

The Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-32

- The parable of “The Prodigal Son” is one of the most moving and thought-provoking parables Jesus ever uttered.
- It contains valuable lessons for our age and every age.
- It will motivate us to be merciful to those turning from sin and drawing near to God.

Two Sons

LUK 15:11 **And He said, "A certain man had two sons;**

1. The parable speaks of “a certain man” and his two sons
2. The "younger son" may represent the sinful Jews (verses 1,7,10) and the elder brother those [the self-righteous religious leaders] who criticized Jesus for receiving sinners. (Lk. 15:2).
 - a. LUK 15:2 And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."
 - b. This is not the first time Jesus had received this criticism. (Matt. 9:11-13).

MAT 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to His disciples, "Why is your Teacher eating with the tax-gatherers and sinners?"

MAT 9:12 But when He heard this, He said, "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick.

MAT 9:13 "But go and learn what this means, 'I desire compassion, and not sacrifice,' for I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Some things, such as, mercy and obedience, must come before sacrifices are acceptable. (1 Sam. 15: 22,23).

c. See Luke 19:10.

3. The parable will tell about each of these sons.
4. It is a part of the parabolic discourse beginning with Luke 15:3.

LUK 15:12 **and the younger of them said to his father, ' Father, give me the share of the estate [property, wealth] that falls to me.' And he divided his wealth between them.**

1. The older son would normally receive a double portion. (Deut. 21:17).

DEU 21:17 "But he shall acknowledge the first-born, the son of the unloved, by giving him **a double portion of all that he has**, for he is the beginning of his strength; to him belongs the right of the first-born.

2. The younger son then would receive one-third of his father's estate.

3. The father divided his estate between the two sons while he was living. Abraham divided his estate in his lifetime. (Gen. 25:1-6).

GEN 25:1 Now Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah.

GEN 25:2 And she bore to him Zimran and Jokshan and Medan and Midian and Ishbak and Shuah.

GEN 25:3 And Jokshan became the father of Sheba and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim and Letushim and Leummim.

GEN 25:4 And the sons of Midian were Ephah and Epher and Hanoch and Abida and Eldaah. All these were the sons of Keturah.

GEN 25:5 **Now Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac;**

GEN 25:6 but to the sons of his concubines, Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and sent them away from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the east.

Younger Son Leaves Home His Season Of Indulgence

LUK 15:13 **"And not many days later [with all haste], the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered [wasted, scattered] his estate with loose living.**

1. He probably felt filthy rich for a time.
2. The "distant country" [lit. far country] is not specified and is not important to the parable. See "that country" (Lk. 15:14,15).
3. The words "with loose living" are explained in Luke 15:30.

LUK 15:30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth **with harlots**, you killed the fattened calf for him.'

4. The words "gathered everything together" likely means "converted to cash his inheritance." See Lk. 15:14 "spent everything"

His Misery

LUK 15:14 **"Now when he had spent everything, a severe [mighty]famine occurred in that country, and he began to be in need [dire circumstances].**

1. He had no money, no job, no family, no friends, no self-esteem.
2. The fun had ended, and he was worried about survival with no income and no money in a horrific economy.
3. He was too proud and too ashamed to return home.
4. He was in desperate need, and each day in the hog pen he suffered and more and more recognized his horrible condition.

LUK 15:15 **"And he went and attached himself to one of the [Gentile] citizens of that [distant] country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.**

1. Feeding swine was the lowest and most degrading and humiliating possible job for the Jew.
2. The Jews would not keep or eat swine.

3. Swine were unclean to the Jews. (Lev. 11:7, 8; Deut. 14:8).

LEV 11:7 and the pig, for though it divides the hoof, thus making a split hoof, it does not chew cud, it is unclean to you.
LEV 11:8 'You shall not eat of their flesh nor touch their carcasses; they are unclean to you.

DEU 14:8 "And the pig, because it divides the hoof but does not chew the cud, it is unclean for you. You shall not eat any of their flesh nor touch their carcasses.

4. "One of the citizens" denotes a Gentile.

5. Ordinarily he would have had nothing to do with a Gentile, but desperation changed all that.

ACT 10:28 And he said to them, "You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a man who is a Jew to associate with a foreigner or to visit him; and yet God has shown me that I should not call any man unholy or unclean.

