

## Luke Chapter 15

### Background

Luke 15:1

**Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.**

Tax collectors and sinners. The root of the word sinner means to miss the mark. KhaTa2, خطاً It does not mean to commit to a sin like adultery was the number one sin in the Middle East. Sins were rated some were worse than others. Killing could be justified according to the Sect, Religion, area etc. A man could be condemned as a murderer in some area or being obedient to the commandments of his god.

According to Jews were pro-Roman, they were viewed by Jewish people as betrayers. They informed the Roman authorities to arrest those that did not pay their taxes. They worked for foreigners to persecute their brothers. What is a betrayer? What does it mean to betray?

Judas Iscariot betraying Jesus. Paul made a reference in 1 Cor.11. This chapter is known as the communion chapter.

The tax collectors and sinners drew near to Him. It was a slow gradual drawing of people to Him. He did not have flyers to announce His presence. Which is still the case in ME culture. Word of mouth is the most powerful means of communication in the ME. When men saw Jesus standing by the shore, he would send his wife and children to spread the word. The man would stand there talking to Jesus to make should he would not go anywhere and within a couple of hours a crowd would gather. Keep in mind the news passed through the village by a little child or a woman. It was not clear most of the time. We can see a little boy yelling come and see what is happening or calling for help. The boy might think his father is in danger because the man Jesus they did not know about. It was not clear cut information. It creates curiosity. And suddenly noises are heard in the street alerting neighbors to come and find out what is going on, to ask questions and everyone gets a different answer. The level of curiosity rises. But the neighbors will always make sure that this news be kept from the authorities. The last thing you need is the police, secret police, or the Romans soldiers entering into the streets of your village. The first thing they do is beat everyone and disperse the crowd to bring order to the village.

The crowd came close to Jesus. The running slowed down to find out what is the real story. Who is this man? It is Jesus. They are comforted and at peace with the reassurance that nothing will happen to the village. But their peace did not last long.

Verse 2: The religious leaders arrived. Are they worse than the political leaders? We do not trust them someone will say. It is a set up. How do they know they are not agents of the Romans? The Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes and Herodians. Fear began to rise in the hearts of the villagers. Are they going to punish us for having this man Jesus. Keep in mind several hours have gone by. Noise, unanswered questions, confusion. The religious leaders did not want to upset the people of the village but they played the trick to get the people to stand against Jesus and not believe His message. This man receives sinners and eats with them. This is how you create parties, divisions,

and this is how you become a leader in your own place by gathering crowds to agree or disagree. Jesus answered the accusation “what man of you having a hundred sheep?” One of the men in the crowd shouted, “who is talking about sheep?” In order to understand this region, Jesus was trying to expose the Jewish leaders who come from the Levite tribe and they are serving in the Temple in various positions. He was reminding them of Leviticus( fFnd text). The text says when God told Moses that the tribe of Levi should serve Him and not have any material possessions. According to this scripture, the tribe of Levi should not own land or livestock. Jesus answers them by saying that they accuse Him as sinners. He reminds them of their continual breaking of the law by owning sheep and livestock, homes, land. Jesus continues to reveal their hypocrisy and show the crowd that they don’t only own livestock but animals are unclean. They would not dream of touching a cow or a sheep. They would lose their religious purity. A shepherd was a living of lowest position according to Jews living in the land. Jesus was presenting that the leaders were breaking the law and call themselves clean and holy. But they own unclean animals and hire unclean shepherds to look after their livestock. They pay them to do their work. So who is the sinner? Who missed the mark? Jesus is exposing them as sinners.

Let’s visit Israel in a small village today and today is the Shabbat. The head of the family, the father will lead the family into the Shabbat service. I enjoy the spirit of the Shabbat and support it and believe that Christians should understand the meaning and celebrate the Shabbat Some Jews take it literally. They will not even flip a light switch because they consider it working on the Sabbath. They hire local Palestinians that will work on the Shabbat to cook, switching the light on and off, lighting candles. The whole point is that by maintaining the law to the “t” they force others to work and break the Sabbath.

