

CHAPTER 4

AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP FOR THE LOST

An Expository Study of *Luke 15:1-32*

PREFACE TO CHAPTER 4

This is an expository study of Jesus' parabolic illustration of the lost sheep, lost coin, and lost son, meant to teach man's absolute lostness to God, at the same time exhibiting the seeking Son, searching Spirit and sighing Father, and manifesting God's ultimate and infinite joy in restoring the lost, beyond and above which there is no greater joy.

This parable is vitally related to Authentic Discipleship, especially from its placement by Luke in his Gospel. Luke recorded this teaching of Jesus on one particular Sabbath day that fit his plan to arrange his Gospel in order to maximize its affect. This parable is vitally related to Jesus' condemnation of Jerusalem in *Luke 13:35*, *Behold, your house is left unto you desolate*. Beginning in Chapter Fourteen, Luke followed that pronouncement with pertinent incidents of one particular Sabbath day that illustrated what was missing in Jerusalem that brought such a dark prophecy from the loving Lord. Chapter Fourteen deals with what is required of subjects of God's Kingdom and of authentic disciples. First it is love with its mercy, humility, and grace (*verses 1-14*), then Luke recorded Christ's Parable of the Great Supper to emphasize the necessary call from God's Spirit (*verses 15-24*), and finally Luke detailed the required dedication to Christ's program (*verses 25-35*). Luke then recorded this Parable of the Lost to manifest just who are the real disciples that show such dedication to Christ's program.

The Pharisees and scribes were Jerusalem's leaders and thus were what Jerusalem had grown to be. This dedication to which Jesus referred in Luke Fourteen was not found there. They (Jerusalem) loved neither God nor man. Like the elder brother in this parable, they were ignorant of God's love for sinful men. They failed to know Him or to love what He loved. The resources of God had been wasted in the hands of the Pharisees who knew not God's heart and cared not for sinners. What Luke Fifteen shows is God's love for the very persons scorned and detested by Jerusalem and its Pharisees.

CHAPTER 4 CONTENTS

<i>Heading</i>	<i>page</i>
AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP FOR THE LOST	137
Lost! Lost! Lost!	137
Only One Parable	138
Irony	139
Interpretation First	141
Calvin Versus Arminius	142
Calvin and Arminius	142
Jesus, The Spirit, The Father	142
The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, The Lost Son	143
A Graphic Picture of the Lost	144
The Sheep	144
The Coin	145
The Prodigal	145
THE SEEKING SAVIOR	146
THE SEARCHING SPIRIT	148
First, The Woman Lit a Candle	148
Secondly, The Woman Swept the House	149
Finally, The Woman Sought Diligently Until She Found the Coin	150
THE RESPONSIBLE SINNER	152
THE SIGHING SOVEREIGN	156
God's Compassion	158
The Actions	159
First, a Robe	160
Second, a Ring	160
Third, Shoes	161
Fourth, The Fatted Calf	161
The Ultimate and Infinite Joy	162
An Angry Brother	164
The Elder Brother Typifies the Pharisees and Scribes	164
The Elder Brother Knew Not His Father.	165
The Pharisees and Scribes Knew Not God.	165
The Elder Son Typifies All Mankind.	165

AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP FOR THE LOST: GOD'S GREATEST SOURCE OF JOY

An Expository Study of *Luke 15: 1-32*

⁷*I am telling you that in the same manner, joy will be in heaven over the one repenting sinner, rather than ninety-nine just men who have no need of repentance.*

¹⁰*In the same manner, I am telling you, joy arises among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*

²⁴*Because this son of mine was dead [to me, (God)] and came back to life [to me, (God)]; he was in a lost state and was found [by me (God)]. And they [God and His heavenly hosts] began to jubilate.*

Luke 15:7, 10, 24 ADT

Ring the bells of heaven! There is joy today,
For a soul, returning from the wild!
See, the Father meets him out upon the way,
Welcoming his weary, wand'ring child.

Ring the bells of heaven! There is joy today,
For the wand'rer now is reconciled;
Yes, a soul is rescued from his sinful way,
And is born anew a ransomed child.

Ring the bells of heaven! Spread the feast today!
Angels, swell the glad triumphant strain!
Tell the joyful tidings, bear it far away!
For a precious soul is born again.

Glory! Glory! How the angels sing;
Glory! Glory! How the loud harps ring!
'Tis the ransomed army, like a mighty sea,
Pealing forth the anthem of the free.¹

¹ These words are by William O. Cushing, 1875, from the Hymn, Ring the Bells of Heaven, sung to the tune Ring the Bells by George F. Root, 1875.

AUTHENTIC CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP
 ACCORDING TO JESUS AND HIS DOCTRINES OF GRACE
 Volume III, Chapter 4
 AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP FOR THE LOST:
 GOD'S GREATEST SOURCE OF JOY
 —A DIVINE'S DELIGHT—

This teaching on the lost occurred immediately after Christ's instruction on the severity of discipleship in 14:25-35, and is somewhat connected. In that teaching on discipleship Christ had referred to building and battling for the Kingdom of God. Now Christ would have all to see that the edifice and the victory is built and won only through prodigals who are brought to return to the Kingdom's domain. In other words, in *Chapter 15*, Christ is saying in effect:

We are building the Kingdom's Edifice and fighting the Kingdom's battles; therefore we all must be totally dedicated. In fact, the entire resources of God—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and all created things—are committed entirely to building the Kingdom. God, in the totality of His being, is dedicated to its growth, and is using only prodigals for its living stones and in its aggressive campaigns. Only the lost, worthless, guilty, defiled, and formerly rebellious prodigals are suitable for its royal splendors.

That was an unthinkable absurdity to the Pharisees and scribes.

Lost! Lost! Lost!

¹*And all the tax collectors and the outcast sinners were constantly drawing near to hear him.*

²*And both the Pharisees [the self-righteous sect] and the scribes [the Bible scholars] began grumbling among themselves saying, This [fellow] gives access to sinners and eats [in common fellowship] with them.*

Luke15:1-2 ADT²

It is important that we take note of what this follows in the previous verse, *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear (14:35)*. Luke next records just who it is that crowds around Him in order to hear, ruthless tax collectors and outcast sinners (15:1). In other words, these lost tax collectors and outcast sinners were the ones who had the hearing ears. It was to those that Jesus came,³ and it is with those who hear that He builds His Kingdom. Only the *hearers* are His sheep, because only His sheep hear.⁴ The complaint of the Jewish leaders was that Jesus' companionship was with those whom they, as the religious officers, had cast out of the community of the synagogue. These tax collectors and these sinners were the *lost* according to the term of the day. That term meant that they were outside the blessings of Israel. They would be cast outside the Kingdom into outer darkness. They would suffer loss of every good gift from God. They were men who were *lost* without God or hope of any kind. Therefore, when Jesus used the, *lost sheep (v.4)*, *lost coin (v.9)*, and *lost son (vs. 24, 32)*, the Pharisees and Scribes understood fully what He meant. They understood that these *lost* publicans and these *lost* sinners who had access to Him were the very ones that He sought, and this parable of the *lost* makes it clear to us also.

Only One Parable

*And He spoke to them this [one] parable, saying,
Luke 15:3 ADT*

Luke Chapter 15 contains only one parable spoken to the Pharisees and Scribes, not three. This one parable is a sort of triptych which has three panels or pictures of one basic truth. While there are three parts to the one parable, there is one common theme, the lost. It is a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. There is also one occasion for the parabolic teaching (*verses 1-2*), and it is one continuous story.⁵ Also, this parable has one final aim: To contrast the elder and younger brothers as representative of the two groups of people which occasioned the parable. On the one hand are the self-righteous Pharisees and

³ Luke 5:32 ⁴ John 10:27; 8:47 ⁵ Compare verses 3, 8, and 11

Scribes, and on the other hand are the lost publicans and sinners. These represent two basic groups of people at large in society; namely, those who are lost and do not know it, and those who are lost or were lost and do know it. We might summarize this matter by saying that Chapter 15 is a three-phase parable of the lost aimed at the self-righteous to illustrate how God commits His entire resources to save men who are made genuinely to feel and acknowledge their factual sinful position before Him.

Irony

Only as we remember to whom this threefold parable was spoken will we be able to interpret and then to apply it properly. As before noted, it was spoken directly to the Pharisees and Scribes. These were two groups of men who thought that they were righteous and valuable to God. They considered themselves to be the true sheep of God,⁶ as the true wealth of God,⁷ and as the true sons of God.⁸ These correspond to the three groups in the parable. In accord with this, Jesus is using irony when He refers to the ninety-nine “safe” sheep, to the nine “not lost” coins, and to the one “faithful” elder son. Each of these is meant to picture the Pharisees and the Scribes. An irony is a method of sarcastic expression in which the intended meaning of the words used is the direct opposite of their usual sense. Although Christ referred to the group of Pharisees and Scribes as 99 sheep, they certainly were not, but they thought they were. Christ represented that same group as the safe and kept coins (as if somehow precious to God); they certainly were not, but they thought they were. Again, He spoke of the faithful elder son in the third phase of the parable, and while they certainly were not faithful, they thought they were. Because of this persuasion among them, Christ used their supposed position with God for an opportunity to teach in irony in order to show clearly how God deserts the self-righteous and seeks those who know and feel their lostness. The lost in the

⁶ Compare Christ’s teaching meant to correct that notion concerning their “sonship” in *John 10:1-8*, and especially *John 10:26*.

⁷ Ironically, the “not lost” coins in the parable. ⁸ Compare *John 8:41*.

parable represent men who know that they are lost. They are convinced that they are lost, that they must be sought by God and thus become enlightened, and thereby, are enabled to *come to themselves* (v. 17). Furthermore, they go to God on those realistic terms, and not on a supposed righteousness or a presumed position that is not really theirs.

This method of irony becomes more apparent as we notice the parable in detail, but for now, notice the inconsistencies in the parable if this irony is not understood. First, in the section of the one hundred sheep, notice that this shepherd leaves the ninety-nine *in the wilderness* in order to fetch the one lost sheep. Some have confused this portion of the parable with *Matthew 18:10-14*, but they are definitely not the same parable. In fact, this reference to leaving the ninety-nine in the wilderness is just the key difference. In Matthew, Christ referred to His true sheep and to the love He has for them, and that He would never leave any in the wilderness to seek others. Unattended sheep in the wilderness would meet certain death because of their many predators. In our parable Christ in sarcasm says in effect, “I am leaving you ninety-nine self-righteous sheep in the wilderness and to a certain death in order to seek my guilty and lost sheep, like these publicans and sinners.”

Again, this irony is obvious in the portion concerning the coins. Christ referred to 9 coins being not lost. They were no doubt tucked away in a safe place, but none the less they were *still in the dark*. No light shone upon them. They represent the darkened Pharisees who supposed that they were in the Light of God. In their thinking they were illumined and in safety.

Lastly an irony is in the elder son. The Pharisees, though considered to have been sons of God, are pictured as a group in the elder son’s absolutely ignorance of the father’s real love for the younger prodigal son. The irony lies in the reference to them as an elder son. They supposed themselves to be close in the Father’s house and privileged doubly while the publicans and

sinners were wandering into riotous living. This was true of publicans and sinners in a sense, but the irony is in referring to scribes and Pharisees as an entitled son. Christ means for us to understand this parable in the light of these ironical put-downs of the Pharisees and scribes.

Interpretation First

As we approach our text, we must be careful not to confuse interpretation with application. A great number of sincere and prominent Bible teachers have interpreted the prodigal portion of this parable to represent Christians who return to God. While this could be an application of the story, it most assuredly is not a proper interpretation of it. Many contend that the prodigal pictures a saved man because he is a son already, and that he left the father's house and then returned to it. This resonates well, but as before noted, the occasion of this teaching dictates its real meaning. The prodigal son represents a lost man who was, so to speak, previously in God's house in Adam,⁹ but fell with Adam as did the entire human race.¹⁰ It is that departure from God that the parable should be said to most refer. Then in addition, it refers as well to the departure from God every human without exception takes through this life as each persists in personal sin. In answer to the son question raised above, the especial relation that the parabolic father has with his son is representative of the relation of love the Father has with His elect sons *from before the creation (foundation, KJV) of the world*. As the father in the parable acted always in the best ultimate interests of the prodigal son, so does the Father for His predestined sons.

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will. [Added emph.] *Ephesians 1:4-5 NIV*

⁹ Genesis 2:8-17 ¹⁰ Genesis 3:6-8; Romans 5:12-14, 17-19.

A parable has its limitations, and those limitations are always determined by its original intent and by its peculiar basic lesson which we have already shown. While no theology should be founded upon parables, their interpretation must always agree with the theology of Scripture, as must their application. Let us interpret this parable properly. That is our main goal. Then, the proper applications will come as the Holy Spirit makes real to each person His Word.

Calvin Versus Arminius

John Calvin and Jacobus Arminius. These men represent the two great schools of theological debate concerning the free will of God versus the free moral will of man. Calvin saw in the Scripture that all men without exception were totally depraved, even their choices being affected by the fall of Adam. He saw that the only hope of man was for God by grace to reach down and provide everything for salvation—from front to back, so to speak—if anyone was to be changed. But Arminius thought that man had some spark of goodness left in him; therefore his salvation did not totally depend upon God, but depended upon man's free exercise of his will to choose the good and thereby be saved. This meant that men were saved or unsaved completely by their own wills. This doctrine makes man greater than God in salvation, and is salvation by works. With these two schools of theological thought, there is on the one hand God sovereignly saving sinners, and on the other hand man saving himself through his own free agency, without God's choices involved at all.

Jesus, The Spirit, The Father

One striking feature of this parable of the lost is its contrast between God's sovereign work in His Son and in His Spirit, and the moral agency of man under that sovereign work of God. This contrast is in the three portions of the parable. In the first two, God is at work in the shepherd and in the woman. The shepherd represents Christ, the woman represents the Holy Spirit, and the father represents the Father. In the first two the shepherd seeks the sheep and the woman looks for the coin, but in the last the father seems to

be passively and patiently waiting for the son. The first two represent God's sovereign work in His Son as Savior and in the Holy Spirit as Illuminating Regenerator. But the last portion of the parable depicts the father as representative of the providential behind-the-scenes loving Governor and Provincial Magistrate Who is using so-called "circumstances" (actually Sovereign Providence) to effect a change in His prodigal elect sons.

The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, The Lost Son

But, the greater contrast is in the sovereignty of the three sections. Notice in the shepherd story, it is the shepherd who seeks out the sheep. The sheep may or may not desire to return, but the shepherd seeks out that lost sheep because it belongs to him. Again, the lost coin does nothing but lie there in the dark. It is the woman who takes the initiative to shine light upon the dormant coin. The coin does nothing. Contrast those two with the prodigal son. He *came to himself*. That is, he realized in himself, in his own choices, in his own reasonings, that his father had something better to offer, and that it was by his own willfulness that his situation had grown so ruinous. Based upon that comprehension he turned back to his father. My, how this pictures the fusion of John Calvin's doctrine and the Arminian doctrine of choice. The former doctrine rightfully emphasizes God's absolute sovereignty over man's salvation and that it was the payment of the Son's blood for His own sheep that preceded the Holy Spirit's illuminating regeneration upon certain men who then could see their true lost position. The latter doctrine carries human free will to an extreme that rules out God as God, but makes Him merely a responder to wicked men, even controlled by the wills of men. A god like that is nothing more than an idol, something that men's minds have created; therefore a god beneath them in power and purpose. The Bible contains the truths of human responsibility, but somewhat tempered and with certain limitations. That is, it is indeed for the elect that Christ died and only for them. It is indeed true that the Spirit must sovereignly expose a man to God's light before he is saved. Yet it also is clearly presented in the Bible that man does indeed exercise his enlightened will in the experience

of salvation. It is God in Providence (The father in the parable) Who effects a complete turnaround in some men. He works in Providence, and with the Holy Spirit and Gospel, until the before obstinate and refusing sinner freely, of his own “will,” by his now enlightened moral choice, comes to God in true confession and brokenhearted faith in his new Father’s mercy, love, and grace. Calvin versus Arminius? Who wins the argument? Calvin wins according to the Scripture, overwhelmingly; but the doctrine of man’s choice is, according to the proportions of Christ’s parable, one third of it all, but even that choice is controlled altogether by Sovereign Providence.

A Graphic Picture of the Lost

Since the one common theme throughout the parable is the lost, it then should not be surprising to find here a most graphic picture of that condition in the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Each emphasizes a particular side of lostness.

The Sheep. In the sheep, surely it is stupidity that is underscored. Nothing compares to a sheep for ignorance. That a sheep would wander away from the one who loves and cares for it seems ludicrous at best. It is not consistent with reason that a sheep would endanger itself to fatal and final harm by wandering aimlessly outside the bounds of safety. But that is exactly the conduct of lost men. How very absurd for men to seek their own way outside of the loving protection and care of their God, Who alone and above question cares for and knows better their real interests. Truly does the Holy Spirit speak of the lost as those who *walk in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart.*¹¹ Lost men wander like lost sheep outside God’s protection, and unless and until they are taken up by the Shepherd, they will end in fatal and final ruin.

¹¹ *Ephesians 4:17b-18*

The Coin. The lost coin stresses the utter unconsciousness of lost men to the things of God. Like a dead dormant coin, lying in the dark, the lost man is untouchable or insensible to his God. There is no real value to a lost coin. Lost man is like that. He is dead to God, and therefore he is useless in God's Kingdom. "Dead in trespasses and sins" means just that. Man by nature is unaware of God or of His goodness and love toward him. Like unfeeling pieces of impressed metal, lost man is in another realm, separate from God. He is in a realm of death, darkness, and uselessness to Him Who owns him.

The Prodigal. The sons in the parable represent another two-fold picture of man's lostness. The elder brother will be dealt with later, but for now, consider the prodigal son. He pictures willful estrangement from God. By his own choices he departed from the father. The lost man, while insensitive to God, and while ignorant of God, yet does make a choice about God. Without exception, man's choice is to separate himself from God. Always the lost seek to maintain a chasm between themselves and God.

Like Adam and Eve, who hid themselves from God in the garden, man has ever since sought isolation from God's presence. *All we like sheep have gone astray, we have every one turned to his own way...*¹² Before the prodigal left the father's house it was a complete unit. But he forcibly cut himself off from the home and carried out a plan to put distance between himself and the father's entire household, in order to do as he pleased. This pictures lost men who purposely pull themselves farther and farther from their God in order to carry out their activities apart from Him.¹³

That is the lost, like stupid sheep wandering in danger, or unfeeling coins in the dark, or a headstrong son rebelling against his father's authority. That is the story told of the lost in this parable of the lost.

¹² *Isaiah 53:6a* ¹³ Compare *Romans 3:10-12*.

THE SEEKING SAVIOR

⁴*What man of you having a hundred sheep and having lost one of them does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one having been lost until he finds it?*

⁵*And having found it, places it upon his shoulders, rejoicing.*

⁶*And having come into the house he calls together friends and neighbors saying to them, Rejoice with me because I found my sheep which had been lost.*

⁷*I am telling you that in the same manner, joy will be in heaven over the one repenting sinner rather than ninety-nine just men who have no need of repentance.*

Luke 15:4-7 ADT

If there still exists a question who these ninety-nine sheep are that are left in the wilderness, a comparison of *verses 4 and 7* will settle the question. *Verses 4-6* is a parabolic illustration, *verse 7* is Christ's explanation of it. In Christ's explanation He says that the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness are ninety-nine *just persons, which have no need for repentance*. Since there are no just persons who need no repentance, but only men like the Pharisees and Scribes who only think they are just men who need no repentance, it remains only to apply the ninety-nine to the Pharisees and Scribes. The wisdom of Solomon spoke, *For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*¹⁴ Again, hear the Apostle John:

If we say that we are not having sin [in our lives], we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful [to His own work] and just [about the payment made] in order that He might forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹⁴ *Ecclesiastes 7:20*

If we say that we have not sinned and are in a state where we no longer sin, we are making Him out to be a liar, and His Word is not in us.
I John 1:8-10 ADT

Christ in irony referred to the Pharisees and Scribes as *just persons, which need no repentance*. In their own estimation they were indeed *just*, but their righteousness was only supposed.¹⁵

Christ speaks of a shepherd who leaves these 99 self-righteous sheep to seek after only one lost sheep. That one lost sheep is, according to His story, worth all the effort of the shepherd. To the shepherd that one sheep belonged to him and must be sought; he cared for it. He had nurtured it, raised it, planned for it, and had great hopes for it. Therefore, he sought to save it from the predators and enemies before whom it would fall if left alone. Christ is that Shepherd Who, when having reached one of His own, raises it upon His shoulders and never leaves it nor forsakes it.¹⁶ But what is this seeking of the Shepherd? Christ left the comfort and exaltation of heaven to seek the lost. Not that He just came to earth, but that He came down to the lowest level of earth. That is, He died the lowest death, suffered the most ignominious kind of humiliating end—death by crucifixion. That payment of His own blood was His “seeking” His sheep. He did not just come after them, but He gave all to purchase them as His own. He bought them with a price, and that redemption entitles Him as the Redeemer to have and to save His own sheep. Hence, heaven’s joy is pictured in the story’s shepherd rejoicing with his friends and neighbors. All the hosts of glory acclaim the Son Who as the Great Shepherd gave His life to the predators of the sheep in order to save the sheep from those predators. Christ gave Himself to the Adversary of the sheep, and in so doing gave himself over to an excruciating death to become the sin that had before separated the sheep from Himself. This is Jesus as the Shepherd of His sheep, who only are His sheep because they are lost. They would continue to be lost without their Shepherd. And that condition of being without the Shepherd was why the 99 “safe” sheep were left in a wilderness of their own.

¹⁵ Matthew 5:20 ¹⁶ Hebrews 13:5

THE SEARCHING SPIRIT

⁸*Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?*

⁹*And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost.*

¹⁰*Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

Luke 15:8-10 KJV

We come now to the Third Person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit, in the woman of this section of the parable. As before presented, the lost coin represents the unfeeling and unenlightened dead sinner who by nature was born that way. When the coin is lost in the illustration, the woman begins to search for it. It belonged to her and she would not give up so valuable a possession. She must have it, but in order for the coin to be found, it must be first exposed to the light. She did this exposing in three ways. First, she lit a lamp, next she swept the house, and finally she diligently sought it. That was her preparation and means for finding it. In the story it would appear that finding it was not an easy task. It must have taken considerable time, effort, persistence, and a certain skill. All this pictures for us the work of the Holy Spirit in finding the lost and making them “found.”

First, The Woman Lit a Candle.

This would enable her to see the coin and for it to be thus found by that means. This is the first work of God upon the lost. He convicts the sinner as to his real position. Jesus taught of His Spirit’s work in this manner as recorded by John:

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; it is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

*And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin,
and of righteousness and of judgment:*

Of sin, because they believe not on me;

*Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see
me no more.*

*Of judgment, because the prince of this world
is judged.*

John 16:7-11 KJV

Without going into detail about the Spirit's conviction here referred to, let us emphasize His overall work. As the coin's position is unknown until the candle is lit, so also is the sinner likewise unaware of his lost condition before God. Though he may "know" it in a cold orthodoxy, he really does not know it inwardly, experientially, really. In the story, even after the woman shines the light on the coin and finds it, the coin does not suddenly become alive and start living. Some might maintain that there is an error in the illustration. Perhaps one could look at it like that. But rather, even that supposed omission is suggestive of the complete work of the Holy Spirit. The lost man who is thus enlightened by the Holy Spirit is in and of himself void of light, life, and love. It is entirely the life of the Holy Spirit Who picks him up out of darkness; it is altogether the work of the Holy Spirit by which he has life. The coin, as well as the lost but now enlightened man, must be moved upon from without itself in order to know the safety of closeness with its rightful owner. The work of the Spirit upon unfeeling men is like that. He alone effects the change in position and in relationship for lost men. That change is first effected by enlightenment of his real pition.

Secondly, The Woman Swept the House.

While we must be careful not to carry the picture too far, still this sweeping is suggestive. The woman by her sweeping removed all obstacles around the lost coin in order to reveal its position. The coin had been hidden among the worthless clutter and dirt in the house. When the Holy Spirit convicts the lost of

the truth of God in Jesus Christ, he is insulated from the worldly pursuits all around him. Before the Holy Spirit removed those things the lost man was lost amid them. They seemed to hide him from the reality of his condition. Worldly pursuits and worldly gain are like that. They keep lost men unaware of true happiness, or unaware of their lack of it. Like a kind of wretched fungus which feeds on the cold, damp darkness, the lost never know the warm, dry light of the Sun and of its better provision. They are smothered under an avalanche of darkened gratifications that keep extinguished any light or love from above. Lost men without the Holy Spirit's powerful sweep of holy house cleaning never are unfettered from the dense impenetrable undergrowth of worldly enterprise. But in His mighty stream of brilliantly warm and glowing Presence, all those worldly ventures are nothing more than so much ugly clutter that pales into insignificance beside the now new-felt awareness of an absolute lostness before his Holy God.

**Finally, The Woman Sought Diligently Until
She Found the Coin.**

After having lit the candle and after having swept the house, the woman never gave up on this coin. She knew that it was there, and she knew it was hers. How like the Holy Spirit's persistent and continuous pursuit of His own! Indeed, they belong to God by virtue of the payment made in blood. And the Holy Spirit knows for whom Christ died substitutionarily, and He will never give up on one of them. Every Christian can remember those days when he attempted to flee from this Spirit of conviction. Everything was tried in order to escape His relentless drawing power to Christ. He was quenched, He was quenched, He was quenched. Still, He diligently continued His work of inner conviction. He was resisted, He was resisted, He was resisted. But still on He came, always searching our hearts, always digging deeper into the hidden recesses of darkness, ever calling us to attentiveness to Christ's work in our behalf. And, who won? He finally gave to us that full understanding of God's

good love and grace. How He changed us from holding back! We even began to run ahead to reach our Savior! Oh! How thankful we are that he illuminated us with His candle, swept our house of worldly clutter, and sought us diligently!

THE RESPONSIBLE SINNER

¹¹ *And he said, A certain man had two sons.*

¹² *And the younger of them said to the father, Father, give to me the share of the estate which comes down to me. And he divided the wealth to them.*

¹³ *And not many days afterward, having gathered together all his things, the younger son departed into a distant country, and scattered his estate while living wastefully indecent.*

¹⁴ *And having squandered all his things, there arose an intense famine in that country, and he began to suffer need.*

¹⁵ *And after departing, he bound himself closely with one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed hogs.*

¹⁶ *And he longed to fill his stomach from the [mass of] seed-pod fodder which the hogs ate, and not one [person] gave to him [anything].*

¹⁷ *And coming to himself [about reality] he said, How many servants of my father abound in bread, but I myself am perishing here in a famine.*

¹⁸ *I will move from here and I will go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I sinned in regard to heaven and in your sight.*

¹⁹ *No longer am I worthy to be called your son; begin immediately making me as one of your hired hands.*

²⁰ *And moving from there, he went to his father.*

Luke 15:11-20a ADT

This section begins the third picture within this one parable, the lost prodigal, and deals with the responsibility of the sinner for his own lostness. While presenting the indisputable reality of the Son's seeking out the lost and the Spirit's searching out the lost, Jesus now presents the equally indisputable truth of the lost's own responsibility to respond to the Savior and the Spirit.

This we have dealt with somewhat in the section Calvin versus Arminius, but here we see man's responsibility on both ends of the responsibility spectrum. That is to say, all lost men are chargeable for departing from God and are similarly chargeable for not returning to God.

In the story, a man had two sons. The younger requests his share according to the Jewish law. *Deuteronomy 21:17* requires that at the death of a father one portion went to the younger and a double portion went to the elder. The father did not have to give to this son his portion until his own death. But in this parable, because of the impatience of youth and the rebellion against home restraints, the younger son sought for and acquired his due portion. Now free from all restraints, the younger son removed himself from his father's house to a far country and wasted all his inheritance on riotous or disorderly and wild living. He became a profligate renegade against the moral restraints of his former life with his father. He finally found himself penniless and forced to do the lowest of labor, that of feeding unclean and defiling swine. His hunger was so great that he had even considered eating the swine's food. But he began to realize that even the lowest of servants in his father's house were provided far better than he; and he then realized that his own foolish sinfulness against his father's authority had brought him to such a low estate. Whereupon, he returned to his father and confessed his sin against him and against God; and that he was not worthy anymore to be even named by his father's name. He was about to ask the father for a place of menial service as a hired servant when the father interrupted him with expressions of joy and acceptance. The story depicts in parabolic form the responsibilities of sinners to respond to God's offers of love and grace in Christ .

Lost mankind is like the prodigal, not all lost men are like the returning prodigal, but all are like the departing prodigal. The difference between the sons is the key to the difference between the lost and the saved. This will be dealt with later, but for now, this prodigal pictures the accountability and obligation of sinners before God.

No one ever forced the prodigal to do anything. That is important to see. He was not forced to leave his father's house and he was not forced to return to his father's house. This suggests that the responsibility for both actions falls upon the lost prodigals in this real life. All men have departed from their God. The Bible abounds with that truth; but one must never minimize the awesomeness of each departure by accentuating the overwhelming numbers doing it. As the prodigal, each lost man gathers up his own things and willfully in a headstrong antagonism pulls farther and farther from his God. David wrote, *The wicked go astray as soon as they be born.*¹⁷ At the minute of birth man begins a life-long expedition away from God. One's entire life is filled with premeditated acts against the revealed will of God, until a lost life climaxes in a lost soul in the pit, forever separated from God. Like the prodigal son, men gather up their goods and flee to the far country in an attempt to escape the authority of God over us. And in this life God gives to us more and more latitude until in the end the profligacy has broadened until it has captured our entire selves and completely drawn us prodigals into the pit. At no time or in no way is God responsible for the arbitrary and obstinate determination of the lost person to sin. The lost is as responsible for his lostness as the prodigal son was for his position in the swinetrough.

