

Prodigal Son

Good morning Southwest Family

Fellowship. I hope y'all have had a good week. This week we are going to be diving back into our Summer in the Parables series and unpacking the Parable of the Prodigal Son. This Parable is found in Luke 15.

Now Luke 15 has three parables in a row that all talk about something being lost than found. Jesus is telling these Parables to the Pharisees and religious leaders. It is very similar circumstances to last weeks parable where he is trying to teach and renew the hearts of these religious leaders who are not open to learning or changing. These parables are specifically tailored and told to show them the error of their ways and the lack of love and restoration found in their hearts. But they cannot see it. All they see is a

man challenging their power and authority, and someone they must take down.

This chapter starts out with Jesus telling the Parable of the Lost Sheep to a crowd filled with tax collectors, sinners, and religious leaders. The tax collectors and sinners are eagerly listening and ready to hear what Jesus has to say but the religious leaders are scoffing and looking down on Jesus for communing with sinners. They have a diluted sense that they have attained proper righteousness and because of this standing they think they have, they can look down upon others.

Jesus explains in the parable that if a shepherd has 100 sheep and one goes missing, that they would go looking for the lost sheep and would do everything possible until they found it, and then they would celebrate extravagantly

when it was found. He ends the parable with saying this to the crowd in verse 7, “7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”

He is explaining that new believers and those reconciled to Christ that come back and repent are so important and are worth celebrating. Just as the shepherd would celebrate the found sheep, God celebrates a lost soul coming to him and being reconciled. The piety and self righteousness of the religious leaders makes them feel like they are so much more important and special because they are part of the religious group of people who “don’t have to repent.” So they should be heralded more than the sinner repenting and reconciling with God.

If one of my dogs got out and was running away in the neighborhood, I wouldn’t just look at the second one and be like, “Well I still have you so who cares about the other one?” No! I would make sure the other one is secure in the house or yard and then run to go find and retrieve the lost dog. And I would rejoice and celebrate when I found her. And I believe my other dog would celebrate and rejoice with me!

Next he tells the Parable of the Lost coin and talks about how if a woman had 10 coins and lost one she would drop everything and look for that coin until it was found. He again ends the parable with this message in verse 10, “10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

The message is consistent. Sinners being redeemed and reconciled with Christ is a key component of the heart of Christ and God. These religious leaders cannot see this, they do not hear or feel the call of God on their hearts to help facilitate this heart. If they had they would be celebrating and rejoicing every time a sinner repents and follows God.

Jesus told those two Parables which were shorter and simpler, and then hits them with the deep and powerful parable of the Lost Son or Prodigal Son. It's a longer passage but it's worth reading in it's entirety. Let's dive into that in Luke 15:11-31.

11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. **12** The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

13 "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. **14** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. **16** He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! **18** I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. **19** I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' **20** So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. **23** Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. **24** For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

PART TWO

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music

and dancing. **26** So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. **27** ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. **29** But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. **30** But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

31 “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. **32** But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this

brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.””

That leads us into our first point for today

This Parable shows us the danger of pride and self righteousness and it calls us to humility.

We must analyze the prodigal son's journey from arrogance to humility and understand it as the cautionary tale it is. We also must understand and analyze the older son and his own lostness. This Parable is often called the Parable of the Prodigal Son or the Parable of the Lost Son. But I truly believe a better title would have been, the Parable of the Lost Sons. One ran off physically and rebelled, the other stayed and rebelled. They both had pride and self-righteousness in their hearts, and they both needed humility. We saw it happen in the

younger son but did not see the character development happen in the older son.

We can also see the level of love and humility in the father. In these Ancient Jewish contexts, the patriarch or fatherly leader of the household was meant to carry themselves with dignity, restraint and class. They were not to run or hurry anywhere, they were meant to elegantly and profoundly move from place to place. But in the story we see in verse 20 it says, **“20 So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”**

He ran, he picked up his robe and did the child like and foolish behavior of running. To us in modern times that might not seem like much but in this time, the whole town and area would

have turned and looked with wonderment at seeing the father run out to his son. But like the verse said, he was filled with compassion for him and he ran to him. The humility in the father was so profound that he did not care what he looked like or what message he conveyed. All he wanted to do was love on his son, to reach him as soon as possible.

