

The Thread

Discovering The Thread of the Gospel Through The Big-Picture Story of the Bible

Part 3: The Gospel Come To Life Lesson 34: The Parable of the Prodigal Son



Session Snapshot

Narrative Passage: Luke 15:11-32

Gospel Focus: Luke 15:4-7

Student Takeaways:

- Students will understand that the Prodigal Son is a parable that demonstrates the great love and joy Jesus has for those who return “home” to Him.
- Students will see the great value God places on the lost.
- Students will re-evaluate how they look at others, and will consider what it would be like to see people through the lens in which Christ sees others.



Overview

This week in your big-picture look at the story of the Bible, you’ll be studying one of the most well known passages in Scripture. In the Parable of the Lost Son we see a beautiful picture of how our Heavenly Father sees each one of us. Whether we are wild and rebellious or uptight and stuffy, He loves each of us the same and wants us to come home to Him. Too often we are judgmental about how others are living, and fail to see them the same way God does. In this lesson we’ll be challenged to see other people through the lens in which Christ sees them.



Teacher Prep Video

Each *Thread* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your *Thread* lesson 34 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 34, and click on the “Background” tab. You’ll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.



Bible Background

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide the basic context for the passages you’ll be studying.

- **What do we mean by “context”?** In every ym360 Bible study lesson we encourage teachers to help students know who wrote a particular book, when it was written, and why it was written.
- **Why teach context?** Grasping the big-picture view of God’s story of redemption is difficult for teenagers without understanding the context of the books and passages they’re studying.

Luke

Author: Luke was a doctor, a Gentile Christian and a companion of Paul.

Time frame: The Gospel of Luke was written around 60 AD.

Purpose: Luke is the only Gentile author of the Bible. His entire purpose was to write an accurate account of the life of Jesus so as to present Jesus as Savior, fully God and fully man. It is one of the synoptic Gospels, having much in common with the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

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Lesson Plan

The Lesson Plan contains four elements:

- An introductory activity called Getting Started designed to prepare teenagers to engage with God and the truth of His Word.
- A section entitled The Story featuring a narrative from Scripture that helps teenagers know God better through learning the story of the Bible.
- A special emphasis entitled The Thread where teenagers discover the Gospel thread coursing throughout the story of the Bible.
- An application-focused segment called Wrapping Up helping teenagers ask the question, “How am I impacted by what I learned today”?

Getting Started

- **Goal:** To get students thinking about the concept of value.
- **Set-Up:** Bring a few small objects to class that would have little to no value to the students. Examples could include a pencil, a book they’ve never heard of, and an empty soda can. Also, bring a few things that would have some value to them. Examples could include a \$10 or \$20 bill, a tablet, and an iTunes gift card (it doesn’t have to have anything on it, you’re not giving it away).

FIRST, begin by explaining to the students that you’re going to be talking a little bit about the concept of value. Ask them:

- **Off the top of your head, what are some things you value? What gives those things value?**
 - o Answers here will vary.

NEXT, show them the objects that you brought with you that have little value. Ask:

- **So, if I told you these things were all hidden somewhere in the room and the first person to find them could keep them, what would go through your mind? Would you even move from your seat?**
 - o Answers here will vary. Some of them will probably say they would look at you like you’re crazy, and none of them would think about looking for whatever you showed them.

THEN, show them the objects that have some value and ask:

- **Now, same thing, if I told you that these things were hidden around the room and the first person to find them could keep them, what would you think? Would you get up and start looking?**
 - o Answers here will vary, but they will likely tell you that they’d get up and put forth some effort to find those things.

NEXT, hold up one of the valuable items and one of the ones with little value. Ask:

- **So, what’s the difference? What is about one of these that gets you out of your seat and put forth a little effort while the other one doesn’t make you move? Where does the value of each thing come from?**

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o Answers here could vary. Push them a little bit on the value question. Get them to explain what makes these things have at least some value to them.

