

## Small Group Meeting on Jesus' heart for the lost

### Review (20 mins)

Reflect together on your experiences over the last week. What has God been teaching you? Where have you been growing in your walk with Him? Had you set yourself a challenge in your discipleship? How is that going? Share those experiences with your small group.

### Read (10 mins)

Recap on the sermon from last Sunday. Try to give a summary to those who were not able to be present.

### Luke 15:11-32

Read the Bible passage for this week, slowly and prayerfully. It might help to use your imagination to picture the scene. Below, you will find helpful background information in our 'Setting the Scene' section. There is an extended background at the end.

As you read, look out as usual for *shockers* and *blockers*; but also (given the familiarity of the passage) see if there is anything that strikes you this time you had not noticed before.

*Shockers* – a phrase, word, image or something from the text that resonates, stands out or connects with you.

*Blockers* – something from the text that raises questions for you.

### Setting the scene:

- The contiguous set of three parables in this chapter forms part of Jesus' ongoing debate with the Pharisees and teachers of the

law, who are upset at Jesus' friendship with 'tax collectors and sinners'.

- It is a friendship shown explicitly in 'eating with them'. Table fellowship in the culture was a way of indicating that people were included as insiders not rejected as outsiders. The phrasing of v2 may indicate that Jesus was *hosting* – an even greater 'crime' in the eyes of the religious leaders.

## Reflect (20 mins)

After you have all had time to read the text, pause and be still to listen to God through the Scriptures.

Begin your reflection time by each naming your *shockers* and *blockers*. Listen carefully to each other, share your thoughts and reflect on this passage together.

You might also like to explore one or more of these questions:

Q1. Which character do you identify with when reading this parable and why that one rather than the others?

Q2. Do you struggle with any of the characters and, if so, why?

Q3. How might you use this story with a friend who says: 'I'm not good enough for God'?

Q4. 'I have sinned' – what alternative wordings do people (do you?) use today for when they have done something wrong (think of those accused in #MeToo)? How might we speak in different ways of sin that would resonate in today's culture?

## Respond (20 mins)

As you draw near to the end of your session, consider how you might respond to your reading and reflection by “walking the talk”. What are you going to be doing this week that will help you seal the faith you have? It may be a challenge or activity that you are currently engaged with over many weeks. Be prepared to share how you are growing in that.

### Some new challenge ideas

#### 1 Amazing grace

At the heart of what Jesus is saying here is that God welcomes with open arms a sinner who turns back to him. Spend time allowing that to sink in and turn that back in praise and thankfulness.

#### 2 ‘He welcomes sinners’

Is that a charge that could be levelled against you? Look at your close friendship circle – how many of them are not yet believers? (This gets harder as you get older). What steps might you take to expand your friendship group?

#### 3 Sharing the Parable

Pray for one person to share the parable with. One way of doing that would be to give them a copy of *What’s so amazing about grace?* By Philip Yancey.

## Group Prayer

As a group, pray for one another this week as you reflect on God’s great love for others. explore a deeper life with God through prayer. Pray that your times of prayer and your attempt to walk in the light of God’s ways will increase and become more habitual throughout each day.

## Extended Background

(v12) – to demand the inheritance before death is tantamount to saying ‘I wish you were dead’; yet the father, in an act of love, lets him go. Culturally the older son would be expected to act as a reconciler, but he doesn’t – accepting his portion of the inheritance. There is something amiss with both sons’ relationship with the father.

(v13) – ‘squandered his wealth in wild living’ does not necessarily mean ‘immoral’ living, living the ‘high life’ can be expensive.

(v19) – ‘make me like one of your hired servants’: the son is willing to work/pay his way back into some sort of relationship with the father, there appears to be no interest in, or expectation of, grace.

(v20) – ‘he ran to his son’: ‘Great men never run in public’ (Aristotle). In this action the father is seeking to protect the son from the adverse reaction of the village community to his returning. The father runs the gauntlet for him.

(v21) – the latter part of the son’s speech is missing; was he interrupted or does he at last glimpse what grace is; that repairing the relationship is more important than repaying the money?

(v23) – ‘robe ... ring ... sandals’: all signify full acceptance back into the father’s household as son.

(v28) – ‘his father went outside’: the older son’s refusal to come in is an insult to his father (as was the younger son’s in demanding the inheritance); yet again the father ignores his own position in order to offer grace.

(Adapted from Kenneth E Bailey *Poet and Peasant* Eerdmans 1976 142ff)