

Parable of the Sons & Father

Luke 15¹¹⁻³¹

Warm Up Question(s) – Choose one

- Where are you in the birth order of your family of origin—youngest, oldest, middle? Were you more of a “follow the rules” or a “break the rules” kind of kid?
- How old were you when you left home? Where did you go? What did you do? How ready were you to leave home?

Introduction

The parable of the Prodigal Son is one of the best known of all the parables of Jesus. It has often been preached at evangelistic meetings as a call to repentance and as an assurance of God’s forgiveness for wayward sinners. But Jesus’ target audience for this parable was a group of people who claimed to be God followers, which begs the question, who is the parable for and what is(are) its message(s)?

Discovering the Word

- 1) **Read Luke 15:11-32.** A variety of titles has been given to this well-known parable: “The Prodigal Son”, “The Prodigal Sons”, “The Waiting Father”, “A Dysfunctional family”, and so forth. What working title would you give this story and why?
- 2) What stories immediately precede this parable? What prompted Jesus to tell them and what do they have in common?¹
- 3) Why do you think the younger son wanted his inheritance *before* his father died? How would you feel if one of your kids asked for his/her inheritance early to move very far away from you?
- 4) What caused the younger son to “come to his senses” (v.17)?
- 5) What options did the younger son have at that point? What option did he choose and why?
- 6) If you were the father, how would you have responded when your son returned?
 - a) “Good to see you—but you’re grounded!”
 - b) “Where’s the money?”
 - c) “I don’t approve of what you did, but you’re still my son.”
 - d) “Welcome home, son—I love you!”
 - e) “Do you realize how worried I was?”
 - f) Other: _____
- 7) How do you think the older son felt when he heard about the party? Why?
- 8) What do the different words used to refer to the prodigal son (“one of your hired men”^{v.19}, “this some of mine”^{v.24}, “your brother”^{v.27}, “this son of yours”^{v.30}, “this brother of yours”^{v.32}) say about how he was viewed by himself and others? Whose opinion of him do you think carried the most weight?²
- 9) What prevented the older brother from coming to the homecoming party?
- 10) If each of the main characters shared a lesson they learned, what might each of those lessons be? How has this parable impacted you in the past? In the present?

¹ A derogatory label like “sinners” (v.1) can be powerful. Could it be that Jesus is testing out a better label like “lost”?

² It is helpful to consider the impression the father made for, as Timothy Geddert notes, “The father’s running to meet him is *one of the most stunning expressions of grace* in the entire Bible [for] old men in that culture did not run [since] they would have to pick up their robes [and] make themselves laughingstocks!” Good News For All People (2016), p. 201.