**J**esus turned the tables on the Pharisees. While accusing Jesus for associating with the commoners which is not accepted in the Middle Eastern culture until today. Jesus in essence was telling the Pharisees, that they themselves became partners in an unholy alliance. They broke the law by owning property and by hiring unclean shepherds according to their teachings. They unbiblically owned property. You broke the same law that you established or wrote. (Find text) You created laws that were a burden for people and yet you did not carry them. It certain that Jesus was pointing his finger at the leaders as He uttered these words. Luke 15:4 “What man of you having a hundred sheep..” When Jesus spoke to the leaders at other time, He was healing people on the Sabbath. The accusation against Him was that He was doing good work on the Sabbath. When Jesus spoke to the leaders, if one of you has a sheep that falls in a ditch on the Sabbath, who will not save the sheep? The religious leaders would never touch the animal to save it but in their hypocrisy they will hire an unclean commoner to save the animal. The religious leaders in their mind were convinced that they were not working on Saturday but the hired man was the one doing the work. What difference does it make because the commoner is going to hell anyway? The Pharisees have called the people cursed. (Find text). These people are cursed. It is not certain if the religious leaders are truly convinced if they are still pure before the sight of God. They kept themselves clean because they did not touch the animal and kept themselves clean on the Sabbath. The point that Jesus was making was that if you are guilty in one of the commandment then you all guilty of all. (Find text). Now we can hear the sounds of the crowd cheering Jesus. No one ever dared to speak to the Pharisees.

## The Buildup Parables of Luke 15

The first parable speaks about one sheep out of a hundred while the second deals with one coin out of ten. The third story, and I use story and many theologians agree that this was not a parable but a true story. This story deals with one son out of two sons. One out of a hundred represents something that is important. One out of ten represents something more important. One out of two represents the most important. Sheep in the Eastern culture represent jobs, ownership. It is important to have a job to support your family. The parable of the lost coin which needs to be examined in detail represents the honor and reputation of men and women in this culture because having honor is more important than having a job or ownership. No one will hire you if you do not have honor or a good reputation. No one will deal with a person of bad repute.

The third story deals with humans, a son who is lost and that is the most important. We see from this and other stories that Jesus almost always used a gradual approach to engage the multitudes. He would begin with a simple, small issue to help them grasp the ideas and move forward to a more complex and important ideas. It is important to have a job or a business but more importantly to have a good reputation and be honored in your community. Yet Jesus shows us that the most important is our soul. (Find text...what does man gain if he loses his soul?).

Another thought, the lost sheep represents a human who knows that he or she is lost but does not know how to return home. The lost coin represents a man or woman that does not know that they are lost and does not know how to return home. The prodigal son represents a person that knows they are lost and how to return home. This is essential while we minister to people. There are times when you witness to a person that grew up in SS and is familiar with the teaching of the word of God and is convicted immediately by the Holy Spirit, repents, and accepts the Lord. This person knew that they were lost and knew how to return home. In the case of the lost sheep, sometimes we witness to a person that is acquainted with the Bible and knows that they are lost but needs help and guidance to find the Lord. In such cases, it is important to simple in the presentation of the gospel and not use Christian terminology that the person is not familiar with. For example some of the familiar slogans: Are you ready to trust Jesus with all your heart? Have you ever accepted Jesus in your heart? Are you saved? Do you believe in Jesus? Would you repeat after me the sinner's prayer? Are you ready to be baptized?

The lost coin represents a person that did not grow up in SS and is from a different religion who believes that he is saved through his works and good deeds. He believes that his religion is the correct one and the only way to God. When we deal with a person like this, who does not know that he needs salvation, it will require more time to convince him that he is lost. It requires time, fellowship, trust before presenting the full gospel of salvation.

## The Parable of the Lost Sheep

The lost sheep is one of the most difficult parable to understand because it addresses real life of a hired shepherd that looks after not his own herds but herds belonging to someone else. In this case Jesus is talking to the religious leaders that none of them will dare attend their own flocks. This was considered to be an unclean and unholy occupation for the Jewish leaders. When a hired shepherd loses a sheep, he will be the one to look for the sheep and to bring it back to the

