

Give Up Ten

Week 4 - Brian's Story

The Story of the Lost Son



Reading Luke 15

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

Reflection

When I first encountered Urban Expression, the church I am a part of, I was an atheist - a follower of Dawkins.

I knew bits of the Bible and I always associated with the story of the Lost Son. I thought of myself as the lost son, but I wasn't. I thought that I wasn't worthy of love. A lot of people in poverty think that they are not worthy, not worthy of being loved. I was like the lost son who took his inheritance and went away. But his father gave him it back.

I've always been driven by anger. Anger against injustice. It's why I appreciate that part of my church's commitment is to making sure everyone is heard. It's also why when I was getting treated for cancer recently, I was so scared about losing my voice.

But my days of ranting are over. Now it's about building relationships with people, including people in power. It's about sitting down and listening, persuading. Listening, I've learnt about the experience of others, including asylum seekers. 'New Scots' as we call them here.

I wasn't angry at God. I wasn't angry with Jesus. I was angry with their supporters and their failure to behave properly, justly. Reading the Bible, I came to realise that that is the way that we all are. It isn't God's fault. I came to faith at a time when I was angry with the Church. But in the Church, I found people who didn't preach at me, who just loved me.

And when I read the story of the Lost Son, I recognised myself moving from orphan to son. People don't think that they are worth something, worth anything. You can encounter poverty in so many places. I was an E Grade nurse.

It's time to get rid of the 'them' and 'us' labels. There is only an 'us'. Just as God has seen the good in us, so we should see the worth of others. The worth of those who have struggled.

I keep coming back to the lost son. It's so full of meaning. We might not have used our inheritance the way that we should have but that doesn't matter to God. God loves us just the way we are.

It's a theme that runs all the way through the Bible, There's never a 'them' and 'us'. It's just an 'us'. The Beatitudes - a beautiful piece of writing. I love the Beatitudes. They are written for the poor. To tell us that we matter. And the Good Samaritan. And the Book of Acts. There is never a 'them' and 'us'. There is just an 'us'.

That's why I love the story of the Lost Son.

Questions

What struck you as you read how the story of the Lost Son has impacted Brian?

What was new there? Or reassuring?

How is our understanding of God as Father changed by the story of the Lost Son?

Prayer

God,
Father,
Dad,
we are never lost to you,
even though we feel lost.

You give us freedom,
like a loving parent,
to make choices,
even when they are bad choices.

But the door is never shut;
the coat remains in the wardrobe;
the ring remains in the drawer;
waiting for us to return,
to you.

God,
Father,
Dad,
take away our anger of 'them',
of those that infuriate,
and fill us,
instead,
with the Father's love;
the gift to see others,
as you see us.

Amen.

Action

Brian talks about how important it is for him to use his voice to persuade and influence people. There are many misconceptions around poverty in the UK and we know many people don't know how to make a difference. Could you use your voice and begin some conversations about food banks and hunger in the UK. [Download our conversation starter cards](#) and begin exploring the issues with friends, family, colleagues and church members.