

# Jesus Tells the Parable of the Sons

## Summary and Goal

Most people who have read or heard the parable of the prodigal son understand that it chronicles the dangers of wild living and God's loving acceptance of repentant sinners. But this parable is as much about the older brother as it is about the prodigal. We tend to forget that there are plenty of verses in Luke 15 dedicated to the grumbling of the prodigal's older brother. By depicting the central sins of both the younger and older brothers, Jesus was showing that these sons are not so different, at least not in heart. In this session, we'll examine this famous parable and see how the stories Jesus told reveal God's goodness and heart to welcome any and every sinner home.

## Session Outline

1. Selfishness leads to rebelling against the Father's goodness (Luke 15:11-13).
2. Sorrow leads to repentance in light of the Father's goodness (Luke 15:17-24).
3. Self-righteousness leads to resenting the Father's goodness (Luke 15:25-32).

*Background Passage: Luke 15*

## Session in a Sentence

The stories Jesus told reveal God's goodness and heart to welcome any sinner home.

## Christ Connection

The Pharisees and scribes criticized Jesus for welcoming sinners and dining with them. In response, Jesus told a story of a father longing for and celebrating his wayward son's return. This story illustrates God's joy over sinners coming to repentance and trusting in Jesus, the Savior, who came to seek and save the lost.

## Missional Application

Because we have been forgiven of our sin through Jesus, we celebrate the Father's goodness in welcoming home any repentant sinner.

# Group Time

GROUP MEMBER CONTENT

## Introduction

**PACK ITEM 4: THE HEART OF GOD:** Use the painting on this poster and the paragraph on page 20 in the Daily Discipleship Guide (DDG) to speak of the older brother's often overlooked role in the parable of the prodigal son.

Over our mantel hangs a print of Rembrandt's masterpiece *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. At first glance, it doesn't seem to contain much detail. In the foreground, illuminated by some mysterious light, the repentant son kneels before his compassionate father, who is embracing him. This is the main focus of the painting and most people's recollection of the parable. But to the right stands the prodigal's older brother, with his hands folded. He too is illuminated because his role in the story is equally prominent. While there are other interesting details we could mention, the main point of both the painting and the parable is right there in the light: the father welcomes his "sinful" son with the same love he has for his "righteous" son. Yet this story turns the typical categories of "the sinful" and "the righteous" inside out.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.



Why do you think this parable is so often called "The Prodigal Son" while the older brother's role is overlooked? (the actions of the prodigal come first in the parable; we resonate with the story of a prodigal who returns home to forgiveness and welcome; we readily see ourselves in the prodigal but not the older brother; people only recall the return of the prodigal and forget the older brother's reservations about his return)

**SUMMARIZE:** Most people who have read or heard the parable of the prodigal son understand that it chronicles the dangers of wild living and God's loving acceptance of repentant sinners. But this parable is as much about the older brother as it is about the prodigal. We tend to forget that there are plenty of verses in Luke 15 dedicated to the grumbling of the prodigal's older brother. By depicting the central sins of both the younger and older brothers, Jesus was showing that these boys are not so different, at least not in heart. In this session, we'll examine more closely this famous parable and see further how the stories Jesus told reveal God's goodness and heart to welcome any sinner home.

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## Point 1: Selfishness leads to rebelling against the Father's goodness (Luke 15:11-13).

**READ** Luke 15:11-13 (DDG p. 21).

<sup>11</sup> He also said, "A man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.' So he distributed the assets to them. <sup>13</sup> Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 21) to connect the younger son's decision to live for himself with our choice to sin against God.

Jesus didn't provide a backstory for the events of this parable because one wasn't necessary. This story just dives right in, but one small detail does set the stage for the young son's actions. By asking for his inheritance early, before his father's death, the younger son essentially told his father, "I wish you were dead." Thus, he dishonored and cut himself off from his father and family because he desired to live for himself. This is the essence of every sin, both from the prodigal son and from us.

