

Luke 15: 1-2, 11-24 (ESV): The Prodigal and Elder Sons, part 1

Main point: God welcomes you home with open arms.

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: Jesus is eating with “sinners.”

v. 1-2: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

Questions:

1. *Who are the Pharisees and scribes?*
 - a. The religious rulers, the high class, the “cleaned up,” the “important people,” the “mucky mucks” as I call them ☺
2. *Who is Jesus eating with?*
 - a. Tax collectors – hated among the Jewish people for working for the Romans and skimming off money from their own people
 - b. “sinners” – outcasts from society, prostitutes, etc.
3. *Why are the “important people upset with Jesus?*
 - a. They think that as an important and revered religious teacher, he should NOT be associating with the “icky” people; it reflects badly on him and his judgment and reputation

So Jesus tells the Pharisees and scribes the story of the Prodigal Son ... you’ll likely remember this from your Sunday School classes!

Focus of the study:

¹¹ And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against

heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’²² But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.’²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

Questions:

1. *What does the younger son do?*
 - a. v. 12: Goes to the father and asks for his inheritance
2. *When does a person normally receive an inheritance?*
 - a. When the parent dies
3. *So what is the younger son essentially saying?*
 - a. “Dad, I can’t wait for you to die; I want my money now!”
4. *How would you feel if one of your kids did this??*
5. *But what does the father do?*
 - a. Gives it to him and lets the son go
6. *What happens to the son?*
 - a. v. 13: Quickly goes far away and squanders his inheritance. *What does “squander” mean?*
 - i. I love the King James translation, which says the son “wasted his substance with *riotous* living.”
 - b. v. 14-15: Spends all ... and then gets hungry. Gets a job. *What kind of job?*
 - i. feeding pigs
 - c. *Why would this job be a problem for a good Jewish boy?*
 - i. Not kosher! Forbidden, unclean to touch
 - ii. *I wonder if anyone here has ever been near pigs or on a pig farm? What’s it like?* (The smell is unbelievable – so disgusting you can’t even stay within a few feet for more than a few seconds.)
 - d. *What is the son wishing he could do, and why?*
 - i. Eat what the pigs eat, because he’s starving to death
7. *Then what happens?*
 - a. v. 17: He “comes to his senses” and realizes that he can go home; that his father has servants who eat better than he’s eating.
8. *What does he decide to say to the father?*
 - a. [read v. 18-19]¹⁸ “I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.’¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”
9. Now, here’s the really great part of this whole story: [read v. 20]
 - a. *When the son gets close to home, what happens?*
 - i. the father sees him
 - b. *What does that mean the father was doing?*

- i. looking for his son! Probably up on a hill, searching the horizon – “while [the son] was still *a long way off*, the father saw him”
 - c. *What is the overwhelming feeling that the father has the minute he lays eyes on his son, coming home?*
 - i. compassion! Describe what compassion is.
 - d. *Are the father’s feelings and reactions surprising? What else could he have rightfully done, felt, and expressed to the son?*
 - i. He could have waited for the son to reach him, like a respected, dignified elder and father would have been expected to do
 - ii. Anger; disgust; “I told you so”; “you should be ashamed”
 - e. *Instead, what does the father do?*
 - i. he RUNS to the son, robes flying 😊 Cannot wait to get his son in his arms!
10. *What does the son do?*
- a. v. 21: launches into his speech – but doesn’t get all the way through it
11. *What does the father do?*
- a. v. 22: interrupts him, tells the servants to bring him a robe, ring, shoes; gives orders to prepare a party
12. *What do a robe, ring, and shoes signify?*
- a. The son is a member of the family – not a pauper or servant
13. *WHY is the father celebrating?*
- a. v. 24: “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”
 - b. What is the ONLY THING that matters to the father? Does he care that his son insulted and hurt him, took half his money, wasted it and threw it away in the worst possible way, disgraced himself with a disgusting job, and then crawled back, a total failure?
 - i. No – the only thing that he cares about is that the SON IS HOME.
[repeat/talk about this for a few minutes, letting the feeling sink in]
14. *So – how does Jesus’ story answer the Pharisees’ complaint?*
- a. Review: What were they upset about?
 - i. Jesus hanging out and eating with people who “don’t deserve” to be close to God or anyone who claims to represent God. In their view, only “good” people can be welcomed by God the Father.
15. *If the father in this story represents God, what is God like? How do you think God feel about us? Is he angry with us, with our choices, with our wandering, unwilling to have us come back to him until we’re cleaned up?*
- i. WELCOMES those who come back to him, no matter what condition they’re in
 - ii. Constantly on the LOOKOUT for anyone who wants to come back to him, no matter what condition we’re in
 - iii. EMBRACES us when we come to him, no matter what!

Jesus is trying to tell the Pharisees: Being accepted and loved by God is not about doing all the right things and being a good, upstanding, respectable person; it’s about the *love* and

compassion that God feels for you as a FATHER. That he will *run* to you with open arms and welcome you home, no matter what, every time.

16. Ask for prayer requests for today.
17. Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
18. End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace