 23

The Pharisees wanted to be people who “do not need to repent” (Luke 15:7). They mistakenly thought this is what God wanted of them. I also made the same mistake.

Growing up in a ministry family, I thought church was more about how people saw me than the actual state of my heart. I wasn’t aware of it at the time, but I catered my behavior to what I knew was accepted, praised, or valued. I ended up creating a squeaky clean image on the outside, but much like the Pharisees, “a white washed tomb” (Matt. 23:27). I wasn’t aware of my dead heart until I discovered pornography. While publicly I was the ideal youth group leader, volunteer, and intern; privately, I was a hopelessly lost sinner and addict.

The image I had cultivated in public turned out to be a prison. I was not safe to make a mistake, to mess up, or even name the sin of which I was guilty. Tragically, porn had become my only safe space, where I was away from the prying eyes of the public, and able to deal with emotions that were being neglected and overlooked.

My private sin continued to bury me. I was seemingly powerless to stop it. But what I didn’t realize at the time, to my utter shock, was the very sin burying me was in the redemptive power of God, preparing me for the resurrection to new life in Jesus Christ. Romans 8:28 says, “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, even and especially the most shameful things.”

The very sin that drove me to my knees ended up driving me to my knees before Him! It was only when I had blown it beyond what I could handle that I finally acknowledged who I was. I was not the squeaky clean Christian that didn’t need grace, but the sinner in utter need of saving! I had to admit I was lost if I was to be truly found. Like the Pharisees I wanted to be someone who “did not need to repent”. Turns out, amazingly, Jesus is only looking for the very people who have no

other option than to fall to their knees and cry out: “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me, a sinner!”

RYAN LUNDE

*Young Adults Pastor*

## The Cost

TUESDAY, JANUARY 24

Have you ever thought about the cost of making friends with people who don’t want to follow Jesus? Luke 15:1-2 reads, “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” What would people think if you were hanging out with sinners? Would they wonder if you really followed Jesus or question you and your walk?

Initially I thought, “Could this cause me to become more like them, possibly lose who I am, maybe even stumble?” Then I remembered that I was once in darkness until someone showed me the light. Do you have friends or acquaintances who are not walking with the Lord or possibly making bad choices? I did and was able to share the goodness of God and tried to be a light in their life. My friend noticed the fire in me and my love for people. So, I demonstrated love for her no matter what she did and was determined to expose her to the love of our Father. Over time she received Jesus into her heart and it changed her life forever. Many of us choose to stay in our comfort zone where we feel safe and try to blend into the world. Who can you seek and allow to see the light of Jesus shining through you? When you help find the lost, the reward outweighs the cost.

Jesus knows how vulnerable the one sheep was so he left the 99 to find that one lost sheep because of his extraordinary love. He knew the 99 would be safe with each other and sought the lost sheep. When he found it he rejoiced! “I tell you that in the same way there will be more

rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not repent.” The reward of finding the lost sheep and bringing it home was an example of how God pursues us and in his perfect timing finds and holds us when we need him most. His extraordinary love prompted Jesus to come to earth to find the lost, forgive, and save them. Aren't we called to do the same?

Have you ever shared the gospel and walked with that person as they accepted the great love Jesus has to offer? Maybe it felt joyful like how Jesus felt when he found his lost sheep. Did the risk outweigh the reward?

**JESSICA FELICIANO**

*Preschool Director*

## The Search

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 25

In total transparency, I have always struggled with feeling valued. From an early age, my dad would constantly berate me with comments about being a loser or a waste of life. He would physically abuse me if I didn't perform well in baseball. My mother was so young she didn't know how to raise me, and was trapped in an abusive relationship.

One day my grandfather came and told me to quickly grab all my belongings. I remember being excited knowing I was leaving this broken home and going to live with my grandparents. I love my grandparents and I'm forever thankful for their impact on my life. That being said, I still searched for something. I tried to find the value I never experienced. I began searching in all the wrong places. I found myself drinking and doing drugs in the sixth grade. Things only progressed in junior high and reached their height in high school. I was a mess.

I kept blindly searching for value. Nothing changed until my high school history teacher shared Jesus with me. I became interested and

eventually attended church. I remember sitting in the back and hearing the pastor preach the gospel. I began to cry and finally accepted that everything I had been searching for is only found in Christ.

Read Luke 15:4-7 (ESV)

It seems crazy that the shepherd would be willing to leave 99 sheep to go search for just one. Yet the shepherd knew that the 99 would be safe in the sheepfold, whereas the lost sheep was in danger. The shepherd knew how valuable the sheep was, and God knows how valuable you are.

The beautiful truth is God loves each individual so much that he seeks out each one and rejoices when he or she is found. Our God tenderly searches for sinners and then joyfully forgives them because he loves them! This kind of love prompted Jesus to come to earth to search for lost people and save them. God wants to give this kind of extraordinary love to you. Spend some time reflecting on the moment you received Christ as your Savior. How did you feel at that moment? What changed in your life?

Jesus left the 99 for the 1. Who is the "one" that you want to see accept Christ? Commit to praying the next six weeks for their softened heart!

**JT MARTINEZ**

*High School Pastor*

## The Joy of Finding

THURSDAY, JANUARY 26

Three stories of things lost and later found. A sheep, a coin, and a child. Christians know these stories and sometimes get to experience the kind of joy that comes from finding a precious lost thing.

It could be a little thing like the hair comb I've had since 6th grade. Back then I found it on the playground and in those days, a comb sticking out of the back pocket of a young person was as common as a cell phone today. Someone lost it and I found it. After about a year I

lost it, too, then found it again on that same playground three months later. Eight years later as a college student and youth ministry intern, I lost it again following camp. One year later I was back at the same camp in the boys bathroom getting ready for the day. The student next to me pulled out an orange comb and started combing his hair. I said, "Hey, that looks just like a comb I lost at this camp last year." He said, "Oh, maybe it's yours. I'm not sure how I got it, but I noticed it in my travel kit after we came to this camp last year." He insisted I take it back. (Strangely, he also was wearing a pair of jeans I hadn't been able to find since camp a year before. I let him keep those.) I took the comb back, and bought him a shake during freetime. In fact, I bought a treat for the whole cabin. I was stoked to get my comb back. It may not seem like much, but it really is a great comb. I've never seen or found another like it and it just feels better. Finding a lost thing feels good.

Luke 15, "Rejoice with me; I have found... my lost sheep... my lost coin... For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! So they began to celebrate." Finding lost things brings joy and is cause for celebration. Jesus said, "In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." People are precious to God. Heaven celebrates when people get found. Believers who see the people around them as precious are, like heaven, active in the search of and longing for the celebration of repentance too. The joy of finding.

**JOHN RILEY**

*Junior High Pastor*

## The Practice

FRIDAY, JANUARY 27

I grew up with some speech impediments. Some letter sounds came out a little different and I hated talking when I realized things came out wrong. The weird thing is the same feelings I have about

mispronouncing words, and the insecurities I have about sharing the Gospel, feel very similar. Instead of being confident in the Holy Spirit working, or standing on Scripture alone, I worried more about what people thought about me or how if I said something wrong I would be judged. I really admire Jesus, in the face of judgment and comments from the Pharisees and teachers of the law (v. 2), he still did what God called him to do. He went to the lost no matter the cost.

Why is it hard for me and why might it be hard for you? Instead of trying to find the answer, I would like you to practice something simple. I believe practicing some simple things could change how we view sharing our lives with others. Grab your phone or a pen and paper and get ready to write some things down. Ready? Write down all the places you go the most. Grocery stores, gas stations, coffee shops, etc.; places where there are people you see all the time. This is your first prayer list. Can you spend a little time (even if you feel silly) praying to God about preparing the people for you to get to know them and share Jesus with them? Next, think of the people you see. You might not know their names, and you might not know anything about them, but that's okay. Write down who they are (maybe a person at Starbucks, or at work). Ask God to give you a chance to talk to them and ask them about their day or how they are doing.

Here is why praying for these things and people are important. It allows us to step outside ourselves to extend love to someone else and trust God to work. It also means that we have to put ourselves out there in a way that is similar to Jesus. I don't think he went to dinners with tax collectors and just shared about how he could save them. He probably asked them about life, how they felt, their hopes, then through the conversation their hearts opened and things changed. I think God will still open hearts as we open up our lives to others.

**JEREMY JOHNSON**

*Family Ministry Pastor*

What is your story?

## Spiritual Practice

We all have a story. Some stories are harder than others, but each of our stories have brought us to the point where we are at today. The process of writing out, listening to, and understanding our own personal narrative creates a sense of reverence for our journey, whatever it may be. It frees us from judgment and relinquishes what we can't control into the hands of the one who can. It names our sorrows and our joys. It shows us God's faithfulness and constant presence in our lives even when we couldn't feel it ourselves. Eventually, when we are ready, sharing our stories with others will bring about a deeper sense of community, hope, and trust.

STEP 1: "Be still and know that I am God." (Psalm 46:10)

- Find a place free of distractions.
- Breathe—take at least three long deep breaths, inviting God's presence.

STEP 2: Remember

- Ask God to reveal a significant time in your life that has shaped who you are becoming.
- Consider how it has impacted who you are today.
- Ponder God's faithfulness. Could you see his hand at work even in difficult times?

STEP 3: Write out your story

- No judgment! This is your story and it is precious to God.
- Tell what happened in detail. Describe what you saw, heard, smelled, felt...
- Don't try to draw conclusions. Just tell your story.

