



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: (NASB) ¹Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near him to listen to him. ²Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. ³So he told them this parable, saying...

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.

(1977 movie) Intro, Prodigal Son, Jesus of Nazareth (1977 movie)

<u>Luke 15:11-13</u>: (NASB) ¹¹And he said, A man had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me. So he divided his wealth between them. ¹³And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.

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?

(I))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."

<u>Romans 13:13-14</u>: (NASB) ¹³Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

(1977 movie) Famine, Jesus of Nazareth (1977 movie)

Luke 15:14-16: (NASB) ¹⁴Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.

The son has lost everything and is now feeding swine. For a Jew, this would have been a real disgrace.

(I))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:

<u>Amos 3:1-2</u>: (NRSV) ¹Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel, against the whole family that I brought up out of the land of Egypt: ²You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.

| The Characters | Who did they represent? | Observation | The Lessons for Us |
|--|---|--|---|
| 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. | 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. | "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. |
|---|----------------------------|--|--|
| The Father | God | The father in his wisdom sees the thankless rebellion in his younger son's heart and knows that his stubbornness must give birth to its own actions which in turn will provide the opportunity for learning humility. This son, having truly found himself, goes home. His father in his wisdom had let this son go and now in his wisdom is and has been looking for this son's return. Upon seeing his son afar off, this wise father springs into action, knowing the true character of his son and wanting to pour out compassion upon him. The son is as good as his word in his repentance and the father is as good as his wisdom in his acceptance! | Let go when letting go presents more long run potential for growth than hanging on. God lets humanity learn a bigger lesson through sin and death. |

A caller suggests: The prodigal became bored and disenchanted with the blessings at home. When things go well, we become complacent and take our blessings for granted. Christian life needs daily renewal in God, prayer, meditation and gratitude.

(1977 movie) I will go home, Jesus of Nazareth (1977 movie)

<u>Luke 15:17-19</u>: (NASB)¹⁷But when he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.

(I))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."

| The Characters | Observation | The Lessons for Us |
|-----------------------|---|---|
| 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 himhow far he had fallen! | 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. |

After the betrayal, does everyone have to change to restore order?

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| 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 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. |

hristian (1977 movie) My son is home, Jesus of Nazareth (1977 movie)

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Luke 15:20-24: (NASB)²⁰So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. ²²But the father said to his slaves, Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; ²³and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found. And they began to celebrate.

(I) 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?

(1977 movie)

Luke 15:25-32: (NASB) ²⁵Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. ²⁷And he said to him, Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound. ²⁸But he became angry.



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!

A bit on the celebratory elements that the father used to welcome his son back:

(Source: Wycliffe Commentary) *The fatted calf*. One animal was usually held in readiness for a special occasion, that honored guests might be served quickly. Be merry (celebrate) has the connotation of a party. Music and dancing were probably supplied by hired entertainers. The return of the younger son was cause for a major celebration.



Remember this prodigal observation?

| The Characters | Who did they represent? | Observation | The Lessons for Us |
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| 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. | A sure sign of a prideful heart is finding satisfaction in another's misfortune. |

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: (NRSV) ⁹He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹²I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income. ¹³But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner! ¹⁴I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.

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: But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

Does this same attitude exist among us calling ourselves Christians?

Luke 7:39: Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

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: (NASB)²⁸...and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. ²⁹But he answered and said to his father, Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; ³⁰but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.

(1))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!"

| The Characters | Observation | The Lessons for Us |
|---------------------|--|---|
| 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. | 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?

<u>Jonah 3:10</u>: (NASB) When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

<u>Jonah 4:1-3</u>: (NASB) ¹But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry. ²He prayed to the LORD and said, Please LORD, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore in order to forestall this I fled to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity. ³Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.

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.

<u>Matthew 23:37-39</u>: (NASB) ³⁷ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. ³⁸Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! ³⁹For I say to you, from now on you will not see me until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

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.

How does this all end?

(1) He was lost and now is found, Jesus of Nazareth (Movie 1977)

Luke 15:31-32: (NASB) ³¹And he said to him, Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.

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.

"Desperado," The Eagles

<u>Luke 15:1-3</u>: (NASB) ¹Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near him to listen to him. ²Both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, This man receives sinners and eats with them. ³So he told them this parable, saying...



