

I AM HOME

— Prodigals Welcome —

I Am Home | Campus Pastors | 9.30.17
LG Weekly

START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer the following question:

Have you ever lost something important? Where and how did you find it?

SHARE

When we hear the word 'home' what comes to mind?

For many that word brings to mind a place of refuge or retreat—a sanctuary where we can be ourselves and leave our socks on the floor. However, for others, the very word 'home' can bring up hurt and frustration. Maybe we didn't have a good home, and the things we have experienced in life have distorted everything a home should be. In this series "I Am Home," we are exploring what it means to come home and be home through the many facets of the story of the prodigal son.

Mark Twain, speaking of Jesus' story of the prodigal son, reflected that it was "the best story ever told." It is a powerful and intriguing story of family turmoil, heartbreak, struggle, jealousy, grace and redemption. It was the best story ever told, because God is the best story teller. It speaks to the heart of man and the struggle between our prodigal hearts and our ultimate search to find home. In God's Kingdom, home is where He is. When we start walking home, the Father doesn't stand on the porch with arms crossed, rather, the Father runs to us and meets us with a huge embrace and an even bigger party. The picture of the Father running to the prodigal son and walking him home is at the heart of Red Rocks Church.

We welcome home prodigals.

This week, our campus pastors gave us a 30,000-foot view of the story of the prodigal son in its context of all the parables in Luke 15. While you read the beginning of the chapter, imagine the events unfolding like an act in an epic drama.

Read Luke 15:1-2.

As the curtain rises on this scene from Jesus' ministry, three parties emerge on stage. First, the tax collectors and sinners enter from stage right and walk toward Jesus—the only religious leader who has ever shown them kindness. Then, the Pharisees and scribes are seen grumbling in the corner, pointing and sneering at Jesus because he is surrounded by what, to them, would be considered an unwelcome bunch of “sinners.”

What is the Pharisees' issue with Jesus?

It is in this tense situation that Jesus addresses the Pharisees, the seemingly “righteous” ones of the community, and skillfully adds them as characters in his following three short stories. In fact, all three of the players in the drama appear in each parable.

Read Luke 15:3-7 and 15:8-10.

Identify the three groups (Pharisees, sinners, Jesus) in each of the parables.

Compare the settings, characters and endings of the three parables.

- *What are some differences between how the sheep, the coin, and the prodigal son were lost?*
- *What are some similarities between how the sheep, the coin, and the prodigal son were found?*

G R O W

In the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the shepherd returns to his village and calls his friends and neighbors together to rejoice when the lost sheep is found. Based on the village societies of Jesus' day, the shepherd's flock was likely owned by a number of different families in the community. Everyone would have been concerned with the welfare of the sheep because the loss of one sheep affected the whole community.

Read Luke 15:3-4 in the ESV.

What is significant about Jesus beginning the parable with, “What man of you?”

How have the Pharisees failed in their responsibility as shepherds of the people?

When our Bibles record the Pharisee’s complaint against Jesus in 15:2 as, “this man receives sinners...” it loses its shock value because the word *receive* isn’t one we generally use in this context. The Greek, *prosdechomai*, literally means “to welcome into fellowship.” It conveys much more than just receiving someone into one’s presence or home, it means being willing to sit down and talk with a person and, in so doing, accepting that person as a friend.

But for the Pharisees, Jesus’ act of *receiving* sinners was made worse because he ATE with them. Eating with people in Jesus’ time communicated a level of deep acceptance. For Jesus, a religious teacher, his decision to eat with anyone meant a sort of blessing was imparted to those with whom he was choosing to dine. Such a choice, to eat with those ostracized by the “righteous,” was unacceptable to the Pharisees and so they scorned Jesus for it.

Read some other times where *receive* is used in Mark 9:37, Romans 16:2 and Philippians 2:29.

How does the contextual meaning of *receive* impact the way you think about your own ability to welcome people like Jesus did?

Can you think of a time when you “received” someone with whom you wouldn’t generally associate? What was that experience like and what did you learn from it?

M O V E

In the first two parables, each loss is experienced deeply by one character, yet felt by the entire community. So when what is lost is found, the entire community gathers to celebrate because they truly are ecstatic! They are thrilled, not only for their own benefit, but for the joy, relief, and thanksgiving of the shepherd and the woman. Both parties are even compared to the rejoicing of heaven when one sinner repents.

If these two celebrations took place in honor of *the finding* of what was lost, then wouldn’t

the party the father throws also be in celebration of the father's joy at having found his son? Yes—the son is the honored guest, but the community comes together to celebrate the joy of the Father and as such, experiences true joy of their own.

As each parable builds off of the last, we find ourselves anticipating the single moment when the father asks his older son to come in to the party and “rejoice with me” that the lost brother is found. The older brother had felt the loss, so shouldn't he, like the other communities, want to rejoice? But the curtain falls on the drama without a conclusion. Our master-teacher, Jesus, essentially drops the mic and leaves the Pharisees to ask the same question of themselves.

The older brother didn't want to receive his lost brother. What keeps you from receiving and welcoming those who have walked away from the faith back into the church and your life?

Ask God to reveal someone in your life that needs to be received. Share with your group what you are going to do this week in order to take steps toward welcoming that person.

P R A Y

As a group, spend some time praying with and for each other. Specifically, pray for those in your life who are truly lost. If you are in a coed group, consider breaking up into men's and women's groups to share more freely.

T O G O

Challenge: Is there someone in your life who you could invite to join you at church this coming week? Text them, walk next door, stop by their office or give them a call - the celebration is happening and we want to be rejoicing together.

Isaiah 40:11

“He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.”

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