

Rendezvous with God

Lost and Found—Luke 15

Pack: a Bible and a journal; paper and crayons, colored pencils, or other art supplies

Welcome and Settling In – about 15-30 minutes

Take time to prepare the space, locate bathrooms, coffee and other essentials; welcome your retreat partner; set up emergency contact instructions and any other business. (You may want to post a “Silent retreat in progress; please do not disturb” sign). Pray for each other, together, before you enter into silence. Keep your conversation brief!

Come into the Lord’s Presence – 10 minutes

Take 5-10 minutes in silence to consciously settle yourself with the Lord.

1. Leave behind the burdens, issues and distractions you brought with you. Picture yourself laying them at Jesus’ feet, or giving them to Him to carry (1 Peter 5:7). Resolve that when other distractions arise, you will turn those over to Jesus as well.
2. Notice what is happening in your body: how are you feeling right now? Offer your body to the Lord at this time as well.
3. What hopes or fears are you feeling as you anticipate the silence in God’s presence? Bring those to the Lord too, remembering that He loves and welcomes you as you are.

Greet the Lord, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with this prayer, or your own greeting:

*“ O God, we belong to You utterly.
You are such a Father
That you take our sins from us
And throw them behind Your back.*

*You clean our souls,
As Your Son washed our feet.
We hold up our hearts to You:
Make them what they must be. ”*

From Celtic Daily Prayers, p. 296 – Adapted from a passage in Malcolm by George MacDonald

Come into the Courts of the Lord with Praise – 20 - 30 minutes

Reflect on, read or sing this hymn by Charles Wesley, in worship of our Savior.

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| 1. And can it be that I should
gain
An interest in the Savior’s blood?
Died He for me, who caused His
pain—
For me, who Him to death | 2. ‘Tis mystery all:
th’Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange
design?
In vain the firstborn seraph
tries | 3. He left His Father’s throne
above
So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam’s helpless
race: |
|---|--|---|

pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die
for me?

To sound the depths of love
divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth
adore,
Let angel minds inquire no
more

'Tis mercy all, immense and
free,
For O my God, it found out
me!

4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's
night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening
ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed
with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was
free,
I rose, went forth, and followed
Thee.

5. Still the small inward voice I
hear,
That whispers all my sins
forgiven;
Still the atoning blood is near,
That quenched the wrath of
hostile heaven.
I feel the life His wounds
impart;
I feel the Savior in my heart.

6. No condemnation now I
dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is
mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in
righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th'eternal
throne,
And claim the crown,
through Christ my own.

Take time to praise God in familiar ways – and try something new to express your love and worship to Jesus. Write another verse for the hymn, or draw or describe one of the images described in it. Or, look up Scripture references that are related to the content of the hymn and reflect on them. Let the activities draw you into God's presence, and enjoy your time with Him.

Meditate and Reflect on God's Word

Today you are invited to spend three periods of meditation with the Lord, reflecting on the three primary characters in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, in Luke 15:11-32.

Study Luke 15

Begin your time in the passage with an introductory study, using these questions as a guide. (Note: Eugene Peterson titled a lecture series on the middle section of Luke's gospel, "Tell it Slant," a quote from Emily Dickinson which refers to using "indirect speech" to communicate, when direct or confrontational language would not be well received. Parables are very effective "indirect speech" that can get under one's skin; you are drawn into the story, and then suddenly find yourself the object of it! Let this parable get under your skin today!)

1. Read all of Luke 15. Note the audience, and the question that prompts Jesus to tell this parable. Read the passage again, and note anything that stands out for you; observations, questions?
2. How might you compare the two sons with the two groups in the audience? With which son do you identify?
3. Note the progression in the chapter: How many sheep are there? And how many are lost? How many coins? How many are lost? How many sons? How many are lost? After the prodigal returns, how many sons are still lost? Following this progression, which son is the real focus of the parable?

Additional Resources for Spiritual Formation and Prayer can be found at:

4. Why do you think Jesus doesn't finish the story? How would you end it?
5. How would you summarize the main point of the parable?
6. Take some time in silence to listen for God's voice speaking to you from this chapter. Is there a truth about His character, or yours, that He is highlighting?

Write your reflections in your journal (or draw a response with crayons, pencils, etc).

Take a break and rest, enjoying the truth God is showing you.

Meditation #1: The younger son

Here are some excerpts from The Return of the Prodigal Son by Henri Nouwen. (Nouwen wrote the book after extensive study, prayer and reflection on Rembrandt's painting of the story.) Read them and reflect on where you might identify with the younger son in the parable.

"Leaving home is, then, much more than an historical event bound to time and place. It is a denial of the spiritual reality that I belong to God with every part of my being, that God holds me safe in an eternal embrace, that I am indeed carved in the palms of God's hands and hidden in their shadows. Leaving home means ignoring the truth that God has 'fashioned me in secret, molded me in the depths of the earth and knitted me together in my mother's womb.' Leaving home is living as though I do not yet have a home and must look far and wide to find one.

"Home is the center of my being where I can hear the voice that says: 'You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests'" ... (p.35)

"Yet over and over again I have left home. I have fled the hands of blessing and run off to faraway places searching for love! This is the great tragedy of my life and of the lives of so many I meet on my journey. Somehow I have become deaf to the voice that calls me the Beloved, have left the only place where I can hear that voice, and have gone off desperately hoping that I would find somewhere else what I could no longer find at home." (p.36)

"At issue here is the question: 'To whom do you belong? To God or to the world?'" ...

