

## THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

Scripture Reading: Luke 15:11-32

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is a powerful story. It has everything. Rebellion. Repentance. Restoration. It's a story that speaks to the heart of your relationship with God. And it reveals the endless grace and love of the Father. So today, let's explore the three main characters of this parable: the younger son, the older son, and the father. Each one of them challenges you to reflect on your own life and your understanding of God's grace. Now, the story begins with the younger son's request: *"Father, give me my share of the estate."* That was a deeply disrespectful demand. It's like a child saying, *"I don't want to wait until you're gone. Just give me my inheritance now — I deserve it. I shouldn't have to wait for it!"* That's pretty insensitive and disrespectful. It ignores the parents' feelings and well-being and treats their life as a financial transaction. It's especially hurtful because it suggests impatience for the parent's not passing yet. *"Hurry up and die!"*

Even if that wasn't the son's intention in this story, it's wishing his father were dead in order for him to gain his inheritance, *immediately!* Then after the father gave in to his son's demand, and with his father's wealth in his hand, the son left for a distant country to squander everything in reckless living. Then, when the money had run out, and a famine struck that country, the son is left in utter despair. At his lowest moment while feeding pigs and longing for their food, he came to his senses. He remembered his father's kindness and decided to return home. No longer as a son. But as a servant! And how often have you sought independence from God, believing you can find satisfaction on your own? And like this younger son, you choose to chase temporary pleasures, only to find yourself empty and broken. And as in our story, even in failure, God invites you to return to Him.

And the father's response is astonishing! While the son was still far off, the father saw him. He ran to him. He embraced him. And kissed him. He didn't wait for explanations or apologies from his son. He welcomed his son with open arms. A robe, a ring, and sandals were given to signify the son's restored status. A feast followed that was a celebration of life and redemption.

Let's stop and think about that. That father's grace is a beautiful image of God's love for us. No matter how far you may wander, God is always watching and waiting for your return. Have you accepted God's forgiveness? Or are you still carrying the weight of your past? Now, let's turn to the older son and his reaction to all of that. Upon hearing the celebration, he reacted with anger. He's the son who had remained obedient. Yet, he resented the father's mercy toward his wayward brother. His heart revealed a belief that love must be earned, rather than freely given. And the father's response to the older son is also compassionate. He reminded him, *"My son, you are always with me. And everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found."*

See, the father's love was not lessened by welcoming the younger son. It was absolutely abundant! Are you ever like that older son, quick to judge and slow to forgive? Being **quick to judge and slow to forgive** is an attitude that often comes from a lack of patience, or sympathy or understanding. When someone is quick to judge, they tend to form an opinion or assume without taking the time to gather all the facts or even consider different possibilities. This can lead to misunderstandings, unfair treatment, and damaged relationships. For example, someone could say, *"I saw Sarah leave the office early today. So, she must be goofing off and not taking her work seriously."* That person was assuming Sarah's early departure was due to laziness or lack of dedication without knowing the real reason she left early. It could have been that Sarah had a medical appointment, a family emergency, or prior approval to leave early.

Making assumptions like that can lead to unfair judgments and misunderstandings. On the other hand, being **slow to forgive** means holding onto resentment and grudges. Even when the other person has acknowledged their mistake or apologized. It shows a reluctance to let go of negative emotions, which can weigh heavily on both parties. While forgiveness doesn't mean excusing unruly behavior, it does mean releasing the hold that anger or bitterness may have. This combination — quick judgment and slow forgiveness — can create a cycle of conflict and isolation. It prevents growth, healing, and the restoration of trust. Developing patience, practicing empathy, and striving to understand others' perspectives can help break this cycle, fostering stronger and more compassionate relationships.

So, the Parable of the Prodigal Son offers several meaningful lessons for us. First of all, there is Forgiveness and Grace. One of the most prominent themes here is the unconditional love and forgiveness of the father. He represents God's grace. No matter how far you stray. No matter how badly you behave. Sincere repentance can lead to forgiveness.

And then there is the danger of Selfishness and Pride. The younger son's decision to demand his inheritance and waste it on reckless living serves as a warning about the consequences of selfishness, poor choices, and pride. This teaches that pursuing temporary pleasures without responsibility can lead to ruin. And when the son hit rock bottom, he chose to return home in humility, acknowledging his mistakes which reminds us of the importance of recognizing our wrongdoings and seeking forgiveness. The father's celebration upon his son's return emphasizes the joy that comes from reconciliation and restored relationships. It demonstrates the idea that reconciliation is always possible, even after great mistakes.

Then there is the older brother's anger and resentment which reveal the dangers of self-righteousness and jealousy. This part of the story encourages us to celebrate others' growth and redemption rather than bitterness. And this parable

encourages us to extend grace to others, to seek forgiveness when we fall short, and to rejoice in the restoration of relationships. It's a reminder that everyone has the opportunity for a fresh start.

The idea that everyone has the opportunity for a fresh start is a powerful theme in this Parable of the Lost Son. It emphasizes the belief that no matter how far someone has fallen, or how many mistakes they've made, change and renewal are always possible. After the younger son in the parable squandered his inheritance and made reckless choices, and he realized the consequences of his actions, he humbled himself, acknowledged his mistakes, and returned home which demonstrated a fresh start begins with genuine repentance — the willingness to admit wrongdoing and commit to doing better. When in real life, people often face regrets over past actions.

But recognizing those mistakes and seeking forgiveness opens the door to a new beginning. It's a reminder that poor choices don't have to define you forever. And the father in the parable didn't just tolerate the son's return; he embraced him with open arms, celebrated his return, and restored him. This reflects the idea that true forgiveness makes a fresh start possible. The same is in our relationships by extending grace to others and choosing to forgive. That can foster healing and reconciliation. Offering a second chance can be life changing — both for the person seeking forgiveness and for the one offering it. And you have to move beyond shame and guilt. Often, people struggle to forgive themselves even when others have extended forgiveness. The son could have let his shame keep him from returning home, but he chose courage over self-condemnation.

A fresh start requires believing that you are worthy of growth and redemption. This means recognizing that mistakes are part of being human, but they don't define your entire story. Remember, a fresh start isn't a one-time event. Life offers countless opportunities to begin again — whether it's rebuilding a broken relationship, pursuing a new career, breaking free from harmful habits, or seeking spiritual renewal. Every day is a chance to make better choices. Just as the father welcomed the son back without hesitation, there will always be opportunities for renewal, restoration, and a better path forward. Ultimately, embracing the belief that everyone has the opportunity for a fresh start means recognizing the power of grace, resilience, and growth — both for yourself and others. God's grace is not a limited resource. Rejoicing in the restoration of others is a sign of understanding the fullness of God's love.

You may see yourself in each character of this parable. You may be like the younger son, in need of repentance and the embrace of the Father. Or you are like the older son, struggling to extend the grace to others you have received. But the Father's love remains the central theme — a love that pursues, forgives, and celebrates. Come home to God, knowing that you are welcomed, not because of what you have done, but because of who He is. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we come before You with grateful hearts thinking on the story of the prodigal son. Thank You for Your love that welcomes us home no matter how far we have wandered. Lord, help us to turn away from our pride and sin, and to run into Your open arms. And for those who feel lost, remind them You are always waiting with love and compassion. And for all of us Lord, let this story transform our hearts so that we may love others as You love us. In Jesus' name, we pray.  
**Amen.**