

## Prodigals

Scripture presents a very different view of God than we usually have ...

**Ezekiel 18:32** For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

**Isaiah 62:5** For as a young man marrieth a virgin, so shall thy sons marry thee: and as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.

**Zephaniah 3:17** The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

Jesus often got into problems with the Pharisees because He presented God as SEARCHING for fellowship with sinners! That's what the three parables in Luke 15 are all about – lost sheep, lost coin, lost son.

**Luke 15:1-2** Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

**Luke 15:7** I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

**Luke 15:10** Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

God gets joy when one sinner repents! He isn't waiting to start the party when 1000 or 100 or 10 are saved ... it only takes one!

Joy of GOD in the presence of the angels – the joy comes from HIM.

Author Charles Dickens called Jesus' third parable "the greatest short story ever written." It is critical that we understand its meaning.

**Luke 15:11-16** And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

The prodigal son is a name we have attached to this story. The word prodigal doesn't appear in the Bible, but it means "wasteful." The story of the shame he brought on his family and his father, his disrespect and greed, his squandered privileges, and the horrible depths to which this Jewish boy sunk would be absolutely shocking to the Pharisees.

**Romans 6:23** For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The death didn't come when the prodigal got to the pigpen, the death came the moment he left the father's house. In that culture, they actually had a FUNERAL for a son like this who brought shame on the family. To everyone looking on, the younger son was DEAD. Period. End of story.

In this famous story, Jesus actually creates the ULTIMATE SINNER – someone who actually spurns the love of God, walks away in rebellion, does incredibly stupid things, wastes all their blessings, and ends up out on the street with nothing left, a victim of their own sin and stubbornness.

So, the question is, how does God treat the WORST sinner? Because if we know that, we know how He will treat us when we have sinned!

**Luke 15:17-24** And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

**EVERYTHING IS WRONG ABOUT THIS STORY!** The prodigal should have crawled home in shame and humiliation. That's what he deserved! He should have been held in contempt by his father and his family, at the very least. He should have been made to take a bath before anyone even talked to him! He should have had to work for years to pay back everything he squandered. This is what the Pharisees are expecting – because this is what the Law demanded. In fact, the Law demanded the ultimate price for rebellion – the prodigal son shouldn't have been able to even get as far as the gate of his father's property! Rebellious sons were supposed to be stoned to death by the entire city.

**Deuteronomy 21:18-21** If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother, and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear.

You know who the prodigal son is, right? It is YOU. It is ME. And you know who the father is, right? It is God incarnate, who loved us so much that when we were still filthy sinners he was longing and looking for us to come home every single day. Who broke all the rules about decorum and dignity, and ran to us the moment we decided to walk away from our sin and come back home. Who kissed us and held us when everyone else wanted to see us punished. Who prevented the stones of judgment from hitting us. Who actually transferred our shame to himself.

Jesus is saying to the Pharisees, “Does YOUR God do this?” Because if He doesn’t, then you don’t really know God!

The son has his speech all prepared ...

**Luke 15:18-19** I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

But once he has been shown such love and forgiveness, he leaves out one part ... because he realizes that he doesn’t have to work off his debt to be accepted ... the father has covered the debt on his behalf!

**Luke 15:21** And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

“Bring forth the BEST robe!” – this is the father’s OWN robe!

**Psalms 103:8-13** The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

The party is certainly not in honor of the son’s sin, or even in honor of his restoration – it is in honor of the father’s forgiveness and happiness!

**Luke 15:25-32** Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. 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.

There is one person who is not at the party – the elder brother. He would have been content to never see his wasteful younger brother again. He doesn’t understand the celebration at all – and he gets ANGRY.

**He doesn’t realize that HE IS ALSO A PRODIGAL.** One son left the property and wasted his inheritance, but the other son stayed on the property and wasted his inheritance! In all these years, he had worked hard but actually resented it – and he had never once enjoyed a party! One prodigal was rebellious while the other was religious – but what the father wanted was relationship!

You know who the younger son is, right? He is the SINNER. And you know who the father is, right? He is GOD. But have you ever thought about who the elder brother is? He represents the PHARISEES, the religious people who are so busy policing everyone else that they don’t realize they may be on the property, but they are not in the HOUSE! The elder brother is just as lost as the younger brother, but doesn’t know it!

This story ends awkwardly, and we never find out in the parable what the elder brother did. But we know who he is, right? So really, we do know exactly what he did. He got so angry at the father for welcoming the prodigal home that he picked up a piece of wood and beat the father to death! The elder brother is the PHARISEES, who crucified Jesus Christ!

**Luke 7:44-48** And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven.