

## THE PRODIGAL SON

Every culture has stories, and our most popular ones are designed to teach some kind of important lesson, most often to our children.

Some are beautiful, comical or eloquent in their details:

- The Ants and the Grasshopper, in which the grasshopper spent the summer singing and dancing while the ants worked to put away food, and then went hungry when the winter came.
- The Little Red Hen, in which the dog, cat, pig and turkey don't help make the bread, so they don't get to eat the bread.
- The Three Little Pigs, in which the third wise pig took longer to build his house out of bricks instead of straw or wood and survived the huffing and puffing of the big bad wolf.

Other stories are more local, and sometimes brutally practical.

- The boy who ran with scissors and poked out his eye.
- The boy who went swimming right after eating and drowned.
- The boy who sucked a balloon into his windpipe and choked.

Here's a famous story that appears in many cultures ...  
PRODIGAL SON – LUKE 15 – MODERN RETELLING

**Luke 15:11-14 (MSG)** Then he said, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.' So the father divided the property between them. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt."

Use the "alternate" ending of the rabbis ... the prodigal son arrives home and finds that he is NOT welcome! The father rejects him, the father has died, the estate has been sold, etc. There were dozens of variations, but always with the same theme to teach rebellious sons a lesson.

**Deuteronomy 21:18-21 (CEV)** A father and a mother may have a stubborn and rebellious son who refuses to obey them even after he has been punished. If a son is like that, his parents must drag him to the town gate, where the leaders of the town hold their meetings. The parents will tell the leaders, "This son of ours is stubborn and never obeys. He spends all his time drinking and partying." The men of the town will stone that son to death, because they must get rid of the evil he brought into the community. Everyone in Israel will be afraid when they hear how he was punished.

Jesus told the same story, but He changed the ending!

**Luke 15:20-24 (MSG)** When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again.' But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, 'Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed heifer and roast it. We're going to feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here—given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found! And they began to have a wonderful time.'

Jesus' version of this story was so controversial that theologians still debate His meaning. In the early years of the Christian church, Tertullian insisted that the parable of the prodigal son must never apply to Christians. If it did, he said, then not only "adulterers and fornicators" but also "idolaters, blasphemers, and renegades" would use the parable to pardon their sin. "Who will worry about losing what can so easily be regained?" he asked, and others agreed with him.

Think about it. The son's return has nothing to do with missing his family, he's just hungry! The father forgives him, before he ever gets a word of apology out of his mouth! The elder brother is made out to be the villain just because he resents his lazy baby brother coming home to live on his share of what's left of the family fortune! You can imagine what was going on in his mind as he saw the scene unfold ...

*'I'm not setting foot in that house as long as that kid's in there! I'm the one who stayed here; look at these calluses on my hands - see those? They're from working this farm. I was here the night he left; I was here when he told dad he'd had it with farming, that my father was out of date. I was here when he walked down the road with his inheritance in a big bag. He didn't even look over his shoulder at us. I was here! I was here when the people came in from the town and they taunted dad that he must have been a great father because his little boy was doing him proud in the big city. I was here and heard dad sometimes sob in his bed at night - and I knew what he was crying about. I was here! And now the kid comes home because he's hungry. He ran out of money and ran out of friends and ran out of food - he's home to sponge off dad again.'*

The payment for a life of sin is a lavish party for the sinner?! Is this really a story you want your children to learn in Sunday School?

**Luke 15:2** And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

Then, as now, the people who find this story offensive tend to be those who through heroic discipline, have never broken any of the Ten Commandments. They have never left home. They have never squandered their inheritance. They have never abandoned their responsibilities. And God loves them for that, just as the father loved the elder brother. But God has other children too, those who have made horrible mistakes, taken foolish risks, and basically wasted their lives. And God loves them in spite of that! The father welcomes sinners home, even at the risk of offending obedient sons who will not do the same.

**Mark 2:17 (NLT)** When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough.”

**ONE PRODIGAL LEFT THE HOUSE AND WASTED HIS INHERITANCE; THE OTHER PRODIGAL STAYED IN THE HOUSE AND WASTED HIS INHERITANCE! IN ALL THESE YEARS, HE HAD WORKED HARD, BUT NEVER ONCE ENJOYED A PARTY!**

The Gospel has not always gone down well with the church. We are so afraid of letting people off the hook, and so resentful of unearned love. **That is, unless we happen to be the ones toward whom the father is running with his arms wide open!**

What Jesus was teaching had a whole lot more to do with the love of the father than with the sin of the prodigal. The sin was horrible, but the love was unconditional. We learn from Jesus that the wages of sin is indeed death – a boy starving to death in a pigpen, but that the gift of God is eternal life – a welcome home party that will blow your mind!

**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 elder brother needed to repent of his attitude and return to the father’s house just as much as his younger brother. He had nothing to lose by his brother’s return, but he had grown too protective of the father’s house! He did his father’s will, but not from the heart.

One prodigal was REBELLIOUS, the other was RELIGIOUS; what the Father wanted from both of them was RELATIONSHIP!

**DON’T STAND OUTSIDE! DON’T MISS THE MIRACLE!**