

## SCRIPTURE | Luke 15:1–2, 11–32 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup> “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

<sup>22</sup> “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened

calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup> ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

<sup>28</sup> “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

<sup>31</sup> “ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”

## FOR REFLECTION

In life there are two kinds of lostness — younger brother lostness and elder brother lostness. The younger brother typifies the lostness of secularism; the older brother, the lostness of religion. The gospel stands in contrast to both — and is the solution for both. It is the good news that, in love, God the Father sent his son Jesus on a costly search to reclaim lost brothers. When a person allows Jesus to do this work in his or her life, the broken relationship with God is restored, and the power of God enters his innermost being and renews his life.

1. How are the two brothers different? How are they the same? Which one is easiest for you to identify with? How would you characterize their relationships with their father? Have you ever considered your relationship with God (if such a relationship is part of your life) in those terms?
2. Describe the different kinds of poverty and estrangement the two brothers experienced. Do you see any parallels in our society or in your own life?
3. How does the father pursue each son? What results from each son's response?
4. According to the sermon on this passage, how does God the Father extend himself even further than the father in this story? How does Jesus stand in contrast to the elder brother? What is an appropriate response on our part?
5. Based on this story and the sermon, how would you summarize the gospel in one or two sentences? How is its message unique? Does it change any of the categories and assumptions you use to guide your own life?
6. What kind of response does this story elicit from you? What does it promise?