fold. The question that Jesus directed to the Jewish leaders was being sarcastic to tell them that they as owners of herds would never think of going after a lost sheep instead they hired shepherds, servants, and slaves to do their work. Yet they presented themselves as pure and holy before the nation. Let's reword the question: "if one of you have a hundred sheep and lose one?" You should be the one to attend to your sheep and go after the lost sheep. The wilderness in Israel is a vast, open, rugged, dessert region. The hills and valleys extend for miles. It is a harsh and barren land inhabited by the ibec, Bedouins, and the shepherds with their flocks. The grazing ground for the herds are sparse and far between. The Judean wilderness is the region where David tended his father's flocks and where Jesus wandered for forty days. It is a place that requires a true dependence and trust in the Lord for provision. Imagine a leader of one of the religious leaders walking in this region with his clerical, ceremonial garb, they would trip and hurt themselves and would be in need of someone to come find them. Jesus was trying to make a point that the leaders made themselves so holy, untouchable, and clean that their clothing made it almost impossible to reach out to the needy. Jesus was saying that they were not fit for the job. Their garb hindered them from true ministry. Jesus was trying to stir up the teaching that moved them to the point where they were more concerned with how they looked than with helping a person in need. "Where is your conscience?" We can here Jesus saying. They did not care about the lost. It is the hired shepherd to find the lost animal because otherwise he would lose his job and would have the cost of the sheep deducted from his salary. "And when he finds it (Find text). Who really found the sheep? The owner or the hired shepherd? It is the hired shepherd. Will the hired shepherd call his friends to rejoice? The hired shepherd will not tell the owner that he had lost a sheep so the invitation will go to the other hired shepherds who actually assisted the shepherd to find the sheep. We often see this picture in churches that the congregation is more involved in reaching out than the elders. The ones who are rejoicing are not the religious leaders but the neighbors and the friends of the hired shepherd. I say to you, "heaven rejoices when one of these is found" (Find text). The ninety-nine righteous: who are the ninety-nine righteous? The Bible says that no one is righteous, not even one. Jesus says pointing to the religious leaders, that they call themselves righteous, in your eyes you are righteous. Heaven is not rejoicing over you ninety-nine righteous and do not need salvation. Jesus is saying that those that think they are righteous, heaven does not express joy over them but rather the one that was lost. We can see the focal point of Jesus' teaching is restoration. It is always on God's heart to restore. The lost sheep was restored to the herd but also the hired shepherd was restored to his job. Had the owner of the sheep learned of the lost sheep, he would have fired the shepherd for negligence. The Shepherd called his friends to rejoice, those friends are other hired shepherds in the area. They know that they have to work together and help their colleague to find the sheep because tomorrow it might be their sheep that is lost and they will need help to find it. In the Byzantine culture neighbors worked together and responded to the call for help. I need help today, tomorrow you will need help. It is the same idea when you run out of sugar and you have a guest and you go to your next store neighbor and you ask to borrow sugar. The term borrowed is used because tomorrow you will need bread and you will feel comfortable to knock on my door and borrow bread because you lent me sugar. Life continues like this and the community is self sustained and there is no need to appeal to an outsider who eventually will have a different interest which usually leads to control of the communities resources. Keeping out the stranger is very important to not only

protect the community but also to provide an environment of flourishing and export this to other communities. The credit system is used in this community as the word of mouth, covenant, and promise. I borrow from the neighbors. My promise is my support, my credit that travels throughout the village and community and is made known to the rest that I am a man of my word. Once my word is broken, the whole community will know and I will be almost outcast and no one will trust me and will not do business with me. I will not be able to establish or continue business.

### The Parable of the Lost Coin

What is a coin? Why did the get lost? What does it represent and how do you find it? The coin represents a person that does not know that they are lost and does not know how to come back and be restored on it's own. The coin, it is part of the dowery paid to a woman at the time of engagement. Therefore, it represents her reputation and honor in the community. A woman who loses her reputation and honor in the community will bring shame on her family, father or husband and in some areas she will be stoned. A girl never leaves a father's house unless she is married. She moves from the covering of her father to the covering of her husband. In the case of a death of the father, the eldest son becomes the lord and provider for the family. If the son is underage or there are no sons in the family, the paternal uncle becomes the guardian of the family. There is always a guardian in the family. The worst thing to happen to the child is for them to be orphaned. When this woman was engaged her family makes sure that the future husband will pay as much dowery as possible. There is no dating in the culture. Marriages are arranged. Arranged marriage sole purpose is to keep the inheritance and the name of the family secure. Marrying within the family (i.e. cousins) is always the case. The oldest daughter will marry the oldest cousin. Jacob fell in love and tried to be smart by marrying Rachel first however, the words of his uncle Laban is a reminder that we do not do it this way. Leah had to go first. When a couple is getting ready to get married, both parents of the man will initiate the first visit to determine if the girl and her family are suitable. "We would like to come and have coffee with you". The parents of the girl will respond quickly, happily knowing that this is the beginning of the marriage process. The girl's parents will make sure that their oldest daughter will be the one to meet the parents of the man, bring a tray of coffee and no other girls will be in the house just incase the man will like the other sister instead. The oldest girl must be married first. That happy girl cannot wait to know that the coffee tastes good. The mother of the boy will examine her head to toe and observe every move. She will be the to give the final approval because the daughter in law will live with her and will work with her. The mother wants to make sure that they will be able to live together and that the girl is teachable. The mother in law will not hesitate for a second to teach the new bride her ways of cooking and managing the home. The girl's old way of doing things is not acceptable in the new home. "We like you coffee". The parents of the boy will say. Another visit is in the works and this time to discuss the dowery. How much? Hoping that her coffee tasted good the parents of the son will address the parents of the girl as they are. In some cultures it is almost like buying a woman. But in the Byzantine culture it is a wise decision to get as much support from the man for the daughter as possible. This in essence becomes the future support or retirement plan, if the woman gets divorce the dowery belongs to her and her children. If her husband knows this is her savings plan, if the

husband is disabled or loses his business the dowry becomes the means of support for the family. Both sets of parents will bargain. What can the husband give to prepare for the marriage? The forms of the dowry include: gold jewelry, a place to reside, furniture, and all that it takes for the couple to establish their new life. Once the dowry is agreed upon, the groom will go away to work and time agreed upon is a year. Whether in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, it gives the groom the time to prepare the house. This is the picture that Jesus told his disciples, that he was going to prepare a place for them and afterwards he would come back. The church today is engaged to Christ, it is the bridegroom of Christ and is waiting for the return of Christ for the wedding. The signs of a woman being engaged our jewelry. At the time of engagement in the Byzantine culture is as good as married. Mary was engaged to Joseph but in the culture she is married but waiting for the husband to come back with everything arranged for the new home because at the time of engagement the contract was signed. At the marriage night, it is a time of celebration and the man is coming to take his wife and consummate the marriage, give her a party and in some places it can last for seven days and some places three days it depends on the financial situation of the groom. Today it is an all night celebration. We need to keep in mind the contract was signed, they are legally married. The celebration is to acknowledge and approve the marriage by celebrating with the couple. Today we wear a ring on the right and left hand but at the Byzantine time, the woman will always wear a necklace of ten coins. The message that is given to the community is that I am engaged, I am married, I have a man, I have a darling. Other pieces of jewelry will be kept at home in a safe place because remember this is her savings. If the man and the wife are invited to a party or another wedding, the wife will wear all the jewelry to show her beauty at the party and to honor her husband that gave her that much. At times it can be a competition between women “My husband gave me more than your husband gave you”. This is good for the wife’s reputation, “my husband loves me very much” and “he values me” and “I’m worth a lot in his eyes.” Jesus is dealing a problem that happened in this community, a woman appeared with nine coins instead of ten. The ten coins are the number agreed upon by the whole community so the man has to give ten and then out of his generosity he can give more. But the ten coins were the required number as a sign of engagement. What does it mean that the woman lost the coin? I can her the community especially the women are gossiping that the husband did not love her that much because he only gave her nine coins, She is not worth the ten coins, she is blemished. Worse yet she has been with another man and that man took a coin from her to keep her for himself and to control her. Whatever the case is, this woman cannot appear in the streets with just nine coins. Jesus presents a very interesting resolve to the matter, to search diligently. How do you do that when the floors are dirt? She has to turn the whole house upside down until she finds the coin. With that kind of condition, and the coin almost the color of the floor or once hidden in the furniture it would have taken her days but this is the only solution to restore her honor and reputation in the village. “ I want to show you how much my husband loves, I am without blemish, and my husband paid the full price for me.” That is easily said “show us the ten coins woman”. There might be one or two of her friends and neighbors that believe her and came to her aid. She is under pressure of her husband who is pressured by his family and friends to solve this problem because his reputation and theirs have been affected by the loss of the coin. If the issue is not solved soon, she will be divorced and denounced from the community is a dishonest woman. Someone asked me, why does not this woman just go to the

gold smith to match the lost coin? She is not that stupid, I said. Just imagine this woman going to the goldsmith in the community and asking him to match the coin and not tell anyone. The goldsmith will go to his wife and say guess what? But don't tell anyone. The news spread rapidly through the village and that would prove to the community that she is blemished and not faithful and now she is lying. She is smarter than that. She knew that the only way to restore her honor and reputation in the community is to find the lost coin. Another message that Jesus gives about restoration. (Come back to your first love-Find Text). She invited her friends and neighbors.

