

TODAY

A Catholic Journey Through the Gospel of Luke

SESSION 9

This My Son Was Dead

Luke 14–15

The banquet of the unrepayable, the cost of the road, and three parables of the lost

Leader Preparation Guide

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim: Participants discover that every banquet parable has been previewing Isaiah's feast on the mountain, where death itself is swallowed up, and then walk the parable of the prodigal son slowly enough to find the Sacrament of Reconciliation hiding in plain sight: the Catechism itself reads the story as the map of conversion (CCC 1439).

Catholic Touchstone: The Eucharistic banquet of the poor, maimed, lame, and blind; the hard grace of counting the cost; and Confession as the father's embrace: contrition, confession, and the robe, ring, and feast of restoration. The elder brother receives equal pastoral attention; most parish groups contain more of him than of his sibling.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Luke 14 opens at a Pharisee's sabbath dinner, the third great table scene, where Jesus heals a man with dropsy under hostile watch, then reads the room's seating scramble and teaches the guests (take the lowest place) and the host (invite those who cannot repay you: the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just). The guest list is the theology: grace, by definition, invites the unrepaying. A guest's pious toast, blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God, triggers the parable of the great banquet: invitations issued, excuses tendered (field, oxen, wife, the respectable machinery of a settled life), and the master's house filled instead from the streets with exactly the list Jesus just gave the host, while none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet. Tonight's first discovery sends the group to Isaiah 25:6–8, the feast of fat things on the mountain for all peoples, where the Lord swallows up death forever and wipes away tears: the horizon every table in Luke has been pointing toward, and the reason excuses are tragedies.

Then the road again, and the hardest sentence in the Gospel: if any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Tonight's steelman takes the hostile reading at full strength, Jesus the family-wrecker, the cult leader's demand, and answers it from inside the Hebrew Bible: hate in Semitic comparative idiom means to love less, to subordinate, as when Leah is hated (Gen 29:30–31 uses loved less and hated interchangeably) or Jacob I loved but Esau I hated (Mal 1:2–3) assigns preference, not malice; Matthew's parallel makes the comparative force explicit, whoever loves father or mother more than me (Mt 10:37). The demand is still staggering, rightly understood: Christ claims the supreme place in every love, and the tower-builder and king-at-war parables insist that the claim be costed before it is signed. Salt that has lost its taste closes the chapter as the portrait of uncosted discipleship.

Luke 15 is the Gospel's beating heart: one parable in three movements, told at grumblers. The setting is the meals thread at full pressure: tax collectors and sinners drawing near, Pharisees and scribes murmuring, this man receives sinners and eats with them, and Jesus answering the murmur with the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost sons. The sheep and coin establish the pattern: the seeker's initiative (which of you does not leave the ninety-nine and go after the one), the disproportionate search, and joy that demands company, rejoice with me. Both end with heaven's arithmetic: more joy

over one sinner who repents. St. Gregory the Great preached the coin's detail the modern eye misses: a drachma bears an image, and the woman sweeping her house for the coin is God turning the house upside down for the creature stamped with his own likeness.

The prodigal (15:11–32) deserves the slowest walk of the study so far. The younger son's request, give me the share of property that falls to me, asks his father to act as if dead; the far country and the famine strip him to feeding pigs, an occupation that ends a Jewish son's identity; and coming to himself, he drafts a confession in three clauses: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants. Watch what the father's run does to the draft. While he was yet at a distance, the father saw him (which means the father was watching the road), had compassion, and ran, a run widely seen in that culture as beneath a patriarch's dignity, gladly paid, embraced and kissed him before one syllable of the speech. The son gets through contrition and confession; the third clause, the demotion to employee, dies in the father's arms, answered instead by the robe (the best one), the ring (authority), the shoes (a mark of the free son of the house; servants commonly went barefoot), and the fatted calf, because this my son was dead, and is alive again. The Catechism reads the whole arc as the process of conversion and repentance (CCC 1439), the paragraph the Catechism sets within its teaching on the Sacrament of Reconciliation: the misery of the far country, the coming to oneself, the resolve, the confession, and the father's restoration exceeding all petition, culminating in a feast; so the path of Reconciliation ends with the penitent restored to communion and pointed back to the Eucharistic table. Then the camera turns to the field. The elder brother's anger is the parable's live wire for parish people: these many years I have served you (the verb is a slave's), I never disobeyed, you never gave me a kid, and this son of yours (not my brother). The father's answer is as tender as the run: Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours; it was fitting to make merry, for this your brother was dead. Luke leaves the elder brother standing at the door, music pouring out, choice unmade, because the parable's last character is its audience.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

