



## Pray

*God, come to our assistance.*

***-Lord, make haste to help us.***

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit*

***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

## Reading: Luke 10:25–29

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "**what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" <sup>26</sup> He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" <sup>27</sup> He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live." <sup>29</sup> But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

## Meditation

The test question was, "What must we do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded with a question of his own: "What does the law require?" The lawyer replied that the law requires us to love God and to love our neighbor. "OK, do that and you will live," Jesus said. The scholar knew that to love God, one must keep the law. But what does the law say about my neighbor? One place seemed to say that our neighbor was someone from our own family; another verse suggested it was the stranger who is living in our town (Leviticus 19:18, 34). That didn't include Gentiles and Samaritans, because they were enemies, and as the Psalmist says, "With fierce hatred I hate them" (Ps 139:22). If the law requires that I love my neighbor, is my neighbor "my family," or do I include the "strangers who live in my town?" We all have ways of knowing who is in our group and who is not. We hear them talk; we see the color of their skin and the clothes they are wearing. Our neighbors are the ones who think the way we do, pray the way we do, enjoy the same music and movies. Or are we, like the lawyer, asking the wrong question?

**Quiet reflection:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.



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**Reading: Luke 10:30–37**

Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' <sup>36</sup> Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" <sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

**Meditation**

Jesus answered the lawyer's question, "Who is my neighbor?" with a story. A Jewish man was on his way down the steep road from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was viciously beaten by cutthroat robbers. The poor man was left unconscious, naked, and without any money. First on the scene was a priest, probably riding his horse and on his way home to Jericho after spending two weeks serving in the Temple. The priest had a serious dilemma. The law required that he help a neighbor. But it was not clear if a wounded man fit the law's description of "neighbor." The usual clues were missing, because he had no clothes and couldn't speak. Further, if the priest touched a dead man, he would be defiled, and would have to return to Jerusalem for another week to undergo ceremonial purification. Why risk it? It was better to leave him alone! The Levite was also on his way home. He may have been the priest's assistant in the Temple, and it is possible that he saw what the priest did and followed his example. What was to be gained by acting like he knew the law better? That would be an insult. So, he passed by too. But the hated Samaritan acted in the most surprising way. He had compassion.

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## Reading: Luke 10:33–37

But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. <sup>34</sup> He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' <sup>36</sup> **Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?** <sup>37</sup> He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

## Meditation

The story turns on the Samaritan's great act of compassion. He did what the Levite and priest should have done: he had mercy. But now the Samaritan faced great danger. He would not be safe bringing a wounded Jew into a Jewish town. He ran the risk of being accused of the crime and beaten by an angry mob. On top of that, innkeepers, who in general had bad reputations, would have sold the wounded man into slavery if he could not pay his bill. The Samaritan couldn't just leave him; the wounded man had nothing—no money, not even clothes. The Samaritan risked his life. He used his own money. He became a neighbor to the wounded man. The question is not "Who is my neighbor?" but "What does it mean to be a neighbor?" The Samaritan showed the kind of costly love that Jesus would demonstrate on the cross for all of us.

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## Reading: Luke 15:1–2

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. <sup>2</sup> **And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."**

## Meditation

These two verses provide the setting for the stories that follow. Who has been invited to dinner, and why are the Pharisees so upset?

Luke describes the guests as "tax collectors" and "sinners." Tax collectors were hated. They had obtained a commission to collect taxes. They were supported by the military and could collect the Roman tax, plus whatever more they could get on top of that, as their profit. They were collaborators. Remember that hatred towards collaborators intensifies as revolutionary fervor increases. And nationalistic fervor was increasing almost daily during Jesus' time. In addition to being extortionists, the tax collectors were traitors! And then there were sinners. Sinners were breakers of the law, people of low moral character. This group would include adulterers, Gentiles, and anyone else considered unclean. It included the blind, deaf, lame, lepers, and anyone unfortunate enough to have a physical deformity. All these people were outcasts.

We see that traitors and the unclean were drawn to Jesus, and he welcomed them. The sinners knew where they stood with him. He challenged them to stop sinning, to stop cheating people, to repent—and they did. He did not sanction ethical compromise, and yet they were drawn to him. What was the reaction of the scribes and Pharisees? They murmured. Luke uses the same Greek word that the Septuagint used to describe the people murmuring in the wilderness. The only other time this word occurs in the New Testament is also in Luke (19:7): the Pharisees murmured and complained that Jesus was eating in the house of the sinner Zacchaeus.

Their complaint was this: he "receives and eats with sinners." Here the word "receives" indicates "to receive into fellowship, to accept as a friend." To eat with a person is to accept that person at a fundamental level. Jesus was eating with these people as if they were his friends.

