

## Luke 15:11-32 The Prodigal Son

This is a story told in two parts.

Breakdown:

### Lk. 15:11-12

Experts in Middle Eastern culture tell us that the young man was virtually expressing a wish for his father to die. A father could initiate a discussion about inheritance, but never a son. (The Parables, Understanding what Jesus Meant, Gary Inrig, Pg. 16)

According to Kenneth Bailey, author of Poet and Peasant, this is the only case in Middle Eastern literature from ancient times until now where a son, younger or older, is asking for his inheritance from a father that is in good health.

How much of the estate was the son going to get? 1/3

Do you think the father knew what the son was going to do with the money?

Do you think the father gave in right away?

### Lesson 1 - Sometimes a parent is helpless to prevent a child's course down a destructive path.

By using the term "estate", the Bible may be inferring that the father not only gave money, but property as well. This is important because it represents the father's security in old age. This makes the father vulnerable.

### Lk. 15:13-16

The son liquidates his assets and turns it all into cash.

Why is this insight so important? He is cutting all ties with his past, his family and his family's God.

The term distant country tends to infer that he was going to a Gentile country which was known pagan values and heathenistic morals.

What do you think the Bible means by saying "loose living"? He has hanging out with "girls who do", prostitutes. The bible tells us in verse 30.

### Lesson 2 - Sooner or later, choices bring consequences.

As Merle Haggard sang, "Are the good times really over for good?"

The cold hand of reality finally smacks this young, proud Jew. Desperation knows no pride, so the boy is now feeding pigs.

Not only is the son living with pigs but he is also willing to eat with the pigs, except that there is a problem. What is meant by the term, "no one was giving him anything?"

In times of famine, pigs will be of more value than human beings because they are a food source. He had truly fallen a long way.

What do you think we would say today if the Lord had stopped the story at this point? He's getting what he deserves. God will punish misbehavior. Remember, Jesus was telling this story to the Pharisees. The Pharisees were content to leave sinners in the pigpen (see the woman who pours the expensive perfume on Jesus' head). Jesus was and always wants to see sinners find their way back into the Father's house.

### **Lk. 15:17-19**

Sin can only blind us for so long before we see the truth in ourselves. The son suddenly sees himself for who he really is.

Is there a certain insanity to sin? What is insanity?

### **Lesson 3 - The first step to spiritual repentance is a realistic of who God is and who we are in relation to Him. (Verse 18)**

The young son realizes that his choices were not only sinful to his father, but also to his father's God.

### **Lesson 4 - We can never find ourselves in sinful indulgence. Sometimes the only way to see the truth is through the muddy eyes of a pigpen.**

The prodigal son had left home to find freedom. To be his own man. Instead, he found servitude and bondage greater than he would have ever experienced at home. How do we know? Because he was willing to go back home and be a hired hand.

Remember, the younger son knows he has forfeited all rights to being a son. He is hoping that his father will accept him as a servant, but there is certainly no guarantee of that.

### **Lk. 15:20-24**

Nothing is probably as humiliating as going home a failure. Can the young son hide his failure? Not at all. He's dressed in rags. He's dirty. He stinks.

What is the implication of verse 20? Not only is the father willing to receive him, he is looking for him. How do we know? "while he was still a long way off". The father's heart had been broken when the son left, but now it is the father that is running to embrace the son.

Note the timing of the event. The son is too far away to express his repentance but the grace of the father is already present.

Older men in Middle Eastern culture do not run.

- a. He's old
- b. He's wealthy. It would be undignified.
- c. His attire probably made it difficult.

Think about our time today. Important people tend to restrain their emotions publicly. (Pres. Bush on 9/11)

So why did the father run?

1. His undying love for his son.
2. He wants to reach him before the villagers do.

What would we have done? (Old buddist proverb, father recognized the son, but the son did not recognize the father) WE WANT TO SEE SOME PROOF OF REPENTANCE.

**Lesson 5 - God's grace and forgiveness are immediate. Our word is good enough for him (if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us)**

The son begins his speech but is stopped. The father says nothing to the son. Instead he says, go get the best robe. Scholars tell us this would have been a festival robe worn on very special occasions. This tells us the young son was the guest of honor. Put a ring on his finger. What does this mean? He's giving him the symbol of authority. He's my son. Put sandals on his feet. Slaves and servants went barefoot. The father is not just clothing his son, he is covering him with honor and acceptance.