FINALLY, transition the conversation a little by asking something like:

- **What about when it comes to people? What makes you value certain relationships more than others?**
 - o Answers here will vary.
- **Is it sometimes based on how you're treated? Have you ever been mistreated and decided to "cut someone loose"? What does someone have to do to push you to that point?**
 - o Answers here will vary.

Transition to The Story by explaining to the students that during this lesson you're going to dig a little deeper into this concept of value, except we're going to look about from God's perspective.

The Story

- **Goal:** That students will understand that the Prodigal Son is a parable that demonstrates the great love and joy Jesus has for those who return "home" to Him.
- **Setup:** Students will need a Bible or a Bible app.

FIRST explain that in this lesson you'll be looking at the famous story of the parable of the Prodigal Son. If you'd like, use the "Connecting The Dots" section below to do a little review and/or fill in the gaps from your last lesson and this one.

Connecting The Dots

As you teach The Thread, there will naturally be some gaps in the story. This is an optional way for you to fill in some of the gaps between the last lesson you taught and this one. Use it as a way to review and/or to connect the dots to the events surrounding the passage.

- **It's important for the students to understand that two parables came before the one you're going to really look at today.**
- **The first one is the parable of the lost sheep. Jesus uses the example of a man with a hundred sheep that leaves 99 of them behind to go find one that's lost.**
- **The next one is the parable of the lost coin. In this one Jesus uses an example of a woman that loses one of her ten silver coins and searches diligently until she found the lost coin.**
- **In both parables there was great rejoicing when what was lost was found.**
- **Jesus explains that there's even more rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents and is no longer "lost," but is "found."**

NEXT, read or have a student read Luke 15:1-2. Explain to the students that Jesus is about to tell this group three different parables. The audience includes sinners, tax collectors, and Pharisees in it. Ask something like:

- **Do you think the people in the crowd will hear the parables differently? Explain.**
 - o Answer: They probably will receive the parables differently. The Pharisees were a more uptight bunch. The tax collectors and sinners were a rougher bunch. They were probably going to pick up on

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different things in the parables and have different opinions on what Jesus was getting at.

Remind students that in the two parables before the one we're really going to look at, something is lost and the owner fervently looks for it and rejoices when it's found. Ask something like:

- **What point is Jesus making in these parables?**

- o Answer: Jesus' point is that in the same way the owner of the sheep and coin rejoiced, there is also much rejoicing in heaven when one lost person comes to faith in Jesus.

THEN, explain to the students that after two very similar parables, Jesus tells a third parable about something that was lost, except this time it was about a son. Ask something like:

- **After the first two parables, what do you think the people were expecting to hear in this one?**

- o Answer: It was probably reasonable for everyone listening to think this parable would follow the same pattern.

NEXT, read or have a student read Luke 15:11-12. Ask:

- **What was so disrespectful about the younger son's request at the beginning of the parable?**

- o Answer: He asked for his inheritance early. That usually happens when a parent dies. He was basically telling his dad that he didn't really care about him, he just cared about his stuff.

THEN, read or have a student read Luke 15:13. Ask:

- **Who in the audience probably resonates most with what has happened in this parable so far?**

- o Answer: The sinners and tax collectors do. They probably understand making similar decisions. They were likely thinking, "Yeah, that sounds like me."

NEXT, have a student read Luke 15:14-16. Ask:

- **Do you think this is how the younger son thought things were going to go when he got his early inheritance? How do you think he planned for everything to go?**

- o Answer: No, surely he didn't think he was going to end up being jealous of a bunch of pigs. He thought he was going to have a lot of money and go have fun, but he was "reckless" and things didn't turn out that way.

- **What do you think is going through the Pharisees' minds at this point in hearing the story?**

- o Answer: Some of them were probably sitting back nodding along, thinking, "Yep, that's exactly what those sinners and tax collectors are like."

