

**LOST**PARABLES OF A
GOD WHO PURSUES**The Older
Brother**villagebible.church/lost

DEVOTIONAL

***'But he was angry, and would not go in...'* Luke 15:28**

After the prodigal son had returned to his father, there was great rejoicing. Everyone celebrated the prodigal's return...everyone, that is, except the older brother. Instead, he moped, and he lashed out at his father for celebrating his brother's return.

We can put sin into two categories: sins of the flesh, which the prodigal son embodied, and sins of the disposition, which are typified by the older brother. Pride was the older brother's main sin. C. S. Lewis, the great Christian author, has said, "It is pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But pride always means enmity—it is enmity. And not only between man and man, but enmity to God." Since pride produces nothing but misery and division, it is not surprising that the older brother felt miserable and separated himself from his family.

Some people have tried to excuse the older brother's tantrum by saying that it was only a fit of temper and nothing to concern ourselves with. But Jesus had enough concern about it to include it in this parable. We can't dismiss the older brother's outburst, for his tantrum reveals the rottenness of pride at the core of his being, pride which rose to the surface when his brother returned and would rise again the next time someone threatened his self-righteousness.

For as bad as the prodigal's sins were, the older son's sin was worse. While the prodigal came to the father and confessed his sins, the older brother never did. He never entered the house. Night fell and left him outside. And the story ends there. Why? The story ends with the older brother outside in the dark because a person with such a spirit can never enter heaven. That kind of person must become grateful anew for salvation given in grace, never earned. The love of Christ must come into that person's heart to remove the pride from his or her soul.

Does this hit a little close to home? Have you ever found yourself a tad indignant that someone who has sinned so greatly receives the same salvation God gives you? Then confess that pride today. Ask God to remove it from your heart. And thank God that His mercy extends to prideful sinners, too!¹

¹ Devotional entitled "The Older Brother" by D. James Kennedy found @ <https://www.djameskennedy.org/devotional-detail/20180524-the-older-brother>

OPEN IT

1. What has been the best event/party you have ever attended? What about it made it so special?

READ IT

Luke 15: 25-32

EXPLORE IT

2. Where was the older brother when his younger brother came home? What alerted him to this unexpected arrival?
3. How did he respond to the news of his brother's return?
4. Who came and implored the older brother to join the festivities?
5. What was the older brother's main issue in verse 29?
6. In what two ways does the father describe the prodigal to the older brother?

APPLY IT

Up till now in Luke 15 Jesus is showing with parables what it means that he "receives sinners and eats with them." This was the accusation of the "Pharisees and scribes" in verse 2. Jesus said, in effect, when I receive sinners and eat with them, it is like a shepherd seeking and finding a lost sheep and rejoicing; it is like a woman seeking and finding a lost coin and rejoicing; and it is like a Father running out to welcome home a rebellious son who was humbled and repentant. Jesus' words and actions toward sinners are the love of God reaching out to sinners. That's what it means when he receives sinners and eats with them.²

7. Jesus was speaking to a mixed group of Jewish people in Luke 15. What part of Luke 15:11-32 resonated with the "tax collectors and sinners" and which part should have rebuked "the Pharisees and Scribes"?

8. What does Luke say about the Pharisees' and scribes' response to Jesus at the beginning of Luke 15? How does the story of older brother seem like a loving response by Jesus?

THE RIGHT STUFF???

If there is anyone who served his father, it was this elder brother. In fact, he is out there working in the field when he finds out that his younger brother has returned. We will find out that there is no harder worker than this brother. **However, serving God is no substitution for fellowship with God.** This is a lesson for everyone who is a member of the Church should learn. It is possible for us to work, it is possible to serve, and it is possible to obey the commandments and still be out of fellowship with God. Check your attitude as you do these things.³

9. Why is it so easy to substitute serving with fellowship? What steps must Christ followers take to ensure that their heart is in line with their good deeds?

² Sermon excerpt from The Blinding Effects Of Serving God by John Piper found @<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-blinding-effects-of-serving-god>

³ Sermon excerpt from David Himes found @ <http://focusongod.com/Luke-15.htm>

10. We will see later in the text that the older brother had some pent up bitterness. What things can cause someone with such internal anger continue to be obedient outwardly? Why do these rarely seem to appease us for long?

YOU'VE LOST THAT LOVING FEELING!!!

What strikes me is that the father hasn't told him anything. The father certainly hasn't been looking for him. The father hasn't sent a messenger to the field wherever he was to say, "Hey, hey, hey. Your brother's back and we're going to have a party. Come on in, greet your brother. Embrace your brother. Rejoice with me and help me get this party off the ground."

Because, look, he was the number one primary party planner in the family. That was the job of the firstborn son. He had the responsibility to carry off all the events of the family, particularly those that were designed to be in honor of the family. And the party was in honor of the family, not so much the son who came back, but the father who took him back, reconciled him. And the whole village came together to give honor to such a loving, gracious, merciful, forgiving, reconciling father. But nobody bothered to tell him.