STEP 4: Spend time with your story

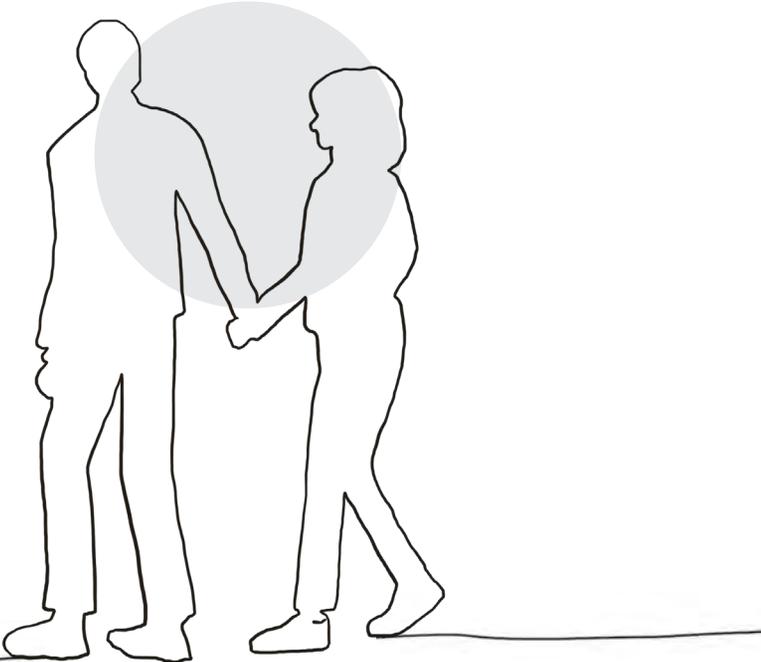
- Notice times when you felt like giving up, but God helped you to persevere.
- Cry over sad events and rejoice over joyful memories.
- Thank God for his constant presence.

STEP 5: Share your story

THIS IS MY STORY

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WEEK  
**No 2**



**Give Me Mine**

Luke 15:11-12

A large grid of small dots for taking sermon notes, spanning the width of the page.

# Group Study

Give Me Mine :: Luke 15:11-12

Think about a time that you enjoyed creating something.  
What was it and what about the experience brought you joy?



## DISCOVER THE WAY OF JESUS

Read Genesis 1:31. How would you describe God's perspective about his creation?

Now read Genesis 2:5-7. At this point, what was missing in creation? How is it that you "work the ground" or care for God's created order in your daily life?

Read Genesis 2:15-17 and compare it to Genesis 3:1-6. Why does the woman think that the fruit is good? And what does their actions say about their willingness to follow God's design for them?

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## NURTURE THE HEART OF JESUS

Our temptations are different, but the motivation for sin is still the same. How are we a lot like Eve still today?

How is it that you say, "Give me mine!" to God?

How does the knowledge of your design and purpose help you to know how to avoid living in rebellion against God?

What would change if you saw your work (past, present or future) as a way of fulfilling your created purpose in life?

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## ACT FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

This week, try to think differently about the value of the "work" that God has given you. Take a picture of something that you do to bring order to the created world this week and text it to 760-781-2161 so we can celebrate how God is using you.

As a group, here's an option for a way that you can literally "care for the ground" right here in Escondido. Consider adopting a street to take care of. Visit [streetstewards.com](http://streetstewards.com) for more info.

## The Prodigal Son

MONDAY, JANUARY 30

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is most likely the best known parable. It's the longest, has the most details and unlike other parables, it has more than one lesson.

- Repentance & Forgiveness
- Self Righteousness & Moral Superiority

While reading this parable, I wondered which brother to write about, which one could I see in myself? The older brother and his self righteousness & moral superiority? Probably, how many times have I listened to a sermon, known exactly who it was meant for and thought, "too bad they weren't there to hear it".

I certainly couldn't see any of myself in the younger son. The Greek word for prodigal is 'dissolute' and carries with it the idea of a depraved lifestyle. That's not me, I would never ask for my inheritance and then squander it! Then the Holy Spirit gave me a little nudge to pray and this is what He brought to mind.

I am like the prodigal, I have squandered, misused, wasted my Father's inheritance, many times, in many different ways:

- **Selfishness:** It blinds us to the needs of others. The gifts that I have received from a generous God, I have sometimes kept to myself, assuming they are just for me and not others. They're mine! No, they are to be shared, they are for blessing and supporting the body of Christ.
- **Pride:** Have I thought too highly of myself, that what I have to give is too good for someone else? It's mine! Am I too focused on myself? Have I allowed real needs to become trivial, next to my priorities?
- **Worldliness:** Do I prize and prioritize what the world does? Do

I waste and misuse my gifts and my time by enjoying what the world finds comfort in? Having fun, hobbies, social media, really anything that keeps us from spending time with Him. When our prayer life is not what it should be, neither is our walk.

It is never too late to share the gifts He has given us and make a difference in the lives of others.

CYNDIE EVANS - *Operations Coordinator*

## God's Gift of Free Will

TUESDAY, JANUARY 31

In this parable, Jesus tells us of a son who demanded his inheritance while his father was still alive. While we might see that as rude or presumptuous today, in Jesus' time that would have been unthinkable! In this situation, the father would have been expected to run the household until he died. For the son to ask for his portion of the inheritance was the same as saying his father was dead to him. In return, the son would be dead to his father. It was an incredibly selfish and disrespectful request made by a rebellious son.

What was the son really asking for? He wanted out of the family and to be completely independent. He basically said, "Give me my stuff and I'm gone." So why does the father say yes and give him the inheritance?

Even today, we would be surprised by a father who would give in to such a demand. The reason he did though was because, in this parable, the father represents our Father in Heaven, not an earthly father. As He often does with us, the father in the story gives his son what he asks, even though he knows it will lead to unhappy consequences. He allowed his son the free will to choose to go his own way, even if it might lead to sinful living.

In Genesis 2-3, we read about the story of how Adam and Eve rebelled, and they could no longer stay in the good and perfect place that God had prepared for them. The fall in Eden is an example of God giving us free will, either to choose to follow Him or our own ways. Free will is an incredible gift that God gives to us, but it can also be used to rebel and distance ourselves from God.

After hearing the Prodigal Son's story, how can we avoid falling into the same temptation of choosing our own will over the Lord's? By God's grace, we can trust in His Spirit to lead us to walk in His will and to be blessed with the strength to choose His will above our own.

CHERI WRIGHT

*Communications Director*

## The Father's Heart

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 1

*And He said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that is coming to me.' And so he divided his wealth between them..*

Having a prodigal child is tough. In Luke 15:11-12, the son said, "give me my share". How did the father feel as his son just left with his share?

We have a daughter who is temporarily out of communication with us. Children leave home sometimes under tough circumstances. When that happens, what grabs our heart? The father didn't know where his son was or when he would ever return. We don't know when we will see our daughter again. Of course we want her back but as we wait, what is our heart condition? Is it worry, anxiety, hurt or bitterness? "Lord, bring back what is ours." Is she truly ours? Or...

- Do I trust that God is good? (Psalm 145:9)
- Do I trust that she is His child? (John 1:12)
- Do I trust that I am complete in Christ in order to be at peace no

matter where she is in her journey? (Col. 2:10)

- Do I trust that He will work all things together for good and according to His (not my) purpose? (Rom. 8:28).
- Do I trust the good work He has done and is doing in her? (Phil. 1:6)

What will be the condition of my heart when she returns? Will I be willing to receive her unconditionally as the father did? Am I a minister of reconciliation for God? (2 Cor. 5:17-21)

This is not easy, I know. But the truth is we have a Good Father who knows us intimately and loves us so much that He sacrificed His Son for us. Jesus died for us after we left Him, welcoming us back. Now nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 8:39)

Because of Jesus, we have the Grace through The Holy Spirit to welcome others back and love them as He loved us. The choice is ours to follow Him or go our own way.

LORI PIERCE - *Executive Project Specialist*

## Seeking More

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 2

I grew up in a Buddhist home full of love and trauma. My mother could pray for hours on the floor and had special prayer pillows deeply indented by her knees. I would tell people my mom could outpray any Christian because she was a "prayer warrior."

In 2012, we found out she had stage 4 cancer. It didn't stop her from living life to the fullest. She passed away in 2018, and I don't know if she accepted Jesus as her Lord and Saviour.

Why am I sharing this story with you concerning the teaching of the Prodigal Son? It's because what I haven't told you is she always wanted

more from life. She wanted money, jewelry, happiness, and success. The prodigal son also wanted more.

*"The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate ...' - Luke 15:12*

She wanted all these things while working hard to be at peace. She was at odds with herself and took it out on those around her. Months before she passed, I visited her in Thailand. She was in a lot of pain, frail, distant, and constantly meditating to be a better person for the next life.

One morning she took a break from meditating and asked me to share my beliefs about life and death. I did my best to share the amazing love of Jesus Christ as I had done many times before. However, this time I knew it was going to be my last. After I finished, she looked at me and said, "I never heard Jesus like that before." All I could do was look into my mom's eyes and pray that she would sense God's love and peace.

Until her death, I never stopped praying for her. I hoped she would come to know Jesus and be welcomed into the eternal family to find the peace, joy, and love she had been seeking. Just like the prodigal son did when he finally came home.

Father, open our eyes to welcome all who don't know you. Keep your church a place of peace, love, and rest for all who are looking for a home. Amen. - **MICHELLE JONES** - *Operations Director*

## Choose God

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3

When I gave my life to Christ in 1999 I had no idea who or what I was giving my life to. I soon realized that in order to experience any

significant life changes, I would actually have to do things differently. Poor decisions in life can often cause major setbacks. In a life led by Christ, he will allow us to make choices that don't always line up with his will for our life; or perhaps they do. In Luke 15 Jesus tells the parable of the prodigal son who told his Father to give him the share he had coming, so the Father divided the assets to both sons.

