



THE PARABLES OF JESUS

SESSION 5

Parable of the Prodigal Son: *Participant Guide*

ICE BREAKER

Start off with an ice breaker to get everyone warmed up.

WELCOME

Considering all of Jesus' parables, there may be none more famous than the parable found in the book of Luke known as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. It is a parable of a son who takes his father's inheritance and wastes it all. Then realizing his mistake, he returns to a forgiving father. But, in telling this parable, we often forget that there are two sons mentioned in this parable. This is a parable about a younger brother and an older brother. In this parable, Jesus has given us both brothers so that we can compare and contrast the two brothers. If we don't compare these brothers, we will miss the message that Jesus is leading us to in helping us understand our relationship with God.

As we turn our attention to this parable, we will be reminded of the weight of human sin as well as the grace, mercy and joy of our Heavenly Father every time a sinner seeks forgiveness and restoration in His father's arms.

QUOTE

Jesus's teaching consistently attracted the irreligious while offending the Bible-believing, religious people of his day. However, in the main, our churches today do not have this effect. The kind of outsiders Jesus attracted are not attracted to contemporary churches, even our most avant-garde ones. We tend to draw conservative, buttoned-down, moralistic people. The licentious and liberated or the broken and marginal avoid church. That can only mean one thing. If the preaching of our ministers and the practice of our parishioners do not have the same effect on people that Jesus had, then we must not be declaring the same message that Jesus did.

Timothy Keller, [The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith](#)

QUESTIONS

Does anything stand out to you about this quote? Do you agree/ disagree with this quote?

SCRIPTURE

Have someone in the group look up and read [Luke 15:1-3](#)

Before we begin with this famous parable, we must understand the context – the first three verses, tell us there are different groups in the crowd - Tax collectors & sinners and Pharisees and scribes.

But, in these groups we see two different responses to Jesus' teaching:

- The tax collectors and the sinners were "drawing near to hear Him."
- And the Pharisees and scribes "grumbled" against Him.

QUESTIONS

Does the context/ background of verses 1-3 help you to understand the reason Jesus told the parable of the prodigal?

Based on what you know about the parable, who do you think represents the:

- *Younger son?*
- *Older son?*
- *Father?*

What type of people were naturally drawn to Jesus and why?

How are the Pharisees just as lost as the tax collectors & sinners they despised?

SCRIPTURE

Have someone in the group look up and read [Luke 15:11-12](#)

Jesus' parable begins with a speech and an introduction to the younger son. The younger son comes to the father and basically says, ***“father, give me my share of the estate.”***

Now – just so that we are aware – this request by the younger brother would have astonished the audience, because it would have been seen as highly disrespectful and unconventional. The parables Jesus taught often _____ His listeners. He didn't give them what they expected. This approach, exemplified also in the parable of the good Samaritan, reveals Jesus' unique teaching style, which aimed to provoke thought and challenge the “norm”.

In those days, if you were a father and had two sons – and you died – then the estate would have been divided this way:

- **2/3** to the oldest son – because the oldest son received a double portion.
- And **1/3** to the youngest son.

Through his demands we see that the younger son wants the father's _____ but not the father. He simply wishes that the father was dead – and this is unheard of. Now, if Jesus' listeners were shocked at the son's speech, they would have been even more amazed at the father's response. In verse 12, the father _____ to divide his property between his two sons.

QUESTIONS

What motivated the younger son to demand his inheritance from his father and what type of pain did the father likely experience?

What are the sins of the younger son?

- ***Have your actions ever communicated that you want God's things but you don't want God?***

SCRIPTURE

Have someone in the group look up and read [Luke 15:13-24](#)

After receiving his share of the inheritance, the younger son squanders it all in reckless living. His life is ruined, and he finds himself literally among the pigs in the mud. It's in this moment that he comes to his senses, recognizing the foolishness of his actions. From this position – he develops a plan.