- The son committed himself to a sinful life indulging the desires of his flesh. His actions were self-centered—this was self-worship. Rather than honoring his father, as the Fifth Commandment would have him do, the son sought only to honor and please himself.
- In the Book of Judges, all the bloodshed and perversion was the result of every person doing whatever seemed right to him (Judg. 17:6; 21:25), otherwise known as *moral relativism*. In a sense, all sin is a form of moral relativism because we are deciding in that moment that our desires take precedence over God's glory and the needs of others. What's right or wrong becomes subservient to our wishes and whims.

*Application:* We may not think our sins could compare to the brazen actions of the prodigal son. We may not boldly dishonor our parents and then go bankrupt by spending money on wild living, but any sin is a turning from the satisfaction of God to the prospect of satisfying ourselves apart from Him. Sin is living as if we were the lords of our own lives, the sovereigns of our own kingdoms. When we choose sin, we are choosing to live as if our heavenly Father were dead.

**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

 Why might people resist identifying with the prodigal son at this point in the parable? (his sins are excessive; we don't think ourselves capable of sinning on the level the prodigal does; we don't understand how insidious all sin is; we think we are only guilty of "respectable" sins)

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**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 21) to emphasize that living for yourself leads to spiritual bankruptcy and personal emptiness.

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In verse 13, Jesus said the inheritance the son took early in his greed was “squandered” and that his lifestyle was “foolish.” Whatever experience or possession the son was chasing after in his new life came up short in reality, and the pursuit cost him everything (vv. 14-16). He should have seen it coming—but do we? Not often enough. A lifestyle of sin, whether public or private, one day will cost us everything. To live with yourself at the center—rather than God—is to live spiritually bankrupt and set yourself up for utter catastrophe and sorrowful emptiness.

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- We can imagine the son foolishly telling himself he could turn everything around. We can even rationalize that the highs of his licentious living were too addictive. But squandering his material possessions landed him in a pigsty, one of the worst places a Jew could land because pigs were unclean by law (Deut. 14:8). And what’s worse, he was so hungry that he wanted to eat the slop the pigs ate (Luke 15:14-16). Such is the end of a life oriented around oneself.
- The teacher of Ecclesiastes gave us a philosophical background for the prodigal son in this parable. Possibly the reflections of an elderly Solomon looking back on his life and offering words of caution and wisdom to his younger self or a son, we note how often he declares the heights of his hedonism and the peaks of his accumulation as nothing more than vapor, smoke, a “pursuit of the wind” (Eccl. 1:14). Once you catch it, it vanishes in your hands. The pursuit, at the end of it all, proves fruitless, worthless, and empty.

*Application:* The prodigal son’s tour of debauchery is nothing new. People have lived for the sake of their own pleasure since the fall of humankind. One reason this story from Jesus still resonates so well today is that the hedonistic, licentious lifestyle of the younger son has basically become the default state for a typical young adult in the Western world. You don’t even have to renounce your father to live like the prodigal son anymore; you can do it at college in your frat house or on spring break, indulging in sins considered by many to be rites of passage, all on your father’s dime. But another enduring constant of this parable is the end result of that kind of living. What happens to the prodigal son is what happens to everyone who goes full tilt into self-worship—they end up with nothing to show for it but scars, sorrows, and a life of regrets. Nobody gets to their deathbed, after all, and says: “I wish I’d been more selfish. I wish I’d lived more wastefully.”

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**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

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What words of warning and encouragement might you give to someone younger than you? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

## Point 2: Sorrow leads to repentance in light of the Father's goodness (Luke 15:17-24).

**READ** Luke 15:17-24 (DDG p. 22).

<sup>17</sup> When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup> I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. <sup>19</sup> I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers.'" <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'

<sup>22</sup> "But the father told his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast, <sup>24</sup> because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate.

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 22) to address what repentance should look like.

The prodigal son has bottomed out. He is not just at the end of his money and wild lifestyle but at the end of *himself*. In coming to Christ, we all must come to this same end. The circumstances will look different for each of us, but until we despair of ourselves, we will not see the beauty of Christ in the gospel. Still, in coming to Christ, we must come in the right way. The prodigal came hoping only to be a hired hand, but his father had other plans.

