

- ***READ Luke 15:11-32*** While **Luke 15** is most well known for its containing of this parable of the prodigal son, we would be remiss to not consider the circumstances & context preceding this parable and why Jesus shared it with the people to begin with. Beginning in **Luke 15:1**, we read that tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus so that they might listen to His teachings. This surely would've been something that Jesus warmly welcomed for it will be in just a few chapters that Jesus will tell Zacheus and his household that, *"the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (**Luke 19:10**) However, not all people were so warm in their reception of Jesus spending time with the tax collectors and sinners.
- In fact, what we see in **Luke 15:2** is the Pharisees and the scribes grumbling about Jesus's eating with the tax collectors and sinners. Jesus obviously is aware what was within their hearts and minds, and this prompts Him to begin to share a number of parables. The first parable in **vv.3-7** concerns the shepherd who leaves his 99 sheep in order to go and find the one that sheep that has come up missing. After he finds it, he returns with it on his shoulders, and he throws a party for his friends and neighbors to come so that they might all rejoice in the lost sheep being found. Jesus finishes this parable by giving the sense of it. *"I tell you in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance."* (**Luke 15:7**)
- He then goes on to share another parable concerning a woman who has ten silver coins and she loses one of them. He searches the entire house, and finally finds the lost coin. She, like the shepherd, calls her friends and neighbors together to celebrate her having found the lost coin. Jesus again concludes this parable by saying, *"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* (**Luke 15:10**)
- It is at this point that Jesus then goes into the all familiar parable that we have just read. As we focus our time of study on a consideration of this parable of a dad and two sons, I would suggest to you that our normal focus on just the younger son that we refer to as the prodigal son causes us to miss out on some key lessons that are taught to us by the dad and the older son. Therefore, our lesson will come in three parts. We'll first consider what the young son teaches us about sin. We will then consider what the dad teaches us about grace, and we will conclude by considering what the older son teaches us about ourselves. Let's begin with what the younger prodigal son teaches us about sin.

I. The younger son teaches us about sin.

A. It is rebellion. (Luke 15:11-19)

1. The parable of this dad and his two sons begins with the younger son coming to him and asking that he go ahead and receive his share of the inheritance. As the younger son, he would've received half of what was given to the older brother. At the time of their father's death, the older brother would've received a 2/3's share of the inheritance while the younger son would've received a 1/3 share. Though it was within his right as a son to receive his inheritance, the request could be taken to imply that he wished that his dad would just go ahead and die so that he could receive it. Instead of following the customs of the society, this younger son chose to rebel against his father and societal norms by demanding the inheritance early.
2. The rebellion of the younger son is further seen in that he takes his inheritance and goes away to a far land where he squanders it with "loose living" as the text tells us in **v.13**. We are not given much information on what "loose living" might mean, but the older brother seems to think that he blew all of his money on prostitutes. If this is true, then even if we don't view the original request for his inheritance as sin, then we can at the very least infer that his heart wasn't as it ought to have been since he took what was given to him and went to live this immoral lifestyle. Sin was certainly present in the way he lived once he left his family.

3. In living in this way, we come to understand that sin is rebellion against God. We see that this younger son was going to do what he wanted regardless of how it might affect others or how it might look like to others. His concern was only for his desires, and he wasn't going to allow anyone to stop him from doing what he wanted. This is rebellion against his family and God pure and simple, and anytime we sin this is what we are doing. We are rebelling against God and His will for us in this life. When we do this, we are living without consideration or obedience to God's commands, and that very simply is sin according to what John says in **John 3:4**, "*Everyone who practices sin also practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.*" This practicing of lawlessness is rebellion against God, and the actions of the younger son represent that same rebellion that we sometimes perform in our own lives.

B. It wants us away from good company.

1. Notice that this rebellion of the son led him to leave his family and go off to some foreign land that was far away. Why would this be something he felt the need to do? It seems to me that this would've been necessary if he wanted to be able to live his life by his terms. As long as he was home there would be people surrounding him who would more than likely call him out for living this type of loose life that possibly involved prostitutes.
2. If we are surrounded by people who love us and care for us, then our desires to live in rebellion will often only be possible if we create some distance between ourselves and those who would hold us to a high and godly standard. I think it no coincidence that the Hebrew writer so encourages so greatly our coming together in **Hebrews 10:23-26**. He encourages our coming together and stresses the importance of it in that we are able to encourage and stir up one another to love and good works. Notice as well in **v.26** the warning that we not go on in continued rebellion against God because there then remains no sacrifice for our sins.
3. The point seems clear to me. When we spend more time around others who are committed to God then it becomes easier for us to stay on the straight and narrow. However, when we continually choose to not spend time with others who hold good and godly standards...then it becomes so much easier for us to live in rebellion to God. The younger son felt the need to separate himself from his family in order to live this loose life, and sin within our own lives will also do everything it can to create space between us and those who would be good influences within our lives. We might think that this space will allow our lives to be more fun and fulfilling, but the truth we will soon see is that sin will leave us with nothing good as it might promise.

C. It will leave us with nothing.

1. The stage is set for the younger brother of **Luke 15**. He has his inheritance, he has his space, he has his loose living...but that is where it all ends. The text tells us that the younger brother squanders his inheritance, and he finds himself left with absolutely nothing at all. Instead of being wise with his money, the younger brother foolishly blows his money which is bad all by itself, but what compounds his issues is when a severe famine comes down upon the land. He already had nothing, and the famine only makes things worse. The younger brother is truly impoverished, as the text tells us in **v.14**.
2. The younger brother has to do something in order to live, so he sells himself out to be hired by citizens of the country in which he finds himself. His job he obtains is...taking care of pigs in a field. We can probably assume that this young man is a Jewish man, and if this is the case then there is hardly a worse job for a Jew to have. Pigs were the considered nearly the most unclean of the unclean animals, and for this young man to have this job would've been most humiliating.
3. The younger brother's situation gets to the lowest point of desperation when he finds himself thinking to himself that he would gladly eat of the pods that the pigs were eating. He was truly left with absolutely nothing! He even desired that which the pigs had which could be understood as the pigs having it better than the younger brother himself. This is exactly where

sin and temptation want to take us. This younger brother had illusion of a grand life away from his family with all of his money, and yet once all the money was gone...he had absolutely nothing. We can probably imagine that he was a popular man while going around with his wealth, but once it was all gone...No one was there to give him anything at all. This is exactly what sin promises. It gives us promises that things will be great, but in the end we will be left with absolutely nothing at all. We will be left helpless and hopeless. If the story ends at this point then we are left with a man who made horrible decisions that led him to complete ruin.

II. The dad teaches us about grace.

A. It never stops waiting.

1. Before we get to the specifics about the younger brother's realizations during his low point, let's look at what happens when he finally decides to return to home. Would you notice that we read in **v.20** that while he was still far away from his father's home that his dad saw him coming in the distance. Could this have been purely coincidental? Sure, it could've been just a coincidence that the father looked up and saw him...but it also could've been that the dad always had his eye towards the road that came into the house just hoping and praying that he would see his son making his way back home.
2. This is a beautiful picture painted for us of a father's love for his child for when the dad sees his son the Bible tells us, ***"His father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him."*** (v.20) Jesus is surely trying to give us a visual representation of our heavenly Father's excitement when He sees one of His straying children coming home after leaving his fellowship. Someone might say, *"well why doesn't the dad just stop the son from leaving in the first place?"* This is a fair question, but I believe it is answered when we consider this parable is to represent our relationship with God. The truth is that God allows for His children to leave if we don't desire to remain in a relationship with Him through righteousness and obedience. This son wanted to leave for he had a different lifestyle on his mind. So too we might leave if we are not willing to live as God would have us live.
3. However, this doesn't mean that God isn't anxiously waiting on us to decide that we need to return back to him. Sometimes we realize the error of our ways while we are living away from God, but sometimes we have to hit rock bottom first, and that is exactly what happened with this son. He realized that he had hit rock bottom, and we read this in **vv.17-19**. He realized that his life wasn't even up to the standard of his dad's servants. He knew that he had messed up, and he knew that it was time to return home. Yet, he also realized that he didn't deserve his dad's mercy for his foolish decisions. Instead, he was willing to live just as his dad's servants lived and be a servant himself. Thus we see him making his way back to His dad's house.

B. It forgives us of all sin.

1. Once the younger son arrives back with his dad he says, ***"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son."*** (v.21) He must have been expecting for his dad to only allow him to live there again as one of his hired servants, but instead we see the dad leap at the occasion of his son coming home and commanding for a celebration to immediately take place, ***"for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found." And they began to celebrate.*** (v.24)
2. There doesn't seem to be any hesitation on the part of the dad to forgive his son and welcome him lovingly back into the family. He was immediately give many different symbols of sonship in the form of the best robe, a ring, sandals, and the fattened calf was to be prepared so that they might eat in celebration. The son's apparent repentance and desire to simply be a small part of his dad's family was reason enough for the dad to fully forgive his son and welcome him back with open arms. So, too, does God desire to welcome us back into His arms.

