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A Party in Heaven

Did you know that when you decided to follow Jesus, the angels threw a party in Heaven? It's true! They were so excited to know that you had returned to your Father and were going to be spending eternity with them that they just had to have a celebration. (Luke 15:10)

THE LOST ONES

Jesus told three stories about how God feels whenever one of His children finds their way back to Him: the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. The first story talks about a man who has 100 sheep. Every day he takes his sheep out to the hillside where they can graze on plenty of tender sweet grass. Nearby is a quiet little stream where they can drink without danger of being swept away. The shepherd stands guard to be sure that no wild animal attacks them. But one day, one of the sheep wanders too far. He doesn't mean to get into trouble. He isn't trying to run away. He just has his head down, enjoying the meadow and following his nose. "This is really good grass. Ooooh, up ahead there's a nice patch of clover! Yum! Hey, that looks good over there." And

before he knows what is happening, he has lost sight of where he started and he doesn't know where he is or how he got there.

Thankfully, the shepherd knows and loves all his sheep individually, so he soon notices that this one is not where he should be. He leaves the 99 other sheep in a safe place and goes out searching. He looks in the thickets, among the rock piles and across the stream. Finally he finds him, far off the path in a waterless, dangerous place. He is so thrilled to find him that picks up that sheep and joyfully carries him on his shoulders all the way back to the rest of the flock. When he gets home that evening, he is still so happy that he calls all his friends and neighbors together to celebrate with him because he found his lost sheep.

Jesus says, "I tell you that in the same way, there will be joy in Heaven over one sinner who repents..." (Luke 15:3-7)!

The next story is about a woman who had ten silver coins. One day while she was looking at them, one fell and rolled away under the furniture and into a dark corner. The coin didn't try to get away from the woman; it was just powerless to resist the circumstances. But the coin was important to the woman so she lit a lamp, got out her broom, and searched carefully through her whole house until she found it. When she did, she called together all her friends and neighbors to celebrate with her because she had found her lost coin.

And Jesus says, "In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:8-10)!

In the third story, a man had two sons. One day, the younger son decided he was tired of waiting for his father to die before he was able to spend his inheritance having fun and doing the

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things he wanted to do. So he demanded his share of the estate from his father and took off. He couldn't wait to get far away from the responsibilities and restrictions of his home. When he arrived at a distant country, he really let loose. He threw parties every night for his new "friends," each one wilder than the last. Before long, his money was gone, and so were his friends. A famine hit the land where he was living and he became totally destitute and impoverished. The only job he could find was feeding disgusting, unclean pigs. He was so hungry that even the pods he was feeding to the pigs looked good to him. But no one would give him a thing.

His stomach was growling, his clothes were in rags, he was tired, and he smelled terrible. Finally he came to his senses. "What am I doing here? The servants in my father's house have plenty to eat and here I am dying of hunger! I'm going home. I'd rather be a hired hand in my father's field where at least I will be fed than here among strangers who don't care anything about me." So he headed for home.

But his father had really missed him and was watching the roads, hoping that someday he would see his beloved son returning to him. Finally, there he was! Even though he was still a long way away, his father recognized him and knew that he was on his way home. The father ran out to meet him and hugged him close, kissing him and welcoming him back. He called to the servants to bring him new clothes and to prepare food for a big party so they could celebrate his son that was dead and had come back to life again, who was lost and had been found (Luke 15:11-24).

You may have been like the lost sheep, not deliberately turning your back on God but just wandering away, seeking the things you thought would make you happy, enjoying the pleasures of life, blindly drifting along until you found yourself

alone, lost, empty and afraid. Or you might have been like the lost coin, feeling pressured by circumstances you couldn't control and didn't know how to resist, until you were lost in the dark and you felt like no one could see you. Or maybe you were like the lost son, knowing right from wrong, raised in the ways of God, but you wanted to be free from rules and responsibilities and do whatever you wanted, until your life was a mess and nothing seemed worthwhile anymore. It doesn't matter how you became lost; it only matters that now you are found! You are home and all of Heaven is rejoicing!

A CHILD OF GOD

The sinful actions and attitudes that had separated you from God and caused so many problems in your life were washed away by the blood of Jesus. He made you pure and holy and flawless in His sight. On the cross, Jesus took all of your sin and gave you all of His righteousness in exchange. When you received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, He clothed you in a shining robe of righteousness. When God looks at you, He sees perfection! He makes the choice that He will never again remember your sins and lawless actions (Heb. 8:12, Heb. 10:17). In the eyes of God, you have a totally clean slate. You are born again!

*"To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name,
He gave the right to become children of God"*

(JOHN 1:12 BEREAN STUDY BIBLE)

When you received Jesus, when you embraced Him for all that He is, He embraced you as a child of God! The Heavenly Father became your very own loving Father Who cares for you, provides for you and tenderly watches over you. Jesus is your Elder Brother

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who has promised to never leave you or forsake you. And all other believers in Him became your brothers and sisters.

HIS SPIRIT WITHIN YOU

When you became a child of God, the Holy Spirit came to live inside you, uniting with your spirit so that you became a brand new creation (Acts 2:38, 1 Cor. 6:17). You are a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). You are not a mere human anymore; you are born again as a child of God!