### Voices from the Church

"Repentance doesn't mean just feeling sorry for what we've done. It involves action. It means moving back toward God, humbly confessing our sin to Him, and receiving His forgiveness and restoration. When we do these things, God welcomes us back to Himself, forgives our sin, and redeems what we've lost when we were away from Him."<sup>1</sup>

—Tony Evans

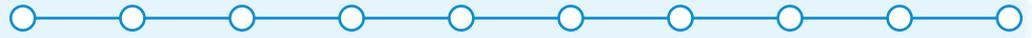
- Humbled by his helpless estate, the prodigal son came to his senses in the pigsty: everyone is better off back home, even the hired hands. So the younger son humbled himself and went home. He did not go to claim his place as a son but to work for his father. In his ignorance, he figured that was the only way of being acceptable to his father, as someone working for his living, to pay off his debt.
- How many people, believers and unbelievers alike, make this mistake? Seeing our great sin debt to our great and holy God, we automatically assume that we must begin paying it off, even after learning that salvation is freely given to all who believe in Jesus. We are so sorrowful about our debt that we assume the Lord will only bring us on as a hired hand rather than welcome us home as a beloved child. We simply cannot fathom the possibilities of His grace.

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**INSTRUCT:** Ask group members to use the scale in their DDG (p. 22) to examine their own views of coming to God in repentance for sin.

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In your repentance, how do you typically come to God?



As a Hired Hand

As a Humble Child

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**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 22) to relay how the father in the story corresponds to our heavenly Father, whose love is steadfast and abundant toward all sinners.

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Some have said that the most significant character in this parable is the father. He corresponds to our heavenly Father, who overflows with lovingkindness to all. The father in the story, like our heavenly Father, is a giver of grace! Despising the shame, he runs to his once-lost son and then throws a party for the son who once wished his father were dead.

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- The word *prodigal* is an adjective referring to profuse expenditures and a sense of wastefulness. This applies, of course, to the younger son who squandered his inheritance on reckless living. But maybe we ought to see the *father* in this story as the most prominent “prodigal,” as he “wastes” his affection on his disgraced son, lavishing his goodness upon the one deserving of his condemnation. So, as pastor and author Tim Keller says, the image of the gospel we receive in this parable of the prodigal son is actually of “the prodigal God,” who loves us—His sinful children—with overwhelming abundance as He gives us His Son, and by extension, He generously gives us all things (Rom. 8:32).<sup>2</sup>
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**SAY:** The prodigal son came to the point of seeking first his father’s kingdom, and everything else was added to him. He used up his father’s love, but still more was added. Grace turns our expectations and intuitions upside down. In His fulfillment of the law, Christ put an end to the idea of earning salvation with religion forever. Grace really is revolutionary.

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**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

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What has been your experience of the overwhelming grace of God through faith in Jesus? (be prepared to give an answer of your own to jump-start the conversation)

### Point 3: Self-righteousness leads to resenting the Father's goodness (Luke 15:25-32).

**READ:** Ask a volunteer to read Luke 15:25-32 (DDG p. 23).

<sup>25</sup> “Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant. <sup>27</sup> ‘Your brother is here,’ he told him, ‘and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

<sup>28</sup> “Then he became angry and didn’t want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> But he replied to his father, ‘Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.’

<sup>31</sup> “‘Son,’ he said to him, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

**EXPLAIN:** Use the first paragraph in the DDG (p. 23) to explain the older son’s worldview and its shortcomings because it denies God’s goodness toward us in the gospel.

Through the older son’s disdain for the younger and his conversation with his father, we can decipher his worldview: life is a spiritual meritocracy, where God’s holiness is to be taken seriously and obedience to the law of God should earn you good standing in the world. On the surface, this worldview sounds worthwhile, but in the end, it comes up short because it fails to take seriously God’s goodness toward us in the gospel. In fact, it rejects the need for the gospel and leads to resenting those who fall on God’s grace.

**FILL IN THE BLANKS:** Provide group members with the answers for the call-out in their DDG (p. 23).

**God Is Gracious:** God’s **nature** is to delight in giving **unmerited** favor to those who are undeserving. Because of sin, we deserve death. But God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and **forgiveness** for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

**Essential Doctrine “God Is Gracious”:** God’s **nature** is to delight in giving **unmerited** favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and **forgiveness** for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).

