



## Renewed Life Church

JESUS > RELIGION • COVENANT > CONTRACT • LUKE 15:1-32 • 6/15/2020

---

### MAIN POINT

A covenant is about the promise, not the behavior. A contract is about the behavior, not the promise.

---

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Think back to our group last week. What was one thing that you heard or learned that stuck with you?**

**This week, we will take an even deeper look at our relationship with God through Christ. What's the most meaningful promise anyone has ever kept to you?**

**What's the worst experience you've ever had with a broken commitment?**

Relationships are built on trust. We know everyone is imperfect; we'll let others down, and others will let us down. But Jesus is perfectly faithful. A relationship with Him is certain and trustworthy because that relationship is built on a covenant, not a contract. In this session, Jefferson Bethke will help us see that a covenant is about the promise, not the behavior. A contract is about the behavior, not the promise.

**WATCH THE SESSION FOUR VIDEO FEATURING JEFFERSON BETHKE.**

---

### UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**What was your biggest takeaway from the video?**

**Think about your own relationship with Jesus. In the depths of your soul, do you believe you're a child of God, or do you live like an employee who hopes not to upset the boss?**

**Have you ever felt you're one sin from God's giving up on you? When?**

Though we might say we believe we are children of God, many of us still adopt a "contractual" attitude with Him. We feel like God puts up with us, that we're only one sin away from His giving up. Jesus told a story that helps us see the depth of God's love and commitment to us in Luke 15.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:1-2.**

**What encouragement or conviction does it give you to know that Jesus reached out to sinners and that they were attracted to Him?**

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:11-32.**

**What sticks out to you the most in this story?**

**Are you more like the rebellious or the entitled son in this story? In what ways?**

**What is one specific time you experienced the grace of the Heavenly Father?**

**How does understanding that you're a child under covenant—not under contract—change your view of God?**

**How does it change your view of sin and forgiveness to know that your Father celebrates your return?**

Jefferson explained that the gospel isn't just for saving you, and then you try to live a better life so that God won't be mad. The gospel is relevant every day, especially when you mess up. Because we are in a covenant relationship, God is not going to abandon us. He will always welcome us home.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GENESIS 3:8-9.**

**What was man's response to sin? What was God's response?**

**Starting right now, how can you come out of hiding, take off your mask, and experience the joy and freedom of Christ?**

It's crazy to act as if the all-powerful Creator doesn't know where you are or what you're doing. God, the One who made you and knows everything about you, is inviting you out of the darkness and into His warm light. No more hiding. No more blaming. No more faking that you don't need grace. God is calling you to a better life.

---

## **APPLICATION**

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What are some specific ways that come to mind in which you need Jesus each day?**

**What are some practical ways you can remind yourself how much you need Jesus? How do you think your perspective would change if you lived with that conscious reality?**

**What are some ways the way we treat each other in our group can reflect the grace that calls us all out of hiding from our sin?**

---

## **PRAYER**

Close your group in prayer. Ask God for your group to have the kind of honesty with Him and each other that's rooted in a secure relationship with Him. Pray for those who might be hiding in shame, that they would come out into the light, knowing God will welcome them home.

## COMMENTARY

### LUKE 15:1-32

15:3-6. As a shepherd, you care for 100 sheep. One night, one lone sheep wanders from the fold. What do you do? You leave the 99 to fend for themselves in the relative safety of the open field and begin an immediate search-and-rescue mission for the lost sheep. Having found the sheep, you gather all your friends and neighbors and share the good news with them.

15:7. That is what heaven is like. Ninety-nine self-righteous people who keep all the rituals, festivals, and rules bring no joy to heaven. One sinner confessing his sin and repenting sets off celebration. God is concerned about the lost who admit they are lost and turn back to Him. He wants people to put the sinful life behind them and follow Him. Pharisees never do this, because they never realize they are lost. They always count themselves among the saved, even though they have never repented of their sins.

15:8-10. Jesus gave another parable, hoping His hearers would get the idea. A woman had saved her small wages and gathered ten silver coins, her wages for ten days. Tragedy struck. She lost one coin. To search for a lost coin indoors required lighting a lamp since very few homes had windows. This search also required sweeping the house, because the floor was dirt. Jesus repeated the message of verse 7. Joy in the presence of God's angels speaks of God's joy over a repenting sinner.

15:11-12. Jesus turned to the family setting for this parable to illustrate why He associated with sinners. A younger son demanded his share of the estate and got it. We don't know why he wanted it or why the father so quickly gave it to him. The younger brother's portion was only a third of the estate if the entire estate were divided. By law, the older brother got a double portion (Deut. 21:17). Although this well-known parable (vv. 11-32) is usually called the parable of the prodigal son, the other son and the father are also important characters.

15:13-16. The younger son did not plan to return to his family. It is impossible to know whether his foolish living included "prostitutes" (v. 30), or if that was just an angry accusation made by the older brother. The irony of the younger son's new job was that pigs were unclean animals to Jews. He was at rock bottom in his new life.

15:17-19. It took extreme poverty and hunger to bring the younger son to return and become one of his father's hired hands. The younger brother came to his senses: the day laborers on his dad's farm had enough to eat. The sinful younger brother had forfeited his position as son. He had no more claims on his father, so he applied for a new job—day laborer. Humans have the capacity to change. We do not have to remain in the pigpen. We do not have to continue to live as sinners. We can become responsible for our lives. We can come home.

15:20-23. Focus shifts from son to father. That the father saw his son coming from a long way off indicates that he habitually looked for his return. Perhaps the normal parental reaction to the younger son's return would be anger or at least deep disappointment, but this father's response displayed: (1) compassion, (2) love (threw his arms around his neck and kissed him), (3) celebration (a feast), and (4) joyful restoration of status for his son (a robe of distinction, signet ring of family authority, sandals worn by a son, in contrast to barefoot slaves).

15:24. At this point the parable ties to the two previous stories about God's joy in saving the lost. The father's celebration shows the way God the Father receives repentant sinners. How could the father act like this? Did he not know what the son had done? Of course, but the son had been given up for dead. The lost sheep is back. Certainly a lost-and-found son is worth much more than a coin or a sheep. What a picture of the Father in heaven.

15:25-30. Instead of the story ending on a note of joy and celebration, as might be expected, the spotlight shifts to the older brother. Unlike the father's positive attitude, the older brother (1) was surprised at the return of his sinning brother, (2) was offended and jealous at the father's celebration, (3) became angry at the father's forgiving love, (4) declared his own self-righteousness, and (5) focused on his brother's sinfulness rather than his newfound repentance. Jesus' representation of the religious leaders in the character of the older brother was a scathing rebuke of their self-righteousness.

15:31-32. The rebuke of the religious leaders continues. They did not understand (1) the opportunity for a close relationship with God, (2) the generosity of His grace, (3) His joy at the salvation of sinners, or (4) the profound transformation of conversion.