This is how I picture God when we decide to dedicate our lives to him and accept his love and grace. Him frantically and lovingly sprinting over to us to hug us, embrace us and welcome us home.

With the sons we see how pride can lead us away from God (or the father) and result in destructive choices and consequences.

When we look at the older son we see the dangers of self righteousness. We see a man who does not have a lot of compassion or an understanding spirit. He is jealous, he is resentful, and he feels he deserves better for never leaving. He cannot celebrate his brother's return.

The younger son thought he could live a better life, a more fun life, a more fruitful life, away from the father. So he physically rebelled and self righteously took off on his own. The other son on the other hand diligently worked for the father and continued to love and serve him, but when things didn't go his way, he began to resent him. Both sons show their form of lostness and their need for reconciliation and humility.

One showed that rebellion in an outward physical running away. The other harbored resentment and bitterness in his heart. It led to feelings of self-righteousness, pride and entitlement.

Timothy Keller in his book *The Prodigal God* says this about the older son, "However, in this parable Jesus wants us to discern another, more subtle, but no less devastating form of lostness. Once we have Jesus's deeper definition of sin we should be able to recognize it, and it is crucial that we do. We will call it "elder-brother lostness." It brings as much misery and strife into the world as the other kind. A closer look at the elder brother helps us discern its features.

We see that the elder brother "became angry." All of his words are dripping with resentment.

The first sign you have an elder-brother spirit is that when your life doesn't go as you want, you aren't just sorrowful but deeply angry and bitter. Elder brothers believe that if they live a good life they should get a good life, that God owes them a smooth road if they try very hard to live up to standards."

Humility is an essential virtue in our lives, and we must seek God's guidance and surrender our egos, to avoid the pitfalls of pride. We mustn't have this elder brother spirit where we get angry, bitter and resentful when our lives don't go the way we want them to. We also mustn't feel like we can go off and live a better, more fruitful life on our own like the younger brother. Both showed the dangers of pride and self righteousness, and show their need for humility. And it also showed their need for forgiveness and reconciliation.

That leads us into our second point for today, This Parables shows us the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Our parable from last week is very similar to our Parable today. Last week a father asked his two sons to work in a vineyard and one said No, but did it later after repenting and reconciling, and the other said Yes but didn't do it. Well in this Parable the father is desiring his sons' love and close relationship and the first says no and runs off to live his own life, but then is remorseful and repentant and wants that relationship with his father desperately again. The older son on the other hand initially says yes to the father and is in close relationship to him, serves him well, is connected to him, but over time his entitlement, resentment and bitterness turn his yes to being connected and close to his

father into a deep distance of anger and resentment.

We continue to see Jesus talking to these Pharisees and religious leaders through these Parables throughout his ministry journey. And throughout he tells similar messages, that even though they seem to be saying Yes to God, seem to be following his will, seem to be obeying and doing all the right and righteous things, their own hearts, feelings and judgment are keeping them removed and separated from true relationship and closeness with God.

They say they believe in the power of forgiveness and reconciliation and the power of God's love, but their actions do not back up their intentions or words.

The father's response to the prodigal son's return is a symbol of God's unconditional love and forgiveness. The elder son's response to the love the father shares with the younger son is a metaphor for the religious leaders' view of Jesus loving and forgiving the "sinners", the dirty tax collectors and prostitutes that they have labelled as unworthy by their own views of righteousness and their own spiritual authority.

We have to remember the transformative power of forgiveness and its ability to restore broken relationships. Jesus' power of forgiveness and reconciliation is powerful enough to redeem and restore the tax collectors, the prostitutes, the sinners and even the religious leaders. It was hard for these religious leaders to see that they were in fact the older son in this Parable, or that they were the other son in the Parable from last week.