We know that the younger of the two sons left and squandered his inheritance, however the Father was filled with compassion when he finally came home. I often say "sometimes I make the wrong choice before I make the right one." When Adam and Eve sinned, they hid from God among the trees in the garden of Eden. God is the one who pursued and came after them, "*the LORD God called to the man*" (*Genesis 3:8-9*).

Whether my decision or choice is right or wrong, God is always there for me. He had a perfect design for us from the beginning and gave his own son to die for our sins. We will always be challenged with making decisions or choices, and Jesus will always be with us to help us and refine us through the good and the bad decisions we make in life.

Throughout the Bible, we see the ongoing charge for us to pursue God and we see the story of Him pursuing us. In Jeremiah 29:13 God tells the Israelites, "*You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.*"

God loves us, always pursues us, and we can choose to be caught. The best choice I ever made was to choose Jesus and make him the Lord of my life.

**RANDY CARTER**

*Inside Maintenance Director*

# Spiritual Practice

## INTRODUCTION

Lectio Divina or "Scripture Reading" is simply a process by which to slowly read through a passage of Scripture, setting aside our own agendas, and listening for God's voice. The practice encourages conversational intimacy with God. In doing so, you are not seeking information as much as formation. The simple prayer practice of Lectio Divina takes us through five steps, as we are drawn closer to God, through each prayerful reading of the Scriptures.

### 1. SILENCIO (SILENCE)

Make yourself comfortable in a place that is free from interruptions. Begin with silence for a few minutes, humbly asking your Heavenly Father to quiet your heart and make you aware that you are in His loving presence. When you are ready, begin reading.

### 2. LECTIO (READ)

In this first reading, simply open yourself to the presence of God. Read the passage slowly and prayerfully, allowing short pauses between sentences. You will soon discover whether it is more helpful for you to read silently or out loud. Try them both. As you read, take in the words and the overall flow of the passage. Then allow a time of silence and listen for God's Spirit.

Read Luke 15:11 - 32 on pages 8-11 of this guide.

### 3. MEDITATIO (MEDITATE)

During the second prayerful reading of the passage, listen for a particular word or a phrase through which God wants to speak to you. You will notice your attention being drawn to something. Once you have "received" the word or phrase, begin to silently meditate on that word or phrase. Reflect on why God would highlight this for you today, ask Him any questions that come to mind, and note things that seem important as you meditate on what He has given you.

### 4. ORATIO (PRAYER)

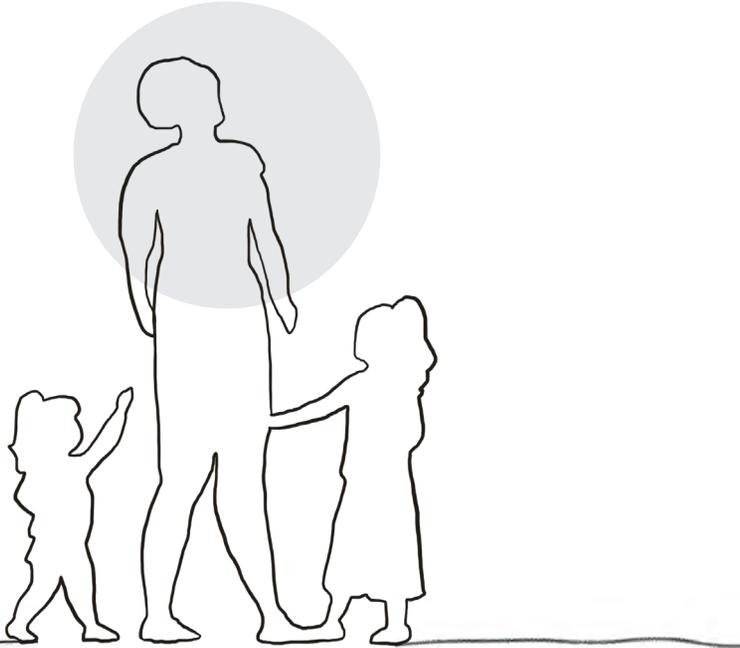
In the third prayerful reading of the passage, listen now for your Father's invitation, and respond from your heart. God is always inviting us in some way... to let go of something, or to take up something; to do something or be something. The invitation can take innumerable forms. Following the reading, continue to listen for His invitation and then respond silently or out loud from an honest heart.

### 5. CONTEMPLATIO (REST)

The focus of the fourth prayerful reading of the passage is to simply rest now in the love that your Father has for you. Let the words wash over you. Simply allow the Spirit to draw you close and fill you with His love, grace and peace. Linger in this place of deep connection. You are being filled and refreshed for your continuing journey. Take your word, phrase or image with you. It is something to which you can return throughout the day; a reminder of the love of the Father for you and the special word He had for you today.



WEEK  
**No 3**



**A Far Country**

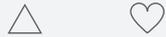
Luke 15:15-16

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# Group Study

A Far Country :: Luke 15:15-16

Did you take a picture of something that you did last week?  
Show it off.



## DISCOVER & NURTURE

Read Luke 15:13. What does the allure of “a far country” feel like? Have you ever experienced a temptation like that?

Can you relate to this younger son? Have you ever squandered property, time or money on reckless living? What did you learn?

Read James 1:13-15. What do we learn about temptation in these verses? Is the temptation itself sin?

Read Luke 15:14. What must it have been like for this man, who had never been in need before, to suddenly experience poverty? Have you ever experienced anything like this?

Read Luke 15:15-16. How successful is the young man at trying to fix his problems by himself? Have you ever been in a situation where you failed in a similar way?

Read Genesis 3:23-24. God made humans to live in this Garden of Eden, but because of sin, we don't have access to it anymore. What if this is what we are really longing for in this search for a “far country”? How does that change the way we see this temptation?

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## ACT FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

How do you treat people who are in jobs like this that no one wants? What do you tend to think about them? How might Jesus have treated them? What needs to change in us?

What is a practical way that I can stave off temptation today?

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## An Inheritance Squandered

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 6

*"...and there he squandered his property in reckless living...He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything." - Luke 15:13b & 16*

Jesus paints a vivid image of this younger son's journey from abundance and excess to utter need and desperation. From the comfort of his father's home to the allure and decadence of the far country leading down into indentured servitude with the swine.

When I read through the Parable of the Prodigal Son, I usually quickly wrap up this part of the story to get to the happier parts of Jesus' story. Why would we want to dwell on such a wretched existence? I have never received an enormous amount of wealth from my earthly parents, and I cannot relate to spending time rolling around with pigs desperately hoping to eat whatever they have been gobbling up. The Pharisees listening to Jesus tell this story also would have felt a disconnect with this foolish young man's experience. One of their thoughts (and even mine) may have been that this son simply got what he deserved. If you are going to waste all you have and disrespect your family of origin, what else should you expect but isolation and destruction?

The reality is that, yes, our sin does separate us from the Father. Paul put it this way in Ephesians 2:1-3, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked...carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

God gave each one of us an amazing inheritance. He created us in His image, gave us a wonderful world to enjoy, and each one of us has told Him that our way is better. I was dead in trespasses and the sins and apart from His goodness, I still would be dead in my trespasses and sins!

I've grown to love the story of the Prodigal Son because it reminds me of my deep need for God's grace in my life. Apart from His gentle, life-giving kindness, I would still be living a life separated from my Creator!

How does this truth shape the way we view and act toward those around us? Is there someone in your life that needs to hear a life-giving word from you today? May we love and see others the way our loving Father does - precious in His sight and worth rescuing!

TIM MITCHELL

*Welcome Specialist*

## Thieves of Joy

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 7

Have you ever belly laughed at a silly pet video or teared up watching the testimony of someone who came to faith in Jesus? At its best, social media has had a positive impact upon building community, fostering relationships, sparking joyful moments, and inspiring people towards creativity and acts of kindness.

Many social apps open windows into the lives of our friends, celebrities, and random people around the world, giving us a chance to endlessly scroll and live vicariously through them. Sometimes this seemingly innocuous activity has the ability to evoke 1) a sense of FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out), and 2) feelings of comparison. The content we consume can create discontentment in our hearts, creating thoughts that who we're with, where we are, and what we're doing just isn't good enough.

The Younger Son (prodigal) had serious FOMO and comparison issues. He thought his best life was out in the world, partying and squandering away his wealth, away from his loving father who provided for all his needs. Even today, some people may believe living life to the fullest looks like quitting your job on a whim, seeing every country in the

world, falling recklessly in love, and trying every new experience. Augustine once said that our hearts are restless until they find rest in the One who made it. Our fleshly hearts and desires will always be chasing the whims of the world, never feeling content, purposeful, or satisfied - until we run into the arms of our loving Father. He promises us the fullness of His joy.

“Every minute we spend focusing on comparing ourselves with others and trying to be more or less like them is time we are distracted from the work Christ desires to do in us to make us more like Him. Comparison is a heavy burden to carry. It puts the focus on replicating personality rather than embracing identity. When we allow the Father to release us from the bondage of comparison, we can live in freedom to be transformed by His kindness and mercy. - Heather Fallis

Lord, help us to not be distracted by FOMO or comparison, but let us continually be focused on Your mission of love.

KARINA PAJE

*Project Specialist*

## **A Heart for Those Lured Away**

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8

One of the reasons that I am following Jesus today is because of a guy named Otis who had a heart for kids who were lured away by “a far country.” Otis worked with an outreach ministry called “Young Life,” which has a reputation for seeking after the hardest to reach students on a high school campus. There was a time when I was one of those kids.