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**EXPLAIN:** Use the second paragraph in the DDG (p. 23) to highlight how the extended point of the parable is as much about the older son’s legalism as the younger son’s hedonism.

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The parable of the prodigal son is as much about the older son’s legalism as the younger son’s hedonism. Our heavenly Father’s goodness is not contingent upon the law—as if we could earn His favor through our legalistic efforts. Rather, we experience God’s goodness through His grace—namely, the person and work of Jesus Christ, who put an end once for all to legal striving and redeems us from the curse of the law through His own perfect obedience on our behalf.

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- This parable is the third in a string of stories Jesus told because the Pharisees and scribes complained about Jesus’ welcoming and eating with “sinners” (Luke 15:1-2). Already He had taught that heaven rejoices over sinners who repent (15:3-10). With this third parable, the Pharisees and scribes did not need a cautionary tale on the dangers of wild living, which they already believed was sinful. What they needed was to have their tidy moral universe disrupted—this parable is more about grace’s welcome than it is sin’s danger.
- While Jesus has definitely shown that sin is destructive, He also shows that the older brother’s self-righteousness and pride in his own obedience was just as distancing between himself and the father. With the prodigal home, who is now the lost son? Who is the one really far from the kingdom? The prodigal had repented and enjoyed the ensuing celebration; the older brother refused to go in and celebrate, holding a grudge against his younger brother and even more against his father for his grace and goodness.

**Commentary:** According to Jewish custom, the oldest son was the honor-bearer of the family. But throughout the Old Testament, family after family shows us the younger brothers outwitting, outlasting, and outshining the older brothers. The failure of the older brother to live up to his honorable position began with Cain and proceeded through Esau to Joseph’s brothers and to David’s brothers. The younger siblings themselves were not perfect, of course, but one way God reinforced His penchant for shaming the wise with the foolish and the strong with the weak (1 Cor. 1:27) was by making the older serve the younger (Gen. 25:23, Rom. 9:12). In the parable of the prodigal son, the older brother once again proves himself unsuitable for the role of carrying on the legacy of the family, prompting the question *Is there a good older brother?* Not in the Pharisees and the scribes who complained about younger brothers repenting. The only good older brother is Jesus, who came to seek and to save the lost and call them to repentance and the celebration of heaven through faith in Him.

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**INTERACT:** Ask group members the following question.

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What are some ways Christians can exhibit a legalistic worldview? (holding others to their own personal standards rather than holding themselves to the standards of Scripture; refusing to fellowship with sinners and to welcome them into the body of Christ when they repent; basing their standing with God on their level of obedience or disobedience instead of trusting in God’s grace shown in Jesus)

# My Mission

**EXPLAIN:** Jesus is the good older brother. He will wander out into the wilderness, wherever He must go, to search out the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7). That's why He came. That's His business. He will light up the house, put the chairs up on the tables, and sweep every floorboard and into every corner to find that one lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). He will go searching every gambler's den, whorehouse, and pigsty until He finds His younger brothers to bring home. Over and over again, we see in the Gospels as Jesus was extending the welcome of the kingdom to the lowest of the low that He was scandalizing the self-righteous older brothers. Because we too have been forgiven of our sin through Jesus, we must resist the lure of pride and choose to celebrate the Father's goodness in welcoming home any repentant sinner.

**READ** the following missional application statement in the DDG (p. 24), and encourage group members to choose at least one of the options below as a way to respond to the truth of God's Word.

Because we have been forgiven of our sin through Jesus, we celebrate the Father's goodness in welcoming home any repentant sinner.

- **What do you need to repent of and so come to the Father in humble faith?**
- **How can your group/church exhibit a welcoming culture of grace toward sinners who repent?**
- **How will you share the gospel message of God's grace in Jesus with the sinful prodigals and self-righteous older brothers you know?**



## Voices from Church History

"Every sinner has a false idea of God; he thinks God is not ready and willing to forgive him. He says it is not justice. But God wants to deal in mercy ... God stands ready and willing to receive you to His bosom and to forgive you freely."<sup>3</sup>

—D. L. Moody (1837-1899)

**CLOSE IN PRAYER:** Father, let our prayer be that of prodigal sons and daughters whom You have rescued. We thank You for our generous older brother, Jesus, Your eternal Son, whose sacrifice entitled us to share in His inheritance. Send Your Holy Spirit ahead of us to lead others toward You, the God who loves and forgives both wayward prodigals and self-righteous Pharisees through the preaching of the gospel. Amen.

