

Introduction: Why is understanding grace so important?

What is grace?

- A dictionary definition
- A theological definition
- A Sunday school definition
- The problem: It's still **NEBULOUS**.

How do we get a grasp of grace?

- Examine its roots Exodus 33:19-34:5
- Examine the life of Jesus John 1:14-18
- Examine the teaching of Jesus Luke 15

A prodigal love *

Luke 15

A. This is an incredible and (in Jesus' time) **CULTURALLY** flabbergasting chapter of scripture!

B. This is the only time in Scripture when Jesus tells 3 stories in one parable. He wants to dramatically emphasize some essential and (to His audience) revolutionary truths about God.

1. Jesus wants us to **KNOW** what God is like!

2. Jesus wants us to understand the **HEART** of the Father.

C. Jesus ministered in a Middle-Eastern **PEASANT** culture.

1. Even the “urban” and the educated had their roots in that peasantry.

2. The peasant **CUSTOMS** and traditions were known by everyone in the culture.

D. “Jesus **WELCOMES** sinners.”

Luke 15:1-2

1. What flabbergasted and angered the Scribes and Pharisees was that Jesus, who claimed to be one with the Father, **RECEIVED** sinners as friends!

2. Jesus was **SHAMING**, and defiling, God's reputation. At issue was God's character.

*Notes adapted by permission from Roger Williams, CEO – Mt. Hermon Christian Conference Center, 4 months before his death.

E. “He **EATS** with them.”

Luke 15:1-2

1. Eating a meal together has great significance in the Middle East – it is a sacramental act signifying total acceptance and conferring blessing.
2. This act **DEFILED** Jesus, according to the Pharisee’s norm.

F. “...muttered...”

Luke 15:1-2

1. This **WORD** is used only twice in the New Testament – here and in Luke 19:7
2. Because of a special prefix, it has added strength. There is a murmuring through the crowd – they are actively stirring up a public undercurrent of **DISCONTENT** and disapproval.

G. Notice the **PROGRESSION** of this chapter:

1. In the first story the lost is one in a hundred. In the second, the lost is one in ten. In the third, the lost is one in two.
2. In the first story, the lost is out in a wide wilderness. In the second, the lost is inside the house. In the third, the lost is inside the **HOME (HEART)**.

H. Notice the parallel characterizations of this parable:

Actors	The Lost Sheep	The Lost Coin	The Lost Son
God	The Shepherd	The Woman	The Father
Sinners (Irreligious)	The Lost Sheep	The Lost Coin	The Younger Son
Sinner (Religious)	The 99 Sheep	The Nine Coins	The Older Son

I. Notice the common themes:

	Something Valuable Is Missing	Something Valuable Is Found	Celebration!
Lost Sheep:	Missing Sheep Matters	Missing Sheep is Found	Luke 15:5-6
Lost Coin:	Missing Coin Matters	Missing Coin is Found	Luke 15:9
Lost Sons:	Missing Son Matters	Missing Son is Found	Luke 15:22-24

Questions to Ponder:

1. How do you tend to view God?
2. How would you now explain grace?
3. What do you think God is saying to you in this lesson?

Suggested Reading:

The Return of the Prodigal Son by Henri Nouwen
Prodigal God by Tim Keller
AHA by Kyle Idleman

Introduction: Jesus redefines God

- The Occasion Luke 15:1
- The Conflict Luke 15:2
- The Parable Luke 15:3-32

The one parable has 3 stories.

Each story has **FIVE** things in common:

1. Something valuable is **LOST**.
2. An intensive **SEARCH** occurs.
3. That which was lost is **FOUND**.
4. A great **CELEBRATION** follows.
5. The spiritual application is **EXPLAINED**.

What do we learn from this parable? (Review)

- God deeply values irreligious, immoral, lost people.
- God is actively pursuing relationship with lost people.
- Heaven rejoices when one lost person repents.
- The value of that which is lost exponentially increases in each story.

(Sheep → Coin → Sons)

- The father in story #3 represents God.
- The two sons depict the “immoral sinners” (younger son) and “religious sinners,” Pharisees (older son).
- Both sons are equally lost, but not equally aware of their lost-ness.

What do we learn about the 3 main characters?

Luke 15:11-12

- The son’s request: “I want **MINE** now!”
- The son’s message: “I wish you were **DEAD.**”
- The implications for the father **ECONOMICALLY** and **SOCIALLY.**

- The father's unprecedented response **SHOCKED** his audience.
- The older son's shocking **SILENCE** revealed his broken relationship with his father and brother.

What can we learn about ourselves?

** Luke 15:13-17

- "... distant country..." where he's gone.
- "... severe famine..." why he doesn't just come home.
- "... feeding pigs..." can't get any more desperate
- Younger son "came to his senses."
 1. I will **RETURN** "... go back home."
 2. I will **CONFESS** "... my sin to my father and God."
 3. I will **MAKE RESTITUTION** "... a hired hand."
 4. I will **DO IT NOW** "... he got up and went."

** The son's expectations, fears, and perspective from a Middle Eastern peasant culture is available in Dr. Ken Bailey's book: *The Cross and the Prodigal*

The Prodigal and the Perfectionist

Why We All Need Grace

(Part 2)

Receiving Grace
Luke 15:11-24

What do we learn about God's heart?

Luke 15:20-24

1. The best **ROBE**:
2. The **RING**:
3. The **SANDALS**:
4. The **FATTED CALF**:
5. The **FATHER'S PARTY**:

The father's response is shocking, **SCANDALOUS**, and completely unexpected as he takes the **SHAME** his son deserves.

Jesus' message to us is...

Discussion Questions:

1. Where do you need grace in your life right now?
2. Which part of this story resonated the most with you?
3. Who in your relational network has hit "rock bottom" and needs to know God values them through you?
4. What step of faith do you need to take to draw near to your heavenly Father?

Introduction: “See to it that no one misses the grace of God.”

Hebrews 12:15

- “In general, the churches... bore for me the relation to God that billboards did to Coca-Cola: they provided thirst without quenching it.”

John Updike
A Month of Sundays

- “I went looking for spirit and found alcohol; I went looking for soul and I bought some style; I wanted to meet God, but they sold me religion.”

Bono
Walk on: The Spiritual Journey of U2

Why isn't the "Good News" good news anymore?

1. Jesus tells a story:

- The occasion Luke 15:1
- The conflict Luke 15:2
- The parable Luke 15:3-32

2. What did this story teach about God's heart for lost people?

- The younger son receives **GRACE**.
- The father receives the son's **SHAME**.

3. What was Jesus' **MESSAGE** to the elder brothers (Pharisees) of that day?

4. How do you **KNOW** if you're an "elder brother"?
5. What is Jesus saying to us "elder brother" types today?
6. How did the elder brother respond to the father's invitation to **COME HOME**?
7. What keeps **YOUNGER** and **OLDER** brothers from responding to God's grace?

Questions to Ponder:

1. What keeps you from responding to God's grace?
2. Do you see yourself as more of a younger brother or older brother?
3. Are there fears that hold you back from responding and receiving God's grace? What are they?
4. How would Christians be viewed if we saw lost people the way Jesus does, and God our Father the way Jesus revealed Him?