

## The Parables of Jesus

### Lesson 3

Parable of the Prodigal Son – Luke 15:11-32

It's always encouraging to study about God's attributes of love, patience, mercy, grace and forgiveness. This is exactly what we'll be studying in this lesson. We will also be reminded about how sinful the human heart really is.

#### Setting for the Parable

Jesus was teaching people one day when some Pharisees and priests joined the audience. As always, they found something to complain about and this time it was the fact that Jesus befriends and dines with common sinners. Jesus knew their thoughts, he knew their motives and he knew their hearts. Jesus then turned to the Pharisees and priests and taught them three parables...The Parable of the Lost Sheep, The Parable of the Lost Coin and The Parable of the Prodigal Son.

Normally a parable has one truth but the parable of the prodigal son has many amazing truths found throughout the story. This parable is jam-packed with insight about God and people from start to finish. There is some debate as to whether the lost son represents someone who was never saved then gets saved or someone who was saved, backslides then repents. The interpretation is up to you.

#### Telling of the Parable

Parables use fictional figures to represent reality so let's understand this from the start. The father in the parable of the prodigal son represents God as the central figure. The two sons (using my interpretation) are members of God's family. The prodigal son's friends represent worldly people and the father's servants are others within his family. The parable of the prodigal son holds some wonderful surprises for us so let's move on to its meaning.

#### Meaning of the Parable

**The Prodigal Son** - According to Deuteronomy 21:17, the oldest son had rights to an extra share of the inheritance. In the parable of the prodigal son there were two sons in the family. Normally the entire inheritance is passed on at the death of the father.

This parable however, contains a request outside the norm. The youngest son approached his father and requested his share of the estate. The son wasn't content in his setting. He wanted to travel and leave his home. He sought adventure outside his safe and protected environment. He grew tired and bored with himself. The story soon reveals that he was full of sinful desires which wouldn't let his soul rest. He lacked faith in the sovereignty and righteousness of God.

**The Father** – He allowed the request of his youngest son and divided his estate into thirds...giving his eldest son the future rights to two-thirds and immediately passing on one-third to his defiant son. After a short time passed the younger son took his belongings and inheritance to a distant land.

The defiant son showed a blatant disregard for his father by basically making the statement that his father may as well be dead already. He could not wait until the day of his father's death to receive his share of the inheritance. Time will also soon reveal the rebellious son's other issues. The youngest son rejected his righteous father, took his earthly possessions and left for a faraway land.

**Squandering the Possessions** – This parable shows that the sinful nature of humans tends to lead to total depravity. The prodigal son chose to live in a state of self-indulgence. He wasted his inheritance on immorality, entertainment and eating & drinking. His friends in sin were plentiful. The prodigal son was having fun and enjoying life. He was living carefree and had no thought of personal responsibilities. Life was exciting...just as he imagined.

Back home his father had thoughts that his younger son was probably in trouble...possibly even dead. The father missed him and longed for his return. He kept a watchful, hopeful eye on the path by which his prodigal son could return home someday. Time passed with no word from the son.

**Reaping What Was Sown** – The parable of the prodigal reveals that one day the young man ran out of money. There were no jobs to find because a terrible famine had fallen across the land. Foolishly he had wasted his inheritance leaving himself unprepared when disaster struck.

He finally found a gentile farmer who allowed him to care for his pigs. This was a severe embarrassment to a young Jewish man. Pigs were disgusting creatures to him and here he found himself feeding them and sleeping near them. No one gave him anything to eat because of the famine. His so-called friends had long since deserted him because he ran out of money.

The prodigal son was broke, hungry, thirsty, lonely, disgusted with himself and thoroughly embarrassed. The parable of the prodigal son teaches us the disaster of following our own evil desires.

He convinced himself that life should be full of fun and work-free living. His mind could no longer properly reason sound judgments. He was blind to the sinfulness of his lifestyle. He was deaf to the good teachings he heard in his youth about God's ways, morality, family and wise living. Those good things were all a distant memory to him. He ultimately found himself in a shameful situation. Sin always drags a person into the mud of a pig sty.

**Repentance** – We are told that the son approached the point of starvation. His body, his stomach longed for something...anything to eat. He was helpless and alone. Slowly but surely he started having thoughts of his childhood. He missed his family and their farm. His memories of those things warmed his heart. He recalled all the good things of family, hard work and right living. He began to understand those lessons from his youth.

