



**“It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found,”** Luke 15:32.

## **Welcome the Penitent**

**Lesson Aim:** To cultivate a Christian spirit which welcomes the penitent sinner.

**L273. Date:** May 1978. **Text:** Luke 15:11-13, 20-32.

**Topic:** Forgiveness; God: Forgiveness of; Repentance.

Luke 15 is one of the greatest chapters in the Bible. It reveals the heart of God in Jesus Christ. It expresses the waywardness of man, the grace of God, and the inexpressible joy with which God finds and restores the sinner.

Luke 15:11-32 recounts Jesus' parable of two sons — both of them prodigal — one of whom repented and changed, the other unrepentant and unchanged.

Yes, it is a story of two sons. One prodigal son was lost from his father by geography: he left home. The other prodigal son was lost from his father in spirit; he remained at home but did not share the spirit of his father. The lesson comments which follow will review the case and course of both prodigal sons.

Luke 15:11-32 is commonly called the parable of the prodigal son. It might be more properly called the parable of the loving father. The emphasis of the parable is on the father of the two boys. “Father” occurs twelve times in verses 3-34.

### **I. TWO PRODIGAL SONS OF A LOVING FATHER**

#### **A. The younger son was a prodigal bound by sins of the flesh.**

**“Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me”** (verse 12). The request indicated how self-centered and heartless he was. He would

have received his portion of the family estate upon the death of his father, but he could not wait.

He cared not that such a request would break his father's heart and disturb the financial affairs of the household business. He wanted what he wanted when he wanted it, regardless of who was hurt by it. That is the spirit of a prodigal in every generation, for the flesh does not change.

The younger son took his inheritance and departed into a **“far country.”** He left his home and countrymen (the story is told from the viewpoint of a Jewish society) and went to live among the Gentiles who neither revered the God of Israel nor lived according to His laws.

His actions showed a rejection of his father's values. It indicated the emptiness of his heart and the searching of his spirit for satisfaction in life. He is not the only prodigal to go into a **“far country.”**

The younger son lived a life satiated with lust. The King James Version describes his lifestyle as **“riotous living.”** (Other translations use terms like “dissolute life” and “wildest extravagance.”) He thought he was free, but in reality he was in slavery to “I want.”

Lust is never satisfied. The more it has, the more it craves. The young man found that the demands of lust finally consumed all the inheritance he had received from his father, and he was left in abject poverty.

### **B. The elder son was a prodigal bound by sins of the spirit.**

The sin of a foul and festering spirit is as reprehensible in the sight of God as gross sins of sensual lusts. Both types of sins are evident today, as in New Testament days.

The elder son was critical of his father and his younger brother. Why? The Bible does not say. It may have been an attempt to cover his own sin that he accused others of wrongdoing. One wonders if his bitterness might have been a reason the younger son left home. His critical spirit kept him from being happy when the younger son returned.

He refused to forgive, as the father forgave. He declined to enter into the festivities which the father planned. He would not even go into the house, but preferred to stay outside and pout! The critical person forgets it is the fallen who needs help the most.

The prodigal in spirit is envious. He is unhappy of success and glad of failure in others. The elder son hated the father's generosity to his younger son. He was so filled with anger that he could not even refer to the younger son as “my brother.” He spoke to the father of “your son . . . this one.” Envy consumes the spirit which dares to welcome it.

The prodigal spirit is filled with pride and self-satisfaction. The elder brother compared himself with his younger brother and concluded that he

was much superior to the young prodigal. .

He pointed out that superiority to the Father. **“These many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment”** and yet **“thy son (the younger) hath devoured thy living with harlots”** (verses 29, 30). The spirit of selfish pride never delights to forgive or to restore. It is the very opposite of the spirit of God.

There are the two sons. Both were prodigals. One was a prodigal to the sin of the flesh. God condemned his immorality, rebellion against parental authority, and self-centeredness. The other was a prodigal to the sins of the spirit. God hated his critical, envious, proud, unloving, and unforgiving spirit.

The sins of the spirit are as serious as the sins of the flesh. Jesus said that publicans and harlots would go into the kingdom of God before religious people who were guilty of sins of the spirit (Matthew 21:31). Both of the sins were wrong; both were prodigals.

There are two kinds of prodigals today. One who is a prodigal to sins of the flesh is condemned by the specific laws of God. One who is a prodigal to sins of the spirit is condemned by that same law of God.

Sins of the flesh will ruin one's reputation in his community, but they will not condemn a person before God any quicker than will sins of the spirit. Many people who would flee from immorality harbor envy, criticism, pride, anger, and unforgiveness, often not realizing God condemns that as sin. God calls both kinds of prodigals to repentance.

## II. THE LOVING FATHER OF TWO PRODIGAL SONS

### A. The father supplied both his sons with their wealth.

Jesus is very specific. The father had worked hard and managed wisely to accumulate the family estate. The impression is left that the estate was considerable.

When the younger son asked for a division of the wealth, the father **“divided unto them his living”** (verse 12). The younger son had enough wealth that he could travel to a far country and pay the price for riotous living.

God has provided you with what you have. **“What hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”** (I Corinthians 4:7). How are you using the goods you receive from your Father's estate?