3. Of course, God would much rather we never leave His fellowship to begin with, but when we do make the decision to rebel against Him, He stands ready and willing to forgive us. Through humility and repentance, God is willing to forgive us of our sins and accept us back into His fellowship. *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9)* He wants for us to be saved and in fellowship with Him, and he is willing to forgive us of our sins...if we are willing to recognize our need for repentance. Sometimes that will demand that we read rock bottom, but be that as it may, if we will return in humility and penitence we will be fully forgiven by our great God.

III. The older son teaches us about ourselves.

A. We cannot ignore our own shortcomings.

1. While the dad was quickly willing to forgive and receive back his younger son who had rebelled and yet is not penitent, the older son/brother was not so quick to forgive and move on. In fact, we read beginning **v.25** that the son is quite angry that his dad is so quick to forgive. After inquiring as to what all the commotion was about and being told that his brother had returned, the Scripture tells us, *“But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been seeing you and have never neglected a command of your; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’” (vv.28-30)*
2. Let’s notice a few things about what the older brother says here. Firstly, he behaves as if he has never done anything to disrespect or go against his dad’s commands. I know that there are some pretty great kids out there, but I highly suspect that even the best of kids slip up and go against their parent’s wishes at one time or another. While this son might not have fully rebelled in the way his younger brother did, this son still more than likely couldn’t behave as if he were a perfect child and deserved everything the younger brother was being given.
3. Further, would you notice how he speaks about his brother? *“When this son of yours came...”* This brother isn’t even willing to acknowledge his brother as actually being his brother! He was so upset with the celebration of the younger brother’s return that he wouldn’t even acknowledge him as his own flesh and blood! Even if this son truly was sinless, that streak had now been broken by his hateful attitude towards his brother who had returned home. He was spiteful and behaving jealously, and his pride and arrogance led him to behave in such a way thinking he deserved better than what he had received from his dad. Yet if we are not careful...we can fall into the same type of mindset with a lost person either comes or returns to the Lord. We can become spiteful at the celebration of such a thing, and that should never be the case.

B. We should always welcome the repentance of others.

1. Instead of bashing the older son who was behaving so poorly, notice the patience of the dad as he responds to his first born, *“And he said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But 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.’” (vv.32,32)* The focus at this juncture shouldn’t have been upon the older brother’s faithfulness. It was a good thing and surely was appreciate, but the focus was now on the restoration of the younger brother who had strayed. The dad refers to him as having been dead, but now being alive again!
2. This should bring to our minds the two parables before this one and the whole reason Jesus shared these parables to begin with. He was spending time eating with tax collectors and sinners, and the Pharisees and scribes wanted to make a big deal out of it. Jesus then tells these three parables to show them how their attitudes were out of line. Each parable shares

the fact that something is lost. First it was a sheep, then a coin, and now a son. In each of these parables the lost things were either found or returned, and in each case there was a celebration. However, the celebration wasn't just for the one who found the lost thing, but it was also for anyone else who could rejoice. Finding lost things is a cause for rejoicing, and in no way is this more true than when the spiritually lost return back to God. We should never allow thoughts of jealousy or resentment to creep into our minds because if it does then we are no better than the Pharisees and scribes. Each of these groups had their own shortcomings, and they often wouldn't acknowledge such things. Instead they would only hound on Jesus eating with the tax collectors and sinners, but that was exactly where they needed to be...with Jesus learning how to come back to God. This should be our only desire...that sinners come to Jesus. This should bring us great joy to see the lost being found.

Often when we consider this text we focus mostly just on the prodigal son, but hopefully we can see the tremendous and important lessons that can and need to be learned from the dad and the older brother. May each of us be well aware of the dangers of sin, why we need the grace of God, and how we ought to respond to others who see the error of their ways and come back to the Lord. If we are not careful... we can easily find ourselves in the same shoes of either of these brothers. Therefore, may God help us to be ever mindful of the temptations of the devil and stand firmly in the strength of our God so that we might defeat him in whatever way he might seek to tempt us. A story of a dad and two sons...may this great parable of our Lord Jesus be on our minds as we go throughout the rest of our days.