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## Reading: Luke 15:3–10

So he told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> **"Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it?"** <sup>5</sup> When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. <sup>6</sup> And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' <sup>7</sup> Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. <sup>8</sup> **"Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?"** <sup>9</sup> When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.' <sup>10</sup> Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

## Meditation

Jesus was hosting the banquet that marked the end of exile! When Israel's long exile finally ended, there would be a great banquet, the messianic banquet of Isaiah 25 and Isaiah 55: God's great wedding feast, to be celebrated with great joy. However, here the leaders were witnessing the very thing they had been longing for—and they were murmuring! The scene was set. Jesus was having table fellowship with traitors and outcasts, and the Pharisees were grumbling, as Israel had against both God and Moses. Jesus told them a series of stories that were intended to help them, if they had eyes to see and understand just what it was they were witnessing. He invited them to find themselves in the story., and in doing so, choose how they would like to respond. So, he told them the story of a shepherd who left 99 sheep in the care of his cousin or underling, and went out to find one lost sheep. When the shepherd found the sheep, he had a celebration with friends and family. Jesus next told the story of a woman who had lost a coin. Perhaps it represented a significant portion of the money she had to live on. When, after much effort, she found the coin, she too celebrated with friends. The proper response to finding something that was lost was to celebrate. Jesus was comparing the response to finding lost items to finding and restoring lost sinners. The shepherd and his village got it right; the woman and her friends got it right. However, the Pharisees who were standing at the door (and who themselves were the 99 sheep still in the wilderness, and the other coins) did not join the celebration. They didn't get it.

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### Reading: Luke 15:11–13

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> **The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.'** So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup> A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.

### Meditation

The younger son had a legal right to the *possession* of one-third of his father's property, but not the right of *disposition*. That is, the father could give it to him, but the Father still retained control over it, and could use it as long as he was alive. But the younger son was impatient for his father's death. He was a rebel. With this request, he had not broken a law; he had broken his father's heart.

The younger son did not seem to care that his action affected the entire clan. All the wealth of the clan was in land, flocks etc. Those things continue to produce and add to a clan's wealth; now, they were to be sold off in a fire sale, and their productivity lost to the clan. The younger son was ungrateful and selfish. He had cut himself off from his family and village, which would have been his social security in time of need, provided his health care, found him a spouse, etc. All he wanted was the money. The deep irony is that he was once rich in relationships; now, all he had was money. Then he squandered even that. The sheep wandered away; the coin was dropped. But the story of the younger son is so much more tragic. The younger son chose to deliberately wound his father and break his relationship with his family. Like Israel, he made the choices that sent him into exile.

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### **Reading: Luke 15:13–24**

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup> When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup> He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' <sup>20</sup> So he set off and went to his father.

### **Meditation**

The younger son went into servitude; he was as low as one could go. The employer was not doing the young man a favor. Rather, one gets the impression that he was simply trying to get rid of the younger son. He gave him a job that he would not possibly take—but he had run out of money, run out of friends. So, he took that job and would gladly have eaten pig food. But he could not digest it, and besides, no one would give him any. He came to his senses. But what would it cost to go back? Could he live with his brother? Could he face the wrath of the village? The reception back in the village would not be pretty. He knew he would be harassed by packs of boys. Village society was ruthless with the man who was down. See the story of Elisha in 2 Kings 2:23–24:

He went up from there to Bethel; and while he was going up on the way, some small boys came out of the city and jeered at him, saying, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!" <sup>24</sup> And he turned around, and when he saw them, he cursed them in the name of the LORD. And two she-bears came out of the woods and tore forty-two of the boys.

But what was to happen next for the younger son would be stunning!

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### **Reading: Reading: Luke 15:20–24**

So he set off and went to his father. **But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.** <sup>21</sup> Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup> But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

### **Meditation**

Consider the cost of the father's love. Consider his action. Old men don't run, but he ran. He did not give the younger son the chance to get through his prepared speech. The father reclaimed his son; gave him a lavish robe, a ring, and shoes; and called the whole village to come join a great festal meal. It is hard to imagine how absolutely shocking the father's behavior was. Imagine running through the town, something you probably have not done for 30 or more years, your long robes gathered, exposing your legs and feet. How humiliating! All of this in front of your kinsmen and neighbors, who publicly pronounced your dishonor when you lost control of your son and he left. The father ran to the edge of the village in order to spare his son the humiliation and outpouring of shame that was most certainly his due. He then reclaimed him as a member of the family and restored his status.

The father ascribed honor to the son and restored him to a place of respect in all his relationships: he restored his place in the town by greeting him publicly, and with the household servants by having them dress the son. The son's new shoes were symbol of his rank: sons wore shoes and servants went barefoot. And all this was in the eyes of the city elders, who saw the son now dressed in the father's finest robe and wearing the family's signet ring. Not only that, but at great expense he hosted a party for the whole town, a celebration of extraordinary love. The father had reestablished all the son's relationships . . . save one. For the father's trials were not over. But for now, think of the outpouring of love that the father had already expended. Think about what this had already cost him.

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### Reading: Luke 15:25–28

<sup>25</sup> "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, **he heard music and dancing.** <sup>26</sup> He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup> He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup> Then he became angry and refused to go in.

### Meditation

This was the eldest son of a wealthy family. They had servants, property (enough to distribute), festive robes, fattened beef cattle, goats, a home big enough to host a party for a crowd big enough to eat a calf, and fields. Imagine the elder son out supervising the workers in the field, perhaps sitting respectably under a shade tree. He went back to the house and heard the noise of the party. One could imagine a slight smile on his face and a sense of pleasant anticipation. Surely, he was looking forward to entering the great house and asking his father about the cause of the celebration. But he did not.