Isa 25:6–8 The feast of fat things for all peoples; death swallowed up forever — **Lk 14:15–24**

Prov 25:6–7 Do not put yourself forward; better to be told, come up here — **Lk 14:7–11**

Gen 29:30–31 Leah loved less / hated: the comparative idiom — **Lk 14:26**

Mal 1:2–3 Jacob I loved, Esau I hated: preference, not malice — **Lk 14:26**

Ezek 34:11–16 I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out — **Lk 15:3–7**

Gen 41:42 Robe and ring: Pharaoh's investiture of Joseph, authority restored — **Lk 15:22**

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

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St. Peter Chrysologus (*Sermons on the Prodigal Son*)

Chrysologus, the golden-worded, preaches the father's run as the Gospel's whole physics: it is not the manner of age to run, yet love outstrips dignity, and the father falls on his son's neck so that the son's rehearsed speech is smothered in the embrace. The father, he says, was not ignorant of where his son had been; mercy chose to see only that he was coming home, and the kiss restored what the

confession had not yet finished asking.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Gregory the Great (*Forty Gospel Homilies, Homily 34*)

On the sheep and the coin, Gregory hears the shepherd carrying the sheep on his shoulders as Christ carrying our nature home in the Incarnation, and the coin as the soul: a drachma is stamped with an image, and the woman ransacks her house by lamplight because what is lost bears the likeness of the owner. The friends and neighbors summoned to rejoice he reads as the angels, for heaven's joy over one repentant sinner is not a courtesy but a feast.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Ambrose of Milan (*Exposition of the Gospel According to Luke, Book VII*)

Ambrose walks the prodigal's return as the soul's: the father sees him afar off because God sees the penitent before the penitent sees God, and runs because grace moves faster than repentance. The robe is the garment lost in Adam restored, the ring the seal of the Spirit, the shoes the readiness of the Gospel, and the calf, Ambrose does not hesitate, is rich with the mystery of the Eucharist: the feast that stands ready whenever a brother dead in sin comes home alive.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1439 The process of conversion and repentance described by Jesus in the parable of the prodigal son: the Catechism's own walk through tonight's text.

CCC 545 Jesus invites sinners to the table of the kingdom: the scandal of the meals as mercy's method.

CCC 1443 Reconciliation with the Church: readmission to the community's table as sign of God's forgiveness.

CCC 2839 Returning to the Father like the prodigal: the confession of our sin as the door of prayer.

THREAD WATCH

Meals with sinners (peak pressure tonight): 15:1–2 is the thread's thesis statement: this man receives sinners and eats with them. All three parables answer the murmur. The table's destination (Sessions 13–14) is two stops away.

Banquet of the unrepaying (develops from Session 8): Last week's east-and-west table becomes tonight's Isaiah 25 discovery. The poor, maimed, lame, and blind guest list echoes 4:18.

Blessed outsiders (develops): The streets and hedges fill the banquet. Keep the tally.

Lost and found (plants tonight, resolves Session 11): The seeking shepherd of 15:4 returns in person at 19:10: the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost, said over a tax collector in a tree. Say nothing; let Session 11 close the loop.

