Introduction: Hope is the oxygen of the soul

- Everyone puts their hope in something or someone.
- Hope is “a feeling that what is wanted is likely to happen.”
  - Webster’s Dictionary
- We hit “rock bottom” when what or who we hoped in cannot or will not come through for us.

Rock bottom usually happens in two predictable places: The pit and the peak.

When you hit rock bottom, the only direction you can look is up.

Where is God when you hit “rock bottom”?

Jesus’ Answer - Luke 15

- The Occasion
  - Luke 15:1
- The Conflict
  - Luke 15:2
- The Parable
  - Luke 15:3-32
This one parable has three mini stories:

1. The lost sheep
2. The lost coin
3. The lost son

Each story has five things in common:

1. Something valuable is lost.
2. An intensive search occurs.
3. That which was lost is found.
4. A great celebration follows.
5. The spiritual application is explained.

What do we learn from this parable?

- God deeply values irreligious, immoral, lost people.
- God is actively drawing them to Himself.
- Heaven rejoices when one lost person repents.
- The value of that which is lost exponentially increases in each story. (Sheep ➔ Coin ➔ Sons)
- The father in story #3 represents God.
- The two sons depict the “immoral sinners” (younger son) and Pharisees (older son).
- Both sons are equally lost, but not equally aware of their lost-ness.
Jesus Offers Hope . . . when we “blow it” big time

- The son’s request: “I want mine now.”
- The son’s message: “I wish you were dead.”
- The implications for the Father: social and economic.
- The father’s unprecedented response: thunderously shocking to his listeners.
- The son hits “rock bottom” = hopeless
- The son’s response to his hopelessness: 
  1. I will return - go back home.
  2. I will repent - my sin to my father and God.
  3. I will make restitution - as a hired hand.
  4. I will do it now - so he got up and went.
- The father’s response: 
  1. The best robe
  2. The ring
  3. The sandals
  4. The fatted calf
Jesus’ message: There is hope!

It’s never too late! Failure is never final!

The Father is waiting, watching, and longing for restoration!

Discussion Questions:

1. Where do you need hope in your life right now?

2. Which part of this story resonated the most with you?

3. Who in your relational network has hit “rock bottom” and needs to know God values them through you?

4. What step of faith do you need to take to draw near to your heavenly Father?
Introduction: Two well-worn paths of life

Self-Discovery . . . Moral Conformity

Progressives . . . Conservatives

“Our Western society is so deeply divided between these two approaches that hardly anyone can conceive of any other way to live. If you criticize or distance yourself from one, everyone assumes you have chosen to follow the other, because each of these approaches tends to divide the whole world into two basic groups. The moral conformists say: ‘The immoral people – the people who ‘do their own thing’ – are the problem with the world, and moral people are the solution.’ The advocates of self-discovery say: ‘The bigoted people – the people why say, ‘We have the Truth’ – are the problem with the world, and progressive people are the solution.’ Each side says: ‘Our way is the way the world will be put to rights, and if you are not with us, you are against us.’”

Timothy Keller, The Prodigal God

Jesus’ parable (Luke 15) teaches both approaches are wrong.

Where is God when being good isn’t “good enough”?

For more resources, go to www.LivingontheEdge.org
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Jesus Offers Hope                                          When Being Good Isn't Good Enough
(Part 2)                                            Luke 15


- The one parable with ___________ mini stories      Luke 15:3-32

Jesus Offers Hope . . . When Our Goodness Fails       Luke 15:25-31

- The elder son’s response:  Anger - “I won’t go in.”

- The elder son’s reason:     Pride - “I’ve never disobeyed you.”

- The elder son’s message:    “You owe me, I’ve been slaving for you.”

- The elder son’s attitude:   Bitter and resentful, his motives exposed. He wants what the father has, not the father himself.

What do we learn from the elder brother?

- Very good, moral, religious people who believe the Bible can be as lost as the most immoral sinner.

- Jesus extends forgiveness to elder brothers (Pharisees then, many of us now) – “come in to My house.”

- Elder brothers' lives are as miserable as prodigals.
Traits of elder brothers and their relationship with God is characterized by . . .

- Duty and **obligation** = dry prayer life.
- Thinking God owes them a **good** life.
- Guilt because they feel they never quite **measure up**.
- Feeling pressured - **rules**, **laws**, and **legalism**.
- Performance - feeling loved only when your are **doing** what you ought to do.
- Right living is the **means** to getting what you really want from God.

Traits of elder brothers and their relationship with other people is characterized by . . .

- Feeling **superior**, critical, prejudice, judgmental.
- The legalistic letter of law; not the **spirit**.
- Championing God’s **justice**; not mercy.
- **Repel** irreligious people.
- Espousing correct doctrine, but acting in **unloving ways**.
- Struggling with **depression** and often having secret sins.
How do elder brothers experience God’s love & forgiveness?