THEN, read or have a student read Luke 15:17-19. Ask something like:

- **Think about a time where you messed up really, really badly and had to go talk to the person you hurt. Did you think about what you were going to say? Did you play the conversation over and over in your head beforehand? This is similar to what's going on here.**

- **Who do you think the younger son represents?**

- o Answer: The younger son represents the sinners and tax collectors that were in the crowd listening to Jesus. He represents all those that sin and rebel by looking for satisfaction and fulfillment through "reckless living."

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- **What was his relationship with his father like? In the beginning, what did he want most from his dad?**
 - o Answer: He didn't seem to care much about his father or a relationship with him. In the beginning he was more interested in his dad's money than he was with a relationship with his dad. He only valued what his dad could give him.
- **When he came to his senses, what did he think about his dad?**
 - o Answer: It seems like he thought his dad would be upset with him, but would at least treat on the same level as a servant. He figured as mad as his dad probably was, he would agree to that and that was better than starving with pigs.

NEXT, tell the students that you're going to read just the first half of the next verse. Read: "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him..." and stop there. Then, say something like:

- **Imagine the father sitting there on his porch and seeing his son in the distance. He would have every right to be angry, right? To sit in his chair and tap his foot and just wait for the son to get there. And he's probably heard one of these speeches a hundred times. So, he knows what's coming.**

THEN, ask something like:

- **Before we really start talking about the dad, let's circle back to the folks listening to Jesus. What do you think the sinners and tax collectors are thinking is about to happen?**
 - o Answer: Let's be honest, these folks are the ones that have been told how messed they are their whole lives. Speeches? They've probably heard a million of them. So they're probably sitting there rooting for the younger son to nail his speech, but also thinking, "Yep, his dad is about to light him up."
- **What about the Pharisees?**
 - o Answer: They're the speech givers. They can't wait for the dad to get ahold of the son and give him an "I told you so" speech for the ages.

NEXT, read or have a student read all of verse 20-24. Ask something like:

- **Did the father's response surprise you? Why or why not?**
 - o Answers here will vary.
- **Compare verses 18-19 with verse 21. What do you notice? What happened to his speech?**
 - o Answer: He started his speech, but he didn't get to finish it. His dad cut him off and started giving instructions to get a party started.
- **Why do you think his dad cut him off?**
 - o Answer: He was overjoyed to have his boy back. He wasn't terribly concerned with a speech or apology. His son was home and that was all that mattered.
- **Did the son deserve this kind of treatment?**
 - o Answer: Of course not. In the beginning of the story he basically told his dad that he'd rather have his stuff than have anything to do with him. He totally disgraced his father and then went off and wasted everything he was given. The dad didn't owe his youngest son anything else.
- **So, let's stop and talk about the dad for a second. Who does he represent? What point is Jesus making through this character?**
 - o Answer: The dad in this story represents God. Jesus is making a point about the incredible, lavish, and undeserved grace the Heavenly Father has for even the worst of sinners. He was letting every-

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one know that no matter what's been done, the God just wants His children home.

THEN, ask something like:

- **What do you think is going through the sinners and tax collectors' minds when they hear Jesus tell the father's reaction to his son coming home?**
 - o Answer: The sinners and tax collectors must have been blown away. They are all "younger sons." They're the crowd that has used people and blown it on "reckless living." They're the ones that believe they aren't worth it, that they don't have value, and that no one cares if they're lost. But then Jesus hits them with this story and tells them that all of that is untrue, that they're believing a lie, and that their Heavenly Father desperately wants them to come home.
- **What do you think is going through the Pharisees' heads at this point?**
 - o Answer: The Pharisees must have been blown away too, but for a different reason. They had been waiting for that "told you so" speech and then this? They're sitting there wondering what is wrong with this dad. He had a perfect opportunity to judge his son and look down on him.

Transition to The Thread by saying something like:

- **So, when we piece all this story together - the audience Jesus was speaking to, the two parables that come before it, the father's reaction to his youngest son's return, and the reaction of the oldest son - what is Jesus teaching us? What is the main point of it all? Let's dig in a little more and find out.**

If students don't have any questions, transition into The Thread and take a look at where we see the connection of the Gospel to the big-picture narrative of Scripture.

