



Part 3: Lost and Found

Big Idea

This week, Pastor Rich Wilkerson Jr. shared a message on God's love for us that is shown through the Parable of the Lost Son. After requesting to have his inheritance before the appointed time, the lost son went away—leaving his father—and squandered all he had. Only when he found himself at rock bottom with nothing left did he decide to return home, expecting the worst. Instead of turning him away, his father ran to him, welcoming him with open arms and throwing a party in his honor. Much like the prodigal son, we may often take our gifts and squander them, going our own way and giving into the desires of our flesh. When we've hit rock bottom and decide to return to God, expecting the worst, He always welcomes us back with celebration, just as the Father in the parable does for his son. No matter what we've done, where we've been, or how low we may have sunk, our value in God never diminishes. When we walk away from Him, He never stops pursuing us, and when we decide to return to Him, He runs to us, calling for a celebration in our honor. While we may have all been in the scenario of the lost son—having gone our own way and returning to Jesus—we may have also been in the mindset of the obedient son as well. Instead of rejoicing with his father that his brother returned, the obedient son gets angry when his father throws the party because he felt that his own hard work went unnoticed and uncelebrated. As Jesus shared the parable, His audience consisted of two groups of people—the religious and the sinners. While the lost son represents the sinner, the obedient son represents the religious crowd who follow the law out of obligation and pass judgement on others' sins. So often we come to church, serve on a team, and even read our Bible daily, but our hearts may not be tuned into the Father's voice. When we operate in this mindset, it can be easy for us to judge others' sins, believing that we are more righteous. However, the good news is, as Pastor Rich said, Jesus loves all people. Just as God has grace for those who sin, He has grace for those who believe they are righteous by their works. As Christians, it is possible for us to know all about Jesus and not be in a relationship with Him. We cannot do enough good to earn Jesus' love or do enough bad to lose it. Jesus did not come to establish religion, but relationship with us, and it is through that relationship that we are saved and can be used for the Kingdom.

Discuss

- Think about the difference between the ideas of religion and relationship. Discuss the differences between the two. Consider the two types of people in the crowd as Jesus taught—the sinners and the religious. Which type do you identify with most?
- Read Luke 15:8-10 out loud. What can we learn about our value from this parable? Does this change the way you see others who are lost and living in sin? Discuss how the good news affects the way you see yourself.

Prayer Focus

Thank God for His unconditional love and for valuing you, regardless of where you've been or what you've done. Ask Him to show you areas in which you can grow closer in your relationship with Jesus. Ask Him to help you see yourself as He sees you, and to live your life out of the overflow of your relationship with Him.

Next Steps

If you don't have a daily time to read God's Word and pray, consider establishing this routine. Set aside the first fifteen minutes of your day to focus only on encountering Him, and invest in your relationship with Him. As Serve Day approaches, prayerfully consider how God wants to use your gifts to make an impact in your community. Visit www.churchofthehighlands.com/serve/ for details on how you can get involved.