

Week Four—Redefining Lostness

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in.”

It’s true for everyone: life doesn’t always go as we would like. But how we react to that fact varies tremendously.

Do we get angry about it or perhaps bitter?

Does the unexpected turn of events steal our sense of joy or peace?

Are we devastated by criticism or suggestions?

These responses are signs that we are lost and might not even know it—that we might have a case of “elder-brother lostness.”

In this parable Jesus is teaching how the Father’s love for us can set us free—free from fear, discouragement and lack of joy. But often the first step of freedom is recognizing where we are. Are you ready to be free?

Memory Verse:

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.”

James 4:10

Definitions and Translations from the Greek

(he was) lost (*apollymi*)

- 1) destroyed; ruined
- 2) put out of the way entirely; abolished
- 3) rendered useless
- 4) forfeited, as a lost estate
- 5) was dead
- 6) employed to no good purpose
- 7) metaphor for given over to eternal misery in hell
- 8) Not able to find the right way or the place intended
- 9) Bewildered; perplexed; like being in a maze
- 10) Alienated; insensible; hardened beyond sensibility or recovery


(and has been) found (*heuriskō*)

- 1) to come upon; after searching, to find a thing sought
- 2) those who come or return to a place
- 3) to find by enquiry, thought, examination, observation; to find out by practice and experience
 - a) to see, learn, discover, understand
- 4) to be discovered, recognized; of one's character found out by others (men, God, or both)
- 5) to get knowledge of, come to know, God

Judge (verb) (Webster’s 1828 Dictionary)

- 1) To compare facts or ideas, and perceive their agreement or disagreement, and thus to distinguish truth from falsehood.
- 2) To form an opinion; to bring to issue the reasoning or deliberations of the mind.
- 3) To hear and determine, as in causes on trial; to pass sentence.

Read Chapter Four of *The Prodigal God*.

 First, look over the questions below. You may want to answer some as you read.

From your reading:

1. Keller asks, “**What does it mean to be spiritually lost** (PG page 48)?” He goes on to say that the younger brother’s lostness is clearly seen when he ends up in the pigsty. His self-indulgent, undisciplined, and foolish behavior led to a complete life collapse. “At that point, the younger brother realizes that he has ‘lost his way’ and returns to try to rebuild his life (PG page 49).”

There is also a subtle, but just as devastating form of lostness Keller calls the “**elder-brother lostness.**” What are the 3 features of this lostness and their accompanying signs?

<u>Features of Elder-Brother Lostness</u>	<u>Accompanying Signs or Characteristics</u>
(1) (PG pages 49-57)	(1)
(2) (PG pages 57-63)	(2)
(3) (PG pages 63-65)	(3)

2. When reading a book such as *The Prodigal God* that is based on the Bible, we will usually **gain insights about God and ourselves.**

- a) What stands out to you about God?
- b) What insight did you gain about yourself or your relationship with God or others?
- c) Is there something you’d like to talk about in your discussion group?

3. **Referring to elder brothers,** Keller states that a **dry prayer life** “reveals that their main goal in prayer is to control their environment rather than to delve into an intimate relationship with a God who loves them (PG page 65)”. **Ask the Lord to show you if this is true in your life.**

Take at least ten minutes. Ask God what’s on His heart.

Listen. Respond.

Ask Him, “What else?” Listen.

You might want to respond, “Tell (or reveal to) me more.”

Invite Him to continue the conversation. You’re available. You’ve set the time aside.

Write down your experience.

Read the *Parable of the Lost Sons*, Luke 15: 1-3, 11-32, on SG page 4 or in your Bible.



Ask God for fresh insight and for His perspective of the older brother.

Digging into the Scripture:

4. The concordance in the back of our Bibles and the cross-references on the Scripture pages add clarification and insight to God's Word. If you are unsure what these are, be sure to ask. It's always a blessing to help someone discover tools to make the Scriptures more alive.

a) **Look up at least two cross references** for Luke 15:24. Choose references having to do with "dead/alive" or "lost/found". Write them down.

1.

2.

b) Look up "lost" in the concordance and see if there is a verse that adds insight or understanding to the lostness of the two brothers. Write down the reference, verse, and insight.

5. **Read 1 John 4:18 and 2 Timothy 1:7** (printed out in the *New King James Version* below).

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.

a) How is a spirit of fear demonstrated in the older brother?

b) Ask God if a spirit of fear is at work in your life. If so, ask Him if it is there because you still wrestle with a lack of assurance that God really loves you.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son . . . (John 3:16)

c) Go back to question 1 on SG page 18. If you exhibit any of the signs you listed under feature #3, spend time listening to God's perspective in these places. Remain with Him in this place. Let His perspective and the Scriptures WIN! Write down what God shows you.

6. **Read Luke 6:37 and look at the definition of "judge" on SG page 16.**

a) What is the result of judging another?

b) What is the result of condemning another?

c) What happens if you refuse to forgive another?

d) Ask God how He wants to use these truths to continue to free you from "elder-brother lostness."

7. Read **Matthew 16:13-19**, Peter's confession of Christ.

The Parable of the Lost Sons was especially convicting to the Pharisees in Jesus' day and is to the elder brothers in our churches today.

As we see God clearly and receive His love, like Peter, we will be able to be a part of the church God uses to reach the lost.

a) Spend time confessing any unconfessed elder-brother traits you've become aware of. Simply ask God to bring them to mind and tell Him you're sorry.

b) Receive His forgiveness. Ask Him to make you humble and the kind of person on which He can grow His church (Matthew 16:18). Write out your prayer.

c) Now pray for your own church, the churches of this community, and the church worldwide.

Lord God, I cry out for Your church, the bride of Christ. May judgment, fear, comparison, and criticism have no place in Your people or church. May our churches be safe places for those who are looking for fulfillment, purpose, and help. May those who are lost find You through your Spirit of Truth.

- Pray for pastors, priests, and church leaders.
- Pray for missionaries, those who are local and the ones around the world. Pray specifically for those the Lord puts on your heart. Write them down.
- Pray for our churches to be welcoming.
- Pray for there to be no trace of "elder-brother lostness" in Christians and in your church specifically.
- Ask God how to continue to pray. (He will ask some to pray for children's ministries, some for the deacons' outreach, some for financial provision, some for the Holy Spirit's power to be known in real ways, etc.). Write down how God asks you to pray.

d) Thank God that "it is not by might, nor by power, but by His Spirit (Zechariah 4:6)" that He will answer the prayers of your heart. Thank Him for His love, wisdom, and truth—and whatever else He puts on your heart. Write down your experience.