But another responsibility is evident in the prodigal. He realized in himself that the father's house was an improvement. He made a decision to seek his father's forgiveness. All lost men are like that, because God does not force men to come to him at the time of their conversion. Though at first they are dead set against God—and literally so, He will work on them until He has turned that previous opposition into love and great desire for His Son and His ways. That is the result of the seeking Savior and the searching Spirit, Who together from the beginning, convicted, sought, and even nearly drove him to the Father. God lingers with prodigals; He enlightens them; He turns providences to influence

¹⁷ *Psalms 58:3*

them. And as real and as compelling as His dealings are, still the lost prodigal must make his own enlightened moral choice to come to Him in repentance for his sin and in faith in His gracious love. Granted, the Son seeks out and has paid for elect prodigals. Granted, the Spirit searches out relentlessly every avenue for the persuasion of the lost. But in the end the decision is the prodigal's own to return or not to return, to decide for rather than against his new Father. If he was chosen by God, if Christ died for his sins, if the Spirit has searched him out, then that prodigal will without fail return to the Father, exercising a moral, but now enlightened, choice.

THE SIGHING SOVEREIGN

^{20b} *But, while he was yet far away, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and having run [to him] he fell on his neck, and smothered him with kisses.*

²¹ *And the son said to him, Father, I sinned in regard to heaven and in your sight; no longer am I worthy to be called your son.*

²² *But, the father said to his servants, Quickly bring out the number one robe and put it on him, and place a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet,* .

²³ *And fetch the fatted calf, kill it at once and let us jubilate after we eat,*

²⁴ *Because this son of mine was dead, he was in a lost state and was found [to me] and came back to life [to me]. And they began to jubilate.*

Luke 15:20b-24 ADT

The Son seeks and the Spirit searches, but what is the Father's work in all this? Providential controls are the works of the Father in bringing prodigals home to Himself. He turns events and so-called circumstances *for* their eternal good. That good must include their initial salvation as well as the Christian's life after salvation. God is sovereign over both. But that is not the primary thing that Jesus pictures in the father in the parable.

In the parable God the Father is like the father of the two sons; God is One who does a work of waiting for the prodigal to return, having left in his father Adam. In the story told by Jesus, the father gave to his son his portion of the father's wealth. God does that for every prodigal man. *He sendeth rain to fall on the just and on the unjust.*¹⁸ God has given to lost men much wealth. In fact, everything he has comes from God. He is good and has proven Himself to be good, even to unthankful prodigals who leave Him.

¹⁸ *Matthew 5:45*

The father in the parable also was wise in his restraint toward his son. He realized if he had resisted his son's desire to leave with his share of the inheritance, that the gap would have widened between the two. Instead of demanding in a sort of legal command for faithfulness to him from his son, he acquiesced in the matter. He realized that a heart-felt obedience is the only worthwhile kind; and that sort of loyalty could only be effected through a change within his son's heart. My, how like *our* God is this! He desires no legalistic and forced obedience to Himself from any man. What He desires is an appreciation to Him for all His goodness. God deserves obedience and is worthy of faithfulness because of how He is. God is love. That love is felt, seen, and must be acknowledged by all who really know it, just because that love is communicable. No creature can experience exposure to His love and not be somewhat affected. That return of love is what God seeks from prodigals. He is like this waiting, giving, and understanding father in the parable, who was willing to await the day of a heart-felt change in his son's appreciation of and love for himself.

And this father could have sent his servants after the son and forcibly brought him back home after a time. Many human fathers might have grown impatient at the son's prolonged estrangement, and might have taken matters into their own hands. But God awaits the proper day. He patiently does His work in prodigals' hearts by allowing the prodigals to run out of their rebellion, and to see for themselves their need to turn to their loving Heavenly Father.

When the prodigal was *yet a great way off, his father saw him* (v. 20). This devoted father had been looking for the return of his son. Before the son arrived home, the father went out to meet him. Just how many days had that father spent looking down that road by which his son had left? The father agonized longingly and lovingly after his lost son. Every day, if one was in tune with him and close to him, he could be heard to sigh in his very soul and heart toward his departed son. His interest was on his son even though he was not there anymore. It is God who sighs achingly for His lost prodigals. Even after they display a disregard

for and even a despite against Him, still He keeps His interest upon them. He never gives up, and He meets them before they can reach Him; and He runs to greet them, as if the love He has for them cannot restrain itself. Truly, it cannot and will not be suppressed.

The father seems to have been presented by Jesus in two perspectives. In *verse 20*, his feelings toward his son are predominate; but in *verse 22*, his actions toward his son are stressed. The feelings of the father are exhibited in meeting him, running to him, and smothering him in kisses—all outward displays of affection. It was in a word, compassion. All the display of emotion is qualified in this one word. His love as a father was real, and it was certainly genuine. But fatherly love alone might find a restraint against its immediate display in order to discipline the son. Fatherly love might see a need to correct the son by limiting its expression until he was sure that the son clearly understood his former error. Contrariwise, this compassion was a sweeping emotion that overpowered the father. It had filled the father's every thought about his son until nothing could contain an outward display of its rule over him. This compassion is the key feeling of God for prodigals also. Behind every act of love lies this compassion. It has controlled God because God is love. God's compassion for the lost has brought His only beloved Son to a cruel death. God's compassion for prodigals who hate Him leads Him to act in providence for their salvation. This compassion is constraining God in all His works among mankind.

God's Compassion for prodigals is a felt sorrow for their suffering and misfortune, accompanied with a strong attentiveness to spare them those pains. This father had continuously suffered sorrow for his departed son. He, being wise and experienced, knew that his son would have suffered much pain. Misfortune is a ready caller upon young men who, before being adequately prepared, go out on their own to *enjoy* the pleasures of youth for a season. All the hugging and kissing from this father simply was telling out the father's heart of compassion. He knew the difficulties that his son had faced:

good-time friends who deserted him when his money was gone, harlots who only loved for the price of a loaf of bread, confidence men who swindle simpletons and the hardship of losing everything with nothing but scars to show for it. This father understood all that. He felt sorrow for his son, and he had the desire to alleviate the hurt and to remove the sorrow and would restore his son to the blessed and happy state of peace at home once again. That is also God's compassion for His lost prodigals. God understands the pains and sorrows caused by sin. He is there now to remove the hurting and to replace it with peaceful happiness. Sin will rape a prodigal and leave him with nothing. But God feels with sinners and alleviates the pains of sin through His own closeness to returned prodigals. God casts off all restraint upon Himself. He is the Great Omnipotent, Almighty Ruler of the universe, the Great I AM Who rules all from the majestic splendor of the Throne over all; yet He casts aside all that pomp and finery in becoming a Man in Christ—as deserved and true as it is—in order to be compassionate upon the needy. Like this father in the parable who cast aside all formality, decorum, and propriety in order to assure his son of his continued love, God also became very unconventional, almost unlike the God of the universe, in order to shower compassion on those out-of-the-way prodigals who return home to Him. Amen!