He was beginning the process of repentance. His reasoning returned. He thought, "I'll return home and confess my sins. I'll tell my father I'm not worthy to be his son I'll work and live as his servant. It's my only hope to survive." The cloud of shame continued to lift. The prodigal son was hopeful that his father would forgive him and allow him to work for his wages...at least enough to buy food.

**The Prodigal Son Returns Home** – We then find the son nearing his home after a long, difficult journey. “If only my father would allow me to work as a servant in the fields. He probably won’t but it’s my last hope.”

Still a ways from his home, his father’s eyes spot his lost son. He is so excited! He drops what he is doing and races out to greet him. His son has returned! The father kisses him on the neck and embraces him. The prodigal son attempts to confess and apologize but gets cut off by his father who tells the servants, “Bring out the best robe for my son and place a ring on his finger. Put sandals on my son’s feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it so we can celebrate. My son has returned!”

What joy! What excitement! Life is good again. The father is so happy. The prodigal son simply cannot believe the incredible reception, love, forgiveness and mercy that is being shown by his father. The lost son now completes his process of repentance by accepting his father’s forgiveness.

The father’s gifts to the son were special. The robe signified that he was the guest of honor at the banquet. The ring was given as a symbol of his authority in the family...the father restored him to his previous position...his son. The sandals for his feet were given to him because only slaves worked without sandals.

The father had graciously returned his prodigal son to

his prior position within the family. That is the remarkable way of our incredible Father!

**A Bad Attitude** – The older brother returned from where he had been working. He hears the celebration, laughter and music and is told by a servant that his brother had returned. He cannot believe what is happening. His father is throwing a huge banquet for his delinquent brother. Are you kidding?

The father comes out to greet the oldest son and tells him the great news. The older son became angry with his father. He had been a loyal son...always obedient and never leaving the family. Never had his father thrown a party for him. The son felt his father was unfair, totally unjust and even foolish. Essentially asking, “How could you do this to me?”

Not once did the older brother show the slightest hint of joy for his brother returning. He was irate...nearly in a rage about this welcome home party. He felt belittled and betrayed by his father’s choices to forgive and renew his brother. “How could my father show mercy to this disrespectful son? This despicable person who threw away a third of his father’s wealth? It just doesn’t make sense!”

The father calmly explained to his eldest son that he will always have his blessing and his inheritance... nothing will take that away. The older son will receive the entire estate at his father’s death. Nothing changes those facts. The father told him that his brother has returned and because of that fact they should be glad. He was gone and now home. The son was lost but now he is found. He was dead to us but now he is alive. Let’s celebrate! A human is worth much, much more than any amount of land, money or goods. The parable of the prodigal son has given us a lot to consider. What an awesome Father we have!

## Get This!

Picture yourself in your church. Years ago you had a friend leave the church and fall into every kind of sin imaginable. You heard the stories of immorality and ungodly lifestyle. Years and years pass by and you with your brothers and sisters in Christ have been working away at church...never having enough help to lead, teach, serve, witness...not to mention cleaning or giving.

One Sunday morning this long lost friend stumbles in the front door. The pastor rejoices! Many brothers and sisters jump for joy to console this long lost friend. But for some reason, you're angry with this person. Everyone is making such a fuss over this loser. You think, "Why? He's a mess...just look at him! Get him out of here before he corrupts someone else!"

That, folks, is what the story teaches about human nature. Now let's look at what it teaches us about God's nature. God always welcomes back a repentant sinner. God works hard to make sure one of his own never falls. It's patient, difficult work on God's part. He has to first allow the person to make their own wrong choices and wallow in sin like the son with the pigs.

When the sinner finally repents and returns, the Father and his angels rejoice! The child was lost but now has returned!

We as family members should rejoice when an undeserving brother or sister returns in repentance. This is a great testimony to God's redeeming power. Our lack of joy over a repentant person reveals a cold, hard heart in us. We must appreciate God's undeserved favor not only in our own lives but in the lives of others as well.

God is full of patience, mercy, grace and forgiveness. His love for us is immeasurable. God's favorite moments are when a sinner gets saved and enters the family and when those wandering children come back home.