

Prayer and Study Guide

Daily Scripture Readings – 9/23/18

Monday – Read Luke 5:27-32 and Luke 15:1-2. **They Don't Count.** Matthew was part of the most hated profession of the day. Israel was occupied by the Romans. The Romans would offer tax franchises for sale. Some Jews would renounce their Jewishness and buy these tax offices. They would over tax their own people and then send some of it off to Rome and keep the rest. It was legalized extortion. They were considered traitors and sell-outs. But Jesus didn't see Matthew this way. He saw one of his "sheep" in need of his inclusive love. Jesus not only loved Matthew; he also invited him to follow him. How do you see people who are caught in sin? Do you see them as awful people, or do you see them as people in need of Jesus' love, grace, and forgiveness? Pray for people who are caught in sin.

Tuesday – Luke 15:1-7. **A Shepherd Had 100 Sheep.** One of the biggest complaints that the religious leaders made about Jesus was that he spent a lot of time with sinners. In his ministry, Jesus was always talking about reaching out to the lost sheep of Israel. He told this short story to help us understand that the Church exists to reach out to people who are not yet part of the Church. Jesus is always calling us to turn ourselves outwards towards the world to share God's love with unchurched and nominally religious people. Think about some of the people in our church who have drifted away recently. Who are the people that you have not seen at church in a while? Pray for God to give you an opportunity to reach out in love to one of these people to check on them and to invite them back to church. Say a prayer for this person.

Wednesday – Read Luke 15:1-2, 8-10. **A Woman Had Ten Coins.** The woman's ten silver coins, which were called *drachmas*, represented about ten days' wages and many months of saving. Like the shepherd, she seeks "until she find it." There is no giving up in either story. Her joy of finding the coin cannot be contained. One person alone cannot adequately celebrate it. She must invite others to a party to celebrate. Jesus invites even his critics to join him and all of heaven in celebration of finding the lost. Finding and restoring the lost gives pleasure to God and all who are about God's business because everyone counts in the kingdom of God. Our worship service is like a one room school house with six generations present. Each Sunday we do our best to touch the hearts and minds of people who see the world in different ways and to offer something for everyone because we believe that every person counts in the kingdom of God, and every generation counts in our church. Spend some time praying about how we can reach each generation.

Thursday – Read Luke 15:1-2, 13-20a. **The Younger Son.** The word *prodigal* can be defined as *spending money or resources freely, recklessly, and wastefully*. This is exactly what the younger son did with the inheritance his Father had given him. Those who choose to go down a prodigal path tend to become increasingly self-centered, think that they have all of the answers, and demand immediate gratification. Of course, these attitudes put a strain on a relationship between a parent and a son or daughter and on many other relationships as well. Do a self-examination. Do you tend to have any of these prodigal attitudes? Ask God to help you become generous, humble, and patient.

Friday – Read Luke 15:1-2, 20b-24. **The Loving Father.** How do you reach a son, a daughter, or a friend who has gone down a prodigal path? You live with Unconditional Love. This is one of the most touching stories in the Bible. *But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.* The son did not get what he deserved. The Loving Father showed his son great mercy and extravagant grace. This is a picture of God's unconditional love for us. We are the self-centered ones, the ones who think we know it all, the ones who want immediate gratification. And God is the one who runs toward us when we simply turn toward Him. Spend some time in prayer thanking God for God's Unconditional Love for you.

Saturday – Read Genesis 4:1-16 and Luke 15:11, 25-32. **A Man had Two Sons.** Why must a man always have two sons? Why not only one? Why not only me? But two sons are essential to the reality of the plot. In Jesus' story, the older brother is not quite a murderer, but he senses the same realities. He smells his brother's blood, and the father knows. Like Cain, the older brother is "in the field," an exile away from the house, from security and joy, away from the father, unprotected. For that brother also, sin waited in lust. The story of Genesis 4 is reenacted in Luke 15, only the father deals differently. We are left to wonder: will the older brother embrace his anger and remain in the field, or will he forgive and join the party? As you pray consider: "How would my life be different if I forgave the person who has hurt me?"

Lectionary Readings: Proverbs 31:10-31; Psalm 1; James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a; Mark 9:30-37.

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