

SESSION 1: THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Luke 15:11-32; Romans 3:23

QUESTIONS

1. Discuss why the older son must also repent in this parable even though he stays at home with his father and obediently carries out his daily tasks.
2. The older son believed his conduct required his father to respond to him in a certain way. Describe a way in which people try to control God through their obedience.
3. What does your "good conduct" entitle you to?
4. If God's grace is free and we cannot earn it in any way, what motivation is there to live an obedient life?
5. If at the Last Judgment God, in His righteousness, determined all mankind could enter into eternal fellowship with Him, He would be pleased. In the end we would have the same reward as someone who comes to love, believe, and follow the Lord at the "last minute". What would allow us to rejoice as He does over this?
6. What does this parable tell you about God's heart for us? What does it tell you about the heart God wants us to have?
7. What is your personal call to action from this parable and discussion?

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SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

Today, we're going to talk about the parable of the prodigal son. As you know, family members can sometimes be harder on one another than friends and neighbors may be. Jesus told this parable to make the point that we need to love these difficult family members as God loves us. On the other hand, when we demand fairness over grace, and fail to assume the nature of Christ in dealing with our brother or sister, fellowship cannot occur.

Luke 15 records Jesus telling three consecutive parables about things or people who were lost. They are: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. The parable of the lost son is a little different than the other two. Among other things, it addresses the conduct of the older son. Though there are three main characters, and each character's conduct teaches important spiritual lessons, today we'll focus on just one character - the older son - and touch on just a few aspects of his conduct.

Please pause now and read the parable in Luke 15:11-32, and as you do, focus your attention on the older son's conduct.

Here are a few reasons the older brother also needs to repent:

First, like his younger brother, the older brother displays a sense of entitlement. His "what's in it for me?" attitude is evident when he points out that he has remained with his father, yet the father never held a celebration in his honor. The older son feels he should receive greater recognition for his faithfulness and loyalty. His attitude makes us wonder: does he regret having remained faithful and loyal, in light of the reception his brother received? What motivated him to remain with his father? Was it love and loyalty, or, the prospect of material gain and of being elevated over others?

Because of his sense of entitlement, the older son is upset that his father has forgiven his brother; it doesn't seem fair. He reminds his father of all the bad things his younger brother did. "Fair" to the older son seems to be that he wants the younger to be treated according to the law. He should suffer for his misdeeds and shouldn't get a second chance.

Second, the older brother lacks the loving and gracious attitude of his father, in that he exhibits no love for his brother or joy over his return. His conduct does not align with the teaching of Luke 15, or of Jesus' command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves, and to love one another as He has loved us. Because of his attitude, the older son does not share the joy of fellowship or being reunited with his brother.

He also cannot share in the joy of his brother's salvation. God wants all mankind to be saved. That is the goal of His plan of salvation.

If at the Last Judgment God in His righteousness determined all mankind could enter into eternal fellowship with Him, He would be pleased. But would we? Might we feel "shortchanged" because we wind up with the same reward as someone who comes to love, believe, and follow the Lord at the "last minute"? May we feel we "deserve" more because we have "done more", and/or have "done it longer"?

God's capacity to bless is different than man's. When the father says to the older son, "*Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours*", Jesus is saying, that His Father's capacity to bless and share is infinite. It is impossible for a man to say to more than one person, "All that I have is yours" but God can and does say it. This is hard to understand because our human experience teaches us that we have finite resources, and to give one everything means another has nothing.

But our Heavenly Father is different. His resources are infinite. There is no limit to what He has or to what He can do. In short, nothing any of us could ever do would entitle us to the great gift of God and His Son, Jesus Christ.

As Paul says in Romans 3:23, *...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*. We are utterly dependent on His grace, and our only motivation is our love for Jesus Christ.

ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

Joy in fellowship

This parable, from the beginning, is about family, about community. To the father in the story, the return of the son completed the family again, it didn't undermine it like the older brother thought. Often our view of community, of family, differs from that of our Father.

In Jesus' compassion, we see that He welcomed all to His table. If we look at the surrounding verses they tell us that the Pharisees were upset because Jesus was eating with sinners and that creates an interesting backdrop to the story. Jesus welcomed those sinners (similar to the lost brother), but

also those who figured themselves set apart, or better, (the older brother). And even with all these different personalities gathered, the table, the community, is a place of joy.

The parable is left open ended – will the older brother join the celebration? Will we be open to forming inclusive community in our church, in our neighborhood? Even if we feel it's at a cost to ourselves? Or do we build a community that excludes?

ADDITIONAL CONTENT

The workers in the field

The script notes that the “older son feels he should receive greater recognition for his faithfulness and loyalty.” This conduct is reminiscent of the first group of workers in Jesus’ parable on the workers in the field. Read Matthew 20: 1-16 and think about the similarities in the parables.

Consider this in conjunction with this quote from our Chief Apostle: *The love to the Lord is inseparable from the love to our neighbor. Jesus expects of His own that they love their neighbor as He loves them. He, who is perfect, is willing to share His heritage with us, the sinners, because He loves us. The commandment of love demands from us that we love our neighbor as we love ourselves. If we veritably love, we do not grow indignant if the Lord gives the same to our neighbor as He grants to us.*

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