- **To go home.** Home is where he belongs and where he is accepted.
- To payback what he owes. The younger son isn't seeking to be reinstated as a son – he acknowledges that he doesn't deserve that status nor is he worthy of it. Instead, he proposes to _____ his way back, seeking only an opportunity to prove himself through his actions.

It's crucial to note that the younger son's intention was not to be brought back into the family but to earn his way back. However, the father's actions, such as clothing him in a robe, placing a ring on his finger, and giving him sandals, demonstrate that he is not interested in making his son earn his place back but rather in bringing him back into the family through grace. Through these gestures, the father essentially reinstates the younger son's sonship, not based on merit but out of sheer grace.

Similarly, when we approach God, we often feel unworthy and believe we must earn our place in His family through our efforts. However, God's grace, demonstrated through Jesus, grants us full rights as adopted sons and daughters, accepting us and providing us with security.

QUESTIONS

What did the younger son do with his inheritance money?

When the younger son returned to his father's home, what was his hope?

How did the father receive the younger son?

The prodigal son expected to be a servant, but what was lavished on him instead?

How does sin promise enjoyment but bring enslavement? How does obedience to God's will bring true freedom?

The son was brought to repentance. How is true repentance different than regret or remorse?

SCRIPTURE

Have someone in the group look up and read [Luke 15:25-32](#)

Jesus finishes by introducing a new character – the older brother – and He tells us that this brother is in “the field.” Now, we are meant to take many things away from this brother. The older brother has: Stayed with the father; Remained faithful to the father; Has not embarrassed the father [yet]; and, he continues to work in the field.

So, he was in the field and when he came near to the house, he heard a party going on with music and dancing. Upon hearing music and dancing coming from the house, the older brother inquires from a servant about the cause of the celebration. Learning that his younger brother has returned and that his father has killed the fattened calf in his honor, the older brother becomes furious and refuses to join the celebration. By making this move, the older brother not only rejects his brother's _____ but also insults his father's _____. Essentially, he implies that he wants no part in his father's family if his younger brother is welcomed back. The father attempts to reconcile with the older brother, but his efforts are in vain.

SO, we must ask the question – what does the older son care about? What is really important to him?

- The older son cares about the father's things. That is what is really important to him.
- And, he doesn't seem to really care about the father...***is this sounding familiar??***

He seems to care more about: the family name [serving and obeying his father.]; the estate [in the fields working]; and the cost of the celebration [fattened calf] that is taking from his future inheritance.

Based on this, he cares more about the father's things but doesn't seem to care about the father's _____.

QUESTIONS

How did the older brother respond to the celebration when the younger brother returned?

What are the sins of the older son?

How was his attitude like that of the Pharisees and the scribes?

Are churches today more full of “elder brothers” than we would like to think? In what ways?

How can we avoid thinking, feeling, and acting in the same way as the elder son?

CONCLUSION

So, the most stunning thing about this parable is in the way it ends. We now know who the “2 sons” represent. Remember the context, He was speaking to tax collectors & sinners as well as Pharisees & scribes.

- Tax collectors and sinners are like the younger brother. The younger brother has been “bad,” and through his actions we get a very traditional picture of sin.
- Pharisees and scribes are like the older brother. The older brother has been “good,” and through his actions we get a very traditional picture of obedience.

From this, Jesus’ listeners know exactly what His point is and so do we.

- The younger brother goes off – then comes back. He humbles himself, repents and goes into the feast a saved and recognized son of the Father. The lover of prostitutes is saved.
- But the elder brother – the good man who has kept all of the moral rules – is lost as far as we know.

QUESTION

List the 6 most influential things that you believe is causing the church not to reach out to the “younger sons/brothers” of the world today?

The remaining parables we will be discussing this spring are:

- ***The Parable of the Talents - Matthew 25:14-30***
- ***The Parable of the Ten Virgins - Matthew 25:1-13***
- And, ***the Parable of the Good Samaritan - Luke 10:25-37***

I would encourage you to read ahead and study these parables in the days and weeks ahead. I am excited to see where this study leads us as a group and individually in understanding the teachings of our Lord, Jesus Christ.