

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



The Story of the 'Not-Prodigal'

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Luke 15:1-32; Gal 5:19-21; Rom. 3:10-31; Titus 3:4-5; Matt. 23; Ps 14:3; 53:3

In Luke 15, the Pharisees and Torah scholars who are walking with Yeshua through Samaria are disturbed because Yeshua welcomes sinners and eats with them. These tax collectors and sinners are being drawn to Him, and the religious insiders don't know what to do with that tension. So Yeshua begins unfolding what is often called the Parable of the Prodigal Son, though it is really a story about two lost sons. One son was obviously lost in rebellion. The other was lost in self-righteousness.

Most of us easily identify with the younger son. We know what it is to be broken, ashamed, weary from our sin, and overwhelmed by the mercy of God. We love the image of the Father running toward the prodigal. But the final scene of the parable forces us to ask a harder question. What if we are also capable of being lost while remaining near the Father's house? What if the greater danger is not obvious rebellion, but hidden pride? Yeshua leaves the story open-ended because He wants the listener to step into it personally. The issue is not simply whether sinners can be restored. The issue is whether the "righteous" are willing to rejoice when grace is given freely.

1. THE BLIND SPOT OF THE "NOT-PRODIGALS"

The younger son's lostness was obvious. He squandered his inheritance, dishonored his father, and hit rock bottom among the pigs. Everyone could see his condition. But the older son's lostness was hidden beneath duty, morality, and religious performance. He stayed home. He "slaved" in the fields. He outwardly obeyed. Yet when the father rejoiced over restoration, the older brother revealed that his heart was disconnected from the father all along. He could not celebrate mercy because self-righteousness had blinded him. The "good son" turned out to be just as distant relationally as the prodigal.

This is the danger of self-righteousness: it flourishes most easily among people who genuinely care about righteousness. Violent sinners often know they are broken. The openly rebellious may eventually look up from the pigsty and cry out for mercy. But self-righteous people rarely recognize their own condition. They compare themselves to other sinners and conclude they are doing fine. Yeshua was speaking directly to the Pharisees and Torah scholars who were grumbling about sinners being welcomed. The blind spot of the "righteous" is that we assume we are not the ones who are lost. We know how to identify sin in others while remaining blind to pride, superiority, and lovelessness in ourselves.

2. THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS STORY THE “NOT-PRODIGALS” TELL OURSELVES

The older brother tells himself a story: “I have earned my place.” He looks at his younger brother and says, essentially, “I stayed. I worked. I obeyed. I deserve more.” His righteousness is measured entirely by comparison. As long as his brother looks worse, he feels justified. But his anger exposes the true condition of his heart. He is not relating to the father as a beloved son, but as a slave trying to earn approval. “Look, so many years I’ve slaved away for you.” Those words reveal a profound misunderstanding of the father’s heart. He has proximity to the father without intimacy with him.

We often do the same thing spiritually. We compare ourselves to other people instead of comparing ourselves to the holiness of God. We think, “At least I’m not like them.” But Scripture levels the ground completely. *“There is no one righteous—no, not one.”* (Rom. 3:10). We are not saved because we outperformed other sinners. We are saved by mercy alone. Even beautiful things — Torah observance, feast celebrations, ministry involvement, spiritual disciplines — can become sources of pride if they are disconnected from humility and grace. The moment we begin feeling spiritually superior, we have drifted into the same blindness as the older brother.

3. THE FATHER’S GRACIOUSNESS TO THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS

One of the most beautiful parts of the parable is that the father pursues **both** sons. He ran to the prodigal in his rebellion, but he also came outside to plead with the older brother in his self-righteousness. The father absorbs humiliation from both sons, yet continues extending grace. The older son publicly insults him by refusing to enter the celebration, but the father does not reject him. Instead, he pleads tenderly: *“Son, you are always with me, and everything that is mine is yours.”* The father’s heart is still open. Mercy is still available. Grace is extended even to the self-righteous.

This helps us better understand the heart behind Yeshua’s strong words toward the Pharisees. His warnings were not rooted in hatred but in love. His “woes” were prophetic cries meant to awaken blind hearts before it was too late. The self-righteous often require stronger words because they are convinced they can already see. Yet even then, the Father comes out pleading. He desires restoration for the religious insider just as much as for the obvious sinner. Yeshua’s message is clear: do not miss the Father’s heart. Heaven rejoices when the lost are restored, and the righteous are invited to rejoice too.

CONCLUSION

The story ends without resolution because the ending belongs to us. The older brother stands outside the celebration with a decision to make. Will he enter the feast and rejoice with the father? Or will he remain outside, clinging to pride and resentment? Yeshua tells this story in the middle of real life — in Samaria, in the in-between, surrounded by sinners, tax collectors, religious people, and hurting people. The question is not whether grace is scandalous. It is whether we will embrace the Father’s heart enough to participate in it.

Yeshua's harshest words were never aimed at broken sinners who knew they needed mercy. They were aimed at self-righteous people who could no longer recognize their own need. The invitation of this parable is not merely to repent of outward rebellion, but to repent of hidden pride. "Amazing Grace" is not only about being lost and found; it is also about being blind and finally seeing. May the Lord open our eyes to our blind spots. May He teach us to rejoice when the lost come home. And may we remember that Yeshua alone is our righteousness.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why do you think Yeshua included the older brother in the parable instead of ending with the prodigal's return?
2. What are some ways self-righteousness can hide inside religious or spiritual communities?
3. Why is it often easier for openly broken people to receive grace than for self-righteous people?
4. How does the father's pursuit of both sons reshape your understanding of God's heart?
5. What practical steps can help us celebrate restoration instead of comparing ourselves to others?

CLOSING PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your overwhelming mercy and grace. Thank You that You pursue both the openly broken and the secretly self-righteous. Forgive us for the times we have looked down on others, compared ourselves to sinners, or trusted in our own righteousness instead of Yours. Open our eyes to the blind spots in our hearts. Teach us to rejoice when the lost are found and when relationships are restored. Let us reflect Your heart in the in-between places of life, extending mercy the way You have extended mercy to us. Remind us again that Yeshua alone is our righteousness. Lead us in the way everlasting

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.