

The Discipler's Commentary

Answer Outline for the Discipler

Luke 15

15:1-2 – Jesus is spending time with and ministering to tax collectors and sinners. This causes the Pharisees and scribes to grumble. Why?

- *The discipler may need to review why tax collectors and sinners were so abhorrent to Pharisees.*
- *Ask the disciple what kind of reaction the Pharisees, experts in the Old Testament, should have had toward those who were lost because of sin. (Law vs. love)*

15:3-32 – Because the religious leaders obviously do not see any benefit in Jesus spending time with the sinners, Jesus begins teaching a series of parables.

- *The discipler is equipped here to explain the purpose of parables; see below*

The purpose of parables:

- *The discipler may need to elaborate each of these points.*
1. A parable is designed to teach a spiritual truth
 - *Parables are not just cute stories such as Aesop's Fables, or proverbs which teach lessons about life. They are specifically intended to teach a spiritual truth that helps the listener see how God sees things.*
 - *Parables are often taught to help the listener understand what the kingdom of God looks like.*
 - *Parables are also taught to help a believer understand how to live a godly life, or how to be a true follower of Jesus.*
 - *Parables do not predict the future, but equip the believer how to cope with whatever the future holds.*
 2. A parable is a story that could be true but is not necessarily true;
 - *Parables are therefore taken from everyday settings and events that the listener can relate to.*
 - *Parables are uniquely designed for the given audience.*
 3. A parable is designed to reveal truth to believers and hide truth from doubters and skeptics.
 - *A believer will attempt to understand the meaning of the parable; he or she will seek out the spiritual truth which should result in changed behavior or changed relationships.*
 - *An unbeliever will not want to waste time trying to understand a parable, and in fact may be so blinded by disbelief that he is completely unable to grasp the spiritual truth.*

15:4-7 – The parable of the lost sheep

- *All of Jesus' audience would be familiar with sheep. The disciple may not be.*
- *The discipler may need to explain to the disciple the characteristics of sheep and how they can become lost.*

Major themes:

1. The value of the lost individual (the "one")
 - *The key word here is "value." Every individual is valuable to God. Can the disciple name some kind of individuals that the world—or even the church—might find NOT valuable to God?*
 - *Ensure that the disciple understands why it is so important to God that a lost individual is found. Ensure that the disciple knows what are the consequences for dying as someone who is spiritually lost.*
 - *Ask the disciple what the reaction of the Pharisees should have been toward the lost being found. Can the disciple describe why the Pharisees would not see finding the lost "sinner" a cause for rejoicing?*
2. The joy in heaven over recovering one who is lost & unaware he is lost
 - *Ask the disciple why there is so much rejoicing over a spiritually lost person being found.*

3. The joy for the one who finds (recovers) the lost

- Ask the disciple if he or she can determine why the Pharisees were not rejoicing over lost sinners being found.
- Make sure the disciple clearly understands the fact that the Pharisees viewed sinners only through the eyes of the law, whereas God sees sinners through the eyes of love.

15:8-10 – The parable of the lost coin

- The themes are the same as the previous parable. One exception is that the main character in the parable of the lost sheep is a man; the main character in this parable is a woman.

Major themes:

1. The value of the lost individual (the “one”)
2. The joy among angels over recovering one who is lost
3. The joy for the one who finds

15:11-32 – The parable of the lost son (prodigal son)

- Quite likely, the disciple has heard of this parable. Ask him to retell the parable in his own words.
- The disciple may not know the meaning of the term “prodigal.” It means one who spends money or resources in a reckless, self-serving way.

Major themes:

1. The son chose of his own accord to leave the presence of his father
 - Ask the disciple if he or she has ever acted like a prodigal, or known someone who has. (The answer to the latter usually involves a family member.)
 - Ask the disciple if he or she can identify with the lost son.
2. A person may not realize they are spiritually lost until they hit rock bottom
 - If the disciple is able to identify with the prodigal son, ask what happened to turn him around and make him come to “his senses.” (This can be a very personal and intimate time, and the discipler should allow the disciple to speak freely and, if necessary, acknowledge repentance.)
3. The father was always looking for the return of the lost son
 - A great discussion can be elicited here. The disciple may be the lost son, or the disciple could actually represent the father who was looking for the lost son. If the latter is the case, ask if he or she ever wanted to “give up” on the one who was lost.
4. There was great celebration when the lost son returned
 - Ask the disciple if he or she has ever felt like the son who was NOT lost.
 - Ask the disciple if the church he or she attends celebrates the recovery of a spiritually lost person.
5. The fact is that the lost son squandered his inheritance; there are earthly consequences for sin.
 - This is a very important point to stress to the disciple. Ask the disciple what can be lost by becoming a prodigal son. For example, innocence, finances, and relationships may be lost. Other consequences can be bad memories, a loss of physical or emotional health, guilt, regret, and loss of self-esteem.
 - Ensure that the disciple does not leave the session on a negative note. What should be emphasized is the never-ending love of our Father in heaven who not only forgives completely, but throws banquets for a returning lost son.

Question: How is God speaking to you through His word today?

- This is a great place to ask the disciple, “How has God spoken to you through His word today?”