**INSTRUCT:** As your group departs, encourage group members to read and respond to the **Daily Study** devotions in their DDG (pp. 25-27), which build and expand upon the group study. Also advocate for small groups or families to use **Encourage One Another** (p. 28) for mutual accountability and fellowship grounded upon the foundation of God's Word.

# Daily Discipleship

Throughout the week following the session, use the ideas below to remind and encourage your group members to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. The **Daily Study** devotions in the DDG (pp. 25-27) will help group members get into God's Word and study it for themselves. **Encourage One Another** (p. 28) will help group members and families fellowship with one another with purpose.

## Daily Study

Brief daily devotions in the DDG (pp. 25-27) will help group members take initiative in their own discipleship.

- Make sure all group members have access to a Bible to read. Have some Bibles available to give to guests who may need one, or offer to get one and arrange a time to meet to give it and show how to navigate it for the devotions.
- Share the following idea from the devotion for **Day 5** as a part of point 3 in the session: **The legalist doesn't really measure other people against the holiness of God but against the perceived holiness of himself. We need to take care in realizing that all fall short of God's glory, including ourselves.**



Consider leading by example and reading the daily devotions yourself with your own DDG. Based on your study, use brief messages throughout the week (group text, email, social media) to encourage your group to keep up with their daily time in God's Word and to live it out. Here are a couple of examples you can use:

- **Day 1:** "Remember that Christ sees the lost not as gross or untouchable but as those who are 'like sheep without a shepherd.'"
- **Day 4:** "The disposition of the heavenly Father over you is one of great joy. He's glad you're His. He's never sad to see you. He loves you and rejoices over you."



Visit [www.GospelProject.com/Blog](http://www.GospelProject.com/Blog) for additional content and resources you can use to help group members gain more insight into their daily studies. Send group members a link or a portion of a blog post or other content that you believe will be helpful and encouraging for their time in God's Word.

## Encourage One Another

This brief plan for fellowship and accountability in the group member's DDG (p. 28) will help groups of 2-4 people to meet sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and they are responding. It could also be used for family discipleship with students and children who are using *The Gospel Project* in their groups.

- **Encourage group members to discern how they can best practice proclaiming the gospel to both indulgent younger brothers and self-righteous older brothers.**
- See yourself as a member of the group who also needs encouragement in the faith, and participate in such a group this week.

# Additional Commentary

## **Point 1: Selfishness leads to rebelling against the Father's goodness (Luke 15:11-13).**

“Although it is not expressly stated, Luke believed that the need to repent is universal. This implies a doctrine of sin and depravity. And if repentance results in immediate entrance into the kingdom, then this also implies that salvation is by grace. Even though the parable of the gracious father was not given to teach the doctrine of justification by faith, the younger son's acceptance by his father rings true to this biblical teaching. His acceptance was entirely gracious. The question has been raised about whether this parable teaches that God's forgiveness is 'free.' Did Luke believe there was thus no necessity of an 'atonement'? One cannot require in a parable such as this, which teaches God's love for the outcasts and the hostility this encounters, a complete doctrine of the atonement as well. A parable is not meant to serve as a shorter catechism of all Christian doctrine. Luke expected that this parable would be interpreted in light of what he had already said in his Gospel (cf. 9:22), what he would say shortly (cf. 19:10; 22:17-22), what he would write in Acts (4:12; 13:26-39; 20:28), and what they had already been taught (perhaps a tradition such as 1 Cor. 15:3-8). The purpose of this parable is to teach essentially one basic point dealing with the situation described in 15:1-2. To ask more of it than this is unwarranted.”<sup>4</sup>

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“**give me ... property ... coming to me.** The younger son does not want to wait for his father's death to receive his inheritance. He was probably a teenager, since he was unmarried. His share would have been half of what the older brother would receive, or one-third of the estate (cf. Deut. 21:17). **He divided** indicates that the father responded to his younger son's request and allowed him to make his own choice to go his own way ... **Gathered all** indicates that the son converted into cash all of his inheritance, which may have included land or cattle, which he then foolishly **squandered ... in reckless living.**”<sup>5</sup>

## **Point 2: Sorrow leads to repentance in light of the Father's goodness (Luke 15:17-24).**

“God is pictured as a patient and compassionate Father who welcomes our repentance with great rejoicing. Our repentance is also vividly depicted as coming to realize the foolishness and unsatisfying nature of living apart from the Father (vv. 17-19). The gospel is explained through this image as a call for us to turn away from all that does not truly satisfy and return to the welcoming grace of our Father God. This applies not only at our conversion but to every day of our life of faith in a broken and tempting world. It is important to note that the father runs in welcome to his son before his son has made any confession—grace even precedes the needed repentance.”<sup>6</sup>

“Then he shall get up, come to his father, and confess to him, ‘I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me like one of your hired servants’ [vv. 18-19]. When he confesses like that, he will be considered worthy of more than that for which he prayed. His father neither takes him in like a hired servant nor treats him like a stranger. Oh no, he kisses him as a son. He accepts him as a dead man come back to life again. He counts him worthy of the divine feast and gives him the precious garment he once wore. Now there is singing and joy in the father’s home. What happened is the result of the Father’s grace and loving kindness. Not only does he bring his son back from death, but also through the Spirit he clearly shows his grace. To replace corruption, he clothes him with an incorruptible robe. To satisfy hunger, he kills the fatted calf . . . Most wonderful of all, he puts a divine signet ring upon his hand. By all these things, he begets him anew in the image of the glory of Christ.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Point 3: Self-righteousness leads to resenting the Father’s goodness (Luke 15:25-32).**

“The conclusion of the story is not very pleasant. When the older brother came home from the fields where he had been working and learnt from a servant that his younger brother had come home, he refused to join the celebration (15:25-28). When his father came to look for him, he accused his father of never having rewarded him for his years of faithful and obedient service (15:29-30). The father gently reminded him that all the father owned belonged to him because he had always been with him. However, that did not preclude rejoicing at the return of his delinquent brother (15:31-32). The parable does not say whether the older brother ever joined the party, but his attitude matches that of the Pharisees who refused to join the poor and the outcasts in accepting the good news of salvation. The father’s request to the older brother to join the celebration of the finding of the lost son matches Jesus’ invitation to his opponents to join the heavenly banquet and celebrate the salvation of outcasts.”<sup>8</sup>

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“The father’s response reveals the son’s blindness. The elder son did not know what he had: ‘He said to him, “you are always with me, and everything I have is yours”’ (v. 31) . . . The sinner’s repentance exposes the hardness of the self-righteous. A sinner’s repentance should be good for a saint’s heart. Though we like to imagine ourselves to be the younger brother, many of us are actually the older brother. In our self-righteousness we tend to think that self-help is how we made it. We tend to think those broken by sin ought to go on and mend themselves and mend their ways in order to become the ‘deserving spiritual poor.’ Then maybe—just maybe—we will celebrate at their repentance.”<sup>9</sup>

## References

1. Tony Evans, *God Can Not Be Trusted (And Five Other Lies of Satan)* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005), 60.
2. See *The Prodigal God*, by Timothy Keller (New York: Dutton, 2008), xiv-xv.
3. D. L. Moody, “The Prodigal,” in *The D. L. Moody Collection*, ed. and comp. James S. Bell Jr. (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1997), 346-47.
4. Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2003) [Wordsearch].
5. Wayne Grudem and Thomas R. Schreiner, “Luke,” in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 1989, n. 15:12; n. 15:13.
6. Jonathan Pennington, “Luke,” in *Gospel Transformation Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 1384-85, n. 15:1-32.
7. Athanasius, Festal Letter 7, in *Ancient Faith Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2019), 1259, n. 15:11-24.
8. Takatemenjen, “Luke,” in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 1366.
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