I don’t remember Otis ever preaching a sermon to me. He never condemned or judged me. Instead he was just really nice to me, he asked me the right questions at the right time, and he listened to me as I tried to sort things out. As I look back on it, I realize that he created a safe place for me to run back to the Father after squandering my

inheritance in a far country. You see, I wasn’t the typical lost kid who didn’t know Jesus, I was a prodigal. I had run away from the faith of my parents. I had been given an amazing “inheritance” of a loving Christ-centered, conservative, Evangelical Christian home with parents who loved me and even sent me to a Christian school! But all of that wasn’t enough for me... at least not when I was 16, because the allure of “a far country” was really strong.

However, what was stronger still was the love of Jesus made real by this quirky guy named Otis who took the bold step of befriending me. One day, after spending months earning my respect, Otis simply asked me a question. It was not a profound question, but I’ll never forget it... He simply leaned over to me and said, “Josh, what are you doing?” That was it! That’s all I needed to hear. My heart was convicted. I knew that I had disappointed Otis, and because of that I knew that I had disappointed God. However, at the same time, I knew that Otis still loved me, and that God did too. Right then and there, I gave my life to Jesus and I have been serving him ever since.

Do you know any prodigals who have been lured away from the faith? I want you to know that God wants to use you in their life today. However, at this point, they might not need another sermon. Instead, let your love and kindness lead in that relationship. Then we’ll pray that they will see your kindness as the very kindness of God that leads them to repentance (Romans 2:4).

JOSH ROSE

*Discipleship Pastor*

## **Free Will or Control**

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 9

We desperately crave to be known and understood deep in our souls. Yet, we also struggle with wanting independence and our own way. We want to navigate our own journey and sometimes learn lessons

the hard way. I think that's why our souls find so much comfort in the parable of the Prodigal Son.

Having parented for two decades I find myself identifying with the father in this parable. I had to giggle at myself when I read verses 12-13, "The younger one said to his father, "father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living."

If I were to rewrite this, it would say, "so the younger son asked for his half, and the mom, out of her parental concern, asked 100 questions, warned of making foolish decisions, and then placed some healthy boundaries."

Please tell me you're giggling because you'd do the same! Apparently the father divided the money and let him go. There seems to be no words or pleading from the father. He released control, allowed the son to experience his own journey, and learn some life lessons. Ooof..... that can be hard because we want to protect our loved ones from pain and hardship. We involve ourselves deeper and give ourselves more responsibility than we were meant to carry. This helps me understand free will in a deeper way and with a more tender heart. God has given us direction and truth for our own good, yet allows us to make decisions whether we make them good or bad.

We love the people in our lives and want to protect them. Sharing wisdom and truth is part of a healthy relationship. But we need to remember God has an individual calling and journey for each of us. Our responsibility is to share the truth in love. Then we pray and allow the Holy Spirit to work. Will those we love make bad choices sometimes? Sure! But the Holy Spirit will work in their life and our constant love will be a gift of grace.

When we release our control in others lives, we take ourselves and desires out of the equation, and trust our Heavenly Father. Sometimes the journey back to Jesus is slow, but forgiveness is always immediate.

God loves our loved ones more than we can comprehend and we can trust His plan and journey for their lives.

**BONNIE NICHOLS**

*Women's Ministry Specialist*

## Longing for a Far Country?

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10

*"the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country..." - Luke 15:13a*

Throughout human history, the phenomenon of migration has impacted the lives of millions of people around the world. People make the decision and move into different countries for different reasons, but the vast majority of them migrate to avoid suffering. Most immigrants leave behind relatives, possessions, and pretty much everything they love in order to seek better life opportunities for themselves and their families.

In this parable, we see a young man decide to go on a journey to live as an immigrant in a foreign country. The motivations of this young man to leave his country of origin were not to escape a difficult, chaotic or a dangerous environment, but to pursue a life of pleasure away from his father's influence. Up to this point, the prodigal son lived a very pleasant life in his home country and in the company of his father, but he was not content. Apparently, there was an emptiness in his soul that led him to start paying attention to the rumors of a better way of experiencing life. So, without much thought, the prodigal son gathered all he had and left his home country in pursuit of happiness.

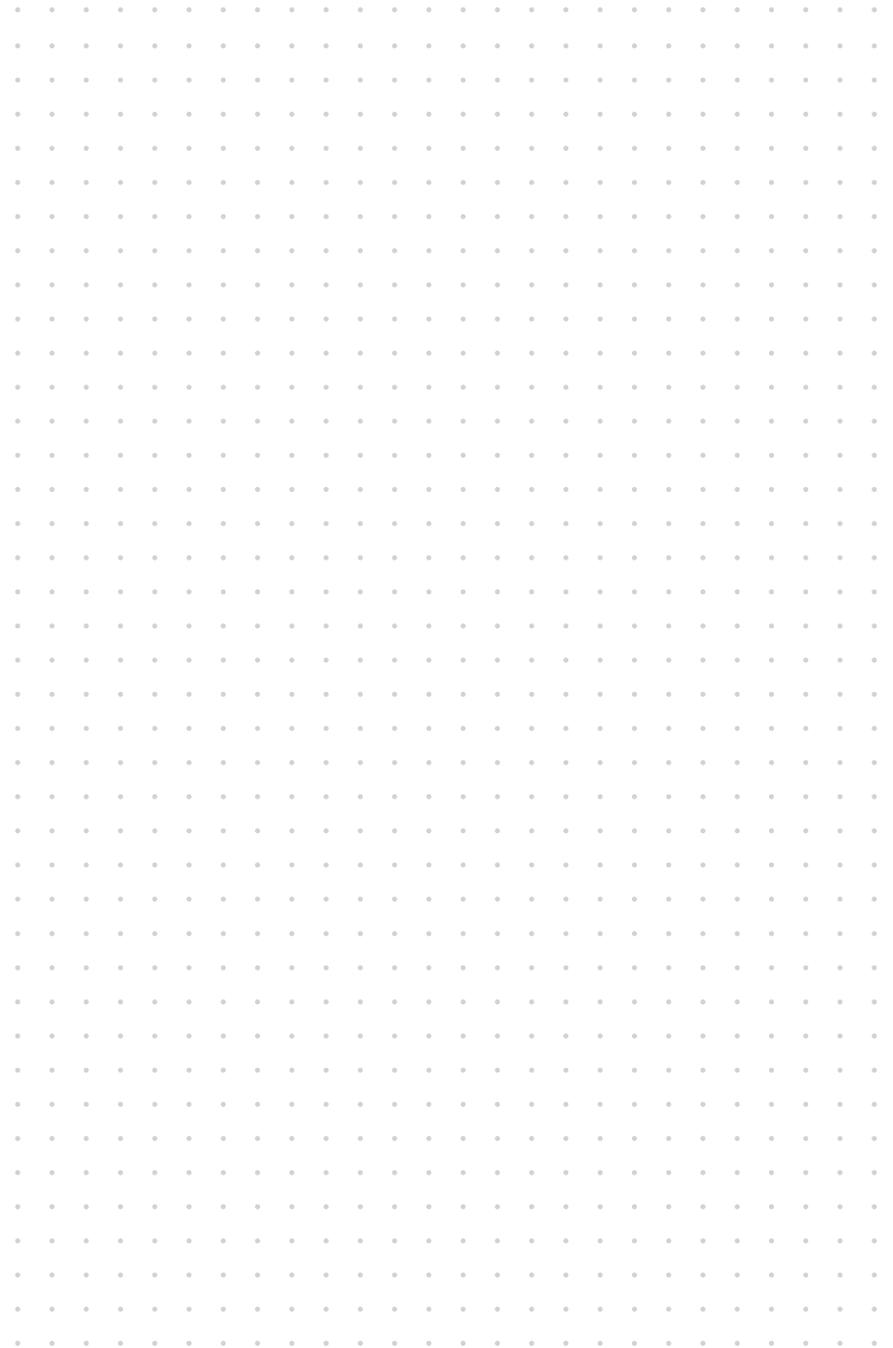
We don't know how long he lived as a foreigner, but what we do know is that he wasted everything he had living recklessly. He was left with no other option but to look for a job in order to survive. Fortunately, this young man found a job, but he couldn't find any food. At the

time, the whole country was going through a severe famine. The prodigal son ended up hungry and alone. He was experiencing the reality of being apart from the provision, care, love, protection, and instruction of his father. The fact of the matter is that this young man had everything he needed in his father's house, but his discontentment came as he started distancing himself from his father's heart. As the story progresses, the prodigal son came to his senses and was able to recognize and value the beautiful companionship and character of his father. In the end, he realized the longing he felt in his soul to start a new life in a different place was not as fulfilling as his longing to enjoy the company and the guidance of his father.

I think one of the lessons that we can learn from this parable is to make sure we don't get distracted by our desires to do life on our own, but to learn to delight in the company of our Heavenly Father as we go through the good and the bad experiences in life.

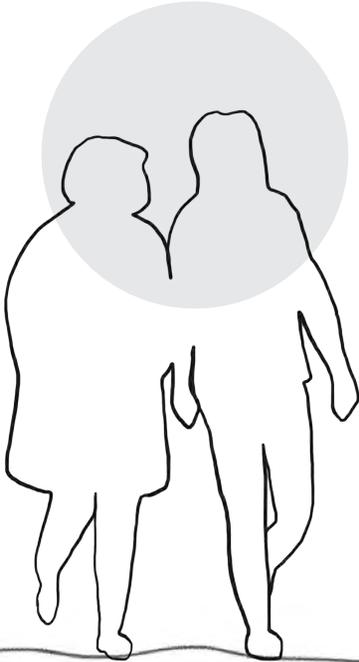
**ESTEBAN TAPIA**

*Teaching Pastor*





WEEK  
**No 4**



**Coming Home**

Luke 15:17-20a

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# Group Study

Coming Home :: Luke 15:17-20a

All of us have dealt with relationships that have been broken by sin, but do you have any stories of relationships that were healed because of repentance?



