

THINGS TO STOP AND START STUDY THREE

Stop Shaming and Start Honoring

Luke 15:11–32

Stop giving shame any respect. It grows if you don't deal with it. It's like dealing with a bully. Shame's plan is to hurt you, wound you, make you afraid, and put you under the thumb of the one shaming you. Refuse to hear the shame, tolerate it, or give in to it.

—Charles R. Swindoll

SHAME is like a dark cloud that overshadows the soul. Sometimes, it signals within us a need to make things right when we sin. Other times, however, shame goes beyond remorse and intensifies into an emotional storm that batters us into feeling utterly worthless and hopeless.

Shame and guilt are often connected, but there is a difference. While guilt targets our behavior, shame, in its most damaging form, attacks our being. Guilt prompts us to admit failure, but shame attaches a condemnatory label: “I *am* a failure!” Guilt motivates us to right a wrong and leads to forgiveness, restoration, and a fresh start. But shame pushes us into a pit of self-reproach with no hope of rescue. Guilt allows us to retain our dignity as we struggle to get past a failure. But those living under shame’s storm cloud believe nothing they do is good enough or worthy of forgiveness, acceptance, or belonging. Essentially, shame is fear of disconnection in which we tell ourselves: *I’m unlovable, I will never measure up, and there is no chance for reconciliation with those who have cut me off.*

Recorded in Luke 15:11–32 is Jesus’ parable of the Prodigal Son. It’s a beautiful story of a father who opened his arms to his wayward son and rescued him from shame’s dark cloud rather than cast more shame on him. What did the father do? How does our heavenly Father rescue us from shame in a similar way? And how can we *stop shaming and start honoring* others who desperately need a glimpse of God’s grace through shame’s cloud? Let’s dig into the Scriptures and find out!



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Luke 15:11–32



PREPARE YOUR HEART

The safest refuge for the shame-bound soul is Christ's inviting presence. Use the following verses as a prompt to write a prayer expressing your desires to draw near to the Lord, release yourself from shame, and honor rather than shame others.

I prayed to the LORD, and he answered me.

He freed me from all my fears.

Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy;

no shadow of shame will darken their faces. (Psalm 34:4–5)



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Open your Bible and read [Luke 15:11–32](#). Take a moment to put yourself in the setting of the story. Imagine the faces of the father and his two sons. Try to picture the family's property with servants doing chores. Imagine the prodigal son *living it up* in a foreign land and then *winding up in* a pig sty. Finally, picture the son's return, the feast, the older brother's outrage, and the father's final words to his sons. As you read, linger over Rembrandt's masterpiece [The Return of the Prodigal Son](#) for a powerful image of the story's climactic scene.



Observation: Two Brothers Lost in Sin

Jesus mounted this gem of a story in a cultural setting to enhance its meaning. A helpful resource to gain insight into the customs of Jesus' day is [Insight's Handbook of New Testament Backgrounds: Key Customs from Each Book](#). Also, we recommend Chuck Swindoll's commentary [Swindoll's New Testament Insights: Insights on Luke](#) for a deeper understanding of Jesus' parable of the prodigal son. Now let's observe the passage.



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The Short-Sighted Younger Brother—Luke 15:12–21

Read *Luke 15:11–12*. The younger son brazenly demanded from his father, “I want my share of your estate now *before you die*” (Luke 15:12, emphasis added). Can you feel the jab to the father’s gut? This same boy who, as a child, sat on his father’s knee and lovingly hugged his neck now, as a young rebel, wished his father dead so he could have his father’s money.

What attitudes characterize the prodigal?

Put yourself in the father’s shoes and describe his heartache as well as the cultural shame he must have endured because his son loved his father’s money more than his father.

Rather than shame his son, the father absorbed the son’s hurtful words. He didn’t lash back, cling, or lecture; instead, he calmly “agreed to divide his wealth between his sons” (15:12), gave the prodigal what he asked, and let him go.¹ What qualities of the father do you observe?



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Read *Luke 15:13–16*. This Jewish boy scorned his father, family, and his own heritage by bolting to Gentile territory. When his money ran out and famine stripped the countryside as bare as his bank account, the once unbridled youth bound himself to a Gentile farmer and ate pig slop to survive. He was alone and ashamed, rejected and unclean by Jewish standards, and starving.

Put yourself in the sandals of Jesus' listeners. One group consisted of "tax collectors and other notorious sinners," and the other group, "the Pharisees and teachers of religious law" (Luke 15:1–2). Describe how these groups might have responded to this part of the story. Would they have felt compassion toward the young man? Or judged him? Perhaps the Pharisees remembered *Proverbs 13:15, 18, and 25*. Reflect on each group's view of the young man in his shame.

Read *Luke 15:17–21*. The opening line in verse 17 is the turning point of the story, "When he finally came to his senses." A stubborn will does not crumble easily. For the son, it took an onslaught of hardship to break through his pride before he finally surrendered. What signs of shame do you observe in the young man's thoughts? Through his actions, what did the father communicate to his son without saying a word?