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FIRST let's look back to the first parable in the chapter to answer those questions. Read or have a student read Luke 15:4-7. Ask:

- **What truth is being shared in this parable that transfers to the parable we just studied?**
 - o Answer: God is passionate about the lost. He's willing to leave the "found" where they are to pursue the lost, and there's great rejoicing when one of the lost is found. We see this at play in the parable of the prodigal son.
- **What's different about these parables?**
 - o The parable of the Prodigal Son didn't involve an inanimate object or an animal. It was a person. The younger son didn't accidentally get lost. He openly rebelled and ran off. So, the father had every reason to be mad, to punish him when he came home, or ignore him all together. But he ran to him. He wrapped him in his arms and threw a party. This shows us the amazing nature of God's grace and love towards us.
- **What does this tell us about the value God places on His children?**
 - o Answer: All three of these parables show us that God infinitely values us. No matter what we've done or how far we've strayed, Jesus has come on a journey much farther than a "far country" to find us and redeem us! Now that's valuing someone!

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If your students don't have any more questions, transition into the "Wrapping Up" section.

Wrapping Up

- **Goal:** That students will re-evaluate how they look at others, and will consider what it would be like to see people through the lens in which Christ sees others.
- **Set-Up:** None needed.

FIRST, explain to the students that we've talked about how God sees the lost and the value He places on them. Now, we're going to talk a little bit how we look at other people. Ask something like:

- **Think about people that live like the younger brother. How do you view them? What do you think about them?**
 - o Answers here will vary.

Say something like:

- **Think back to what we said about the Pharisees' reaction to how the father treated his younger son when he returned. Jesus knew that this was going to be the Pharisees' reaction and that's why He didn't end the story there. He went just a step further with the next eight verses to drive a point home to the Pharisees in the crowd.**

THEN, read or have a student read Luke 15:25-32. Ask:

- **So, what is the older son's problem?**
 - o Answer: The older son is mad because his dad is throwing a party for his reckless, stupid brother. He's self-righteous and tells his dad how good he's been for him all of these years, yet a party was never thrown for him.
- **How does he view his younger brother?**
 - o Answer: He looks down on him. He doesn't even refer to him as his brother. He only calls him "this son of yours" while he's talking to his dad. He doesn't think his brother is worth as much as he is.
- **Can you relate to this at all? Have you ever viewed prodigals the same way the older brother viewed his younger sibling? What makes you feel like this about them?**
 - o Answers here will vary.
- **Look back to verse 28. What did the father want for his youngest son? How does that correlate to what God wants for all of us?**
 - o Answer: He wanted him to come inside. He wanted him at the celebration. He wanted him home. He wanted the same thing for both of his sons. God wants all of His children home, the stuffy and uptight ones and the wild, careless ones; He loves all of us and values all of us.
- **How can we start viewing people through the same lens as God views us?**
 - o Answer: It starts by having a healthy view of ourselves, whether we are more like the younger or older son, we are all desperate for the Father. We're all desperate to come home and join the

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party. When we realize none of us deserve it, but that the Father wants us, we can start seeing everyone as loved and valued by the Lord.

- **What would it look like for all of us to start seeing all people this way?**

- o Answer: Christians are often known for being judgmental. Maybe if we started seeing people the way the Lord sees them, that would change and people would be more receptive to the message we're proclaiming.

Close your Bible study in prayer, perhaps including thanksgiving for what God has promised followers of Jesus about eternity.

- **If you've purchased the *Tracing The Thread* devotional journal, remind students that they'll be working through Week 34 this week. Encourage them to keep up with the daily devotions, and to give memorizing this week's verse their best shot.**
- **If you'll be utilizing the digital devotions included in the *Thread* curriculum, remind students how you'll be making them available, i.e., Instagram, Facebook, etc.**
- **Use the Social Media guide to stay in touch with students via text or Twitter, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.**

We Want To Hear From You . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at feedback@youthministry360.com.