The Way of Grace (Lk. 15:1-32)

We continue in this sermon series, ***On the Way with Jesus: A Lenten Journey Through Luke***. In Luke, Jesus is constantly on the way toward Jerusalem, the destination of his death on the cross. This morning we will look at *The Way of Grace* (Luke 15:1-32).

In Luke 15, what some commentators described as the "Gospel within the Gospel,"[1] Jesus delivers three parables with one identical thematic rhythm: **Loss, Search, Recovery, and Rejoicing.**

Look at the math: 1% (the sheep), 10% (the coin), and 50% (the sons). The intensity builds because Jesus wants us to see that in the Kingdom of God, the "Return on Investment" isn't measured in dollars—it's measured in souls.

N.T. Wright has pointed out that in and through these three parables "we get a wide open window on what Jesus thought he was doing and, perhaps, on what ourselves should be doing."[2]

So in the remaining of this message we will consider how we can live out grace in the most practical ways in our personal lives and as a faith community here in Markham-Stouffville and beyond.

The Lost Sheep (Luke 15:3–7): A shepherd leaves 99 safe sheep to find the one that has wandered away until it is found. The focus is on the lost who is prone to wander and incapable of finding his own way back.

So Jesus told them this story: "If a man has a hundred sheep and ***one of them gets lost***, what will he do? Won't he ***leave the ninety-nine*** others in the wilderness and ***go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it***? (Lk. 15:3-4 NLT)

Jesus demonstrates that God takes the initiative to seek the lost, not just passively waiting for them to return - grace is never inactive but love-motivated and dynamic.

The shepherd is …

> aware of the sheep is wandering off somewhere;
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> he is intentional about going to search,
>
> and the goal of bringing the lost sheep back to where it belong, safe and secure.

Jesus' message aims at the grumbling Pharisees and the teachers of the law who complain about His association with sinners and look through the lens of judgment and contempt toward those they despise.

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[1] Cf. Norval Geldenhuys, see https://archive.gci.org/articles/the-prodigal-god/#:~:text=Some%20refer%20to%20it%20as,(verses%2017%2D24).&text=But%20there%20is%20more%20to,short%20story%20in%20the%20world.%E2%80%9D

[2] N.T. Wright, *Luke*, p. 183.

But this parable highlights God's compassion and redeeming love for every unique individual; no one is beyond redemption, even those who are deemed unworthy and inferior ethnically, morally, socially, economically, and politically.

Grace pursues and is offered to every individual, irrespective of our bias or dislike toward the person or circumstances.

Leaving 99 sheep in the open wilderness to find 1 seems foolish and economically reckless in a pragmatic and profit driven culture – this is a terrible business move and there's hardly any return on investment (ROI).

But God's gracious love is "reckless" by human and moralistic standards:

> The joy of the Heavenly Father over one repentant sinner outweighs the status quo of those who feel they have no need to repent.
>
> Grace provides the space for acceptance & safety and offers rescue, restoration, & renewal.

Of course here we are immediately confronted with a couple of challenging personal and corporate application:

> **Stop counting "the 99": find out who has wandered away from Cornerstone.**
>
> **Start searching for those who feel lost and helpless in our church, in our neighbourhood, or in our spheres of influence.**

The Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–10):

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. ***Won't she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it?*** And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbours and say, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents." (Lk. 15:8-10 NLT)

The lost coin is of great value to the woman (i.e., 1 drachma worth a day's wage), no matter if it's a tarnished coin or a shiny one. Her sweeping represents her thorough effort, persistence, and tenacity to find the lost coin.

Finding a lost coin in the dark is like trying to find a single corrupted file on a massive hard drive or a lost wedding ring in a backyard. The woman didn't just "hope" the coin would turn up; she "lit a lamp" and "swept the house" (Luke 15:8).

Grace refuses to give up on what's lost and amplifies the value of what's found.

Of course, the religious leaders despise the cheats, the traitors and scumbags who are less than human, beyond

redemption, and deserving nothing less than death. They are blinded by their own pride and prejudice and ignored Jesus' intents and mission.

For the Son of Man came ***to seek and save those who are lost***." (Lk. 19:10 NLT)

Every individual created in God's image matters; every human life carries immeasurable dignity and respect regardless of capacity or condition.

Like a coin, even if one is "lost" in a dark corner or feels hidden under the "dust" of a busy life or a broken past, a person's intrinsic worth remains unchanged in the eyes of the owner/God because every image-bearer is His "treasure," irrespective of present or past broken condition.

There is a famous story from Spain about a father who put an ad in the paper for his estranged son: *"Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father."* Eight hundred "Pacos" showed up.[3]

There are many "Pacos" in Markham-Stouffville — hungry for a place where they are not judged by their social profile or persona.