The Actions that the father took for his son are given in *verse* 22. He covered him with his best robe, put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and provided food for him in the fatted calf. One can imagine this son as he came down that road toward home. He must have been a disgusting sight: his appearance probably unkempt, his outer garment in shreds, his shoes worn out, and particularly noticeable was the strange lack of class his son now showed. When he left he had money, jewels, and a certain stamp of quality which marked all residents of that father's home. Obviously, it was a wealthy family because of the reference to servant's (v. 26); the son had left in a gala status of the same class as the father's house. But now he returns a completely changed and unfit person. The father quickly moved

to change all that. He provided a new robe, a ring to distinguish his stature and identify him with the father's household, shoes to replace those that had been worn out by sinful pursuits, and the best food he had to offer, which was reserved for only the most qualified guests. In that way the father restored to his rightful son the original class and dignity of his original status as his rightful son and heir.

There were four actions taken by the prodigal's father which symbolize the position of God's children. In passing, it should be noted that the father commanded the servants to provide these things for his son. Giving these commands immediately at his son's return and in the presence of the just returned prodigal was an assurance to him of the father's genuine and complete forgiveness. Even in like manner, does the Heavenly Father desire that His own know assuredly that they are completely and irreversibly forgiven, saved, and possessors of eternal life.¹⁹

First, a Robe. "A robe, the number one" [Lit. trans.] was put on him as the mark of having received honor in his father's house. This was a practice in the Eastern cultures.²⁰ This "number one" robe represents the "only begotten" Son's righteousness and honor which God gives to repentant sinners. He places the greatest honor of His realm on them when He grants to them the standing of His Son.²¹ God covers all the former shame and is pleased to see no tarnish but only virtue.²²

Second, a Ring. A band was placed on his hand. This was the signet ring which was used in lieu of a signature to verify authority to act in the place of the one it represented. This seal-ring authorized this just-returned prodigal to act in behalf of the father immediately. It symbolized his absolute and complete restoration as a full joint heir with all that the father had. That is indeed the position of every prodigal who comes to God through Jesus Christ. Immediately, he is given the status as operating in behalf of the Father, and has the joint tenancy of all possessions of God as Christ the Son also has.²³

¹⁹ *I John 5:13* ²⁰ *See Esther 6:1-11, esp. vs. 7-9.*

²¹ *See Revelation 3:18; 7:14; Romans 13:14; II Corinthians 5:21.*

²² *Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 3:24* ²³ *Romans 8:15-17*

Third, Shoes. Shoes were provided for his feet. These were usually given only to free men. Slaves, in order to hinder their movements and to restrict their possible escape, commonly went barefoot. But this returned prodigal was to be free, and would be trusted with his freedom as a rightful and mature son. So, Christians have liberty in Christ Jesus. In God's kingdom, they have no outward restraints indiscriminately placed upon their movements, yet are obliged to obey all righteousness out of a heart of love for their Heavenly Father, lest they should dishonor Him.²⁴

Fourth, The Fatted Calf. A specially kept calf was killed and a feast was assembled for this prodigal son's return. This was the fatted calf already prepared in the stall. It is as though the father in the parable was completely prepared to provide adequately for his son's return at all times. Similarly is God prepared for all His returning prodigals. Christ Himself is the *Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.*²⁵ His blood is sufficient for the return of every prodigal who returns to the Father. He is God's provision "in the stall" so to speak. He is the way to God by virtue of His payment for the sins of all the prodigals. And as in the parable, the members of the entire household of the saints assemble at the feast-table of the Kingdom in order to celebrate the Father's inexhaustible payment for their return to their God.²⁶ There is merry-making at the expense of the fatted calf, but it is needful that it be slain else no prodigals could be seated at the table.

With God there is only joy over the returned prodigals who are bestowed with honor from Himself, are recipients of His authority as mature sons, are trusted with their freedom as His representatives, and are provided the sacrifice of the before-prepared Lamb of God for their former riotous living. He is full of joy at their establishment in the family of God, where they can alternately partake of and rejoice in His richest blessings forever and ever. Amen!

²⁴ Galatians 5:1, 13-15; I Peter 2:16 ²⁵ Revelation 13:8 ²⁶ Revelation 19: 7-9

God provides for prodigal mankind as the father in the parable. Before he left God in the garden of disobedience, man in Adam knew all the nobility of God's house. The wealth, the finest provisions, the sweetest charms, were all his. That was how God created him and provided for him. But man removed himself as a prodigal and wasted all—even himself—on riotous living. But when the prodigal returns to his God, God meets him and restores him completely with the very finest of His house. He is tattered and worn, his shoes are spent on sin, his adornments are all gone, and his stomach aches for proper food. Then God gives him everything necessary to mark him as a child of the Highest. He gives him His very own righteousness.²⁷ He adorns him with His finest embellishment.²⁸ He provides his feet with the stability of the gospel of peace.²⁹ Finally, God gives to returning prodigals the sustenance that fills hungry souls, the manna from heaven, Christ Jesus Himself to live and dwell within.³⁰ It is through this provision that what was a worthless and out-of-place prodigal suddenly becomes a suitable adornment to the House of his God. Now, he fits in, and is in accord with the surroundings which mark the House of God.

The Ultimate and Infinite Joy

⁷I am telling you that in the same manner, joy will be in heaven over the one repenting sinner, rather than ninety-nine just men who have no need of repentance.

¹⁰In the same manner, I am telling you, joy arises in the angelic realm of God over one sinner who repents.

²⁴Because this son of mine was dead [to me] and came back to life [to me]; he was in a lost state and was found [for me]. And they began to jubilate.