Do you think it was just the two of them?

- a. We know there were servants, they probably followed him out of the house when they saw the father running.
- b. People from the village probably saw him coming.
- c. Do people drive by a car wreck without looking?

**Lesson 6 - This is not a parable of merits, it is a picture of grace.**

The Pharisees would have understood penance and works. Grace is totally foreign to them. If the truth is told, it is probably very foreign to us as well. God doesn't just accept the sinner, he rejoices over the sinner.

**Lk. 15:25-28**

The prodigal son is meant to represent the tax collectors, harlots and sinners. The Lord is using the older son to represent the Pharisees.

Do you think when the father and his friends got together, that they would talk about how bad the younger son was and how dutiful and good the older son was?

The old son likes protocol. How do we know? Verse 26. He summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what was going on. (KU video story)

What would you have done if you had heard loud music and dancing? I would have gone inside to see for myself.

Lesson 7 - Appearances can be deceiving. There is a goodness that is not good and a righteousness that is not right. Did the older brother have a relationship with the father? He appeared to have a relationship when he in fact did not. Jesus uses the older brother to unmask the claims that they truly knew God.

The refusal of the older brother to go into the house is an intentional public insult to his father. Publicly he is making it clear that he disapproves of his father's actions. Where else is this seen in the Bible? Noah's nakedness, Gen. 9:22. The older son is publicly trying to humiliate his father.

**Lesson 8 - The older son or the religious community, would rather not have fellowship with his father, than accept the treatment of his younger brother, or sinners.**

His brother is not going to be in the company of someone who smells like a pig and has been in the company of prostitutes. If that's the price he has to pay to be in fellowship with his father, then that price is too high.

Here's the correlation. The Pharisees would not have fellowship with Jesus because of His treatment of prodigals. Thus, they were keeping themselves outside the Father's house. If we're not in the Father's house, then where are we?

Don't misunderstand. The father could have sent a servant outside and ordered him to come in. He could have told him to get his rear in gear and put on a happy face and they would talk about it later.

Just as the father humbled himself before the prodigal son, he is now humbling himself before the older brother. The father's love for one son is no less profound than his love of his other son. Again, the father does not stand on dignity, but on vulnerability.

#### **Lk. 15:29-30**

The heart of the older son is now exposed to the light.

**Lesson 9 - Appearances can be deceiving. Appearances suggest a son respectful of his father, totally different from a rebellious brother. Anger unveils an attitude every bit as bad as a brother who wants his inheritance because he's leaving home and never coming back.**

Have you ever considered that what we learn about the older brother may explain why the younger brother wanted to leave home and go to the far country in the first place.

Verse 29 shows us the older brother has a lot of built up contempt for his father. The older brother hasn't stayed home because he loved his father. The older brother has been working in the fields to get what he wanted.

The older brother is a lot more like the younger brother than even he realizes. He's self-centered. He doesn't care about his father's feelings. He's self-indulgent. He's resentful. He's angry that his father hasn't catered to his wishes and desires.

What we find out is that the older son is really no more than a servant by his own accord. He doesn't know the joy of being a son. The "respectable" older son is lost in his own father's house. He is so close to the father and yet so far away from him.

**Lesson 10 - People can be morally respectable and publicly approved and still be farther away from God than a prodigal son in a pigpen.**

**Lk. 15:31-32**

The father does not become furious. Would some of you father's have been angry with the older son.

The father says to his son, we have to celebrate. That's my nature. Because of who I am, I rejoice over lost sons who return. I have no choice. A gracious father will not cancel the party because he cannot. He rejoices over lost children who are found.

What does the older son do? Does he enter the party or does he stay outside?

It's interesting but the Bible doesn't tell us. Jesus purposely omitted what the older son does.

That is the real issue Jesus set before the Pharisees. To reject the Father's graciousness of the most unworthy of sinners is to deceive ourselves about our need for grace. We forfeit our fellowship with God that is based on grace alone. When we show anger and contempt for God's forgiveness to sinners, we stand outside the Father's house. How well we know God is revealed by whether we ache and rejoice the way God does.