SESSION GOALS

1. Run the Isaiah 25 discovery and let the banquet parables acquire their true horizon: the feast where death is swallowed.
2. Handle the hate father and mother steelman with full honesty: idiom explained, demand undomesticated.
3. Walk the sheep and coin for the seeker's initiative and heaven's arithmetic of joy.
4. Take the prodigal at CCC 1439's pace: contrition, confession, and the restoration that outruns the speech, with the robe, ring, shoes, and feast named for what they are.
5. Give the elder brother his full evening: the slave's verb, the refused feast, and the father who comes out to entreat him too.

Time Note (75–90 minutes)

The prodigal needs thirty unhurried minutes; build the night backward from that. If pressed, compress the sabbath healing and seating instruction (14:1–14) into leader framing and fold the salt saying into Q3's close. Never cut Q1's Isaiah discovery, Q3's steelman, or anything in Q4 through Q6. If your group runs long every week, this is the session to let run.

Discussion Guide

OPENING PRAYER

Leader: *Father, you watch the road for us. Before we can finish our speeches you are already running, and the feast is already warming. Give us tonight the younger son's honesty, spare us the elder son's ledger, and seat us gladly among the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind, the company you keep. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

WIN: OPENING QUESTIONS (10 MIN)

W1. What is the best welcome-home you have ever received, or ever given? What made it unforgettable?

W2. When you receive an invitation, what actually determines whether you go: the event, the host, or who else will be there? Be honest.

BUILD: INTO THE TEXT (50–60 MIN)

HOW TO LEAD THIS SECTION

Tonight ends in the most famous story ever told, and familiarity is the enemy: your group thinks they know it. Slow everything down after Q4; read the parable in sections, not one pass; and give the elder brother real time, because he is sitting in your circle. The ANSWER boxes consolidate; the text converts.

1. Live discovery: Read Luke 14:12–24: the guest list Jesus commands (the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind) and the great banquet with its excuses. Then hunt: find Isaiah 25:6–8. Whose feast is this, who is invited, and what happens to death at that table? What have all of Luke's banquet parables been previewing?

Leader: *The find: the Lord's feast on the mountain, for all peoples, where he swallows up death forever and wipes tears from all faces. Every table in Luke points here.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Isaiah saw it first: on this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, and at that table he will swallow up death for ever and wipe away tears from all faces. That is the banquet every Lukan table has been previewing, which is why the invitation list Jesus commands, the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, those who cannot repay, is not charity advice but eschatology: grace invites the unrepaying because the host of Isaiah's feast needs nothing back. The excuses in the parable are therefore tragedies, not etiquette problems: field, oxen, and marriage, the respectable furniture of a settled life, politely declining the defeat of death. And the house will be filled regardless, from streets and hedges, the east-and-west crowd of last week now given an address. The one way to miss the banquet, the parable warns, is to be too invested to come.

2. Read Luke 14:7–11, the seating instruction. What is Jesus actually teaching under the table manners, and where have we heard everyone who exalts himself will be humbled before in this study?

Leader: Quick one. Proverbs 25:6–7 behind it; the Magnificat's reversal as social practice; friend, go up higher.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

Under the etiquette is the Magnificat with place cards: he has put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of low degree, now issued as practical instruction. Take the lowest place is not strategic modesty (angling for friend, go up higher as a compliment) but training for a kingdom whose entire seating chart runs on grace: everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted, a sentence Luke will repeat verbatim over a Pharisee and a tax collector in Session 11. The wisdom is old (Prov 25:6–7); the stakes are new: the table being rehearsed is Isaiah's.

3. Steelman chain: Read Luke 14:25–33. The hostile reading says plainly: a teacher demanding that followers hate father, mother, wife, and children is a cult leader, and this verse is the Gospel's ugliest. Give that objection its full force; do not soften it prematurely. Then interrogate the idiom: read Genesis 29:30–31 and Malachi 1:2–3, and compare Matthew 10:37. What does hate mean in this Hebrew pattern, and what does the demand still cost once the idiom is understood?