Luke 15:7, 10, 24 ADT

There is a progression of joy running through the parable. Joy builds until it reaches the ultimate and infinite Father's joy, and hence all the Godhead's involvement. Note the advancement of joy: in *verse 7* it is *joy in heaven*. In *verse 10* it is the *joy in the*

²⁷ *Philippians 3:9* ²⁸ *John 3:5; II Peter 1:4* ²⁹ *Ephesians 6:15*

³⁰ *John 14: 16-18; Colossians 1:27*

presence of the angels of God. In verse 24 it is the father and the entire household who make merry and are glad. In the interpretation of the parable, the shepherd is Christ, the woman is the Holy Spirit, and the father is the Heavenly Father. This progression is not suggesting that one Person of the Godhead is inferior in joy to any Other. But God's joy is building to a climax of the ultimate joy in heaven, that of God Himself in the Trinity of His Being and in the whole realm of glory.

In the progression, the *joy in heaven* gives emphasis to and concerns mostly the place. *The joy in the presence of the angels* gives emphasis to and concerns mostly created beings. But in the final movement of the parable, it is God the Father Himself Who is rejoicing at the return of a prodigal, marking the complete Godhead as saving the lost. There is no one, no created thing, which knows greater joy than God. He is a constant experience in Himself of joy. His is the ultimate joy and His is the infinite joy; there is no greater joy. It is that joy which God uses to express the pleasure He has in one prodigal who comes to Him in repentance and faith. The joy expressed in the return of the prodigal son is the ultimate joy only because it pictures a broader joy that accentuates God Himself bringing the entire heavenly host into the foremost joy because of one prodigal's deliverance from sin. The joy from one lost sheep saved by the Son and the joy from one lost coin saved by the Spirit is the same joy—the same lost human and the same godly joy, and not a lesser joy. But the ultimate joy is as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit together in personal involvement deliver one human soul from sin.

This parable teaches Triune God involvement in saving the lost. This teaches us that though God's great joy is independent of external influences, it is augmented and broadened when a human prodigal returns to God. Only the Three in One God saves sinners. The joy beyond which it is impossible to joy is the only joy adequate to communicate the immense pleasure in the heart of God when a lost man turns to Him by the redemptive work of the Lord Jesus Christ, through the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and by means of the Providential Government of the Father. Amen!

An Angry Brother

²⁵Now his older son was in the field, and as he was coming near to the house, he heard the sounds of musical instruments and sounds of group dancing.

²⁶And having called one of the younger servants to him, he began to inquire what these things might be.

²⁷And he said to him, Because your brother has care, even your father has killed the fatted calf because he received him back in good health.

²⁸But, he was angry with rage and did not desire to enter [the jubilation], whereupon his father, coming out, began pleading with him.

²⁹But he, answering [to that continued pleading], said to the father, Take note of this, so many years I am serving you and never transgressed your command, and you never gave [even] a little goat to me in order that I might jubilate with my friends,

³⁰But, at the very moment this son of yours came, the very one who has devoured your wealth with harlots, for him you killed the fatted calf!

³¹And he said to him, Child [born to me], you are always with me and all my things are yours,

³²But, it was necessary to jubilate and to rejoice because your brother was dead and came back to life [to us], and he was in a lost state and was, found [for us].

Luke 15:25-32 ADT

The Elder Brother Typifies the Pharisees and Scribes. This elder son is a significant point of the parable. He depicts the attitude and disposition of those to whom the parable was spoken, the Pharisees and the Scribes (v.3). He contrasts the father in the parable in an effective way. There could hardly be a greater disparity or dissimilarity between the hearts of two persons than there is between this father and his elder son. While the father rejoices with great merriment, and engages the whole

household in a time of feasting and celebration, this one son is maddened by such a display of affection for a brother who had so acted. In his words the elder brother reveals a legalist spirit of servitude that was devoid of any real spiritual fervor for his father's propensities. He looked with contempt upon what was the most precious possession of his father. He was devoted to his father's rules, and he was devoted to his father's service, but he was entirely out of touch with his father's heart. How could he have lived so long in his father's house and still be such a stranger to him? The answer seems to be that this elder son had a lack of heart, the absence of affection. He had a name that corresponded to his father's name, but he had a heart that was altogether contradictory to his father's heart.

The Elder Brother Knew Not His Father. When the son had left, life on the farm had continued as ever before. Work was continued "as usual" for the elder son. But not so with the father. He had nursed a bitter grief for a protracted period. He had anxiously kept his attention on that road which had taken his son from him. Nothing was the same for him. But for the elder son the fields were the same fields, the livestock was the same livestock, the duties were the same duties. He felt not, comprehended not, cared not, as his father felt, comprehended, and cared. He walked in the same physical area as did his father, but was an alien to his father's heart.

The Pharisees and Scribes Knew Not God. That was the failure of the Pharisees and the scribes concerning God; put their names in the above description of the elder son and you nearly have it all. They thought to serve the Real God, but comprehended not the God of the Son; and therefore knew not the Son. They revered the Temple, but knew not the just and justifying God of the Temple. They had no understanding of God's loves, because they had no heart for God's loves.

The Elder Son Typlifies All Mankind. This elder son was filled with rage and contempt toward his father; he considered him unfair because of his generous heart of compassion. What a

picture of self-righteous callousness to the generous heart of God! Would men condemn God because His heart is good? Yes! Some men do. They fail to grasp the pleasure He derives from giving needy souls relief from pain and suffering in sin, because only He can provide it. The elder son also mentioned his “friends.” They were the ones with whom he desired company and fellowship, not his father and his household. His father was not special to him. His presence was not his delight. That is the usual feeling of unsaved self-righteous men. They really do not care to company with real lovers of God. They seek out their friends because God is not interesting to them. And they do not at all identify with Him or with His ways. The deepest depravity shuns holy intercourse with one’s God. This elder son portrays man devoid of the love of God. He makes man out for what he is, a stranger to his God.

This parable of the lost shows the true nature of lostness, and the true nature of God’s provision in His seeking Son, in His searching Spirit, and in His own sighing Sovereign Providence. God is the generous God, Who gives and gives and gives for lost and wicked prodigals. The answer of the father to the elder son is the answer of God to all strangers to His generosity. God says in the words of this father, in effect,

It is only proper for all of heaven to rejoice with the highest joy beyond which it is impossible to joy, because I am God; and My joy is the only worthy joy which adequately expresses the pleasures throughout My entire realm of heaven and in Me when just one lost prodigal returns to Me.

Amen!