6. This scene gives us a vivid picture of a Jewish man on "skid row."

7. He had reached rock bottom and was utterly miserable.

8. He was reaping what he had sown. (Gal. 6:7,8).

LUK 15:16 **"And he was longing to fill his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.** Gr. "keration" - husks, carob pods

1. The hogs were probably eating carob pods that are still found in abundance in Palestine.

a. Pods of the carob tree are frequently mentioned in rabbinical literature as fodder for domestic animals.

b. It was food for men only in the most dire circumstances.

c. He was long for hog food, but no one was giving him even this food.

d. The carob pods were shaped like little horns, and they had a gelatinous substance inside with a sweet taste.

e. It was used used for swine, and was consumed by the poorest of people.

2. These carob pods are scarcely palatable as a steady diet, but he did not even have that much.

3. He had gone from a life of blessing to living with the pigs.

Prodigal Comes To His Senses Step One

"He came to his senses"

LUK 15:17 **"But 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 [famine]!' The word "perish" in the original is used here in the sense of "dying."**

1. The words "he came to his senses" denotes self-evaluation, right thinking, and repentance.

a. He was ready to change his life.

- b. He had experienced a life devoted to pleasure and folly, and now knew its bitter ending.
2. He recognized what a fool he had been.
 - a. He had lost the fellowship of his father and the comforts of home.
 - b. He had lost his self-respect.
 - c. He had lost all he had materially. He had nothing, but his dirty, stinky clothes.
 - d. He had no wife or children or friends.
 - e. He had lost his soul as long as he remained in the “distant country” in sin and misery.
 3. Several things had brought him to his senses.
 - a. His empty pocket book was a major contributor to his change of mind.
 - b. The famine added to his misery.
 - c. He learned how hard life could be apart from his father.
 - d. He learned he really had no friends, and no one cared about his horrible condition.
 - e. His memory of his home life aided in bringing him to his senses.

Step 2

He made a decision to return home and confess sins.

LUK 15:18 **'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;** Lit. “before you.”

1. He made a decision to return home and confess his sins.
 - a. This was a hard decision to admit “I have sinned.”
 - b. He did not blame his sins on others.
 - c. He accepted full responsibility for his sins. He was not blaming others.
2. These words "and in your sight" may indicate in this parable the father does not represent God.
 - a. Lk.15:11 “A **certain man** had two sons.”
 - b. See Lk. 15:21 - “**I have sinned against heaven and in your sight**”
 - c. “Heaven” appears to stand for “God.”
 - 1) All sin is against God. (Gen. 39:9; Psa. 51:3,4).

GEN 39:9 "There is no one greater in this house than I, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great evil, and sin against God?"

PSA 51:3 For I know my transgressions, And my sin is ever before me.

PSA 51:4 Against Thee, Thee only, I have sinned, And done what is evil in Thy sight, So that Thou art justified when Thou dost speak, And blameless when Thou dost judge.

- 2) This younger son had a realization he had sinned against God and his father.
3. The younger son had also sinned against his father by dishonoring him and hurting him. (Lk. 15:12, 13).
 - a. The father was heart-broken and shamed when his son left home for a life of sin.
 - b. It was evident that his son was rebellious and was doomed to discover the horrible consequences of sin.
4. In so doing he above all had sinned against God who had given the commandment to honor parents. (Exod. 20:12).
5. His life of immorality had been a sin against God, as well as, others.

LUK 15:19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men. "'

1. The words "I am no longer worthy" reveal the drastic change in his attitude. He has become very humble.
2. The Greek word used here ,by Luke, is "misthios" [**m**ees thee ahs] which means "a hired man, a day laborer."
3. A hired man worked only a day at a time and had no guarantee of employment and lived on the edge of starvation and destitution.
4. He had no hope of being restored as a son after his shameful and sinful actions.
5. He hoped to be received as a hired servant. He would then at least have: (1) Food (2) Shelter (3) Be out of the hog pen (4) Have clothing (5) Regain some of his self-respect (6) Be near his father and older brother.

Prodigal Comes To His Senses Step 3 He leaves for home with a penitent heart.

LUK 15:20 "And 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.

1. He is humble and desperate and acts very quickly without delay.
2. The father sees his beloved son coming "while he was still a long way off" and he is moved with "compassion" (not anger) and runs to greet him.
 - a. The father could have been angered because of what the boy had put him through, and because the son had wasted one-third of the estate.
 - b. He could have rebuked him or even driven him away.
2. The father may have been constantly looking for his son, and hoping every day he would return. He had never given up on him.
3. This father dearly loved his son, and longed for the return of his son. We do not know how long the son had been away from home.