Who was invited?

What does it mean to invite friends and neighbors? Who are the friends? This includes everyone in the village. This invitation is not just for a cup of tea, the purpose of the invitation (elaborate on this).

The purpose of the invitation was to rejoice because her reputation and honor was restored. She wants to give the message first hand to the community, my husband payed the full price. I am worth the full price. He loves me and I have not been with another man and I am a faithful wife. There was a need for the woman to face the community and put an end to the gossip. It is very important and effective for the community to hear it from her not from second party because it will always be mistaken. The situation is similar to the game of telephone. By the time the message reaches the end of the line the message is totally different. Rejoice because I have been restored. The party was not just for a cup of tea but such a party in the Byzantine culture is for a full meal. The coin be worth a hundred dollars but imagine feeding a whole village for a whole meal, that would cost the woman hundreds of dollars. As we see in the parable of the lost sheep that represents business or a job are very important but that your reputation and honor are more important than a business or job. Without a good reputation, you cannot have a business or a job. They are connected. It is very interesting that in America, the house comes first but in Middle Eastern culture the business comes first. A business can buy you a house but the house cannot buy you business. Restoration does not come free, there is a price. Imagine the work the woman put in to prepare the meal for a whole village. This woman had friends to help her in the search of her coin and to prepare the meal. A great picture that Jesus shows us is that we cannot do it alone, we need our community. Keep close fellowship with your friends and family because one day you will need them. We are concerned in the Western culture with privacy and making sure no one invades my privacy and many times we find ourselves alone dealing with issues. In the Byzantine culture you understand that you are not alone. You always have the support of your family and the community. For example I arrived at the Cairo airport and I took a taxi to downtown Cairo to pick up a shuttle that was going to my hometown Fayoum. It is a two hour drive picking up passengers and he was happy to see me because I complete the number of passengers in the shuttle. The passengers were anxious to go. The taxi driver noticed from my accent that I'm not a city boy and asked double for the taxi fair. I tried to reason with him and he got angry. The passengers in the shuttle realized from my accent that I am from their town and they immediately took sides. They gave the taxi driver less than what I offered them and they said that this amount was the accurate and fair amount. Taxi driver understood immediately that he was outnumbered and I was surrounded by my community and they were ready to defend me. I felt sorry for the taxi driver because he got less than what I offered and when I offered him

more to be gracious, my community took care of the matter and protected me and did not allow the driver to take advantage of me.

