

Luke has put together three stories to express Jesus' mission, and therefore ours. The chapter reaches its climax in the Parable of the Lost Son. Unlike the lost sheep and the lost coin, which were not responsible for being lost, the lost son is lost because of his own wayward actions.

***Describe the character of the son and what happens to him as a result of his choice to leave?***

We would all agree that if anyone deserved what he got, it would have to be this ungrateful, selfish and wasteful young man. In the minds of respectable first-century Jewish people the behaviour of this son would be considered disloyal and outrageous. He ends up not only feeding the pigs, but eating their food. His disgrace and degradation have reached their lowest level.

This son's behaviour is shocking, but the more shocking bit of the story is actually the character of the Father!

***What is shocking about him? Discuss before reading on...***

- He does not argue: he divides his wealth between his sons.
- He waits (actively on the look).
- He takes the initiative (he runs, embraces and kisses having not heard yet what the son was going to say).
- He lavishes his love and goodness and kindness (does not punish or lecture the son, but reinstates his full status).

Had the parable ended with v24 it would have been complete, but with v25 a new issue emerges. The older son hears the sound of celebration and inquiries about what is going on.

***Describe his reaction? Would you react in the same way? Why?***

The old son is indignant, refuses to be part of the party. He feels cheated, for no feast has ever been given in his honour.

***Who does the old son represent?***

The religious leaders (Pharisees and Sadducees) rather than celebrating Jesus' successful ministry among the outcasts were muttering.

1. *What kind of muttering and grumbling are among ourselves (in our hearts, in our church) when time, efforts and activities are spent on reaching those outside the church?*
2. *Why do we find it so difficult to rejoice in changes that positively affect our outreach?*

It is dauntingly difficult to join a church and we are called to be more like the father, welcoming and getting to know anyone who crosses the door of our church. So how can we be more intentional in our welcome and how can we ensure that our worship and activities do not alienate those seeking meaning and faith?

***How can you contribute in improving the church's welcome?***

Here are some ideas:

- Talk to someone new: "Hello, my name is... How do you do?"
- Join the team of welcomers / side persons.
- Sit somewhere else (you will have someone different sitting next to you and you can engage with that person).
- Bring a coffee/tea to someone you have not seen before.
- Bring a friend along to a service and introduce him/her to someone else.