The father divided the estate between the two sons without consideration of their personal merit. He probably felt in his heart that the

younger son would not be able to handle the wealth wisely. He could foresee the course the young man would take. That did not keep him from giving what was due him of the estate.

Jesus spoke of a heavenly Father who does much the same: **“He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust”** (Matthew 5:45),

God gives blessings even though He knows a person might use them wrongly. He will not stop the wayward from straying. He will call and convict and plead for repentance, and when the prodigal returns, He will welcome him home with full and complete forgiveness.

**B. The father suffered in love because of the sins of his sons.**

He suffered at the loss of his younger son who left home for the **“far country.”** He suffered because he recognized the seriousness of his son's loss.

The parable pictures the sinner's departure from God. Why do men go away from God? Not because they are atheists. They depart from God because they recognize no need of Him.

Who suffers more, the child or the parent, when a youth rejects parents and home and departs? The parent suffers more! God is saying that humanity suffers in its sin, but that He suffers infinitely more over the sins of men.

No one knows how many sleepless nights and anxious days the father spent as he wondered about the welfare of his departed son. No one knows how many times he looked down the road in hope of seeing him returning. His loving concern never failed during his son's absence. That is the spirit of a loving father.

The father suffered at the sins of his elder son. The return of the young son brought tears of joy, kisses of forgiveness, and a banquet of rejoicing. Feasting, laughing, and singing were the fitting responses to his return.

The elder son refused to enter into the festivities. He refused to enter the house where his younger brother was being welcomed. The father had ordered the celebration. His joy was dimmed by the anger of the elder son. He went out and “pleaded” with his son to come in, but to no avail. The son did not share the spirit of his father, nor was he glad at the restoration of his brother. Such a sinful spirit grieved the heart of the father.

**C. The father kept on loving in spite of the sins of his sons.**

He watched and desired the return of the younger son when others had given up. When the lad came home at last, there was no recitation of his sins to humiliate him, no deeds of penance to punish him, but a loving welcome and forgiveness to restore.

The younger son said, "I have sinned; I am not worthy to be called your son." The father accepted the spirit without agreeing with the words of truth which reflected it. He welcomed him as a son even though he truly was not worthy. The robe, the ring, and the shoes were enough to assure him of the father's forgiveness and love. The banquet was but further confirmation that the young prodigal was restored.

The elder son accused his father of injustice. He complained that for years he had worked for his father, forgetting that from the moment of the division of the estate he was working for himself. What was left of the estate was his! The father had done him no injustice.

The loving response of the father was, "**Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine**" (verse 31). Even God can give no more than all He has!

God does no injustice to the righteous because He forgives the unrighteous. He does no injustice to one sinner because He forgives another sinner. His grace is available to all who hear His voice. He loves all without partiality. Anyone who comes to Him will be received with love and forgiveness (John 6:37).

#### **D. The father welcomed and rejoiced in the repentance of the wayward son.**

He wished that both sons had the same spirit, but the bitterness of one did not keep him from accepting the repentance of the other.

The sinner must come to God in the way the prodigal younger son came to his father.

(1) He came voluntarily. God wants to receive repentant believers as sons, not as prisoners or as slaves. The younger son came to his father when he resolved in himself to come, not when forced by external compulsion. That is the way each sinner must come.

(2) He came confessing. The young prodigal's speech was prepared in advance. He met his father and said what he had planned to say. He made no excuses for his failure: "**I have sinned.**" He recognized the seriousness of his actions: "**Against heaven, and in thy sight.**" He admitted his forfeiture of any claim on the father or place in the family: "Make me a hired servant." God does not want excuses; He wants a humble and contrite spirit.

(3) He came to stay. "**Make me as one of thy hired servants,**" he begged. (A hired servant was paid at the end of each day. Any day his work was not satisfactory, he was told not to report the next day. The prodigal son was willing to work "on approval" to show the change in his life.) He intended to be faithful.

(4) He came to his father. The elder brother of the household would not

do. The steward of the house was not sufficient. No one but the father could receive, forgive, and restore him. Thank God for the person who will not settle with coming to church, accepting a creed, or observing a sacrament. Blessed is the person who will settle for nothing less than the Father.

(5) He came to full forgiveness. The father interrupted his son's confession. A comparison of verses 18, 19 with verses 21, 22 will show that the father accepted the son's spirit before hearing all his words. His compassion, running to meet him, embracing him, kissing him, and clothing him, indicated the loving forgiveness with which he received him.

(6) He came to great joy. **“They began to be merry. . . . he heard musick and dancing. . . . thou hast killed for him the fatted calf”** (verses 24, 25, 30). In all three parables of Luke 15, the story ends with joy. God is always glad when the sinner comes home.

The parable has a dispensational application. The younger son represents the Gentiles who departed from God into idolatry and sensual living. The elder son represents the Jews who kept the Father's revelation but missed the Father's spirit. But there is another application of the parable.

Three sons are mentioned in Luke 15:11-32. (1) There was a younger son who broke his father's heart. (2) There was an elder son who despised his father's love. (3) There was the Son of God, telling the story, who did His Father's will in coming to seek and to save those who are lost. You may be guilty of the sins of the younger or elder son, but those sins can be forgiven when you come to the Son of God.