"As long as I keep running about asking: 'Do you love me? Do you really love me?' I give all power to the voices of the world and put myself in bondage because the world is filled with 'ifs.' The world says: 'Yes, I love you *if* you are good-looking, intelligent, and wealthy. I love you *if* you have a good education, a good job, and good connections. I love you *if* you produce much, sell much, and buy much.'" (p.38)

"I am the prodigal son every time I search for unconditional love where it cannot be found. ... Why do I keep leaving home where I am called a child of God, the Beloved of my Father? ... It's almost as if I want to prove to myself and to my world that I do not need God's love, that I can make a life on my own, that I want to be fully independent. Beneath it all is the great rebellion, the radical "No" to the Father's love, the unspoken curse: "I wish you were dead." (p.39)

... "God has never pulled back his arms, never withheld his blessing, never stopped considering his son the Beloved One. ... It was love itself that allowed him to let his son find his own life, even with the risk of losing it.

"Here the mystery of my life is unveiled. I am loved so much that I am left free to leave home. The blessing is there from the beginning. I have left it and keep on leaving it. But the Father is always looking for me with outstretched arms to receive me back and whisper again in my ear: 'You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests.'" (pp. 39 -40)

We often think of the prodigal's return as analogous to the single act of repentance and conversion that begins one's life in Christ. Nouwen identifies how we all continue to wander from home, or run from the Father's love. We want to take our inheritance, and abandon the relationship with its source, our Father God. We want safety, and blessing, but we fear being dependent and intimate.

How do you identify with the younger son in his leaving, in his lost-ness, or in his heading for home? Where are you, on the journey right now? Take time to converse with your gracious, waiting Father about this, now. When you are ready, run into His arms and receive His loving embrace and lavish celebration welcoming you Home.

Meditation #2: The older son

Read the passage again, this time from the viewpoint of the older son. What is he feeling? Is he justified?

Although the younger son gets all the attention, even when we read this passage today, there is a good argument that Jesus really focused on the older Lost Son. His brother determined that even if he has been cut off from the family, he would do well to be a servant in his father's house. But the Older Son already thinks of himself as a servant to his father. (v.29: "Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.") We can hear huge exasperation and disappointment in the Father's voice as he sees how short-sighted his first-born is, in v. 31: "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.'" The Father has given him His best gifts, and the Son missed the gifts and the Giver, completely.

Ask the Father to show you any ways you are like this bitter older brother who would rather soak in self-pity than come into the party for his brother.

- Are there people or situations of which you are jealous? What do you do with those feelings?
- Do you see God as a stingy provider, or his resources as limited, such that when someone else is blessed, there is less chance you will be?
- Have you overlooked the privileges that are yours as a child of God? What benefit is there for you in the reality that "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours"?
- How is your Abba Father inviting you to be reconciled to Him, and to others?

Take time to reflect on these questions by journaling, or with art work, or perhaps by taking a walk with your Heavenly Father, sharing your heart with Him and listening for His heart. When you are ready, accept His invitation to come into the Party!

Then take a break and rest.

Meditation #3: The Father

Henri Nouwen notices in his book how Jesus was like the younger son – leaving home and coming to a strange land of lost people; and also like the older son – having been with the Father from the beginning. He then shows how Christ's character is actually most like that of the good Father. After many months soaking in the passage, it was a new thought to Nouwen that Jesus was perhaps inviting all of us to become like the Father, as well!

In this last meditation time, go back and look at the Father again. As you have received the gracious welcome the Father gave to his rebellious younger son, and the generous invitation he gave to the jealous older brother, now you come to the Father, and ask Him how you can become like Him, for He invites you to be blessed, in order to be a blessing.

Additional Resources for Spiritual Formation and Prayer can be found at:

How does God want to grow you as a compassionate lover and welcomer of all sorts and conditions of folks?

How is He inviting you not just to receive this amazing grace, but also to share it?

When you are ready, accept His invitation no longer to be His servant, but His friend, doing what He tells you to do. (John 15:15)

If you have spare time, do some kind of creative or recreational activity that will refresh you. (Or take a nap!)

Closing

As you end your Rendezvous with God, take time to give thanks for your time with Him. Also ask yourself, when will you plan another Rendezvous with God? What worked well, and what would you do differently?

In the last ten minutes, meet with your fellow retreatant(s) and share your experience as you feel comfortable. Take care to honor each other's quiet state and the privacy and intimacy of the day. Together, give thanks to God and pray for protection as you go back to the "real world." Here's a hymn about the Prodigal Son to close your time, that was written in 1779 by John Newton, the author of *Amazing Grace*:

1. Afflictions, though they
seem severe;
In mercy oft are sent;
They stopped the prodigal's
career,
And forced him to repent

4. I'll go, and tell him all I've
done,
And fall before his face
Unworthy to be called his son,
I'll seek a servant's place."

7. Now let the fatted calf be
slain,
And spread the news around;
My son was dead, but lives
again,
Was lost, but now is found.

2. Although he no relentings
felt
Till he had spent his store;
His stubborn heart began to
melt
When famine pinched him sore.

5. His father saw him coming
back,
He saw, and ran, and smiled;
And threw his arms around the
neck
Of his rebellious child.

8. 'Tis thus the Lord His love
reveals,
To call poor sinners home;
More than a father's love He
feels,
And welcomes all that come.

3. "What have I gained by sin,
he said,
But hunger, shame, and fear;
My father's house abounds
with bread,
While I am starving here.

6. "Father, I've sinned—but O
forgive!"
I've heard enough, he said,
Rejoice my house, my son's
alive,
For whom I mourned as dead.