The Holy Spirit places within you a deep inward conviction that you have been adopted as a child of God - a conviction which prompts you to cry aloud, "Father! Daddy! Papa!" (Rom. 8:15). The Spirit Himself bears witness with your spirit and provides the evidence that you are a child of God (Rom. 8:16). And if you are a child, then you are an heir of God and co-heir with Christ (Rom. 8:17)! His presence in your life is the proof that you have been adopted into God's family (Eph. 1:13, 14, 2 Cor. 1:22). You have been given everything you need to live the life of a child of God (2 Pet. 1:3).

Jesus said the Holy Spirit would be like a river of living water flowing from your innermost being (Jn. 7:37-39). Deep down inside, you sensed a change when the Holy Spirit came to live within you. Righteousness, peace and joy began to bubble up and out, becoming your new way of living (Rom. 14:17). Old things have passed away and fresh new things have come (2 Cor. 5:17).

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY!

We want to help you understand your new family so you feel welcome and comfortable. There are values and behaviors that

set us apart and make us different than other people, and there are incredible benefits available to God's children that you have not even imagined (Eph. 3:20). In fact, Jesus came to give you an abundant, uncommon, extraordinary, remarkable life (John 10:10), and we are here to explain some of the things you can do to begin to enjoy that amazing life He promised.

The Bible encourages us to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). “Grace” is a very important word to Christians and we will be talking about many different ways for you to grow in grace in future chapters. As you walk with the Lord, you will develop a deeper understanding of what “grace” is, but for now, it is enough to know that it refers to God placing within you the desire to please Him and do His will, as well as the strength and ability to do so (Phil. 2:13).

You might have noticed that we keep referring to the Bible (all those references in parentheses). That's because the Bible is the “operations manual” for believers. When we tell you something, we want you to know that it is not just something we have thought up ourselves but it has the authority of God's Word behind it. You can always go to the Bible yourself to confirm that what we have said is true and to find out more.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Write out your answers to these questions so you can share them and return to them to review what the Lord says to you.

1. Ask the Lord to speak to you through His Word, the Bible. Slowly read and think about the following verses. Open the eyes of your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to use your imagination to show you what they are trying to convey to you.

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*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to **forgive** us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

(1 JOHN 1:9)

“THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL REMEMBER NO MORE.”

(HEBREWS 10:17)

*As far as the east is from the west, So far has **He removed our transgressions from us.***

(PSALM 103:12)

*He will again have compassion on us;
He will tread our iniquities under foot.*

*Yes, **You will cast all their sins***

Into the depths of the sea.

(MICAH 7:19)

God says that He has forgiven you and cleansed you. He has removed your sins from you “as far as the east is from the west,” that He has thrown all your sins “into the depths of the sea,” and He “will remember them no more.” What does that mean to you, personally? How does that truth change the way you look at yourself and your future?

2. Slowly read through the following verses, really looking at what they say about you. Open the eyes of your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to use your imagination to show you what they are trying to convey to you. Ask the Lord to speak to you through His Word, the Bible.

YOUR EXTRAORDINARY LIFE

*He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that **we might become the righteousness of God in Him.***

(2 CORINTHIANS 5:21)

*Therefore, **if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.** The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

(2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 ESV)

*...He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them **you may become partakers of the divine nature,** having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.*

(2 PETER 1:4)

*I will rejoice greatly in the LORD, My soul will exult in my God; For He has clothed me with garments of salvation, **He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness,** As a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, And as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.*

(ISAIAH 61:10)

*For you were formerly darkness, but now **you are Light in the Lord;** walk as children of Light.*

(EPHESIANS 5:8)

Take some time to think about how God sees you right now. Ask Him to open the eyes of your heart to show you yourself as He sees you—pure, holy, flawless, wearing the shining white robe of righteousness. What does that mean to you? How does that change your picture of yourself?

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3. Take time to prayerfully read the following verses, asking the Lord to speak to you through them.

*“To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become **children of God**”*

(JOHN 1:12 BEREAN STUDY BIBLE).

*But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that **we might receive the adoption as sons**. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” **Therefore, you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.***

(GALATIANS 4:4-7)

*For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, “Abba! Father!” The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that **we are children of God, and if children, heirs also**, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.*

(ROMANS 8:15-17)

*He predestined us to **adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself**, according to the kind intention of His will,*

(EPHESIANS 1:5)

*For **you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.***

(GALATIANS 3:26)

What does it mean to you to be adopted as a child of God? What does it mean to God to have you adopted into His family as His own chosen child? Were you a slave to any habits or

sins before you received Christ? What is God's promise to you as His child?

4. King David said, "Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11). Begin now to treasure God's word in your heart. Choose one of the verses you meditated on in the previous questions, or any verse from Chapter 1 that especially spoke to you. Write it down where you can see it often. Think about it throughout your day. Personalize it. (For example: 2 Corinthians 5:17—I am in Christ, so I am a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.) Memorize it so that the truth becomes part of the way you think about yourself.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

1. Share your answers to questions 1–3.
2. The members of the group are now brothers and sisters, part of the family of God. Talk about what that means, practically speaking.
3. Share the verses that you memorized. Talk about why you chose that verse, what it means to you, and any way the Lord has used that verse to help you.