

PARABLE: PRODIGAL SON

Luke 15:11-32

STRUCTURE

Key-persons: Father, the younger son, and the older son

Key-locations: Home, and the distant country

Key-repetitions:

- Younger son's actions: requested inheritance (Lk 15:12); set off for distant country (Lk 15:13); wasted his wealth (Lk 15:13); found job feeding pigs (Lk 15:15); came to his senses (Lk 15:17); returned to his father (Lk 15:20); confessed sins to father (Lk 15:21).
- Father's actions: divided property between his sons (Lk 15:12); received returning son with joy (Lk 15:20-24); celebrated younger son's return (Lk 15:24); counseled older son (Lk 15:28-32).
- Older son: refused to enter house to celebrate (Lk 15:28); expressed resentment to father (Lk 15:29-30).

Key-attitudes:

- Younger son's selfish arrogance in asking father for inheritance.
- Father's despair when younger son left home.
- Younger son's wastefulness in distant country.
- Younger son's desperation when he had spent everything and he experienced famine.
- Younger son's humility when he returned home.
- Father's joy at younger son's return home.
- Older son's resentment of younger son and father.
- Father's love for both sons.

Initial-situation:

Jesus was in the second half of the third year of his public ministry. Jesus had made a trip to Jerusalem to participate in the Feast of the Tabernacles. During the Feast, there was a confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders. After the Feast, on a Sabbath, Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. That created a conflict with the Pharisees. Jesus then declared himself to be the Good Shepherd.

After the Feast of the Tabernacles, Jesus probably traveled to the region of Perea. There he taught, often telling parables, and had confrontations with the Pharisees. Jesus' words humiliated and angered his critics, but the people were impressed by his miracles.

Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedications.

Initial-problem:

Tax collectors and sinners came to hear Jesus. Jewish religious leaders complained that Jesus welcomed sinners and ate with them. Jesus answered with three stories about things lost and found.

Final-situation:

The elder brother remained outside the celebration.

BIBLE STORY

Jesus told a parable, "A certain man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' The father divided property between his two sons. The younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and wasted his wealth in a wild lifestyle. The younger son spent everything. The son had nothing when a bad famine spread throughout that country. The son was in desperate need. The son found a job with a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. The son was so hungry that he wanted to eat some of the bean pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"The son came to his senses, and said to himself, 'My father's hired men have food to spare, and here I'm starving to death! I'll return to my father and tell him, 'Father, I've sinned against heaven. I've sinned against you. I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired men.' The son got up and returned to his father.

"The son was a long distance off when his father saw him. The father felt compassion for his son. The father ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

"The son said, 'Father, I've sinned against heaven. I've sinned against you. I don't deserve to be called your son anymore.'

"But the father called to his servants, 'Hurry! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's celebrate with a feast. My son was dead, now he's alive; he was lost, now he's found.' They began to celebrate (Lk 15:11-24).

"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. The older son returned to the house and heard music and dancing. The older son called one of the servants and asked what was going on. The servant answered him, 'Your brother returned. Your father killed the fattened calf to celebrate your brother returning home safe and sound.'

"The older brother was so angry he refused to go into the house. His father went out and pleaded with the older son to come inside. The older son answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been your slave. I never disobeyed even one of your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours, who wasted your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

"The father replied, 'Son, you're always with me. Everything I have is yours. But we have something to celebrate because your brother was dead but has come back to life. He was lost and has been found'" (Lk 15:25-31).

The elder brother remained outside the celebration.

GENERIC DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

1. What catches your attention in the story?
2. Is there anything in the story that is hard to understand?
3. Who are the main characters in the story?
4. What problems did the characters face?
5. How did the characters face their problems?
6. How have you faced similar problems?
7. Is there someone in the story who is similar to you or who is different from you?
8. What does the story tell about God?

SPECIFIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What stages did the younger son go through in his journey to coming to his senses?
2. What did the younger son learn in the far country?
3. How did the father receive the returning son?
4. How can we help people who are acting like the younger son?
5. How does the older brother react to his younger brother's returning home?
6. Why did the older brother refuse to celebrate the return of his younger brother?
7. How should we relate to religious people who react like the older son and resent repentant sinners?
8. How should we react when a person repents who has deeply hurt us with his past sin choices?

LIFE-LESSONS

1. **A person's worldview influences life-lessons he gains from a Bible story.** The parable of the Prodigal Son was told to a group of internationals. The storyteller asked, "Why did the younger son go hungry?"
 - An American answered, "He wasted his money."
 - An African answered, "There was a famine in the land and everyone went hungry."
 - A Latino answered, "He was an immigrant; no one cared if he lived or died."
2. **God is eagerly waiting to receive the repentant sinner.** In the parable of the Prodigal Son, the father represents God, the Heavenly Father (Lk 15:11-32). The only time the Bible shows God in a hurry is when the father ran to meet his repentant son (Lk 15:20).
3. **The religious person who becomes upset when a sinner repents, has an attitude that is contrary to God's attitude.** The older son represents religious people who don't understand God's desire for sinners to repent. The older son's anger is contrasted with the father's happiness. (Lk 15:25-32).

4. **Parents can gain knowledge on how to face the problem of a rebellious child from the father of the prodigal son:**
- Parents should not protect a child from the consequences of his sin. The father allowed the son to become so desperate that he took a job taking care of pigs (Lk 15:15).
 - Parents should not finance their child's addictions. The father did not send money for the son to spend in the far country.
 - Parents should leave the door open for the rebellious child to repent and return. The father ran to meet the repentant son who was returning (Lk 15:20).

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Role-playing Drama:

Invite two listeners to imagine they were the father's servants and have them discuss the younger son's return. One will defend the father, and the other will defend the older son.