4. The words “embrace him” literally mean “to fall on his neck.”
 - a. The Greek “kataphileo” [kah tah fee **leh** oh] has the idea of kissing him over and over again.
 - b. See Acts 20:37; Gen 33:4; 45:14,15.

Prodigal Repents
Step 4
The prodigal confesses sin.

LUK 15:21 "And 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.'

1. See Lk. 15:18 ,19 - “I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.”
2. It does not appear that the son was able to finish saying all that he had planned to say.
3. It is very possible that his father stopped him before he finished his speech although a few old manuscripts do contain the words “make me as one of the hired servants.”

Father Celebrates Return Of Son

LUK 15:22 "But 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;

- “slaves” is from the Greek word “doulos” [**doo** lahs] meaning “servant, slave.” See Luke 15:26.
 - They are called “hired men” earlier in this chapter. (Lk. 15:17, 19).
1. The father evidently had control over the property that he had given to his older son or he had not given his sons all of his possessions.
 2. The prodigal son had wasted much and hurt his father and perhaps others deeply.
 3. The father still does not rebuke or chastise the son, but he shows deep, pure love and forgiveness.
 4. The father could clearly see the son's sorrow, so that no condemnation was necessary.
 5. "The robe" was a long and stately garment, such as scribes might love to promenade in.
 - a. The son was in shabby, dirty, stinky clothes, but the father orders that the “best robe” be placed on his son.
 - b. See Mark 16:5; Luke 22:46.
 6. “Sandals” were a luxury, and servants did not always have them.
 - a. The Greek has “hupodema” [hoo **pah** day mah] means “sandal, footwear.”
 - b. The word is used a number of times in the gospels (Matt. 3:11; 10:10; Mk. 1:7; 6:9; Lk. 3:16; 22:35; Jn. 1:27).
 7. "The ring" may have been a signet, indicating a person of standing or authority in the house.

LUK 15:23 and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry;

1. "The fatted calf" was an animal reserved for special occasions of rejoicing and hospitality.
2. The words "let us eat and be merry" are not defined.
3. They may refer to friends and relatives.
4. Slaves [hired servants] may also be included in the words "let us." (Lk. 15:22).
5. The main point is the celebration of the son's return.

LUK 15:24 for this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' And they began to be merry.

- "was dead" - the father may have believed his son was literally dead, but it probably has a figurative meaning.
 - Lit. "having been lost" - "Lost" is not used in the sense he did not know where he was, but it is used to mean he was "lost" in sin and lost to him.
1. Observe the words "this son of mine." The father still recognizes the wayward son as his son.
 2. What joy was in the heart of this father!
 3. It was though the son who had been lost (for what seemed forever) had been raised from the dead.
 4. The father knows his son is now safe and now once again he will have sweet fellowship with him.
 5. What a glorious day!

The Older Son **Second Part Of Parable**

LUK 15:25 "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.

1. "older son" is from "presbuteros" [pres **boo** ter rahs] meaning "older."
 - a. It is used at times to mean one older or advanced in age. (1 Tim. 5:1,2).
 - b. It is not used in an official sense here. (Acts 14:23).
 - c. Here it literally denotes the older brother. We have no hint of his age and his age is unimportant.
2. "Music" is "sumphonia" [soom foh **nee** ah].
 - a. The kind of music is not specified.
 - b. It may have been instrumental or vocal or both.
3. "Dancing" is from "choros" [khah **rahs**] denoting an unspecified form of dancing or leaping with joy. It may have been a circular dance by those celebrating the prodigal son return.

LUK 15:26 **"And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things might be.**

1. The word "summoned" is literally "called," but "summoned" is the idea.
2. The term "servants" is from "pais" meaning "child, youth." It is also used to mean "a servant, slave." (Matt. 8:6, 8, 13).
3. It may be used here to denote one of the servants mentioned in this parable or perhaps one of their children.

Servant's Reply

LUK 15:27 **"And 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.'**

1. The servant referred to the brother with the words "your brother." (Lk. 15:26).
2. In contrast to the older brother the slaves [hired servants] were happy. (Lk. 15:24b).

Elder Brother Becomes Angry

LUK 15:28 **"But he [the older brother] became angry, and was not willing to go in [the house]; and his father came out and began entreating [pleading with] him.**

1. Instead of rejoicing over his restored brother, he became angry.
 - a. He may have gone into a rage of jealousy.
 - b. He may have resented the younger brother before he left home, and all this attention to his brother has enraged him even more.
 - c. He would be happy if the brother went away or was dead.
2. He sulked outside the house and would not rejoice over the return of his fallen brother though his father entreated him.
3. He wanted his brother to remain in the far country or at the very least not received back as a son.
4. He may have even been glad his brother had left.
 - a. He then would have the whole estate for himself.
 - b. He would have all the attention.