- Repent of their good works as the basis of their relationship with God.
- Repent of their self-seeking motives.
- Repent of their desire for men’s approval above God’s.
- Repent of their pride and humble themselves (admit their need).
- Refuse to compare themselves with others.
- Refuse to judge others.
- Draw near to the Father, just to please the Father.
- Submit to God’s authority in their lives.
Discussion Questions:

1. How does Jesus shatter our preconceived “2-path” perception of doing life and finding happiness?

2. Read the quote by Timothy Keller out loud; what is it both sons have in common that make them equally lost?

3. What elder son tendencies do you have? How does a “performance-orientation” impact your relationship with God and others?

4. What does repenting look like for you? Who can you share your journey with and who can you help?

Resources:  
- *Tired of Trying to Measure Up* by Jeffrey VanVonderan  
- *The Ragamuffin Gospel* by Brennan Manning  
- *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henry Nouwen
Introduction: WHY would God let our most difficult problems go from bad to impossible, if He really loves us?

Jesus’ Answer: John 11

A problem is brought to Jesus:

1 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2 (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) 3 So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

John 11:1-3 (NIV)

Jesus responds to the problem:

4 When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” 5 Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. 6 So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days…

John 11:4-6 (NIV)
Jesus offers hope when life doesn’t make sense (Part 3)

John 11

Jesus announces His plan to solve the problem:

7 and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.” 8 “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

9 Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light. 10 It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.” 11 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

12 His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.” 13 Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. 14 So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” 15 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

John 11:7-16 (NIV)

Jesus’ better gift to Martha and Mary:

17 On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. 18 Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, 19 and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. 20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

21 “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” 23 Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24 Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

25 Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27 “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

28 After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.” 29 When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.

[continued]

John 11:17-37 (NIV)
Jesus’ better gift to Martha and Mary:

30 Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

32 When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 34 “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

35 Jesus wept. 36 Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37 But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus solves the problem:

38 Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. 39 “Take away the stone,” he said. “But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.” 40 Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

41 So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

43 When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”

John 11:38-44 (NIV)
Epilogue:

45 Therefore many of the Jews who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. 46 But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done.

47 Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin. “What are we accomplishing?” they asked. “Here is this man performing many signs. 48 If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and then the Romans will come and take away both our temple and our nation.”

John 11:45-48 (NIV)

Conclusion:

Sometimes God lets our problems go from “bad” to “impossible” so we might believe.

1. In the depth of His love for us.
2. In the extent of His power available to us.

Discussion Questions:

1. Where in your life do you have a bad or impossible situation?
2. Read out loud Romans 5:1-5. From this passage, how does God use the process of adversity to give us hope?
3. Read 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. How does Paul respond to God not changing his circumstances? What would it look like for you to rejoice in your weakness, difficulty, or adversity?
4. What was your biggest takeaway from this message? What did Jesus want to give Mary and Martha that was even better than relief?
5. Who could help you go through this journey to experience the life of Christ in the midst of your pain? Who might need your help to come through their impossible situation?
**Introduction:** Our story – “The Empty Bucket Syndrome”

Where is hope when success doesn’t satisfy?

**Jesus’ Answer:** Mark 10

**The Context:** Three Issues

1. The issue of *divorce*  
   Mark 10:1-12

2. The issue of *children*  
   Mark 10:13-16

3. The issue of *idolatry*  
   Mark 10:17-31

**An Observation:** This story is present in all three synoptic gospels. Success in the world’s value system is the acquisition of *sex, power,* and *money!*
Jesus offers hope to a very…

- Wealthy
- Successful
- Moral
- Powerful
- Sincere
- Intelligent

...person who recognizes his success has left him empty!

- The successful man’s **question reveals** his perceived need: Mark 10:17
  “What must I **do** to inherit eternal life?”

- Jesus’ **answer reveals** the rich man’s **heart** need. Mark 10:18-21

- The rich man’s **response reveals** the condition of his **heart** and the **god** that he served. Mark 10:22
Jesus Offers Hope (Part 4)

- Jesus warns of the dangers of earthly wealth. Mark 10:23-27

- Jesus promises great reward for those who trust and follow Him. Mark 10:28-31

Jesus’ offer of hope to YOU today…

Come unto Me all of you who are exhausted with the weight and burdens of life and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn to follow Me; for I am gentle and want what is best for every aspect of your life.

Jesus – Matthew 11:28-29

(Paraphrased)
Discussion Questions:

1. What aspect of today’s passage / message was most meaningful to you? Why?

2. What motivated Jesus to command this rich man to give all his money to help the poor?

3. How does the young ruler’s money expose the deeper issues (external behavior vs. internal purity and trust) in his life?

4. Discuss the concept, “Money is not evil, but dangerous,” as it relates to our relationship with God. When and how does it become evil? What are our safeguards with regard to the “deceitful” impact of money / things in our life?

5. Discuss Peter’s crude but honest question, “What is in it for us?” What are the present and future rewards of following Christ? Why is it worth it in your opinion? Share some of the most meaningful rewards (material and / or spiritual) you’ve experienced in your relationship with God.