### The Prodigal Son

One of the most intriguing story and I say story because I believe when Jesus said there was a man and two sons so Christ in his for-knowledge was speaking about a particular family. And therefore, the situation and outcome was true and actually happened. Many times in real life, we see that the younger or the youngest child seems to be smarter than the first child. We are still questioning such a notion because I am the oldest son and I consider myself the smartest because I have achieved more in life than my siblings. But in the Byzantine culture people assumed that the oldest son is spoiled and received too much attention from family members especially his mom. The culture sees that this affects the character of the child. He is always giving whatever is asked. The oldest is served by his mom and sisters and is overprotected. He gets all the toys. The other brothers get the hand me downs but are allowed to explore and find their place in society. They develop a more outgoing and courageous spirit. They have no fear. The traditional picture of the youngest son when he asked his father for his share of the inheritance is a man carrying a bag of money on his back. But this is not the accurate Byzantine account. What was the share of the inheritance that this boy asked for? Remember his older brother received the same equal share. I must say that I need to clarify the fact that these two boys did not have any sisters. How do we know that? Until today, the oldest son receives double and sometimes two thirds of the inheritance. We see that in the Bible and before we say that this is not fair let us consider that God permitted such a law. I want to lead you to the understanding that it is the other way around. It is not fair for the oldest son to carry such responsibility. What is the oldest son's responsibility? He received double or two thirds of the inheritance and he is responsible to make sure that all his brothers receive an education and get married and all his sisters receive at least some education but most definitely get married. By the end of the journey there is hardly anything left for the eldest son to enjoy and he is now older and it is difficult for him to get married. We know from the fact that the father divided the inheritance equally between the two sons that there were no sisters to provide for. What did the father divide amongst his two sons? I want you to remove the image of the man leaving home with a bag of money. There is no such thing. The father did not go to the nearest bank branch and cash out his savings in the Bible. It seems that the father was well to do because he had servants and slaves. When the young son came back the father asked the servants to attend to the son and take care of him. I am back again to the question: what did the father divide? He divided land, livestock, servants, and slaves. When the youngest son decided to move to another county, he took with him livestock, servants and slaves. What happened to the land? The land is there waiting for him to return and when he did return his portion of land was still there. In the Byzantine culture land cannot be sold or exchanged. We live today with a very real example: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is over land. Many western polititians tried to solve this issue once and for all. They suggested that land be given to the Palestinians and they can relocate and be happy ever after. The oldest son addressed this issue of land, when God told Moses no land can be transferred between tribes. (Find text). It is the same mindset of the Byzantine culture in general and sister's land has to remain in the family. I remember hearing the statement, "selling your ancestors land



is selling your identity.” If the youngest son tried to sell his land no one in the community would dare to buy it because it means war with his family. The youngest son was smart when he left he knew that one day he would be back to claim his land. Now the youngest son takes off to a far country. How far we ask? We know he did not take a flight or a train. He had a large number of livestock to move. He had to walk slowly. His servants and slaves attended to the flocks. If the animal were pregnant, the caravan would move even slower. The most he can walk in one day is twenty miles. This helps us to see he did not travel very far. I am sure he went to a place or country that knew about his father and the family business. According to the Byzantine custom they need to keep peace with the father and I am sure they tried to convince him to go back home by giving a place for his animals to graze. They are encouraging the son in his state of rebellion. Such neighbors are interested in keeping a good repore with the father. He might have scoped out several areas to settle down with his caravan until he finally found a tribe to accomadate. We can understand that these people do not know his father or the relationship between them and the father is not that close. He most likely lived with gentiles or foreign people that were strangers to his homeland.

For now this boy is enjoying life, his slaves and servants are attending him and serving him. It is an easy life. Today he has shiskabob and the next day he has lamb kabob. But the day came when he ran out of animals to kill and eat. The servants are hired only and if they are not paid they will leave. We can see that his servants left him to look for other work. However, the slaves are owned. This young man began to sell the slaves. I wonder if the slaves were happy to be freed from this young inexperienced man. Would they find a better master? Whatever he traded for his slaves is gone to support his wasteful way of living.

Now what?

Looking for a job or working was not an option at that time. He never worked in his life, he always had servants and slaves. Jesus made an interesting statement that no one would hire him when he began to look for a job. Was it because there were no jobs around? On the contrary, people had to think about their relationship with his father and by giving this young man a job, they are encouraging him to continue in his rebellion. How many men advised him(go back to your father). But his pride would not allow him to go back home. This is part of the Byzantine culture which is based on shame. “What will people say about me?” said the young man. “I would rather die here than have everyone make fun of me. I’m a failure.” He faced the truth. He had to get a job. He had to work. Only a Gentile, a pig farmer offered him one of the lowest jobs. To raise pigs, you have to do it outside of the community, away from the criticism and anger of the community. The title of the pig owner by the community is “pig” he is a pig. We need to imagine how this man felt that wherever he goes, he can hear the children mocking him in the street, pointing and calling him pig, pig, pig! So he lived in isolation. The youngest son is tending pigs and working for a man that is call Pig, deserted and living alone in the wilderness. You can imagine what is going through his mind. There is no future for him. He can know that the only solution is to listen to the advice “go back to your father”. Out of desperation this young man began to think, “did I lose everything?” “What will happen if “ We do not know how many weeks and months that past by with this boy in this state of mind. “I cannot work raising pigs and to start with I cannot raise pigs, I did not grow up in this environment. There is no future for and I cannot continue to isolated from people.” Wait a minute! I still have my land that I inherited

from my father. Even if I live in a shack on that land, I still have something to establish my life on.”

