



As we begin a new year, many people naturally take stock of their lives. It's a time when we reflect on what's working, what feels heavy, and what we hope might change. That's why New Year's resolutions are so common.

Most resolutions tend to fall into familiar areas: health, finances, personal growth, relationships, or finding more peace and balance.

Beneath all of them is a shared desire *to live better, more meaningful, more whole lives*. Even when people don't formally write resolutions, many still carry quiet hopes or intentions into the year ahead.

Opening Question:

As we've started this New Year, have you found yourself making any resolutions or setting intentions big or small?

If so, what are they, and what's the reason behind them?

Read Matthew 13. 31-34; 44-46

Think: What stands out to you most from these parables of the Kingdom, and why?

Our vision for St James is a vision of growth. Not growth for growth's sake, not numbers on a chart, but *Kingdom growth*: Growing as apprentices of Jesus and becoming people who help others discover him.

One key feature is that the Kingdom is **always moving outward**.

Think: How might this outward movement show up in your lifegroup, your friendships, or your home?

Read: Luke 15:11–32

The story of the prodigal son is one of the most familiar parables in the Christian tradition. Yet, as familiar as it is, it gives us a profound **window into the heart of God**. It's a heart that grieves over the lost and rejoices when they return.

Reflection

- Has this story been particularly influential in your own life?
- How has God's grace toward the lost shaped your understanding of his character or your own journey?

It's easy to focus only on the younger son, but the story actually presents **two forms of being lost**:

The younger son

- Openly rebellious, demanding his inheritance, leaving home, and squandering it.



- His “lostness” is external, his distance from the father is obvious, and his repentance is dramatic.

The elder son

- Stayed at home, appeared obedient, but harboured anger, resentment, and a lack of understanding.
- His “lostness” is internal. He is distant in heart, even though he never physically left.
- He refuses to join the celebration, lectures the father, and reveals that his thoughts and priorities are not aligned with the father’s generosity.

The Father’s Generosity

At the heart of the story is the **generous, relentless love of the Father**:

- He runs to meet the younger son, celebrates his return, and restores him fully.
- He patiently confronts and continues to offer grace to the elder son, even when the elder resists.

Takeaway:

We who have been found by God are called to **reflect his heart**. A God who relentlessly pursues the lost invites us to join him.

Practical Steps:

1. Reflect: Who in your life or community needs to experience God’s love?
2. Pray: Bring these people and places before God.
3. Act: Ask God to use you to **share his hope and joy**, whether in words, hospitality, or example.

Key thought:

“There is nothing more urgent, nothing more precious, nothing more loving we can offer the world than the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

Prayer

Father God,
Thank you that even when we were lost, you came searching for us.
Forgive us for choosing comfort over obedience, fear over faith, and control over dependence.
Move us from clenched hands to open hands, ready to receive and ready to give.
Give us your eyes to see those who are far from you,
and your courage to speak words of life and hope.
Send us out to share the good news in words and actions.
Amen.