Leader: Let the ugliness be felt first. Then: Leah loved less and hated used interchangeably; Jacob loved, Esau hated as covenant preference; Matthew's parallel states it comparatively: loves more than me. The idiom decoded, the claim remains total: first place in every love.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The steelman deserves its moment: in English, the sentence sounds like the entrance exam of a cult. But the group's own hunt dissolves the translation problem without dissolving the demand. Genesis 29 says Leah was *hated* in one verse and *loved less* in the verse before, the same fact in two registers; Malachi's Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated assigns covenant preference, not personal malice; and Matthew's parallel makes the comparative force explicit: whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. Semitic hate here is comparative: to love less, to give second place. So the verse is not a command to despise your family, and the Church has never read it as one. But do not let relief domesticate it: Jesus claims first place ahead of every human love and even your own life, a claim no sane man makes unless he is more than a man, and he immediately demands the claim be costed like a tower and a war, in advance, with eyes open. Salt that has lost its taste is his name for the discipleship that signed without reading the terms.

4. Read Luke 15:1–10. First the setting: who is drawing near, who is murmuring, and about what? Then the sheep and the coin: in each parable, who moves first, what is the search like, and what does the finder do that seems out of all proportion?

Leader: The murmur (15:2) is the thesis all three parables answer. The seeker's initiative, the extravagant search, the party that costs more than the coin. Gregory's image-on-the-drachma is in the Voices box.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The frame is the meals thread at maximum pressure: this man receives sinners and eats with them, and instead of defending himself Jesus describes God. In both parables the lost thing does nothing but be lost; the shepherd goes after the one until he finds it, the woman lights the lamp and sweeps

the house and seeks diligently. Ezekiel promised exactly this: I myself will search for my sheep. And both finders do the same disproportionate thing: they throw a party, rejoice with me, joy that demands company, because, Jesus says, that is heaven's own arithmetic: more joy over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine with nothing to repent. St. Gregory pressed the coin's detail: a drachma bears an image, and the house is ransacked by lamplight because the lost thing is stamped with the owner's likeness. You are the coin. The sweeping you have felt is not punishment; it is the search.

5. Read Luke 15:11–24 slowly. Track three things: what the younger son's request means to a living father; the three clauses of the confession he drafts in the pigsty; and everything the father does before and instead of letting him finish it. What do the robe, the ring, and the shoes each restore? And why a feast?

***Leader:** Give me my share now = act as if dead. The draft: sinned / not worthy / make me a hired servant. The father sees far off (he was watching), runs (an elder's indignity), embraces before the speech; the third clause never gets said. Robe: honor; ring: authority (Gen 41:42); shoes: sonship. CCC 1439 walks this arc as the shape of conversion and Confession.*

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The request is a small patricide: the share that falls to me falls at death, so the son asks his father to be dead for accounting purposes, and the father grants freedom at the price of his own heart. The far country runs its course to the pig trough, where coming to himself the boy drafts penance in three clauses: I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants. Now watch the father dismantle the draft. He sees him while still at a distance, which means he never stopped watching the road; he has compassion and runs, and in that culture a patriarch's running was widely seen as beneath his dignity; that is the price, and he pays it laughing; he embraces and kisses him before a syllable is spoken. The son gets out his contrition and his confession, and the third clause, the demotion to employee, dies in the embrace, because the father will take his son back as a son or not at all. Then the liturgy of restoration: the best robe (honor covering rags), the ring (authority, as Pharaoh ringed Joseph), shoes (a mark of the free son; servants commonly went barefoot), and the fatted calf, for this my son was dead, and is alive again. The Catechism reads this exact arc as the process of conversion and repentance (CCC 1439), and it sets the parable at the center of its teaching on the Sacrament of Reconciliation: the far country, the coming to oneself, the resolve, the spoken confession, and a father's welcome that exceeds everything the penitent dared to ask, ending in a feast. St. Ambrose said the quiet part: the feast that stands ready for every returning child is the Eucharist. Every Confession ends pointed at an altar.