The amazing thing in this story is that when this boy goes back home, the father gave him a ring, sandals, a robe, and the fatted calf. To understand the meaning behind all of this, we must understand Byzantine mindset. What does the ring represent? No, it is not a wedding ring. The youngest son is not married and he left his ring behind. The father in no way would give him his own wedding ring. This would be bad luck. The word ring translated into English is a mistranslation. It is a seal that the father gave his youngest son. Still today in the Middle Eastern culture business owners carry a seal with them. They wear the seal on their right hand. The seal is engraved with the name of the business and the owner of the business. The seal is used to seal a contract or any official document. That seal represents the authority of the person who is wearing it. He is the only one that can sign, approve, and finalize the agreement. We see that the father has given his youngest son the authority to hire and fire, to purchase and sell livestock or slaves, and he is the only one that has the authority to do so. The second thing the father gives his son is the robe or cloak. Some translation says the first or the best robe. We need to understand what the robe stands for. Is a cloak worn over the everyday clothes? It is a recognition that the person who is wearing that robe is a government official, a Politian, a rich man, a tribe chief, it represents a high position in the community. It is very interesting that in the Middle East today, people are recognized by their clothes. This robe belongs to the father, it was his recognition in the community. It was not a special robe tailored for the boy. By giving his son the robe, the father was saying to the community that from now on this son is carrying my name, mantle, and business. The third thing that was given to the son was a pair of sandals. Servants and slaves would walk barefoot, poor people would walk barefoot because they cannot afford to buy sandals. Lower middle class will wear something similar to a slipper. But sandals have a special design and they represent upper class. The class of this boy has been set before the community. The fourth and the last thing that the father asked the servants to do was to kill the fatted calf not the fattest. The fattest means that the servant will go to the flock and choose the fattest. But the fatted animal has been hand picked from the flock, it is the healthiest and it is taken to the home and lives with the family and receives special treatment and is hand fed food, in this case corn. This animal is prepared for a special occasion. It is very interesting to know that the father has been preparing the animal for a special occasion before his son came home. It takes about three months for the animal to be ready. It is usually for a circumcision, engagement, wedding, safe arrival of a family member, business transaction. Now we ask ourselves why would this father do this for his son that took his inheritance, spent it all and wasted it with no regard to his father's tears when he tried to tell him not to leave. The accepted situation in the Byzantine culture is that the oldest son is the one to receive the authority, the honor, the recognition, and the party. Yet the father gives all of this to the son that has been a failure and has been a fool and dishonored his father.

The answer to any questions lies in the statement that the oldest son made. “I have served you all these years and obeyed your commandments, but you never gave me a goat to celebrate with my friends.”

We need to understand the meaning of the goat and what does the goat represent. Why a goat and not another animal? While working in Lebanon among the Bedouins, the first time I visited the

chief of the tribe and after I had been received as an honored guest. A lamb was brought to my feet and was slaughtered and given later to the wives to prepare and cook it for a later meal. Had my host killed a goat, I would know immediately that I was not being received as an honored guest. It would have been just to feed me as part of the hospitality. When the oldest son told his father that even a goat you did not give, this is the least animal that can be offered to the common friends or common guests. The oldest son did not think much of himself and he misunderstood the heart of his father. He asked for so little yet he thought that his father would not give him the least. The father's answer was all this is yours (Find Text what is mine is yours). I can sense the brokenness and the sadness of the father's heart. I'm sure he told his son that all that he desired in life, just a goat. Goats eat garbage. We call them natural mowers. They will keep your house and backyard clean. They also have a unpleasant odor. You can smell them a mile away. How often as Christians, we misunderstand the heart of our heavenly father and we think that he does not want the best for us. His words in the Bible in many places identify him as a good father( Jeremiah: plans to prosper you. Find Text).

Jesus told the disciples whatever you ask in my name( Find Text). Later on he looks at the disciples and ask them this question almost sad and disappointed until now you have asked nothing. The prophet Isaiah comes to King Hezekiah and told him to ask and make your request deep.( Find Text). The king answers that he will not ask and he will not tempt God. God fulfills his promises to matter what. Isaiah continued to say behold a virgin will give birth(Find Text). Hezekiah you did not want to ask because you thought you were tempting me but I have a great plan and future for my people.

