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Have YOU ever been a Prodigal Son?

Luke 15:11: (NASB) *And he said, A man had two sons.*

The parable of the Prodigal Son is probably one of the best known of Jesus' teachings. It touches the heart because of its very practical and dramatic lessons of humility and forgiveness in action. As we look into the story we want to look inward as well. Are we, or have we ever been, prodigal sons? If so, have we come all the way back? And what about the other part of the story - the part we almost never talk about...? Stay with us as we journey through some life changing events!

It's all about Jesus telling a story... but to whom? Luke 15:1-3

Tax collectors/publicans: The publicans were Jews who had become somewhat estranged from their laws and to the patriotic sentiments of the nation, and who accepted service under the Romans as tax-gatherers.

and sinners: The sinners were the more or less immoral, who made no professions of keeping the Mosaic Law, observances of the more sacred rites and ceremonies, holy days, etc. They were Jews by birth but not by practice.

Pharisees and scribes: The scribes and the Pharisees held themselves aloof from the common people—the scribes, because the masses were illiterate; and the Pharisees, under the claim that the people were sinners, cut off from relationship to God. They were the upper level in the religious caste system of the day.

This audience would have been very much at odds with itself, because the listeners were contradictory. The disciples likely were there as well. All of the listening groups would identify with a different part of the story. The story would need to draw in the self-proclaimed leaders quickly, as they would lose interest most easily, while capturing the imaginations of the rest. Jesus was a master at doing this.

🔊 **Intro, Prodigal Son, Jesus of Nazareth (1977 movie):** Luke 15:11-13

Immediately there is drama and Jesus uses this story to teach the audience about themselves. The younger son basically collects, leaves and squanders. Sounds like the pursuit of instant gratification! Sound familiar?

🔊 **Robert "the man," Who needs God, manyviews.org**

- *Robert craved the kind of power and influence held by the mob bosses he idolized. "I loved getting hooked up with this wise guy's son and then we started with our own crew. We started taking numbers and things of that nature. That was the step that I took to get considered as an associate into the Gambino crime family." Soon, Robert gained respect inside New York's criminal underworld. "I was known as the up and coming star and they would take me and parade me around like that. I truly came to believe that I was a legend in my own mind."*

Romans 13:13-14

🔊 **Famine, Jesus of Nazareth (1977 movie)** Luke 15:14-16: The son has lost everything and is now feeding swine. For a Jew, this would have been a real disgrace.

🔊 **Robert the Crackhead, manyviews.org**

- *"And I got attracted to that and thought that was the next level up. But I got caught up with the coke itself and I would do more than I sold and eventually I would owe them money and I started running out of resources of people giving me coke because I owed everybody money. That's when crack started being big, and it was cheaper." Crack consumed him. It cost him his reputation and everything Robert had worked for. "I started realizing this was like the point of hopelessness. Okay, I'm Robert the Crackhead and I will die Robert the Crackhead."*

Who were the two sons? All of the nation of Israel were God's children: Amos 3:1-2

Older son, more privileged and stable = the self-proclaimed "elite" of Israel. The Pharisees and scribes must have liked this story so far - they would have seen themselves as the faithful son, favored and home while the rebellious son was now poor, miserable and alone. The lesson for us? *The Lessons for Us: A sure sign of a prideful heart is finding satisfaction in another's misfortune.*

Younger son, less favored and more rebellious = the "sinners" of Israel. Sometimes we have great blessings and opportunities that we do not even recognize, much less appreciate. This can



often happen when we are given these blessings at an early age, or when we are born into them. **The Lessons for Us:** *"Thank before you think." Assume gratitude and then think through what you will do. Appreciate first and then move forward with other parts of your life. It will focus us on what is most important.*



I will go home, *Jesus of Nazareth (1977 movie)* Luke 15:17-19

Robert's wake-up call, manyviews.org

- A year later Robert was locked up for selling crack cocaine to an undercover agent. This time he had nowhere to turn. One day he phoned his little girl and got a wake-up call. "I'm talking to my daughter and she is crying. So I say, Honey, why are you crying? And she said because you won't come and see me. I'm off drugs and not medicated, but the reality of all the damage that I've done and this little kid crying that I won't come and see her, my heart just shattered and broke into little bitty pieces."

Younger son's actions: Excitement is always short-lived and is always overcome by life - by things like famine, need and difficulty. In your misery, you wake up one day and find that you would gladly rise up to a level that you would have never dreamed of stooping down to! This son was reduced to feeding swine, an unclean animal for a Jew, and he was reduced to desiring their food, though there was none offered to him...how far he had fallen! **The Lessons for Us:** *The further we run to fill a proud and thankless heart, the more lost we will become. The higher the thrill we seek, the lonelier and darker the fall. Thankless actions produce an empty life.*

Younger son's resolution: This younger son finally realizes reality. He resolves to go back to his Father. "I will get up and go" - the word for "get up" is often used relating to "rising up," as in resurrection. This son rehearses his repentance speech: he has sinned against heaven, he has lived a life entirely out of harmony with God, and therefore he has sinned before his father who was a righteous man. His judgment upon himself is to be stripped of his son-ship and to become as a "hired hand." The severity of this self-judgment shows the sincerity of his repentance.