*The father doesn't go to him. Why not? Wouldn't you be listening to the story say, "Why didn't somebody go get him and bring him back?" The answer is that **he has no relationship to the father**. The father knows he has no interest in his brother. He proved that at the beginning of the story when he didn't try to stop his brother from doing what was terrible. He had no interest in his father. He proved that by not intervening between his brother and his father to stop his brother from such a dishonorable act toward his father. In fact, he took his part of the inheritance gladly, never defending his father's honor.*

***He has no relationship to anybody in the family.** Being out in the field is sort of a metaphor for where he was in terms of that family. The younger son was in a far country. This guy's in a far field. But the symbolism there is they're both way off from the father. They both come home, but to very different receptions.⁴*

11. Jesus is warning the Pharisees of "Older Brother Religion". Of what you know of the Pharisees how had they fallen into the same trap as the older brother in Luke 15? Can we as Christ followers fall into the same trap? If so, how?

⁴ Sermon excerpt by John MacArthur entitled the Legalistic Son found @<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/91-3> © 2019 Grace to You. All rights reserved.

12. How do we keep our relationship one of delight and not merely duty? Is it possible to be all delight and no duty and is that okay?

*The older son comes in from the field and hears the music and dancing. He doesn't go inside, but he calls one of the servants and asks what is happening. When he finds out that his no-good brother has returned and that his dad has thrown a party to celebrate, **he explodes**. Whenever anyone blows up like that, it is not just a spur of the moment thing. You're seeing all of the pent-up anger of the years boiling over. He refuses to go in and when his dad comes out to appeal to him, **he unloads**.⁵*

13. Describe a time when jealousy got the best of you? Where do you struggle most with jealousy? How does your jealousy manifest itself?

14. The father doesn't disagree with the older brother regarding his complaints, does this mean he was validated in his response? How could the older brother shared his grievances in a more God honoring way? Why is this more loving response rarely used by people today?

⁵ Sermon excerpt by Steve Cole entitled How To Receive God's Abundant Mercy found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-72-how-receive-god%E2%80%99s-abundant-mercy-luke-1511-32>

Jesus did not come and hang out a help-wanted sign. He came and hung out a help-available sign. Jesus is eating with sinners because he is a doctor with a cure, not because he is an employer with a labor shortage.

The Pharisees and scribes couldn't see that because they themselves had a totally different mindset: "For so many years I have been serving you, and I have never neglected a command of yours."

Test yourself here. I fear that at this point many might say, "It seems to me that the elder brother really has a legitimate complaint." If you say that, you're not getting it. You are still thinking in the old way of master and slave and works. Not the Christian way of Father and child and faith. The question is not whether the son really has kept all the commandments; the question is whether the father wants to be related to as commander to slave.⁶

15. In the above quote John Piper shares an interesting thought that we often forget:

Jesus did not come and hang out a help-wanted sign. He came and hung out a help-available sign. Jesus is eating with sinners because he is a doctor with a cure, not because he is an employer with a labor shortage.

What happens when we see God as needing our help or service? How did this mentality impair the older son's relationship with the father? How can it impair our relationship with God

First he attacks his dad and justifies himself.

(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.

He is bitter, accusing his dad of being stingy and unfair. He is saying, "Just give me what I deserve for all my hard work!"⁷

16. Is it ever right to demand acknowledgment from others? How do we know when this hunger for acknowledgement becomes toxic?

⁶ Sermon excerpt from The Blinding Effects Of Serving God by John Piper found @<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-blinding-effects-of-serving-god>

⁷ Sermon excerpt by Steve Cole entitled How To Receive God's Abundant Mercy found @ <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-72-how-receive-god%E2%80%99s-abundant-mercy-luke-1511-32>

GOOD GOOD FATHER

In spite of the older brother's attack, the father responds with love and gentleness toward this son also. He tenderly calls him, "My child," and reminds him that he has always been with him and that all that the father owned was his. He explains why they had to be merry and rejoice, because "this brother of yours [not, "my son"] was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found." The father's love extended to both sons and he did not want either son alienated from him or from each other.⁸

17. The father had to clear a series of hurdles to show love, forgiveness and generosity to his two sons. What were those hurdles when dealing with the younger? The older?

18. Put yourself into the place of the father of the story. Which son would you have struggled to forgive? why?

19. We easily become like the "older brother" in this story. What takes place in the heart of an "older brother" that causes him to act this way? Where do you see the "older brother" attitude in your own life?

Trevin Wax finishes his great devotional series on Luke 15:11-32 in the following way:

*Jesus ended the parable as a cliffhanger, leaving the audience waiting for the story's resolution. The question must remain and haunt those listening: did the older brother go in and join the family celebration? **The answer is left to the listener.** You're invited to step up onto the stage and act out the parable's final scene.⁹*

20. What things are keeping you from enjoying God's grace in the lives of broken people? What areas in your relationship with your heavenly father needs attention so that you don't respond like the older brother?

⁸ Ibid

⁹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/prodigal-son-15-finale/>

Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. www.villagebible.church/smallgroups