



Illustrations created with Grok (AI) and reviewed by our team

The Son Who Came Home

Luke 15:11–32 · Bud · Ages 9–12

Luke 15 opens with a complaint. Tax collectors and people known as sinners kept coming to listen to Jesus, and some Pharisees and teachers of the Law grumbled that he welcomed them and even ate with them (Lk 15:1–2). Jesus answered with three stories about something lost and then found: a sheep, a coin and a son. This is the third and longest.

A man has two sons. The younger one demands his share of the inheritance now, while his father is still alive. It is a shocking, hurtful request, but the father agrees. Within days, the son turns everything into cash, leaves for a distant land, and burns through it all on reckless living.

Then the consequences arrive. A severe famine hits. Broke and desperate, he hires himself out to a local farmer, who sends him to feed pigs. For a young Jewish man, that was about as low as it could get, because pigs were unclean under the Law. He's so hungry that even the pigs' food looks good, and no one helps him.

Finally, the truth hits him. Even his father's hired workers eat well. He rehearses an apology: he will admit that he has sinned against God and against his father, say he has lost any right to be called a son, and ask to be taken on as a worker. Then he heads home.

But the father has been watching the road. He spots his son far down the road, and his heart aches with love. He runs to him, something a respected older man in that culture would not usually do, and hugs and kisses him. The son starts his speech, but the father interrupts with orders: the finest robe, a ring, sandals, and a feast with the calf they had been saving for a special celebration. A robe for honor, a ring for belonging to the family, sandals because servants went barefoot: he is fully restored as a son. The father's joy is the joy of finding what was lost.

The older brother hears the party and refuses to come in. He has stayed, worked hard and obeyed, and he feels his loyalty has never been rewarded. The father goes out to him, too, and pleads with him: everything the father owns already belongs to him, but they had to celebrate, because his brother is back.

Jesus leaves the story open. We never hear whether the older brother goes in. That was his question to the people grumbling, and it is a question for us: will we share God's joy when sinners come home?

The father shows us what God is like. He lets us choose. He waits. And when we turn back, he runs to us with mercy before we even finish apologizing. Catholics receive that welcome in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, also called Confession.

Talk about it

1. What steps lead the younger son from leaving home to hitting bottom?
2. What do the robe, the ring and the sandals tell the son about how his father sees him?
3. Why do you think Jesus ends the story without telling us what the older brother decides?

Key verse: Lk 15:20. Look it up in your Bible.