

STUDY GUIDE



LET HOPE IN

DUTCHTOWN BAPTIST CHURCH

LET HOPE IN
HOPE PERSONIFIED
LUKE 15:11-32
07/17/2016

MAIN POINT

God welcomes us because of His deep love for us.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

Last week we talked about some situations in our lives in which we need to ask Jesus for help. How did Jesus help you in those situations this week?

Did you come in contact with anyone like the lepers and Gentiles? How did you respond?

How did you invite Jesus into the messy parts of your life this week?

True hope can only be found in Jesus. And Jesus told us a story that personifies this kind of hope. Found in Luke 15, the story of a waiting father shows us the heart of God for us. And we see, gratefully, that God welcomes us because of His deep love for us.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

WATCH THE VIDEO SEGMENT FOR SESSION 3 FEATURING PETE WILSON.

In this session, Pete talked about two sons who were lost. Have you ever lost something valuable or precious to you? What did you do to try and find that thing?

AS A GROUP, READ LUKE 15:11-32.

As Pete talked through this familiar story, what details stuck out to you the most? Why?

What does this story show us about the heart of God?

Are those characteristics ever difficult for you to believe? Why or why not?

How do we see God's love displayed in the way the father in the story responded to his younger son?

How do we see God's love displayed in the way the father responded to his older son?

As Pete told us, both of these sons were lost, but only one of them knew he was. Just as the father wanted to be in a relationship with both his sons, so God wants to be in a relationship with all of us, whether we know we are far from him or not.

Where do you see yourself in this story?

Are you more like the younger son or the older? Why do you say that?

Why do you think it was so difficult for the older son to come into the celebration?

Have you ever felt like that? When, and why?

Pete told us that we have the tendency to believe that God loves us, but He's also always a little disappointed in us. Why do you think we tend to think that way?

How does it impact our relationship with God if we think He is disappointed with us?

Pete also told us that the way we truly please God, like the father in the story, is by having a restored relationship with Him. Do you truly believe you have a restored relationship with God? If not, what is keeping you from believing it?

Thankfully, we can be truly right with God through Jesus. Because of Jesus, God has not held any love back from us. We can move forward in hope and freedom because of Jesus, trusting that we are fully right with God despite our sin.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Do you have any pride or jealousy in your heart that is keeping you from celebrating with God? What is causing that?

How can we help each other enter into God's celebration of our right relationship with Him? How can we emphasize to others they can enter in as well?

As a group, memorize Hebrews 11:6 so we can say it together next week.

PRAY

Pray to close your group. Thank God that He has fully loved and accepted us in Christ.

Visit lifeway.com to purchase the Bible study book for more in-depth individual and group study.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 15:11-32

15:11-12. Jesus turned to the family setting for his concluding parable to illustrate why He associated with sinners. The story was told succinctly with only the points Jesus wanted to make elaborated. A younger son demanded his share of the estate and got it. There is no indication of why he wanted it or why the father so quickly gave it to him. Later we will see the older brother's attitude and surmise sibling rivalry here, as in the Old Testament stories of Jacob and Esau and of Joseph and his brothers. The younger brother's portion was only a third of the estate if the entire estate were divided. By law, the older brother got a double portion (Deut. 21:17). Although this well-known parable (vv. 11-32) is usually called the parable of the prodigal son, the other son and the father are also important characters. It was unusual, but not unheard of, for a father to settle his estate before his death. Since the older son got a double portion of his father's estate, the younger son's share would have been one-third of the estate.

15:13-16. The younger son had no intention of returning to his family. It is impossible to know whether his foolish living included "prostitutes" (v. 30), or if that was just an angry accusation made by the older brother. The irony of the penniless younger son's new job was that pigs were unclean animals to Jews (Lev. 11:7). He was at rock bottom in his new life.

15:17-19. It took extreme poverty and hunger to prompt the younger son to come to his senses and realize that, in spite of all he had done, the correct course of action was to return and become one of his father's hired hands. To do so, however, it would be necessary to confess that he had sinned greatly and was not worthy to be called his son. This is a vivid picture of a person "hitting bottom" and finally realizing the magnitude of his sin. The younger brother came to his senses: The day laborers on his dad's farm had enough to eat. Note how this ties the story back to the beginning of the chapter and the theme of sinners. No longer are we using animals or objects to talk about the lost. Now we have gotten down to basic facts. People are lost. People need to realize their lost condition and admit it. The younger son's first step is saying, "I am a sinner."

What is a sinner? An unworthy person. One who deserves nothing. Yet a sinner wants something. So the sinner searches for someone who loves the unworthy, who is willing to help the undeserving. The sinful younger brother had forfeited his position as son. He had no more claims on his father, so he applied for a new job—day laborer. Humans have the capacity to change. We do not have to remain in the pigpen. We do not have to continue to live as sinners. We can become responsible for our lives. We can quit our riotous living. We can come home.

15:20-23. Focus shifts from son to father. That the father saw his son coming from a long way off indicates that he habitually looked for his return. Perhaps the normal parental reaction to the younger son's return would be anger or at least deep disappointment, but this father's response displayed: (1) compassion, (2) love (threw his arms around his neck and kissed him), (3) celebration (a feast), and (4) joyful restoration of status for his son (a robe of distinction, signet ring of family authority, sandals worn by a son, in contrast to barefoot slaves). Even the joyful welcome did not deter the son from his determined course. He repeated the plea he had rehearsed. Somehow the last line never came out; the job application as a day laborer was never made.

15:24. This is the point at which the parable ties in to the two previous stories about God's joy in saving the lost. The father's celebratory attitude depicts the way in which God the Father receives repentant sinners. This contrasts with the contempt the Pharisees and scribes displayed for sinners who came to Jesus (v. 2). How could the father act like this? Did he not know what the son had done? Of course, but the son had been given up for dead. This was resurrection time. He was lost. We found the precious treasure for which we have hunted. The lost sheep is back. Certainly a lost and found son is worth much more than a coin or a sheep. What a picture of the Father in heaven. How He does celebrate when the lost are found, when sinners repent. What compassion and love He shows. Why does Jesus associate with sinners? Because heaven loves them and waits patiently for them to return and repent so the celebration can begin. Heaven's citizens are repentant sinners.

15:25-30. Instead of the story ending on a note of joy and celebration, as might be expected, the spotlight shifts to the older brother. Unlike the father's positive attitude, the older brother (1) was surprised at the return of his sinning brother, (2) was offended and jealous at the father's celebration, (3) became angry at the father's forgiving love, (4) declared his own

self-righteousness, and (5) focused on his brother's sinfulness rather than his newfound repentance. Jesus' representation of the religious leaders in the character of the older brother was a scathing rebuke of their self-righteousness.

15:31-32. The rebuke of the religious leaders continues. They did not understand (1) the opportunity for a close relationship with God, (2) the generosity of His grace, (3) His joy at the salvation of sinners, or (4) the profound transformation of conversion. Perhaps most crucial of all, however, is the reminder of kinship to the sinners intended in the phrase this brother of yours. The religious leaders refused to accept their Jewish brethren, the "sinners," as the older brother in this story.