## DISCOVER THE WAY OF JESUS

Read Luke 15:17-19. What attribute(s) did the son see in his father that made him willing to come home? How did the son expect the father to respond?

What attributes does the Bible teach us about God that might influence our decision to come home to him? Why is it still so hard to ask for forgiveness sometimes?

Try to break down the son's prepared apology. What can you learn about his heart from this?

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## NURTURE THE HEART OF JESUS

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-11. In verse 10, Paul suggests that there are two kinds of "grief" or "sorrow," then he explains

the outcomes of each in verse 11. How would you explain the differences between the two?

What are the ways that the Corinthians showed "godly grief"?

Read Genesis 3:8-13. What kind of grief do Adam & Eve show here? What does this teach us about how not to respond?

How can we become people who practice "godly grief"?

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## ACT FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

Is there something in your past that you need to "arise and go to" for forgiveness? This may be too personal of a question to share publicly (so no pressure), but if the Lord leads you to share, this may be encouraging to others in your group.

P.S. There are only 2 weeks left in this study. This week, pray about whether this is a group that you'd want to continue.

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## Desperado

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13

In 1973 Don Henley and Glenn Frey of the Eagles collaborated on a song by the name of *Desperado*. In case you don't know, a desperado is, among other things, a desperate man, and the opening lines of the song go something like this, "*Desperado, why don't you come to your senses...And freedom, oh, freedom well that's just some people talking, your prison is walking through this world all alone.*"

Sounds a lot like the younger son in Luke 15:17-20, doesn't it? By this time in his life it's quite safe to say that he's desperate, and that he has some major decisions to make, not the least of which is - What is he going to do with his hunger?

That's a decision we all have to make when we are struggling and broken, isn't it? And while the text mentions only a physical hunger, we know there has to be a relational and spiritual hunger in his life as well. It's safe to say that he's hungry and desperate on every level.

So what do we do with our pain and our hunger? What do you do with yours? As Henley and Frey continue their song, they write this, "*Your pain and your hunger, they're driving you home...*" Sounds like the younger son, doesn't it?

The answer to the question of, "What do I do in my desperation?" is, "You go home." You go home to God, to your heavenly Father, to your loving Lord. (But you only will if you believe some things to be true of Him and if you are willing to believe some things to be true of yourself. We will talk more about those later in the week.)

As *Desperado* wraps up, Henley and Frey write this—"*Desperado, why don't you come to your senses, come down from your fences, open the gate...You better let somebody love you before it's too late.*"

If you have been living far away from God, or farther away than you would like, then today's application is to let Him love you before it's too

late. No one who has made that decision has ever regretted it, and you won't either.

SCOTT SMITH

Care Pastor

## The Patient Father

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

The amazing patience shown by the father waiting and hoping for the prodigal son to come to his senses and return home is a beautiful picture of God's patience toward us. God has been displaying his patience with all humanity ever since creation. The Bible tells us that in the Garden of Eden, at the dawn of creation, Adam and Eve enjoyed regular communion with God their Creator. But later, when Adam and Eve succumbed to the lies of the tempter and fell into sin, they actually tried to hide from God. Even so their loving Creator looked for them and waited for them to come out of hiding. Although sin had disrupted the fellowship they once had with their Creator, God graciously mapped out an amazing plan to redeem a fallen human race that would span thousands and thousands of years. It was a plan that required God's only begotten son, Jesus Christ, to shed his blood and die for the sins of fallen humanity upon a cruel cross.

The Lord continues to wait patiently for people everywhere to respond to His offer of forgiveness and trust in Christ's sacrifice on the cross. His patience continues in our own lifetime. The Apostle Peter spoke about God's incredible patience when he wrote "do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:8-9, ESV)

How has our Heavenly Father demonstrated patience toward you

over the years? Have you thanked Him for being so patient? Is there some way that the Lord is calling you to extend more patience and grace to an obstinate family member, neighbor or friend? Remember the story of the prodigal son and how the gentle patience of that father was eventually rewarded. Our patient God is still in the business of changing hearts.

DAVE KORINEK

*Congregational Care*

## Come As You Are

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15

I relate far more to the older brother than the younger. As a child I was indignant when my younger brother didn't show gratitude and irritated when my little sister got away with actions and attitudes that I would never dare to express. I lived most of my childhood years as the perfect "older brother"; not squandering a thing. Yet something inside of me yearned to be accepted for who I really was. I knew my thoughts and the sinful attitudes that existed deep within my soul. On the outside I portrayed the pious older sibling; self-righteous, exhibiting a perfect exterior. But on the inside I was crying out for love and acceptance, regardless of whether or not I "messed up". It wasn't that my parents had ever offered anything but love, yet somehow I felt a need to prove myself worthy. What would it have been like to be real? To honestly express my frustration and bitterness?

The younger brother didn't hesitate. He lived it up, squandered all he had and then came groveling back home. He fully recognized his sin and had no expectation of regaining his right as an heir. He humbly presented himself before his father, requesting to be treated not as a son, but as a hired hand. In Luke 15:18-19 he says, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants." He named his sins, knowing his father's loving character, but not knowing what life would look like moving forward. He must have felt an intense amount

of freedom as he came to his father as he truly was; not as who he aspired to be, but as himself, in all of his brokenness and despair.

Repentance in our world does not always bring about acceptance, forgiveness, and restoration. But that is not the case with our Heavenly Father. Our confidence in honest repentance and seeking forgiveness is that the Father always welcomes us home. Oh, he doesn't just leave the door unlocked, but he runs to us and pursues us in our brokenness because he longs to restore us to a whole and sweet relationship with him. Henri Nouwen says, "Receiving forgiveness requires a total willingness to let God be God and do all the healing, restoring and renewing." This forgiveness does not depend on us. Our Father is inviting us to come just as we are and he will run to us with open arms.

LYNETTE FUSON

*Care & Counseling Director*

## Guilt or Shame

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16

When I was 10 years old, I picked up some stones and threw them at a dog. Some boys saw me. I was afraid they would tell my dad. Instead of confessing to my dad, I suffered in fear which turned into shame. I never did confess. Whenever I remembered that incident, I always felt ashamed.

There is a difference between guilt and shame. Guilt is an appropriate response to doing something wrong. Shame makes you feel like there is something wrong with you.

God has provided a way for us to deal with guilt. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins..." Confession is admitting that we are guilty of a specific sin. If I had done that when I first threw stones, I probably would have been spared years of shame.

The Prodigal son was guilty of sinning. His comment to his father, “I am no longer worthy to be called your son” indicates he was ashamed as well. Unlike me, he went to his father and confessed, “Father, I have sinned...” That opened the door for his father to forgive, love, accept, and restore him. Since shame is a feeling, being assured we are loved and accepted can help to overcome shame.

God will forgive and remove the guilt of your sin, because Jesus has already been punished for your sins. When you take God at His word and believe you are forgiven, you can leave shame behind.

If you are holding onto guilt over a sin you have committed, believe that God will forgive you when you confess. Go to him as the Prodigal son did, even with his feelings of unworthiness. You do not need to feel worthy or shameless to go to God. He will respond with forgiveness, healing, and restoration.

If shame is a result of something done to you, you are not guilty. It is important to distinguish between guilt and shame. It may take counseling to overcome that kind of shame. Be kind to yourself and seek counsel.

SHARON CHAPMAN

## Surrender

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17

When we think of the word surrender, I'm pretty sure there are many negative connotations that are attached to that word. Words like failure, weakness and fear may bubble to the front of our consciousness. We usually think we are better off if we feel we are in control. We often think that we know best how to take care of ourselves. This was very much true for the Prodigal Son.

In Luke 15, we find this son asking his father for everything that he felt

was due him. He wanted to do life his own way. His father allowed him to do just that. He didn't try to force him to stay. The son took the money and traveled to a far off country. He spent the money on all the things that he thought would bring him happiness and fulfillment. His plan was working well for him...until it wasn't. His money ran out and he found himself starving. All the “happiness” that he bought, didn't last.

The parable of the Prodigal Son may seem extreme to some. We may think that we would never go that far. But how far is too far? In our walk with Jesus, it is important to take stock of the things we are not willing to surrender to Him. How about our fear and anxiety? Our obsession with being in control? Our anger at God for allowing painful things in our lives? Our frustration in waiting for His timing and answers? Our wounds, pain, shame and the lies that we believe? All of these ways that we try to “take care of ourselves” on our own power, actually steal our joy and the abundant life that Jesus wants for us.

Luke 15 continues and says “when he came to his senses (decided that he didn't make a very good god), he repented and surrendered. He saw his wrongdoing and decided to humbly return to his father not expecting anymore than to just be fed. He found his father running towards him with open arms rejoicing that his son had returned. No judgment... just joy. He found the abundant life that his father had for him all along.

How about you? Ask your Father to help you recognize and surrender the things that are keeping you from the abundant life of love, joy, peace, purpose and fulfillment that He has for you.

KATHY MORATTO

*Counseling Director*

## Spiritual Practice

### HISTORY OF THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN - ST. IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

Originally developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, Christians have been practicing the Prayer of Examen for nearly 500 years. St. Ignatius was a Spanish soldier who experienced a dramatic conversion while recovering from the wounds of battle. After feeling God's call on his life, he helped found the Society of Jesus, the Jesuit order. In the sixteenth century, Ignatius crafted the Spiritual Exercises which introduced the prayer of the Examen.