This parable teaches us the power of forgiveness and reconciliation. It shows us what God has done for us, continues to do for us and what he calls us to do for others. We must reflect on our own lives and consider extending forgiveness to those who have hurt us, and through that we will be fostering reconciliation and healing. We were forgiven freely so we must forgive freely. Both sons in this Parable were forgiven freely, but each had different responses to that forgiveness. And the reality is, we have different responses to forgiveness.

It's easy to say were forgiven, therefore we should forgive. But on the other hand its harder to do. The younger son is so wowed and blown away by the father's love and compassion that he receives the forgiveness and reconciliation, even though he knows he doesn't deserve it. The elder son sees this and knows the same, he

knows his brother doesn't deserve it, so he can't accept it. He becomes bitter that his father would do this to him, it becomes all about him. It's all about how it affects him. His brother already asked for his inheritance, he already took the money and blew it, he shouldn't get another chance. His brother was turned off to forgiveness and reconciliation and therefore wasn't impacted by its power or love being displayed by his father. His responses were similar to how the religious leaders looked at Jesus' ministry to the desolate, the sinners, the outcasts.

In this time asking for one's inheritance before your father was already dead and gone was extremely disrespectful and was essentially the younger son saying, "I wish you were dead already!" He was asking the father to sell off land and possessions so that he could have the

money early to party and go do his own thing. He was disrupting the natural order and typically this level of disrespect in this patriarchal society would have led him to being beat, disowned and thrown out with no money or inheritance.

The father though acted out of love and patience and instead gave the son his request. He had so much love and compassion for his son that he did it. In verses 13 and 14 we can see how quickly his life of abundance turned to despair, **13** "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. **14** After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need."

So quickly his plan to go off and live this extravagant life away from his father, turned into

a sad, desperate life filled with despair. His pride and self righteousness led him to a place where he was eating with the pigs and not knowing how he was going to survive. He was humbled real quick and saw a slight opportunity to go back to his father, tail between his legs, hat in hand and ask for forgiveness and then take the place of a servant or worker to then try and repay his debt.

Even his father's workers lived better and more sustainable lives than what he was living. So he set off for home, he had his whole speech prepared, he had his whole reasoning laid out, he was hoping and praying his father would at least accept this. In verses 20-22, **20** So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'**22** "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.'" His father had so much love and compassion for him that he forgave him and loved him.

Timothy Keller in his book *The Prodigal God*, explains the dynamic of putting the best robe on him and what it signifies, he says, "The best robe in the house would have been the father's own robe, the unmistakable sign of restored standing in the family. The father is saying, "I am not going to wait until you've paid off your debt; I'm not going to wait until you've duly groveled. You are not going to earn your way back into the family, I am going to simply take you back, I will cover your nakedness,

poverty, and rags with the robes of my office and honor.”

His father forgave him and loved him out of his own love and forgiveness, not based on anything the son did. Just like God loves us, forgives us and restores us out of his own love, not anything we have done. The father showed the youngest son the power of forgiveness and reconciliation. He hoped that he would just have warm meals and a job that keeps him going in life, he never would have expected the father to take him back with open arms and restore his place in the family, and restore his inheritance and value in the family.

He never could've expected that his father's love and forgiveness could be extended to him, he was not like his loyal and hardworking brother. But the father's love, forgiveness and

reconciliation was extended and available to both sons. There was always a hope by the father that the younger son would come home, there was always an invitation to return to the family.

That leads us into our third point for today, This Parable shows us that God's redemptive love and invitation to return to the family of God is for all.

The father had an unwavering love and patiently waited for his wayward son to return. He never stopped loving him and always hoped he would come back home. Our heavenly father never stops loving us and always hopes we will come back home, that we will walk back into his redemptive arms of love.