The young boy, one of the servants, told the older brother that the father had received a "sinner" into his house and was about to sit down for a meal with him. Sound familiar? This was precisely what Jesus was doing: sitting down and eating with sinners. But the elder brother heard much more than that. "Your brother is here": no hint of repentance. The young boy did not tell of the younger brother's journey or internal state of remorse. Rather, he focused on the father's action: he had killed the prized calf and had received him "safe and sound." This translation does not do justice to what the elder brother heard. He had not actually heard what we mean in English by "safe and sound." Had he heard that the son was well but his status in the house could still be up for debate, the elder son would have rushed in and demanded that his brother pay for his crimes and his disrespect. At the very least, he would have made the younger son work like a servant.

But the elder son did not rush in. Why? Because in a more accurate translation into English, what he heard the servant tell him was "your father has received him with peace (*shalom*).". In other words, "Your father has restored him to full fellowship with himself." What would be the elder brother's response?

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### Meditation

Why was the elder brother so angry? There are several reasons. While legally this was the brother's house, the father still had the authority. Remember that "authority" means the ability to control the behavior of others. Giving a banquet was fully in the rights of the father. Traditionally, the place of the elder son at such a great banquet would be to stand next to his father and function as something like a head waiter. He would join in conversation with the guests, but clearly his function would say to the guests, "You are so honorable that we will have even our son serve you." But could the elder brother wait on his younger brother? The brother who brought dishonor and shame on his family? How could he endure the public humiliation and shame?

In his anger he remained outside. He did not shake the hands of the guests. Talk about an act that would dishonor the guests—and most important, his father! In an honor- and shame-based society, for the elder brother to refuse to enter the house and perform his duty was an unbelievable personal insult and challenge to his father's honor. All the more, it was a public insult.

One presumes that the younger son's rebellion was in private, and the news was spread by gossip and rumor. The rebellion of the elder son, in contrast, was public, and therefore more shameful and serious. I could imagine that the guests would expect the response to that sort of challenge to be swift and forceful—as would be the father's right and duty. But once more, the father's response was totally unexpected. He responded with yet another act of self-emptying love.

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### Reading: Luke 15:28–32

**His father came out and began to plead with him.** <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' <sup>31</sup> Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'

### Meditation

It is almost impossible to convey the shock this action must have caused. The father should have sent one of the servants to deal with the unruly and disrespectful son. Yet he accepted the public humiliation of leaving his guests (unheard of!) and went in great humility to reconcile with the son he loved—every bit as much as he loved the younger son.

More than that, he "entreated" him. The Greek word that Luke uses is *parakaleo*: "to appeal to" or "to entreat" or "to reconcile." It is an interesting choice of a prefix for the word *-kaleo*. The choices are *eng-kaleo*—"call against" or "accuse"; *eis-kaleo*—"call in" or "invite"; *epi-kaleo*—"call by name"; *pro-kaleo*—"provoke" or "challenge"; *pros-kaleo*—"summon" or "call to one's self" as an officer would summon an orderly or a master a servant; *syng-kaleo*—"call together"; *para-kaleo*—"appeal to" or "entreat" or "try to reconcile." The prefix indicates the direction in which the action of calling is intended to go, and to a degree, the posture of the one speaking in respect to the one being spoken to. The elder son, one presumes, was facing the young boy/servant when he summoned (*proskaleo*) him. This would be the position of a superior to an inferior. The father, on the other hand, stands at his son's side and invites him to look in the same direction that the father is looking in.

The father had the authority to "speak to" his son and command him to behave in a different way. Or he could have ignored the elder son and dealt with him severely in private. Instead, he chose to go out, stand alongside his son, and invite him to see the world from his own viewpoint. Again, try to imagine the cost of the father's self-emptying love.

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***-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.***

### Reading: Luke 15:28–32

His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' <sup>31</sup> **Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.'** <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

### Meditation

He overlooked the anger, the false statements, the disrespect, the arrogance, and addressed him tenderly, "son." He gently pointed out that "your son" of the elder brother's angry accusation was also "his brother." Finally, he defended joy. It is right to celebrate when one who was lost is found.

Jesus was saying to the older brother/Pharisees/Israel in exile: "You have broken the father's heart, but it is not too late; give up your agenda, your view, and see the world my way. Come in and share this banquet, this meal. Exile is ending. I know it is surprising, but it's true." The older brother's response is not recorded.

You will note that the story stops here. How does it end? Jesus has invited them to live in the parable. You are invited to live in the parable. Take up residence; look out the windows. What do you see now? What do you see about yourself? What is our response to the unbelievable generous outpouring of the father's love? To the outpouring of the Son's love?

**Quiet reflection:** *Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.*

**Prayers and Intentions:** *As if talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.*

**Lord's Prayer:** *Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.*

**Blessing:** May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

**Unity Prayer:** God, make our hearts one. Amen.