The prodigal said, "Father, I've sinned against both heaven and you." His actions brought guilt, but he went too far when he said, "I'm no longer worthy of being called your son." Shame teaches us that we're unworthy. —Chuck Swindoll



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The Shaming Older Brother—Luke 15:25–30

Before examining the father’s words in Luke 15:22–24, let’s skip ahead in the drama to the older brother. While the younger brother illustrated the “tax collectors and other notorious sinners,” the older brother mirrored the “Pharisees and teachers of religious law” (Luke 15:1–2). Read [Luke 15:25–30](#), and list the pharisaical characteristics displayed in the older brother’s actions and words.

How did the older brother shame the prodigal, show ingratitude to his father, and express his true nature?

Like the older brother, the Pharisees kept the rules but lacked what their Father had in abundance: love. Without love, their obedience had hardened into angry legalism. To them, sin must be punished, forgiveness earned, kindness deserved, and repentance proven. The Pharisees were just as lost in sin as the “sinners.” Both groups were self-centered and rebellious at heart, and both needed their Father’s grace.



Interpretation: The Father Reaching Out with Grace

From observation, we progress to the next phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method: interpretation, which seeks to understand the meaning of a passage. In Jesus’ parable, we’ll focus on a deeper understanding of the father, who exhibits grace in his responses to his two sons.



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The Grace-Based Father—Luke 15:22–24, 31–32

Read *Luke 15:20–24, 31–32*. Jesus put the Father’s loving heart on full display—which was the point of His story and the purpose of His earthly mission. Jesus came from heaven to earth to display His Father’s love—a love that disregards its own dignity to run and restore our dignity and welcome the lost who are mired in the filth and stench of our sinful condition.

What did the elements which the father used to honor his son represent: the finest robe, the ring, the sandals, and the extravagant feast (*Luke 15:22–24*)? And what do they teach us about God’s forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration?

God’s love is equally as shocking in its extravagance as the love of the prodigal’s father. Just as the father covers his son’s shame with a robe of honor and restores his identity with the family signet ring so also our Father covers and restores us. In this moment of grace, prodigals drink their fill of true love and, once satisfied, never wander again.

How did the father show grace to his other son? Rather than chastise him for his hypocrisy, the father addressed him with a gentle hand on his shoulder. As Jesus formulated His words, we can imagine Him stretching out His arms to the Pharisees—the angry, proud, grimly dutiful older brothers. What grace did Jesus, through the father’s words, show to the older-brother Pharisees (*15:31–32*)?



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Correlation: Warning and Directives

In the correlation phase, we compare the meaning of one biblical passage to another. Read *Matthew 9:35–36* about the compassion of Jesus, and write down how the Father loves you through Christ and restores you as His own. Note: the same Greek word for *compassion* in Luke 15:20 is used in Matthew 9:36 to describe Jesus.

Let's cultivate genuine compassion. Compassion is a relationship between equals. The father met his returning son as an equal when he saw him come over the hill. He didn't meet him as his judge. He was one with him. —Chuck Swindoll



Application: How Can We Be Resilient to Shame?

Let's apply this passage from the perspective of those who feel shamed by others (the younger brother) and those who shame others (the older brother).

For the recipient of shame:

1. *Stop giving shame any respect.* Shame is like a bully we must fight against and refuse to tolerate or succumb to.
2. *Start sharing the hurt with others who understand.* When you feel shame, don't hide or keep your thoughts secret. Share your feelings with someone who welcomes you with open arms, like the prodigal son's father.



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When you hear shaming words from others, or even from yourself, how can you escape the cloud of shame?

For those who tend to shame others:

1. *Stop judging others.* The only rightful judge is the Lord because only He has all the facts and has never sinned.
2. *Start cultivating compassion.* The older brother had no compassion because he had elevated himself above his brother. The proud brother couldn't see his own sin, and he only thought of himself. We develop compassion when we can put ourselves in the heartache of other people and see ourselves as equal to them.

If you feel tempted to judge others, what can help you stop shaming and start honoring?

God's grace makes us want to celebrate, doesn't it! Whether we're more prodigal or more pharisaical, let's determine not to stay away from the Father too long. He's calling all His children to His party, and we don't want to miss one minute of it!



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A FINAL PRAYER

Father, help me on my journey home to keep my eyes on You and Your welcoming arms of love. Dark clouds of shame often obscure my view, so shine Your light of grace through my darkness. And when I am tempted to shame others, remind me of Your grace toward them and fill my heart with Your love. Through my union with Jesus Your Son, I receive Your robe of honor, ring of identity, sandals of dignity, and feast of joy! Thank You! Amen.

ENDNOTE

1. According to Jewish law, the father could release the inheritance before his death. The older brother would receive a “double portion” (two-thirds of the estate, in this case), and the young brother would get the remainder (Deuteronomy 21:17). It’s only fair that both boys received their portion. If the younger son got his share, the older should get his also.



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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY

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Tools for Digging Deeper



Things to Stop and Start
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



**Leisure: How to Recharge
without Guilt**
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For the 2019 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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