God's love remains constant, regardless of our mistakes and failures. Our pride and our fear can keep us from the forgiveness and reconciliation we are promised from Christ. It can also keep us from humility and leaning into God and accepting his invitation to return to the family of God. Or it can keep us from humility and lead us into self righteousness and entitlement where we feel jealous or look down upon others being celebrated, loved or blessed by God because of the lack we perceive towards ourselves.

When we feel distant from God, we must recognize His open arms directed towards us, prompting us to return to Him and experience His boundless grace. And when we see God extending that love and grace to others we must be secure and settled in who we are and our identity in Christ, so that we may celebrate with

them and joyfully welcome them into the family of God, rather than be jealous of them.

This Parable is a calling home for both sons. One physically remained but his Spirit and heart wavered from accepting his place at home. The other physically left but emotionally was always longing to come home, just had to rebel and fall to fully see it. Each rebelled and lost their identity and true place. Just like we can lose our true place and identity. We can also judge others and look down upon others based on earthly status, mistakes or the peer view of others.

Jesus' ministry was under scrutiny pretty consistently because of who he ministered to and who he associated with. The religious leaders and "important" people in the Jewish regions looked down upon the fact that Jesus hung out with tax collectors, prostitutes, and

sinners. They did not value these people at the same level as others. Jesus was trying to teach them and show them that everyone is equal in the kingdom of God.

Robert Stein in his New American Commentary on Luke has this to say, “In this chapter we encounter a new scene in which the Pharisees and scribes complain of Jesus’ association with publicans and sinners. Three parables follow that serve both as a defense of Jesus’ ministry to such outcasts and an appeal to his opponents to join in celebrating their entrance into the kingdom. Together the three parables form a tightly knit unit with a single, strongly Lukan theme—God’s love for outcasts and sinners.”

It is not only that these “others,” or the people that the religious leaders, or even our

current society deem less worthy or notable, are of equal value to Jesus. But also these Parables were told and expressed to show that as a follower of Christ we should be celebrating and joyously welcoming any and everyone who enter into the Kingdom of God.

Anyone who accepts God’s love and Jesus’ sacrifice and believes that he died for our sins and rose again. When we choose not to celebrate and joyously welcome these people we are going against the heart of God. We are rejecting parts of the body of Christ. And we are bringing judgement on ourselves as we deem certain people more worthy or righteous than others.

Romans 3:23 lays it out, “23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We are all sinners saved by grace, and therefore

whenever anyone of us is saved and redeemed by God and enters into the family of God we should celebrate joyously. We should not do what the second son did and boycott the celebration because of the entitlement or things we feel like we deserve. We should be in the center of that celebration, joyously welcoming and loving this new person entering the family of God.

Whether the person is a tax collector, prostitute, liar, thief, murderer, adulterer, sexually immoral, or anything else, we should love them and rejoice that they have received the free gift of grace and are redeemed by God. If we are able to be saved and loved by God then so is anyone else. God's redemptive love and invitation to return and join in on his family is for all, and we should live our lives and share God's

love with that notion. It is for all. We should love all. We should share his gospel and heart with all.

The Father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son accepts his son back with open arms, ready to love and accept him, even after everything that has gone down. He is also there with open arms, ready to love and accept his resentful bitter older son. The Father in the Parable is like God who has open arms ready to show redemptive love to us. The two sons are metaphors for us or even different stages of our lives.

The younger son is our rebellious, sinful nature that can take us away from God's direction and will, and the older son is when we are rooted in religion and serving God but lose the message of the gospel, which is redemptive love and sacrifice being provided for all.

The famous painter Rembrandt painted a beautiful portrayal of this coming home of the Prodigal Son. It is called the **Return of the Prodigal Son** and it shows the compassion and the love that the father showed the younger son when he returned home. But if you inspect the painting a bit more, you also see the older brother standing stoic, watching the interaction with contempt in his eyes. You feel the emotion in the painting, you feel the tension and the story being told.

