

Further up, Further in

Resources for Continued Study



LOOKOUT
MOUNTAIN
Presbyterian Church

“THE PARABLE OF THE FORGIVING FATHER”

For individual study or group discussion

DATE: November 19, 2023

SPEAKER: Chad/Wil

SERIES: Gospel of Luke

PASSAGE: Luke 15:11-32

Among all the parables told by Jesus, the three we find in Luke chapter 15 are the best known. In these parables of lost things, the heart of the Father is revealed: a heart that seeks, saves, and rejoices over that which was lost and is found. As we study the final parable in Luke 15:11-32, we observe a father seeking and inviting back home not one but two lost sons. The father's love is central to the story, and this parable could just as well be called *The Parable of the Forgiving Father*.

From last week, do you remember who was gathered in the crowd near Jesus? It is interesting to note how Jesus begins his parable in verse 11, “There was a man who had two sons.” The two sons symbolized the two types of people present in his audience: prodigals and Pharisees.

The younger brother's ruin and return (vv. 11-19)

What makes the younger brother's actions so despicable is the disrespectful way he addresses his father. Basically, he demands that his father “drop dead” and give him his portion of the inheritance. Hastily leaving town with his portion of the estate, he begins to waste it on reckless living (v. 13). Not surprisingly, the prodigal quickly falls into ruin. He ends up destitute, alone, and starving. Looking for human kindness, he finds none. His thoughts turn toward home. He could beg for forgiveness and ask to be a servant in his father's house (vv. 17-19). Anything would be better than his sub-human existence.

- In order to survive, what job did the prodigal do? Read Leviticus 11:7-8 and Proverbs 11:22. What does the Old Testament say about pigs, and how do you think the listeners reacted to this part of the story?
- The prodigal's wake-up call is followed by repentance (v. 18). Read Psalm 51:17, 147:3, and Isaiah 61:1. What does God promise to those who repent?

The Father's extravagant response (vv. 20-24)

The prodigal longed for home. His father longed for his son to return. Day after day he waited, keeping an eye on the road's horizon. And then the day came. The repentant son returned, and his father ran to meet him! Pastor and theologian R. Kent Hughes describes God the Father's extravagant forgiveness to all prodigals who return home: “No one is beyond his love. You cannot do anything that will keep him from kissing you and bestowing upon you the robe, the ring, and the sandals. Utter forgiveness is the only kind God gives.”¹

- The son confesses, the father forgives. But what makes his response so extravagant? Discuss your experiences with the Father's extravagant love.
- Professor James K. A. Smith, commenting on this passage, writes: “To map our roamings like that of the prodigal is not a cartography of despair or self-loathing and shame; to the contrary, it is a geography of grace that is meant to help us imagine being welcomed home.”² Are you tempted to despair over your sin? How has today's passage dispelled any reasons you may have to not return home to God?

The elder brother's scornful response and ultimate dilemma (vv. 25-32)

Mark Twain once said, “He was a ‘good man’ in the worst sense of the word.” Twain's satire aptly describes the self-righteous elder brother who lacks the loving heart of his father. He refuses to rejoice and join the feast that celebrated his brother's homecoming. Again, note the father's unexpected, extravagant response, this time toward the elder brother (vv. 31-34). His love for his eldest son is gracious, unflinching and unconditional: “Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.”

- Read Isaiah 64:6 and Romans 3:10-12. As the younger brother repented of his sins, so the elder brother should have repented of his righteousness. Why is it important for Christians to repent of our righteousness before God? For further study, read and discuss the [Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 24](#).

Family Dinner Table

The Parable of the Two Sons

In Luke 15:11-32, Jesus tells a parable that redefines everything his hearers know about sin. In the crowd are the Pharisees and teachers of the law. The lenses through which they view salvation are black and white. There are law keepers and law breakers. With his story, Jesus seeks to upend their moralistic binary, by exposing the deadly dogma of salvation by law-keeping. In his well-known book on the parable, Tim Keller describes the Pharisees' myopic view of the Law: “The elder brother is not losing the father's love in spite of his goodness, but because of it. It is not his sins that create the barrier between him and his father, it's the pride he has in his moral record. It's not his wrongdoing but his righteousness that is keeping him from sharing in the feast of the father. Both sons resented their father's authority and sought ways of getting out from under it. They each wanted to get into a position in which they could tell the father what to do. Neither son loved the father for himself.”

According to Keller, “It's a shocking message: Careful obedience to God's law may serve as a strategy for rebelling against God.”³

- Comparing yourself to the two sons, which one are you most like? How so?
- In Luke 15, verses 31-32, the father seeks to reassure the older brother. Read Luke 13:34. How is Jesus' lament over Jerusalem like the father's plea to the older brother?
- This week write out a prayer of thanksgiving for the Father's heart of love, a heart that seeks and restores the lost.

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Annette & Tim Gulick, supported
missionary partners

¹Hughes, R. Kent. *Luke: That You May Know the Truth* (Vol. 2). 1998, Wheaton, IL. Crossway Books. 143

²Smith, James K.A. *On the Road with Saint Augustine: A Real World Spirituality for Restless Hearts*. 2019, Grand Rapids, MI. Brazos Press. 15

³Keller, Tim. *The Prodigal God*. 2008, NY NY. Dutton/Penguin Group. 36-37