Many Christians grew up in a religious spirit "I will not tempt God." It is wrong theology and because in our language we do not have the proper translation for tempting and testing. (We will discuss in a later chapter).

With the oldest son's attitude and religious spirit if you will, the father had a difficult decision to make because with this attitude the father could not trust his oldest son to manage his estate. He is looking for a man that has a sharp mind and takes risk and isn't afraid to make mistakes, a man that is ready to do any job anywhere and mingles with other cultures and is ready to learn from his mistakes and start again. The father saw that his youngest son possessed the necessary qualities.

We are very hard on ourselves so often I hear some people saying, "God is angry with me", "I'm not good enough, I'm not qualified, I've never done this before". Does this sound familiar? I have news for you. God always loves you no matter what. There is nothing that you can do to make him love you more or make him love you less. The Apostle Peter had no business to think about walking on water. I'm sure the other disciples looked at Peter when he asked the Lord to bid him to come out on the sea, and thought "Peter you are a fool". It doesn't matter how far Peter walked on the water but he walked. (Discuss in later chapter.)

The statement that the youngest son made: let me go home to my father. He began to start his confession. Let us note that when the youngest son started his journey he went his father and said "give me" but after his experience and his journey and his knowledge of the heart of his father and also his assurance that his inheritance in the land that he could not sell was still waiting there for him. He comes and tells his father "make me" a servant. Please meditate with me for a few minutes on the heart of the son that represents all of us "give me". It sounds familiar and we get

offended when God does not give us what we want but when we enter into the heavenly realm and experience the heart of our heavenly father and know what he has for planned for us our attitude changes. Our perspective, dreams, and vision, are aligned with his and now we say, “make me”. There are Christians that ask the Lord that if he would only give me a million dollars. There are others with dreams, desires, and visions and they know that God wants to take them beyond them. They ask the Lord to make them the king or queen of this town. Do you want to be the chief or governor of the city? (Find text: Exodus Salafat daughter’s wanted their inheritance) (Find text Joshua and Caleb dividing the land and wanting the high and low places.) The youngest son came to the father and said “forgive me” and he was going to continue to ask him to make him a slave but the father did not allow him to utter the word because he had a better plan (Find text Jeremiah).

I dreamed for years to work in a television station but to own one was beyond my wildest dreams. Earth time alone would cost a million dollars a year but the Lord took me on a wild trip to learn, about and engineer a television station. After building two television stations for two ministries, I was approached by an Arch Bishop from the Middle East who wanted to build, he asked me to build him a television station in Orange County, CA. It was a slow process and in my limited mind I wanted to save him money by buying less expensive equipment and I told him several times later on we can upgrade the equipment. He told me no and that he wanted me to buy the best equipment and make the best TV station. Because I do not like to be involved in finances and I get nervous around fundraising and raising support, my limitations were still leading me to save the man the money. Before he would purchase any equipment from me, he asked me what is available on the market and show me the difference and compare the products. What has better quality? So I did. In my mind, I said it is your money, man. I kept telling myself that this was my station and I just try to get by and do the best to get by. It took me two months to engineer it and now the station is running and we are doing live production. Now I am working with him doing technical support and making sure the equipment is running and the station is on air. Five months later the Arch Bishop received a phone call from his superior, come home to the Middle East immediately for an emergency and expect to stay for a few months. I began to panic. I said to him, “What are you going to do about the television station? You spent a lot of money to build this station.” At that moment, I am happy that I am running the TV station. He looked at me with a smile and replied, “This is now your television station, you own it, the station is all yours and go ahead and run it. I will continue to finance the station. Your responsibility is to run it.” Did I hear him right? Now I own a television station that was built with high quality equipment. I acted earlier when I was asked to engineer the station, I had the mindset of the oldest son, a “goat” mind. I misunderstood the heart of the father who took me through experience like the youngest son to engineer the station. The father took me through the experience of engineering the television station. His plan was to give me the best. Now I own a satellite/television station that is well engineered with the state of the art equipment.

Jesus preached to the multitudes and asked the disciples to feed them. (Find text: where can we get money to feed all these people? Just send them home.) But Philip told Jesus WE HAVE a few loaves and fish (Find text). We need to think with the mind of Philip. Similar to the youngest son, he began with give me and he ended with make me.