The foundation of Ignatian Spirituality is an understanding of God's constant presence. Ignatius taught us to speak to Jesus as we would a close friend, and he commissioned the Jesuits to go into the world and "find God in all things." There is a heavy emphasis on discerning God's presence in Ignatian Spirituality, but this awareness is seen as a beginning, not an end.

Over the last four weeks we have been learning about the power of story; both our own stories and those that God uses in his Scriptures to increase our faith and draw us closer to him. Our stories come from daily experiences that form the fabric of our lives. Taking time to examine God's presence in each aspect of our daily journey gives us an awareness of God's presence throughout each moment, whether in rejoicing or in sorrow. This five-step Daily Examen is based on the one described by St. Ignatius Loyola in his "Spiritual Exercises".

#### STEP 1: Become aware of God's presence.

- Look back on the events of the day (or week...) in the company of the Holy Spirit. The day may seem confusing to you—a blur, a jumble.
- Ask God to bring clarity and understanding, to show you where He was at work in each situation.

#### STEP 2: Review the day with gratitude.

- Gratitude is the foundation of our relationship with God. Walk through your day in his presence and note its joys and delights.
- Focus on the day's gifts. Look at the work you did, the people you

interacted with. What did you receive and what did you give? Pay attention to small things – the food you ate, the sights you saw and other seemingly small pleasures. God is there in the details.

#### STEP 3: Pay attention to your emotions.

- One of St. Ignatius' insights was that we can detect the presence of the Spirit of God in the movements of our emotions. Reflect on your feelings experienced during the day.
- Did you feel boredom? Elation? Resentment? Compassion? Anger? Confidence? What is God saying to you through these feelings?
- In this reflection, God may show you some ways that you fell short. Make note of these areas, but look deeply for other implications as well.
- Are you frustrated? If so, perhaps this means that God wants you to consider a new direction in some area of your work.
- Are you concerned about a friend? Perhaps you could reach out to him/her in some way.

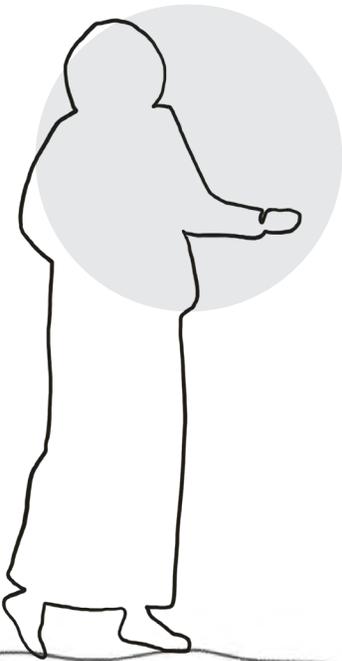
#### STEP 4: Choose one feature of the day and pray about it.

- Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to something during the day that God thinks is particularly important. It may involve a feeling, positive or negative. It may be a significant encounter with another person or a vivid moment of pleasure or peace. Or it may be something that seems rather insignificant.
- Look at it. Pray about it. Allow the prayer that it provokes to arise spontaneously from your heart, whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

#### STEP 5: Look toward tomorrow.

- Ask God to give you light for tomorrow's challenges. Pay attention to the feelings that surface as you survey what's coming up.
- Are you doubtful? Cheerful? Apprehensive? Full of delighted anticipation? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer.
- Seek God's guidance. Ask Him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.
- Ask forgiveness for your sins. Ask for His protection and help. Ask for His wisdom, too, about the questions you have and the problems you face.
- Do all this in the spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned

WEEK  
**No 5**



**The Prodigal God**

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”*

**Luke 15:21b**

A large grid of small dots for taking sermon notes.

# Group Study

The Prodigal God :: Luke 15:21b-24

What is the most kind act that someone has done for you?



## DISCOVER THE WAY OF JESUS

Read Luke 15 20-22. How do you think the son felt as he saw his father run towards him?

Compare what the son said to his father and what he actually said. Notice what he left off. Now, compare what he was going to say with what his father said to him in verses 23-24. Why did the son think that he would need to earn his place back in the family? What did the father do instead?

What does the father's response suggest about the nature of God's repentance?

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## NURTURE THE HEART OF JESUS

In this study, we have noticed how we are like the son.

Now, let's ask the question: How can we be more like the father? How do we become people who forgive like this? How would you describe the attitude with which the father forgives?

Have you ever celebrated repentance like this before? Have you ever thought about it being a joyous opportunity to forgive someone?

How can we become people who celebrate repentance like this? What kind of character traits does it take to forgive the way the father does?

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## ACT FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

Is there someone that you need to forgive today? How can you develop an attitude that would even forgive before a person has finished apologizing?

Have a conversation about this group about whether or not to keep meeting after this study. We'll provide small group lesson guides for the next series that will take us up to Easter.

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## God's Compassion

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20

"[The son] arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him." Luke 15:20

Unconditional love doesn't exist... At least, this was the lie I came to believe growing up. My biological father, who was my best friend, abandoned us when he died of a drug overdose when I was 9. In the aftermath, my family fragmented and I grew lonely. I came to believe if my own father would abandon me, so would everyone else. All they needed was a reason.

So for fear of being abandoned again, I got good. Don't get me wrong, I didn't get "good" in the true sense of the word. I got good at appearing good and hiding the rest. To use a metaphor synergistic with this parable, I left "home" and slapped lipstick all over this pig. But the more I hid, the darker, lonelier, and more empty my hiding place became. All the while, I heard the voice of the Father saying, "Come home, son."

I came to the place where, like the son in this story, I couldn't hide anymore. My soul was in bondage and God showed me the only way to freedom was through the truth... to "return home."

So, one night I called my adopted dad (I know, we're skipping ahead, but that's for another time) and, for the first time in my life, I laid everything out in the open. With similar words, I was saying, "I have sinned against heaven, against my family, and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

And in that moment where he had every right to judge me, reject me, and disown me, he showed me compassion and simply said, "I'm so sorry for you, Nate. I love you... God loves you."

This is the love of the Father... unconditional in the truest sense, one that knows all that you are and doesn't leave, but instead runs to you

with compassion. It's this love, the same love demonstrated through Jesus, that can change the world... I know it changed mine.

NATE KEATING

*Modern Worship Director*

## A Robe

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

When I was young, I knew exactly what I wanted to be when I grew up. "I want to be a band director and a preacher." There isn't any logical connection, but for me, it made perfect sense. When I was born, my dad was a band director. He was gifted and loved by his students. When I was four, God called my father to ministry. A year later, we moved to Kentucky so he could attend seminary. He was a gifted leader and our family was embraced and loved by the churches he pastored.

The journey from my five-year-old dream to who I am today has taken many twists and turns. More times than I can count, I've found myself far from where I expected to be. As I look back, I can clearly see God's unrelenting grace at work, helping me take hold of that for which Christ took hold of me.

Several years ago, I decided to return to school to pursue biblical and theological studies. The process was considerably more difficult than I had anticipated - academically and spiritually. As the deadline to complete the degree approached, I realized I would not be able to complete the degree. I felt very far from my hopes and far from God. In a profound expression of grace, God carried me through. When my doctoral hood and cap arrived, I wanted one thing - to wear them with my late father's doctoral robe. His robe doesn't exactly fit me. He was taller than me and the size was a little off, but that was ok with me.

Throughout scripture, robes symbolize our relationships and calling

(Joseph in Gn. 41:42, Isa. 61:1-11). Paul encourages us to “put on Christ” (Ro. 13:14). The ways Jesus is made known through our lives, work, and calling isn’t something we produce by our own effort. It is a gift from our Father who relentlessly pursues us and robes us in Christ. In Christ, we reclaim God’s dream [for us] as daughters and sons. We bear God’s image, demonstrate His faithfulness, and reveal Christ in the world.

DR. DAVID BALES - *Classic Worship Pastor*

## A Ring

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

*“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.’”*

On a cold Christmas Eve, when I was eighteen, my boyfriend of a year and a half surprised me with a diamond engagement ring and proposal. That ring signified love, hope for the future, and the promise of life with the man I loved.

We all know the story of the prodigal son. We see the forgiving father run to welcome his lost son home! Not only does he prepare a feast, but he gives him a robe, ring and shoes. This tells us that God is concerned not just with our spiritual, but also with our physical well-being. But these gifts to the lost son have a more significant meaning.

The signet ring was a seal to officially sign documents and represented a position of authority. It was as reliable as a signature, a seal of authenticity that branded a document. In a world where the majority of men were illiterate, the signet ring became their writing instrument; an instrument responsible for signing the most historical documents long ago. The ring signified the father’s high level of love for his son.

Our heavenly Father puts no condition on us when we wander and then return. He doesn’t hold back to see if we really mean it or have

some ulterior motive. He doesn’t say, you can come home, but have to earn back my love, trust and respect. He opens his arms wide and lavishes love, mercy and compassion on us. He keeps no record of wrong, he doesn’t say you hurt me, now you must make restitution. No, our Father rejoices when we seek his forgiveness. Henri Nouwen describes it best saying “I realize that I am not used to the image of God throwing a big party. It seems to contradict the solemnity and seriousness I have always attached to God. But when I think about the ways in which Jesus describes God’s Kingdom, a joyful banquet is often at its center . . .”

God celebrates each wanderer upon their return. Can we have his heart of forgiveness and open our arms wide to the prodigals we know and even some we don’t yet, and offer them a special place in our family?

DEB HILL

*Executive Assistant*

## The Shoes

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23

*“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’” Luke 15:22*

Growing up at Emmanuel Faith, I’ve heard the Parable of the Prodigal Son innumerable times. I have no memory of when I first heard or read it. However, this was the first time I’d ever paid any attention to the father giving shoes to his son.