Henri Nouwen in his book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, gives this analysis of the painting and the Parable, "The parable that Rembrandt painted might well be called "The Parable of the Lost Sons." Not only did the younger son, who left home to look for freedom and happiness in a distant country, get lost, but the one who stayed home also became a lost

man. Exterioerly he did all the things a good son is supposed to do, but, interiorly, he wandered away from his father. He did his duty, worked hard every day, and fulfilled all his obligations but became increasingly unhappy and unfree."

Resentment and entitlement can be just as big deterrents to a healthy relationship with Christ as physical and literal rebellion and walking away from faith. They are quieter poisons that permeate our faith and our outlook. We look at things by what we think we deserve, what SHOULD happen, and how others should get treated. We get lost in the comparison and the status.

I shared this quote a few weeks ago from Tim Keller's book on Galatians, and its so good, I

want to read it to you again, “If we see life in this way, we will judge our life each day against who we have been, and who we could have been. When we see progress, we will take legitimate pride in it, whether or not we are better or worse than someone else. We will not compare ourselves with someone who has done less than us (and feel conceited pride) or someone who has done more (and feel conceited despair or envy). God has given them a different load to carry and to serve Him with. Our task is to carry our individual load, not someone else's, in a way that pleases God.”

The older son was not meant to carry the same load as the younger son. He may have been more faithful and devoted to his father physically, but his emotional and spiritual heart was not as open to the love and redemption of the father as the younger son. He was not meant

to compare his interactions with his father to the interactions his brother had with his father.

Just like we are not to compare our interactions with God to the interactions of others with God. We are all loved and saved by grace, and we all carry different loads and have different purposes for our lives. One is not better than the other but they make up the full body of Christ which comes together and glorifies and serves the father well. The Father in this parable desperately wants both sons to serve him well, in harmony and in loving relationship together. He was saddened by the younger son's disrespect, leaving and his rebellion, just as he was saddened by the entitlement and resentment of the older brother.

The last two verses of this Parable are a good reminder for the older son as well as us,

“31 “My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.””

The Father says you are always with me and everything I have is yours. God has unconditional love and care for us and part of that love is him sharing his blessings with us. That is our promise as children of God, that is our promise through receiving God’s free gift of love, grace, and redemption. But he also reminds him, that part of sharing in everything God has, is celebrating with God when someone comes home and joins the family of God. Joyfully welcoming them and happily loving them as they are new members of our family.

Tom Wright in his book *Luke for Everyone* sums up this dynamic “That sums up the older brother in the story. And it's the older brother who provides the real punch-line of the parable. This is Jesus' response to his critics. They were so focused on the wickedness of the tax-collectors and sinners, and of Jesus himself for daring to eat with them despite claiming to be a prophet of God's kingdom, that they couldn't see the sunlight sparkling through the fresh spring leaves of God's love. Here were all these people being changed, being healed, having their lives transformed physically, emotionally, morally and spiritually; and the grumblers could only see litter, the human garbage that they normally despised and avoided.”

This Parable is a wonderful reminder that God has invited us all to come home, all of us that have rebelled “far” from God and what we feel like is “less far.” All of us have this invite sent to us to come home. No matter what type of rebellion, what level, what amount, we are forgiven and reconciled and we are called to turn from a life of pride and self righteousness into a life of humility and love. We see the power of God’s forgiveness and reconciliation and we see through the lives of both sons how easy it is to rebel and fall away from close relationship and intimacy with the father.

Whether you were once lost and now you are found and you are apart of the family of God, or you’re still feeling lost and want to be found and join the family of God. God invites us all home, he invites us all back into his loving and redemptive arms, he’s ready to forgive us and

reconcile with us. And most exciting of all is he’s ready to celebrate and rejoice at our repentance and return home. My prayer would be that we all be found after being lost, and we would all celebrate and rejoice in our brothers and sisters being found and redeemed.

Let’s pray...

As you go today remember you are all called home, you are forgiven and reconciled, and God’s redemptive arms of love are open and ready to embrace you.