

## “Facing Mercy” Luke 15:1-10

**Context:** Along with the hard truth of a sinner’s need for transformation, Jesus also teaches God’s intensive labor to save the sinner and accept his or her repentance. These lessons come as Jesus journeys toward His atoning work of salvation in Jerusalem. The context of humanity’s faithlessness, their rejection of Jesus’ visitation, their ignorance of His significance, and their misunderstanding of His Kingdom provide the framework for these salvation teachings. They also provide those God-lovers with wobbly faith an understanding of just how forgiving and caring God is. This provision fulfills Luke’s purpose of steadying the God-lovers’ faith.

**Life Principle:** Mercy is faced with need (cf. Luke 15:7).

### 1. Mercy faced near - Luke 15:1-2

Luke begins his account of just what provoked Jesus to teach three parables of mercy and grace. He does this with the startling contrast of sinners drawn to Jesus because of holiness lived out in mercy over against the Pharisees whose righteousness was lived out in pride and contempt toward others. The latter sought God’s Kingdom through fidelity to theocracy and ritual; the sinner and publican sought it through humble repentance and grace.

### 2. Mercy faced far - Luke 15:3-7

Jesus uses the symbolism of a lost sheep in the wilderness to portray the helpless sinner lost in the kingdom of darkness. Zeal for finding, saving, caring, and returning the lost to safety is shown by the Shepherd. The return through repentance not only brings the penitent into safety but also into fellowship with those who already experience the joy of being in the presence of God. For those who think they are too righteous for repentance, there is no joy of holy fellowship, for there is no salvific fellowship to begin with.

### 3. Mercy faced low - Luke 15:9-10

Mercy is looked at from another perspective as the lost sinner, symbolized by the coin, is portrayed as one of great worth to the Savior. Although the sum of the coin may be small in the eyes of many, the Savior so values it that He labors with great care to find and retrieve it. Again, repentance of the lost is repeated, as is the rejoicing of those who are in God’s presence at the salvation of the lost one now found.

## For Further Study:

- Luke 15:1-10 sets the context for the parable of the prodigal son. As a **Bible study method**, determine the flashpoint that evoked the parables of the lost sheep, lost coin, and prodigal son. What pivotal principle from the lost sheep and coin sets the stage for the parable of the prodigal son? How can you tell that the ideas in the parable of the prodigal son are associated with the parables that precede it (cf. Robertson’s Word Pictures Luke 15:3 at <http://www.searchgodsword.org/com/rwp/>)? For instance, consider the parallel of the sheep, the coin, and the prodigal son.
- In Luke 15:4, the Shepherd searches for the lost sheep not in the pasture but in the wilderness. In order to understand what this word brings to mind to Jesus’ audience, use your concordance and look at the term “wilderness” as it is used in the Psalms. How did the Israelites respond to God and God to them in these Psalms? Now look up the passages where Luke uses wilderness (especially Luke 4:1ff) and apply them to times when you have drifted, lonely and dry, in the ways of sin. Why is there such joy in deliverance?
- The term ‘repentance’ is found in the concluding statements of both parables (cf. Luke 15:7, 10). We have studied this key term in *Vines Expository Dictionary of the New Testament* as well as in the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* v. 2 (#2340), finding it to mean ‘a change of mind’ and a ‘turning toward God.’ Our doctrinal belief states that “salvation is received only by God’s grace unto repentance” (see our **doctrinal statement ‘On Salvation’** under **what we believe**, footnote 11 at <http://www.gracepointfellowship.org/files/DocStmnt.pdf>). What does repentance have to do with salvation? In both of Luke’s parables the verbal form of ‘repent’ reveals ongoing action. Why? When do we no longer need to repent? Why (cf. Revelation 19:8; 21:1-5)?

## Transformation exercise:

Memorize Luke 15:7 this week. Each morning, ask the Spirit to reveal anyone to you who might be lost in the wilderness of despair in order that you might explain repentance and Christ’s salvation to them.