The Lessons for Us: *The truest values in life can only be realized when we have been humbled to such a point that our eye for life is no longer seeking external events full of thrill and excitement, but has been brought to a new level of vision, a level of clear sight, a level of insight. It is at this point that we can once again go home. "Make me as a hired hand" shows complete attitude overhaul. He started the story with an authoritative demand to "give me" and returns with a humble plea for his father's authority to reinstate him in a vastly reduced position.*



My son is home, *Jesus of Nazareth (1977 movie)* Luke 15:20-24

Robert's deliverance, manyviews.org

- I knew inside me that I needed to know more about this Jesus Christ, and that became my pursuit, kind of like the way I pursued crack! Robert finished out his two year sentence and was released from prison 12 years ago. He has a steady job now and he and his daughter have reconciled. "There is so much God has changed in my life. It's only now through the grace of God with Him living in me did He give me the strength to deliver me from all of that."

We have started discussing the utterly inspiring story of the prodigal son, his arrogant beginning, his father's wisdom in letting him go, his humble return and his father's mercy, love and forgiveness. This is truly a story we can all be inspired by - but what about the other part? The theme text says the father had two sons - what about the older son - the one who stayed home and did the work of his father?



Older brother angry, *Jesus of Nazareth (1977 movie)* Luke 15:25-32: Here we have a deep fault beginning to be revealed. A grand celebration is underway for a younger brother who was thought to be gone forever - and the elder brother became angry! The Pharisees would have gone from happy with the story to livid! In one fell swoop, the rebellious son is back in good graces - NOT possible! And the elder, more respected and worthy son is now angry. Perhaps the Pharisees would have identified with the anger. After all, there was no deserving action on the part of the rebel! On the outside, the older son was doing all the right things. But what about what was happening on the inside? Jesus knew the hearts of the Pharisees and that's why he framed the parable in this way. Here is another example: Luke 18:9-14 Here is the attitude that Jesus was building up to with this whole story and perhaps the greatest warning of the story:



Luke 5:30: Does this same attitude exist among us calling ourselves Christians? Luke 7:39: The Pharisees looked down on everyone except themselves. Do we, as Christians, have this attitude to the people around us?

So, is the father right in his mercy or is the older brother right in his judgment?



Older brother yells, *Jesus of Nazareth (1977 movie)* Luke 15:28-30

Older son and father, Prodigal Perspectives, *Chris Seay, BluefishTV*

- *Elder son: So I'm watching this party from a distance when my father spies me. Can you believe he has the nerve to invite me to this party? Father: There I was, out in the field working away, always one eye working, always one eye on the road, watching, waiting for my child to come home.*



Some of the complaints of the older brother:

"For all these years I have been working like a slave for you!"

"I have never disobeyed your command!"

"You have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends!"

"But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!"

Older son's actions: The eldest son sees life through the prism of himself and outward appearances. He does not have the wisdom of his father and he is devoid of compassion.

The Lessons for Us: Rebellion can come in different forms - it can be overt as in the case of the younger son or it can be covert as in the case of the eldest son. Regardless of its form, it is always destructive, and in the case of a covert rebellion, its manifestation is usually in the form of an overwhelming resentment that eats away at your character, like a cancer.

Such anger! Notice how easily the condemning words dripped off of the elder son's tongue! He showed his heart and how, even though he was in the right place at the right time and even doing the right things, he wasn't the right man in his heart!

Sounds like another man of God...remember Jonah? Jonah 3:10 Jonah 4:1-3

Now Jesus' deepest purpose for this story is beginning to be revealed: He is warning those who rebel *outwardly* that they will have to be humbled, and he is warning those who rebel *inwardly* that they *also* must come to humility. This should be a wakeup call for us. Just because we have a Bible and know how to read it, just because we show up for church, we also must be humble and not rebellious. Matthew 23:37-39: Jesus showed God's will in all he did, but all the Pharisees did was challenge and look down upon the things that were truly from God. Even though the Pharisees were supposed to be "closest" to the Father, just like the elder son, they were full of hatred instead of love.



He was lost and now is found, *Jesus of Nazareth (Movie 1977)* Luke 15:31-32: The final indictment of the story speaks to the core values that the Pharisees, pictured by the older son, had adopted. They had lost all of what was important in life by focusing only on that which was outwardly visible in life. They were focused on the intricate details and missed the love and mercy of their Heavenly Father. Luke 15:1-3: So who was the real wayward son? Both were! But the older son suffered perhaps an even greater loss than the younger, for he spent his days in a quiet and resentful service to his father, perhaps even wishing *he* could have been to one to leave. To his shame, this broken, selfish and heartless attitude was revealed at a time when rejoicing and mercy should have been driving his attitude, for his brother - his flesh and blood - was alive and home!

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

- Are we or could we be in line for such a fall as this older brother took?
- Do we do the work of the Father without possession of the gratefulness of a son?
- Do we show up every day and on time, all the while wishing to be "free" of those very things?
- This son was in line to inherit all - is our heart deserving of the gifts that the Father gives us?



We have choices, whether we have been the younger rebel in our lives or whether we have been the older son. Our choice is between following our feelings or complying with the wisdom and grace of the Father. Joshua 24:15: We can serve the arrogance of idolatry or the love of the true God. Mark 12:30-31: What role are we playing? The prodigal son is a story about putting God first with thankfulness and humility and not our own preferences.

*So have YOU ever been a prodigal son?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions,
Think about it...!*