LUK 15:29 **"But he [the older brother] 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 kid [much less a calf], that I might be merry with my friends;**

1. He complained because he had not even been given a kid that was worth much less than "a fatted calf."
2. He is implying that if anyone got anything, it should have been him. He had always been faithful, that is, "He had never neglected a command" of his father.

3. He speaks with true Pharisee spirit. (Lk. 18:11,12; Rom. 3:9).

“Son Of Yours”

LUK 15:30 **but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with harlots, you killed the fattened calf for him.'**

- He does not refer to the returning son as a brother, but says “this son of yours.”
 - “devoured your wealth” - The older son still views the estate as belonging to the father, and argues the younger son had devoured his father’s wealth with the harlots.
 - He was trying to create resentment on the part of the father against the younger son.
 - He despised the attention his brother was receiving from the father and others.
1. The eldest brother represents the Pharisees and others like them who found fault with Jesus for receiving sinners.
 2. **The older brother was:**
 - a. **Self-righteous** - He could see nothing good about his brother and nothing bad about himself.
 - b. **Jealous** - It appalled him that his father was giving a celebration for this dreadful, sinful brother and not for him.
 - c. **Heartless** - He had no mercy for his brother. He was heartless and would have preferred he had remained lost in sin. He might have been ok if his brother was treated as one of the hired servants, but this is not stated or implied.
 - d. **Anger** - There was no rejoicing, but only anger. (Lk. 15:28).
 3. His whole outlook toward his brother was one of disdain and utter contempt.
 4. He could not see if his father had gained a son that he had gained a brother.
 5. The words “this your son” suggests he disclaimed him as a brother.

Father's Response To Older Son

LUK 15:31 **"And he said to him, 'My child, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.**

1. The father calls him “my child” and lets him know that he would inherit everything.
2. The remaining two-thirds of his father's possessions were his.
3. The fact the father was celebrating the return of his younger son did not mean even for a moment that he did not love the older son or that his love for him had diminished.

“Brother Of Yours”

LUK 15:32 **'But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.'** "

1. The father says "for this brother of yours" reminding his older son that the returned son was his brother.
2. His son had been "dead" spiritually, but now was alive
3. The father was excited and very thankful over his son's return.
4. He wanted all to rejoice over the return of his beloved son.
5. The angels were rejoicing. (Lk. 15:10).

Lessons

1. Sin brings temporary joy. (Heb. 11:24, 25).

HEB 11:24 By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

HEB 11:25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, **than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin;**

2. Sin will make us miserable and lead to our condemnation. (Gal. 6:7,8).
3. God stands ready to forgive all who repent even those who have fallen into the depths of sin.
 - a. See Isa. 1:18; Matt. 11:28-30.

ISA 1:18 "Come now, and let us reason together," Says the Lord, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They will be like wool.

MAT 11:28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

MAT 11:29 "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls.

MAT 11:30 "For My yoke is easy, and My load is light."

- b. God is also willing to forgive His children. (1 Jn. 1:7, 9).
4. God will richly bless those who return to Him.
 - a. He forgives them, and gives them the status of son.
 - b. They enjoy His spiritual blessings for this life and the life to come.
5. It is vital that we return to God before it is too late for us and others.
 - a. Our hearts may later be hardened by "the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. 3:13).
 - b. Death may overtake us. (Prov. 27:1; Jas. 4:14).
 - c. Our opportunity to influence others to come to God may pass.
 - d. Each of us have an influence on others.
6. We must never be like the elder brother who was jealous and hateful and refused to rejoice that his brother had returned home.

7. We must receive those who return with joy and accept them into full fellowship.
 - a. There is no scriptural authority for putting them on probation or treating them in an inferior way.
 - b. God completely forgives and so must we.
8. We must never have the attitude that those coming back to God are not sincere and do not deserve God's forgiveness and our help, fellowship, and forgiveness.
9. The "older son" said he had "never neglected" any of the commandments of his father.
 - a. This was probably a stretch in this parable.
 - b. The "older son" represented the religious leaders of the Jews.
 - c. They may have been sinless in their own minds, but they were far from it. Read Matthew 15 & 23.

"Scripture taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,
© Copyright 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation
Used by permission." (www.Lockman.org)