I’ve never had to worry about owning a pair of shoes. I’ve always had multiple for as long as I can remember and I’ve definitely never made a long journey while barefoot. The prodigal [son] probably never had to worry about shoes either . . . until he left his father. After he left and squandered all that he had, he became a servant and lost his shoes. I’m imagining the prodigal in the fields with the pigs, covered in filth from

head to toe. His feet must have been disgusting. And that's how he returns home to his father: ashamed, destitute, and barefoot.

In that day, only servants and slaves walked around barefoot. In many cases, this was so they couldn't run away. The son returns home asking to be treated as such. But his father orders that he be given shoes, a symbol that this is his son and that he is to be fully restored into the family. You'd think he might wait till he's cleaned up, but he doesn't. And that's exactly what God does for each of his children. Cleanliness doesn't precede restoration. We come to him dirty, having been enslaved to our sins, and he covers us in his grace and forgiveness. That's what makes us whole.

Looking at those shoes now, I realize that the father gave his son the ability to leave again. And as I look at my life, I can see how I've turned away from Jesus time and time again. But I'm comforted by his words to Paul when he states, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Jesus is always ready for us to turn towards him and his grace is abundant. Shoes aren't designed for sitting around. They're for walking. The question is, will we walk with him?

**DANIEL ROSE**

*Production Director*

## Restoration

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24

*Isaiah 43:19: "Behold, I am doing a new thing..."*

For as long as I can remember, I gravitated towards the world of music. I played violin in orchestra, sang in choir and even dabbled in musical theater. Shortly after I accepted Jesus as my Savior, I felt the tug to lead people in musical worship.

One evening after church, a youth leader pulled me aside. "Jean, I know you can sing. Do you want to sing with us on stage?" I was torn. I wanted to respond to what I sensed God asking of me, but I wasn't sure I was up to the task. So I responded with "I don't know." What that leader did next was pivotal in my life. He said to me: "Look, you can sing. But I can't decide for you. So this is the last time I'm going to ask. Do you want to sing with us?"

My yes that night was the catalyst for my journey of leading people in worship of Almighty God for the past two decades. And what a beautiful adventure it has been!

I don't think I'm alone when I admit that it is not always easy to say yes to God. We look at ourselves and see what's wrong instead of the potential. We resign to our brokenness and doubt that healing is possible. We give shame and fear more real estate in our minds than the promises of God's Word.

I'm reminded of a story from the book of John, where Jesus approaches a man who had been ill for nearly four decades. Jesus' first words to him were "Do you want to be healed?" Healing was right there in front of him, but first, he had to admit his need. His "yes" both confessed his need and declared Jesus' greatness, and in response to his honest vulnerability, the Savior stepped in and restored him.

God's ability to restore has no limits. He is ready and waiting to bring us, his prodigal creation, back to our fullest potential. He just needs our yes.

**JEAN MENJIVAR**

*Modern Worship*

## Spiritual Practice

Visio Divina is a way of seeing God as we prayerfully invite him to speak to our hearts through looking at nature or an image. The following page shows a depiction of “The Return of the Prodigal Son” by the 17th century Dutch painter Rembrandt. Rembrandt was known for his use of light, shade, and uncompromising realism. As you walk through the following steps of practicing Visio Divina, or “sacred seeing”, consider the depths of the soul of each character and what God may be showing you through their own realities.

STEP 1: Quiet your soul in God’s presence.

- Invite the Holy Spirit to guide you.

STEP 2: Gaze at the image with openness, seeking to see God’s heart.

- Notice the shapes, the colors and the lighting.
- Notice the detail of the background and the foreground.

STEP 3: Notice what stirs within you.

- What responses, memories or feelings does the image evoke?
- How does the image connect to your own life?
- Why do you think God is drawing you in this way?
- Do you sense an invitation or a calling?
- Don’t rush... take your time.

STEP 4: Notice each character.

- If you were in the image, who would you be?
- What feelings do you notice within yourself as you consider that character?

STEP 5: Talk with God about what you see and feel.

- Give voice to the emotion that is stirring within.
- What will you take with you from this time?
- To what is God calling you to through this experience with him?
- How will you respond to him?



THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON

*By Rembrandt Van Rijn*

WEEK  
**No 6**



**The Party Resistant**

*"It was fitting to celebrate and be glad,  
for this your brother was dead, and is alive;  
he was lost, and is found."*

**Luke 15:21b**

A large grid of small dots for taking notes, spanning the width of the page.

# Group Study

The Party Resistant :: Luke 15:25-32

Have you ever been hesitant to forgive someone? What are the reasons that make you want to be careful about being too quick to forgive?



## DISCOVER THE WAY OF JESUS

Read Luke 15:25-32. Before we judge the older brother, take some time to understand him. How would this situation make you feel? Would you be frustrated if this were your brother?

I have a feeling that there is a little “older brother syndrome” in each of us. We don’t love seeing other people get away with things. What is that about us as humans? Why do we want people to pay for their wrongs?

Notice the older brother’s complaint, in verse 29. Who is he most mad at, his brother or his father? What does this suggest about the reason that we find it hard to celebrate forgiveness?

Notice the first sentence of the father’s response in verse 31. What was the mistake in the older brother’s thinking that the father was trying to point out?

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## NURTURE THE HEART OF JESUS

Compare this parable with the one Jesus tells in Matthew 20:1-16. What does this parable suggest about the problem that we have with seeing God’s grace given to people who don’t deserve it?

What do we need to recognize about ourselves before we can truly celebrate the repentance of others?

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## ACT FOR THE SAKE OF THE WORLD

Go back and look at the first two parables in Luke 15. They both end with someone searching after what was lost. Who should have searched after what was lost in this story?

Is there a lost person that you need to search after today? Maybe invite your group to pray for you as you do.

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## Generosity

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27

“Every time I take a step in the direction of generosity I know that I am moving from fear to love.” Henri Nouwen

How many times are our days taken up by job or family duties, errands, and afternoon activities to only then end the night mindlessly strolling through our phone or watching the news wishing we had time to do “other” things? Do we take priority to set aside time to give to our neighbor? It’s easy for us to set aside time for a friend, yet having a conversation with the homeless person at the gas station requires more time and energy. I find myself often saying “when I have time I’ll do this...” or “Once this season slows down then I can...” I tend to get caught up in the busyness of life and miss what is right in front of me. I forget that I am to be a steward of what God gives me and freely pour out into those around me.

How have we received generosity from Jesus? Are we partaking in the generosity of the feast of the bride and the bridegroom the Son, with lost people? Generosity is an invitation to partake in the Kingdom story which is found in Jesus. It is by inviting people in with our time and gifts that we extend the invitation of Jesus. We aren’t to look at the older brother and try not to be like him, we are to look to the other Older Brother who did extend grace and generosity to our younger brother. There will be times when we feel tired or territorial with our time and skills but when we give freely we experience the love of Christ and His joy.

“The leap of faith always means loving without expecting to be loved in return, giving without wanting to receive, inviting without hoping to be invited, holding without asking to be held. Every time I make a little leap, I catch a glimpse of the One who runs out to me and invites me into his joy.” Henri Nouwen

LILLIAN ARJONA GARZON

*Community Engagement Director*

## Restoring Honor

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

I’ll never forget my first trip to Jordan visiting with Syrian and Iraqi refugees. In addition to losing family members, friends, and homes, they also lost any means to work and support their families, bringing shame and a sense of lost dignity. Broken and cast aside, families were now at the mercy of foreign governments and charitable organizations just to survive each day.

Yet when I entered their homes as a stranger, I was always welcomed as an honored guest, and received the warmest hospitality, hugs, and tea. The root of all this hospitality is the fact that many Eastern cultures are honor bound to the best and highest treatment of their guests. I spent hours in their homes sitting with them, hearing their stories, and sharing God’s word and love with them - but it didn’t end there.

As sons and daughters of the King, we have the highest honor bestowed upon us - and are honor bound to the highest degree. Do we choose to embrace this identity and open our hearts, our schedule, our resources—the riches of God’s Kingdom He has allowed us to steward—to help restore honor to the least, the last, and the lost? The older brother, with all his resources, didn’t do his job to bring his younger brother home and help restore his honor.

After my trip to Jordan, I knew I wanted to share the love of God to my new refugee friends in a practical way to help restore their honor. So I helped start an NGO that allowed for them to provide for their families by creating and selling handmade goods. All profits went back into an education program for their children.

By opening up my heart to strangers in need, God blessed me with people I now call family. When we make space for God in our hearts to move, it grows our capacity to love others and meet their needs.

“Christianity should feel like, ‘my love for others continues to deepen,’ not ‘my beliefs are more correct than anyone else’s.” - Ben Cremer

KARINA PAJE

*Project Specialist*

## Sharing is Caring

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1

No one had to teach us as two year olds to be selfish with our toys. “Mine!” was one of the first words out of our mouth. Sharing was hard with our siblings, harder at the neighborhood playground and harder still with total strangers in the public park.

Not much changed after we grew up. We might be willing to share what we have with our immediate family (or even our spiritual brothers and sisters in the family of God), but we’re less likely to do that in our neighborhood and even less likely with total strangers especially if they don’t share our skin color, political views or lifestyle. Farther out are those who wronged us, those who wish us harm—our declared enemies.

The further away someone sits in our circles of trust and care, the less we are prepared to share with them. It’s perfectly logical. Limited trust, limited care and limited sharing is how we ensure that we have enough to meet our own needs, that we don’t get taken advantage of, that the world is fair and equitable, that there are appropriate boundaries and limits in our society.