Ask and listen to the Holy Spirit prompting to "light the lamp" and "remove all obstacles" so you can find your "Paco."

Sing up to join Cornerstone's "search teams."

The Lost Son (Luke 15:11–32): This story depicts a rebellious son who demands and squanders his inheritance and a father who eagerly welcomes him home, in contrast to the self-righteous resentment of the older brother.

A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, "***I want my share of your estate now before you die***" … A few days later this younger son ***packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land***, and there he ***wasted all his money in wild living*** … (Lk. 15:11-13NLT)

By asking for his share of the inheritance:

> This son ***disrespects*** and ***dishonors*** his father – in a Middle Eastern "honour-shame" culture, he is essentially saying, ***"Father, I wish you were dead."***
>
> He is ***apathetic and self-absorbed*** – he careless about the pain and shame he's causing the family.

By granting the son's request:

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[3] https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/f/forgiveness.htm#:~:text=There's%20a%20Spanish%20story%20of,and%20love%20from%20their%20fathers.

The father has ***broken protocol*** – he granted his wish, instead of striking the boy or disowning him to save face in the family/community.

He is saying to this son, **"I'm still your father even if you dishonor and disown me."**

When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, "At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, 'Father, ***I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant***.'"

So he returned home to his father. And ***while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him*** … his father said to the servants, "Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. [23] And kill the calf we have been fattening. ***We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found***." (Lk. 15:17-24NLT)

This moving scene communicates vividly a powerful message of loving acceptance and forgiveness:

***There's open door, open heart, open arms welcome – no questions asked*!**

"I'll forgive you, no matter how messed up you are."

The waiting father's **forgiving grace is mercifully** extended to the prodigal and restores his honour:

He runs from the house with robe in hand when he sees his son in a distance, ***acting like a servant – humiliated himself publicly***; the father took the "shame" of running so the son wouldn't have to face the community's scorn alone.

He embraces **him even** ***before his confession and before his son asking for a job***.

In spite of his broken heart, the Father was willing to ***take upon himself all his son's shame*** - ridicule, scorn, and criticism levelled at him by the other son, probably relatives and close friends as well as the larger community - to ***prevent*** the prodigal's personal alienation and social estrangement, giving him a robe, a ring, sandals, a feast – he becomes the ***prodigal (lavishly extravagant) father!***

He reconciles with his estranged son ***publicly***, thus showing others his forgiveness and ***inviting others to forgive him*** as well.[4]

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[4] Avoiding the expected "Kezazah Ceremony" ["Cutting off"]: a permanent shunning ritual to punishing any Jewish boy who lost his family inheritance to Gentiles - such loss was considered shameful. (cf. Kenneth Bailey, *Jacob & the Prodigal Son*).

Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house … was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, "All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!"

His father said to him, "Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!" (Lk. 15:25-32NLT)

The father's forgiving grace is extended then to *the elder son* who is physically "home" but relationally further from the father than his brother was:

> The father ***humiliates himself and pleads*** *with the resentful son* to celebrate the occasion; instead of ***forcing*** the elder son who refuses to join the party, thus essentially dishonouring the father.
>
> He is *a* ***peace-maker and affirming that a broken relationship restored is more important than feeling self-righteous and bitter (another way of being lost)***.

God's extravagant grace is available even to ***the most undeserving or a rival sibling or a disgrace relative***; it doesn't depend on the person's ability to clean up one's mess or to put up a front but on His desire to restore.

Grace (Jesus) bears all shame for the joy of restoration.

The parable concludes with the ending "open" for the brother (the religious leaders and us, the reader) to decide if he (they) will accept the Father's inclusive joy.

Here are a couple of challenges to us as Cornerstone continues to discern God's guidance:

> Many in Markham-Stouffville live in multi-generational immigrant households with multigenerational family dynamics/tensions and conflicts. The feeling of being "lost" or "out of place" is a lived reality for many; there are many "lost sons and daughters, lost brothers and sisters, lost grandparents and parents" in our families.
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> **Let us show mercy by giving second (third, fourth …) chances and offering radical generosity in spirit, particularly in interactions that are tense.**
>
> In a diverse, often achievement-oriented community, many like the older brother struggle to accept that a "sinner"/sibling/child can receive the same grace without "earning" it.

Let us show radical kindness and a gift of forgiveness to both the rebellious and the bitter obedient.

Have an open door, open heart, open arms and build a “home” where everyone belongs, regardless of one’s past failure or achievement.

In a world of high expectations, harsh judgment, cancel culture and tribalism, let us follow the Jesus way and be a church that intentionally sends out search teams and practices radical hospitality.