

STUDY 4

People Lost and Found and Resentful
Luke 15:1-3; 11-32

READ the passage.

Jot down what you think it is about.

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Thinking About How You Read The Passage

Who should you eat with? Who should you extend the hospitality of table and time to, at your place? Who is worthy of your company?

It is easy to think that we really are happy to mix with everyone. We don't have any prejudices, and we aren't snobs. You could hardly call us Pharisees or scribes. Or could you?

The reaction of the religious leaders suggests that Jesus didn't just pop down to one of the seedy parts of town and offer help in the soup kitchen or offer some financial support. Jesus actually shared his life and food and company with people. He treated people as real people and not as charity cases, and he didn't just do things for people but with them.

Who would we be surprised to see Jesus sharing his meals with, and why would that surprise us?

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Who are we not sure we want to share our life with (either here or in the kingdom to come)?

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Which people in our society might actually think of you and your church as Pharisees and scribes (i.e., as an elite and judgmental people)?

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Thinking About Luke 15:1-3; 11-32 With Our Partners

To our partners: In your society who plays the role of the Pharisees and Scribes?

Their response was: political leaders, church elders and leaders, the lawmakers, affluent people, and the dominant caste. Others are bigoted, two-faced pastors and church leaders, lawyers and advocates who pretend to be fighting for the common person's rights and also politicians who do the same. They find that people who play the role of Pharisees and scribes usually

come from certain prayer groups (in Indonesian, 'Persekutuan doa'). Moreover, there are members of prayer groups who consider themselves more purified than the church so they stay away from the church to keep purified.

To our partners: 'Who in your society would cause outrage if Jesus ate with them?'

Our partners said: Church leaders, opinion leaders, those who think Jesus did not come for all kinds of people and those who feel that salvation is earned but not by grace. Definitely the conservative church leaders, the dominant caste and the rich. Some would even 'throw down' their collars in protest at Christians eating with gays and lesbians, prostitutes and abortion advocates, freemasons and witchdoctors.

Who are you surprised to find on these lists?

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Do you have any sense that you are on those lists in some way and, if so, how does that make you feel?

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Going Deeper Into The Passage

Here we are back in the story of insiders and outsiders, of people considered to be clean and unclean, of people who could enter the presence of God and those who could not. The tax collectors and sinners were outsiders, and were to be avoided and shunned. To maintain one's purity it was necessary to avoid that which could contaminate.

There are some challenges in this passage:

1. Who we spend time with, who we hang out with, says a lot about who we are. Jesus hangs out with sinners. Indeed, the passage says:

'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.' That was not intended as a compliment.

2. Jesus was not afraid of being contaminated. His relationship with God was such that it was his holiness that changed the world, not unclean-ness. His presence brought salvation because it enabled people to become clean and, thus, social insiders again.
3. There are always people who want to maintain an exclusionary system. A system in which they are both on the inside, and have the power to determine the rules, who is on the outside and how the outsiders can get back in. What made the insiders angry with Jesus is that he changed the rules, and made a relationship with him the very open way back into the presence of God.

We often call this the parable of the prodigal son, missing the crucial part of the story that involves the older son. It is really the story of a lost son, his angry brother, and the forgiving father.

A young man asks his wealthy father for his share of the inheritance. In effect he says to his father, 'You're as good as dead as far as I am concerned, so let me have what I should inherit.' He takes the money and quickly squanders it. He gets a lousy, humiliating, and low paid job to survive. Then he comes to his senses, and realizes that he would be better at home as a servant than in this place. So he heads home, meaning to tell his father that he no longer deserves to be a son, but could be a servant in the household. The father has clearly missed his younger son, watching for him and hoping he would return. The father sees his son while a long way off, and ignoring social conventions and dignity, he runs and embraces and kisses his son in welcome. He will not allow his son's speech, and quickly takes action to both restore him to his place in the house and have a party to celebrate. The father is not interested in 'sin' and 'repentance', but thinks in terms of 'dead and alive' and 'lost and found'.

The older son is in the fields, hears the music, asks what is going on and, when told his brother has returned home, is very angry and will not join the party. The father begs him to join the party, and sits patiently as the son speaks of how faithful he has been, and how little he has received, and how unjust the situation is. Brendan Byrne suggests that a central issue here is that the elder son sees himself as being a servant (rather than a son) and as being in a contract relationship with his father (where his work should have earned a decent reward).²

The father says, 'Son, you are with me always and all that is mine is yours' (vs 31). The father did not see the son as a servant, but as his son. There was no contractual relationship. Everything the father had was his, and he could always have had a calf to celebrate with his friends. He only had to accept the gracious hospitality of his father, rather than figuring out if he had earned the calf.

² Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Strathfield: St Pauls, 2000), 130.

Project

What strikes you most about this project and what it says to your attempt to follow and be with Jesus?

Relief and Development Project 4 *Health care and Mobile Health clinics*

Location - Solomon Islands

Partner Church - United Church in the Solomon Islands

The Situation

The people of the Solomon Islands face multiple problems, many related to the remoteness of communities, transport issues and a lack of health and communication facilities. Many community members cannot access essential health care including child immunisations, medical treatment or emergency care. Access to health services is often limited by scarcity of health facilities, distance from the facilities that do exist and affordability of the services. As a result, local churches play a key role in the provision of health care.

The Project

Since 2007, UnitingWorld has supported Helena Goldie Hospital, in conjunction with the United Church in the Solomon Islands, in running rural health centres and posts and rebuilding health facilities destroyed in the 2007 tsunami. Mobile health clinics to remote regions provide health advice, child immunisations and much needed emergency treatment to people who would be otherwise unable to access professional care. Funds provide transport costs for the medical teams, essential equipment and medication. The visiting medical teams also deliver staff education and training to local health clinic staff.

Achievements

Helena Goldie Hospital launched the mobile health clinics in April 2009, starting with a four day trip, travelling by canoes, to remote communities. The health centres and posts have since provided much needed health services to a population of around 25,000 people, including 2,000 children. These clinics see on average 50-

100 patients per day and provide a vital service to this region.

The Future

UnitingWorld will provide support to recommence the mobile health clinics which had to cease following the tsunami. Monthly mobile health clinics will be conducted to additional isolated communities and HIV/AIDs prevention and information programs will be launched to raise awareness in the community. UnitingWorld will also support our partners to train community leaders in project development and project management to increase their capacity for development.

