



PRODIGAL SON
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The Crossing Church
Las Vegas, Nevada

OPENING

This week we are continuing our series called “Prodigal.” It is the familiar parable about a rebellious son who demanded his share of his Father’s estate, ran away and lost it all. This week we want to talk about the second son who stayed with his father, was obedient, and worked hard. Yet, because of the way their father joyfully welcomed the Prodigal home, he was angry and jealous - very toxic emotions. Some of us are a lot like him. Next week we will learn about the Father who loved both of them just as Jesus loves us.

SCRIPTURE

Luke 15:1-2 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

Luke 15:25-32 Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So, he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I have been slaving for you and never disobeyed 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 has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ‘My son’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.’”

Hebrews 5:12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food.

OBSERVATION

There is a second son in this scenario of the Prodigal. He is often overlooked because he was a good, obedient boy who never gave his father any trouble. But he was lost, too. In Jesus’ day there were two groups of people watching this story play out and He told this parable because of them: One group was made up of people of questionable integrity. They were messy, irreligious, unbelieving, notorious sinners and dishonest tax collectors. The other group were the religious elite who thought they had almost earned their way to God. We are similar people

gathered together here: Those of us who feel like outsiders because of our pasts and those who've grown up in the church and don't really have pasts.

QUESTION: To which of these groups do you belong? Why do you say that?

APPLICATION

There are two ways we can get lost: **1) We can get lost running from God, and 2) We can get equally lost at home with God.** The Prodigal got lost running. He decided that the restraints of his father were too much to take, asked for his share of the family estate and went off to blow it on wild living. When he hit rock bottom, he came back to the family to find that his father accepted him back with no conditions. This is called "the costly demonstration of unexpected love." The older brother models the second group: He is serving, giving, doing all of the right things for his father but, he is a prodigal at heart. This is actually a risk for every one of us who are Christians, especially if we have been Christians for a long time. We develop a syndrome called the Older Brother Syndrome which is defined as losing our hearts for people who are far from God – a time when we think we deserve to be blessed by Him.

QUESTION: How much of the older brother do you think still resides within you?

By all reports, the older brother was a good guy until his anger and jealousy showed up when the Prodigal brother showed up. Then his true character was revealed to everyone. The thing is that the townspeople agreed with him, empathized and identified with him. Without love, this is a natural human reaction.

QUESTION: When have you been jealous of another person's blessing?

QUESTION: When have you been righteously angry?

We can identify, too, with his anger at committing himself to good works and then seeing someone else benefit from his bad ones. If our younger sibling hurt our Dad and humiliated him, as the Prodigal did his, we would run to Dad's defense. We would be angry. Christians who are mad at the world feel like they have done all the right things and life hasn't gone their way. Not only do they believe in hell, but they are happy about it because those people will get what they deserve, right? If we look at obeying God like it is an obligation, we will end up angry at our Heavenly Father and may eventually leave as well. If we resent that God gives somebody else something that we think we deserve or when we see someone who is not living right getting good things, we feel cheated by God.

QUESTION: Where else in the Bible do you see anger and jealousy result in terrible disaster?

QUESTION: When have you thought that death bed redemption is unfair? Why?

The fattened calf should be the angry one in our scenario. He was used as the center of the great celebration – the Ruth Chris entrée – which was actually a celebration of the father's efforts to restore his son. But the older son doesn't want to join in because it wasn't about him. We have a tendency to do this, too if church isn't all about us. If the music isn't our cup of tea, or the sermon doesn't go deep enough - this is called narcissism - having an inflated image of ourselves. That sounds harsh, doesn't it, but it can be a part of all of us.

QUESTION: When have you been critical of a situation because of the narcissist within you?

So, how do we know if we have Older Brother Syndrome (OBS)? 1) If we say, "It should be about me;" or, 2) we think God owes us; or 3) when we think we are better than others. If we've stayed in a marriage, or lovingly disciplined our kids, or tithed our money, we think we are owed something we've earned. This is called following God more for what He can give us rather than

gratitude for what He has done for us. This attitude is called self-righteousness. What is keeping the older brother from his father is not his sin. It's his "goodness" – his self-righteousness. Sort of like the Pharisees. As long as we keep those who are far from God at arms-length, it's easy to separate ourselves from them. The comparisons are "we're good, they are bad" or "we're not lost, they're lost"! C. S. Lewis wrote, "Those who do not think about their own sins make up for it by thinking about the sins of others."

QUESTION: When did you realize that you judge other people because of their behavior without remembering your own mistakes?

But we don't know the rest of the Prodigal's story except that he probably didn't get another half of the estate. That would really have made his brother angry! We don't know if he came to the party, or left still angry with his father. But then our story isn't finished either. Remembering how lost we were before we had Jesus and remembering our sins and our pasts, and remembering that we are saved by Grace, not by anything we have done to earn our salvation, should cure us of the Older Brother Syndrome. Then re-engaging with people who are far from God is the second part. Inviting people to church, praying for them, mentoring, doing anything to help them find Jesus and demonstrating our heart for them can finally rid us of the Older Brother once and for all.

QUESTION: Tell us about your experience in sharing Jesus with others? What did you say?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, forgive our OBS attitudes. Teach us to love others more than we love ourselves and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. In Jesus' name. Amen.

QUESTIONS

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