

## Week Forty-two: The King and Prodigals - Luke 15:11-32



### Overview

God pursues prodigals throughout the story the Bible tells. He pursues Adam and Eve, Cain, Abraham, Jacob, Lot, Moses, the children of Israel, and the kings and nation of Israel before and after their captivity. The King of the universe goes after prodigals.

Jesus uses three parables to teach about the seeking Father and His lost and then recovered possessions. Today's lesson focuses on the third parable, the parable of the prodigal sons. Both sons are alienated from the father. The elder son represents the scribes and Pharisees, while the younger son represents the tax collectors and sinners.

### Lesson Objective:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to identify the similarities of lostness shared by the younger and older brother and appreciate the seeking heart of the father toward both sons.

### Key Truths

*Those who live law-abiding lives rarely see themselves as prodigals who are far from God.*

*Jesus came to redeem religious people from their secret rebellion as they hide behind their self-righteousness, and to redeem those who live riotous lives from their open rebellion as they pursue pleasure.*

*No true spiritual difference exists between the two brothers; both are estranged from the Father by sinful attitudes.*

## Lesson Outline

The story of the prodigal is the third of a trio of parables: the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son. Each parable contains: a seeking owner, a lost possession, the possession recovered, and a joyful ending. The parable of the prodigal reveals two lost sons, the father's attempted restoration of both sons, and the return of one but the continual alienation of the other.

### 1. The Younger Son: The Sin of Reckless Living and Rebellion - Luke 15:11-24

- The younger son wants to live the 'good life' now, and he wants to live it outside of the presence of his father (12-13).
- The younger son squanders his inheritance and the years of his youth on pleasure-seeking pursuits (13).
- The younger son is servant to his fleshly appetites (including harlotry—15:30).
- The younger son is open to return only when he comes to the end of himself (17).

The father doesn't prohibit his younger son from leaving. Without the father's release and the son's departure, the younger son would never recognize the love of the father.

### 2. The Older Son: The Sin of Ritualistic Religion - Luke 15:25-32

- The older son pretends love and affection for the father (29).
- The older son is concerned with doing the right thing but with the wrong motive (29).
- The older son measures his righteousness not by God's perfect standard but by the failure of his brother (29-30).
- The older son records and holds the sin done by his younger brother against him (30).
- The older son feels superior as he compares himself with his younger brother (29-30).
- The older brother condemns his younger brother and judges him harshly (30).
- The older son never leaves home but neither is he really 'at home' with his father.
- The older son does not want the Father's presence, only His gifts (15:29).
- The older brother is open to return only when he comes to the end of himself.

The father doesn't assume that, because the older son has never outwardly rebelled, he has the older son's love. The younger son's leaving exposes the rebellion and alienation from his father in the older son's heart.

### 3. The Scene of Reunion - Luke 15: 17-24, 28-31

- The younger brother expresses joy. He returns hoping for at least a servant's position (19), only to find that he is restored as a son (24).

- The Father expresses intimacy. The father's daily searching the horizon in hopes that his son is on his way home finally comes to a close. He sees him off in the distance and runs to meet him with tears and kisses. He declares a public holiday in which to celebrate his son's return (23-24).
- The older brother expresses anger and alienation. The younger brother's return and his father's fawning over him anger the older brother. He expresses his resentment to his father and refuses to participate in the joyful reunion.

This parable teaches the commonality between the younger brother and tax collectors and sinners—they have ruined their lives and they need to “come home.” The older brother and the scribes and Pharisees mirror one another— they, in their self-righteousness, are unaware of their own alienation from the father—they don't even know that they need to come home.

Everyone has to give up something to come to the Father and experience his love. Rule-keeping moralists must give up their moral superiority and self-righteousness to come to Jesus, while prodigals must give up their immoral sensuality and unrighteousness. The Father welcomes both

**Application** - What does this lesson teach us about God? Man? Sin? Redemption? *Both rule-keeping moralists and rebellious pleasure seekers are alienated from God and need restoration.*

*Rule-keeping moralists are blind to their own need even as they consider themselves superior to rule-breakers.*

*Rule-keepers generally assert their own righteousness by comparing themselves with those around them who do not measure up to or keep the rules that they consider essential.*

*Both sinners and moralists are self-ruled—prodigals by selfish indulgence and fleshly appetites, and elder brothers by self-righteous morality.*

*The Father loves and seeks to restore both sons—the prodigal from a distance, and the elder at the doorway.*

## Summary

*God speaks* through simple stories to capture the serious plight of rebels, blatant sinners, and moralistic sinners.

*God acts* to restore anyone who will come to Him in humility and repentance.

*God reveals* the lostness of self-righteous moralists and pleasure-seeking rebels and His love for both.

## Discussion Questions

Identify ways people who see themselves as morally superior treat pleasure-seeking rebels today.

Why does Paul warn believers not to compare themselves with others (2 Cor. 10:12)? What is the proper standard of comparison?

The older brother's attitudes reveal a heart that is just as out of sync with the Father as the younger brother's. What are those attitudes?

Luke 15 begins by explaining why Jesus felt the need to tell these parables. What reasons does the text identify?