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!

<u>1 Corinthians 1:26-29</u>: (NASB) ²⁶For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no man may boast before God.

- 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.

<u>Joshua 24:15</u>: (NASB) If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.

We can serve the arrogance of idolatry or the love of the true God.

<u>Mark 12:30-31</u>: (NASB) ³⁰ and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. ³¹The second is this, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.

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...!

And now <u>even more</u> to think about... only in the Full Edition of CQ Rewind!

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| The Father | God | The father in his wisdom sees the thankless rebellion in his younger son's heart and knows that his stubbornness must give birth to its own actions which in turn will provide the opportunity for learning humility. This son, having truly found himself, goes home. His father in his wisdom had let this son go and now in his wisdom is and has been looking for this son's return. Upon seeing his son afar off, this wise father springs into action, knowing the true character of his son and wanting to pour out compassion upon him. The son is as good as his word in his repentance and the father is as good as his wisdom in his acceptance! | Let go when letting go presents more long run potential for growth than hanging on. God lets humanity learn a bigger lesson through sin and death. |



Let's take a look at the context of the Prodigal Son:

Actually, Jesus told them three parables - here the first two:

Luke 15:4-7: (NRSV) ⁴Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost. ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

<u>Luke 15:8-10</u>: (NRSV) ⁸Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost. ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.



Observations:

- In these two parables, something of great value was lost a sheep and a coin.
- The owner in each case seeks out that which was lost.
- When found, the owner rejoices and calls others to also rejoice.
- There seems to be complete unity in the rejoicing.
- In both cases, the allusion to "joy in heaven" is a main point.

So, when the parable of the Prodigal Son is told, there is already a momentum set for the theme of recovering that which was lost.

(Source: McClintock and Strong's) *Pharisee*: The name Farisai~ov —*Pharisee* is the Greek form of the Hebrew vWrP and properly denotes *one who is separated*, i.e., by special practices; or, as the dictionary called *Aruch* (s.v.) defines it, "one who separated himself from Levitical impurity and Levitically impure food."

Scribes, Jewish: These persons were originally merely writers or copyists of the law, who followed this business as a mode of livelihood; but eventually they rose to the rank of a learned profession — becoming the doctors of the law and interpreters of the Scriptures. As such they frequently appear in the New Testament and occasionally in the later books of the Old.

A bit more on the "husks" or "pods" that the rebellious son wanted to eat:

(Source: Biblical Commentator Albert Barnes:) The husks—a mistranslation—are fleshy pods, somewhat like those of the locust-tree, from six to ten inches long and one broad, laid inside with a gelatinous substance, not wholly unpleasant to the taste when thoroughly ripe. I have seen large orchards of this kharub in Cyprus, where it is still the food which the swine do eat. The kharub is often called St. John's Bread, and also Locust-tree, from a mistaken idea about the food of the Baptist in the wilderness.



Make me a hired servant: The son wants to go work for his father as a hired hand:

Strongs #3407 misthios (mis'-thee-os) a wage-earner: KJV-- hired servant.

(Source: Wycliffe Commentary) Hired servants in Bible times had a harder lot than slaves, because their employment was more uncertain, whereas slaves could be sure of food and



shelter. Against heaven. In obedience to the third commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of thy God in vain," the Jews substituted other terms for God lest they accidentally blaspheme (cf. <Mt 5:34; 26:64-65>). *Make me*. This petition indicates a complete change in his attitude. When he left home, he said, "Give me..." He left with a selfish demand; he returned with a humble prayer.

A bit more on the celebratory elements that the father used to welcome his son back:

(Source: Wycliffe Commentary) *The best robe*. The best robe was reserved for an honored guest. A ring marked the position of sonship which he had forfeited when he deserted the family circle. *The fatted calf*. One animal was usually held in readiness for a special occasion, that honored guests might be served quickly (cf. <Gen 18:7>). *Be merry* has the connotation of a party. Music and dancing were probably supplied by hired entertainers. The return of the younger son was cause for a major celebration.

Finally, a text that uses the picture of a fine robe, just as the younger son was offered:

<u>Isaiah 61:10-11</u>: (NKJV) ¹⁰I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. ¹¹For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.