6. Read Luke 15:25–32. The elder brother: list his exact grievances and his exact words for his father and his brother. What does his language reveal about how he has understood these many years in his father's house? And notice what the father does that he did not have to do, and how the parable ends, or does not.

***Leader:** The slave's verb (these many years I have served you), the ledger (I never disobeyed; you never gave me), this son of yours. The father comes out and entertains him, repeats Son, all that is mine is yours, and*

corrects one pronoun: this your brother. The story ends with the door open and the choice unmade; the audience finishes it.

ANSWER: SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION

The elder brother has been lost at home. His grievance speech betrays him: these many years I have *served* you uses a slave's verb for a son's life; I never disobeyed is a ledger, not a love; you never gave me a kid prices the relationship in livestock; and this son of yours amputates a brother. He has lived in the father's house on the hired-servant terms his brother proposed and the father refused, and the proof is that the feast sounds to him like injustice. But mark what the father does: he comes out, to the field, to the second lost son, and entreats him, and answers the ledger with intimacy: Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours, then hands back the amputated pronoun: it was fitting to make merry, for this your brother was dead and is alive. And there Luke stops. Music from the house, father in the doorway, elder son unresolved, because the parable was told to murmuring Pharisees and it is still being told to everyone who has kept the rules and resents the mercy. The last character in the story is the reader, and the door is open.

DIG DEEPER: THREE PARABLES, ONE MISSING SEARCHER

The sheep had a shepherd to seek it and the coin had a woman; who goes to the far country after the son? In the story, no one; and Christians have long heard that silence as an invitation: the Father's answer to it in history is the Son who leaves the Father's house for the far country of our exile, eats with pigsty people, and carries the lost home on his shoulders. The parable's missing searcher is the one telling it, and the road he is walking as he tells it (Session 6's hinge) ends at the price of the search.

SEND: TAKING IT OUT (10 MIN)

- S1.** Which brother are you this season, honestly: the one in the far country, or the one keeping score in the field? What would coming to yourself look like this week?
- S2.** The father saw him because he was watching the road. Who are you being asked to watch the road for, without conditions, without a speech required, ready to run?

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Go to Confession this week and let CCC 1439 be your examination's frame: far country, coming to yourself, the walk home, the words, the robe. The feast follows.
- Invite someone who cannot repay you: a meal, coffee, a seat at your table, chosen precisely because there is nothing in it for you.
- Before next session, read Luke 16:1–17:37: a shrewd steward, a rich man and a beggar, ten lepers, and a question about where the nine went.

Scripture memory: **Luke 15:10**, *Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents.* (RSV2CE)

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Father, you saw us at a distance and ran. Meet every far country in this room with your embrace, silence our speeches about being hired servants, and teach the elder brother in each of us to come in to the music. This night, let there be joy before your angels over sinners coming home. Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.***

Leader Reference Card: Session 9

Every passage used tonight, in order of appearance. Isaiah 25 is the load-bearing bookmark; Genesis 29 and Malachi 1 arm the steelman.

Passage Used for

Luke 14:7–11 Q2: places at table; Prov 25:6–7

Luke 14:12–24 Q1: the guest list and the great banquet

Isaiah 25:6–8 Q1 live discovery: the feast where death is swallowed

Luke 14:25–33 Q3 steelman: hate father and mother; the cost

Genesis 29:30–31; Malachi 1:2– 3 Q3: the comparative idiom

Matthew 10:37 Q3: the idiom translated

Luke 15:1–10 Q4: the murmur, the sheep, the coin

Ezekiel 34:11–16 Q4: I myself will search

Luke 15:11–24 Q5: the prodigal and the father; CCC 1439

Genesis 41:42 Q5: robe and ring, Joseph's investiture

Luke 15:25–32 Q6: the elder brother

CCC 1439, 545, 1443, 2839 Catechism Connection

Next week: Luke 16–17: money, Lazarus, and ten lepers. Bookmark Leviticus 14:1–4; the group should discover for themselves why Jesus sends lepers to priests, and what that has to do with a confessional.