And yet, Jesus keeps upending our well-established system. The older son has to put up with the prodigal’s son unconditional reinstatement. The early workers in the vineyard get paid equally to those who joined at the end of the work day. The Messiah doesn’t dethrone the occupiers, he lets them execute him without having a committed crime. The “neighbor” now includes foreigners and strangers. The

“family” of God now includes both Jew and Greek, master and slave...

The logic that determines Jesus’ words and actions is so different from ours, because it is rooted in a different reality. It’s the reality of the Kingdom of God where favor is unmerited, where love is not reciprocal but unconditional, giving is better than receiving, where blessings are shared with irrational generosity... where we can share freely because the supply of “toys” is as unlimited as the Creator himself...

Even though I am still in this world, it’s the reality of the Kingdom of God I want to live in. God, give me an opportunity to do that today.

LUKE BAJENSKI

*Outreach Pastor*

## Grace

THURSDAY, MARCH 2

“We are saved by faith alone [not our works], but not by faith that remains alone. Nothing we do can merit God’s grace and favor, we can only believe that he has given it to us in Jesus Christ and receive it by faith. But if we truly believe and trust in the one who sacrificially served us, it changes us into people who sacrificially serve God and our neighbors.” Tim Keller

How many times do we hide in ourselves and our correct behavior that we forget that Grace has found us and calls us to live in Him? The older son became so focused on doing the right thing that his actions weren’t a result of his understanding of grace but a merit system. When he saw his father run to the younger son, embrace him and prepare a feast the only appropriate answer was anger at the injustice. The younger brother had brought shame unto their family. In that cultural context not only had the younger brother abandoned the family he had basically told the father he wished he was dead so that he could get his inheritance. The older brother watched this all happen

and continued his duty of working. He did not extend grace to the younger brother in going out to find him and bring him home.

How many times as Christians do we look at people outside the church as “outsiders” or “the other”? Do we tend to continue our works to get points in the merit system or do we recognize the grace God has given us daily, and extend it to those around us? We should not consider ourselves as higher than others but display grace with open arms. Who has God placed around you so that you can take that step of displaying grace? Who is your younger brother that God has called you to love and embrace? Ask God this week to reveal a person to you that needs the reminder that God grants us grace and that His mercies are new each morning.

LILLIAN ARJONA GARZON

*Community Engagement Director*

## Upside Down Kingdom

FRIDAY, MARCH 3

“Once you have given up knowing who is right, it is easy to see neighbors everywhere you look.”

-Barbara Brown Taylor

The gospels uniquely teach us about the life and ministry of Jesus and his heralding in of an upside down kingdom. The kingdom feels foreign yet it is one we were originally intended to experience. The Prodigal Son is one of three parables about lost things. Jesus launches into these stories as the Pharisees and teachers begin grumbling about the undesirable company Jesus is keeping (tax collectors and sinners- oh my!). I wonder if this grumbling stems from the Pharisees coming face to face with this upside down kingdom. If King Jesus breaks bread with such company, then where do the devout, the ‘good guys’, and the ones who are ‘right’ fit in to this kingdom? Perhaps envy and fear are the basis of this grumbling. Maybe these Pharisees are even a little

belligerent about their uncertain status.

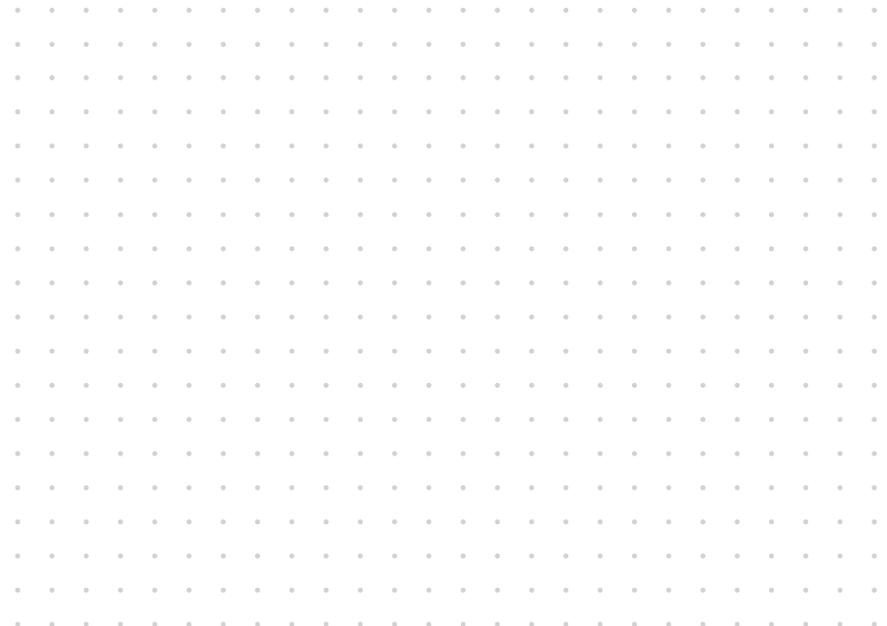
In these parables, the preciousness of the lost item is emphasized. A dedicated shepherd lovingly searching for his lost sheep. An old woman tearing her house apart for that one coin. The prodigal son is precious to his father- clearly the welcome home party demonstrates that- but what is he to his older brother?

The older brother, intent on pointing out who is right and wrong in this story misses the preciousness of his younger sibling.

Love your neighbor as yourself- we know this is one of the fundamental tenets of Jesus’ kingdom. If we desire to live within this kingdom, we must see neighbors - and their preciousness- rather than adversaries and opposition.

ANNA NIELSEN

*Life on Mission Director*



## Spiritual Practice

Listen to the following song. Scan the QR code or search your favorite music app or YouTube for “My Story” by Big Daddy Weave.



### MY STORY

*Big Daddy Weave*

If I told you my story—You would hear hope, that wouldn't let go  
And if I told you my story—You would hear love that never gave up  
And if I told you my story—You would hear life, but it wasn't mine  
If I should speak, then let it be of the grace —That is greater than all my sin  
Of when justice was served, and where mercy wins!  
Of the kindness of Jesus, that draws me in  
Oh to tell you my story, is to tell of Him

If I told you my story, you would hear victory—Over the enemy  
And if I told you my story, you would hear freedom—That was won for me  
And if I told you my story, you would hear life—Overcome the grave  
If I should speak, then let it be of the grace—That is greater than all my sin  
Of when justice was served, and where mercy wins!  
Of the kindness of Jesus, that draws me in  
Oh to tell you my story, is to tell of Him

This is my story, this is my song—Praising my savior, all the day long  
This is my story, this is my song—Praising my savior, all the day long  
For the grace that is greater, than all my sin  
Of when justice was served, and when mercy wins!  
Of the kindness of Jesus, that draws me in  
Oh to tell you my story, is to tell—Of the grace that is greater, than all my sin  
Of when justice was served, and when mercy wins!  
Of the kindness of Jesus, that draws me in  
Oh to tell you my story, is to tell of Him  
Oh to tell you my story, is to tell of Him

This is my story, this is my song—Praising my savior, all the day long  
We have spent the last six weeks studying one of the most passionate stories in the Bible that communicates God's amazing love, forgiveness, and grace. As we close with this final Spiritual Practice, ponder the following questions:

- Where have you experienced hope that wouldn't let go?
- When have you felt God's love never giving up on you?
- When has God given you new life that you knew you didn't deserve?
- How have you experienced victory over the enemy?
- What freedom are you living in today? Or long to live in?
- How is God forming you into his image each and every day?

Reflect on what God has done in your life then go share it with others! Living in the way of Jesus, with the heart of Jesus, for the sake of the world, means that we don't keep our stories hidden. God has done a miracle in each of our lives and that miracle is meant to be shared. Your story may be the very hope that someone else is longing for.

*“but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found!”*  
- Luke 15:32 (The Message)

**Go celebrate and share the life that you have because of Jesus!**

## Next Steps

### FOR FURTHER READING:

*The Prodigal God* by Tim Keller

*The Return of the Prodigal* by Henri Nouwen

*The Cross and the Prodigal* by Kenneth Bailey

### LIFE GROUPS:

Connecting in community produces growth and brings about encouragement as we seek to live in the way of Jesus with the heart of Jesus! If your group plans to keep meeting, then your leader will continue to get guides from us. If you don't have a group or if you need a new one, please visit: [efcc.org/groups](http://efcc.org/groups)  
We would love to get you connected!

### DAILY FILL:

If you have enjoyed reading the Daily Fill throughout this series and would like to subscribe to receive future Daily Fills, please do so here: [efcc.org/devos](http://efcc.org/devos). The Daily Fill can also be found on the EFCC FaceBook page.

### SPIRITUAL PRACTICES:

We hope that you have enjoyed engaging in a weekly Spiritual Practice. God longs to connect with us in every aspect of our lives! For more ideas regarding Spiritual Practices, check out this book by Adele Calhoun: "Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us". You can also access more Spiritual Practices on our website at: [efcc.org/resources](http://efcc.org/resources)

Thank you for joining us on this part of your journey! We hope you are excited about where God is leading next. We have spent time exploring our own stories and how God's hand is at work in each of our lives. With that, some emotions and desires have likely been stirred. Following are some next steps to help you continue in your story of living in the way of Jesus with the heart of Jesus!

Are you looking for a place to serve?  
Consider joining a team at Emmanuel Faith  
[efcc.org/teams](http://efcc.org/teams)

Could you use the support of others to help you on your journey either through a support group or counseling? We care and would love to walk with you.  
[efcc.org/need-help](http://efcc.org/need-help)

Join us for many other ways to grow in your relationship with Jesus for people of all ages and stages:  
[efcc.org](http://efcc.org)



**Emmanuel Faith**  
Community Church

[www.efcc.org](http://www.efcc.org)