

## MORE TO THE STORY: The Prodigal Son<sup>i</sup> Luke 15:11-32

### INTRODUCTION:

Good morning, church family. Welcome to those of you that are guests today. Thank you for entrusting us with your Sunday. It is our prayer that our church already feels like home to you.

We love to connect with our guests. We would ask you to text the keyword, TBCMP, which stands for Trinity Baptist Church Mt. Pleasant, to the number 94-000. Just follow the instructions from there.

Or you can stop by Guest Connect located in the lobby. We have a team that would like to meet you and give you a gift as a way of saying thank you for being with us this morning. We have purchased new gifts that I think is pretty cool. And I will make my way there as well and I look forward to shaking your hand this morning.

### SERIES OVERVIEW:

Today we wrap up a teaching series we've called, "More to the Story." We've looked at several of the parables of Jesus. Today, we close by looking at probably the most famous of Jesus' parables, The Parable of the Prodigal Son. So, I want to invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Luke chapter 15. We are going to be in verses 11-32 this morning.

Now, next Sunday, I'm excited to launch a new teaching series, Blueprints: Building Families by God's Design. Whether you are single, preparing to start your family, in the middle of trying to figure out parenting, navigating brokenness in your family, or empty nesters, God works, if we allow Him, and He leverages the family to make an impact. You don't want to miss out on this study. I'm excited about it. I hope you'll make plans to be a part of each week of that series.

In our current sermon series, we've been working from a definition of what a parable is. A parable as a teaching aid that teaches something unknown (spiritual) by relating it to something that is known (tangible). It is to cast a spiritual truth alongside something that people would know. It's an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus is the master storyteller, and these stories are powerful and challenging to us today.

### **OPENING ILLUSTRATION: Our view of our dads change over time<sup>ii</sup>**

I came across an article this week that was about a child's view of their dad through the years. It pointed out that at age 4, we think our dad can do anything. At 7, dad knows a whole lot. At 12, dad doesn't know quite everything. At age 15, dad is so old fashioned. At 17, I'm not sure dad knows anything. At 21, dad is so out of date. At 25, dad does know a little bit. At 30, maybe I ought to ask dad. At 35, let's see what dad thinks. At 50, dad knows everything. At 65, sure wish dad was here so I could talk this over with him. Funny how our view of our dads changes over the years.

I know not all of us were fortunate to have dad's that were who they should have been in our lives. After all, dads make mistakes, too. Or maybe you lost your dad too young. But we all have a Heavenly Father that is perfect and present and available. And my prayer for us this morning, as we study the Parable of the Prodigal Son, that we would leave here with a greater love and appreciation for God, The Father. He is our good, good, father as we are going to see this morning.

So, like the other parables we've studied, we are going to look at the parable, the point of the parable, and then the practice, the application we can take and apply to our lives today.

### MESSAGE:

So, let's look, first, at...

#### **1) The Parable.**

There is so much to The Prodigal Son, often called the pearl and crown of all parables.<sup>iii</sup> It's probably the most familiar of all of Jesus' parables. Even if you don't call yourself a Christ Follower, chances are you probably know this story.

There are 3 main characters in this parable. The younger son, the one we call the prodigal. The older son, who is often overlooked. Both of the sons are wayward for different reasons. Then there's the father. While it is called the parable of the prodigal son, this really is more about the father than either of the sons. The word, "father," occurs 12 times in the first 18 verses. And while the sons' attitudes are outlandish, the father's love is extraordinary.

Also, interesting of note, the term, "prodigal" means reckless and foolish.<sup>iv</sup> And in addition to us reading about the reckless behavior of one of the sons in this

parable, we are going to see the equally, if not much more, reckless love of God.

The setting and occasion of this parable is important to understand as well. Jesus tells this parable while at dinner with an interesting crowd. Verses 1 and 2 of Luke 15 set the stage for us. Let's look at that before diving into the particulars of the parable. *<sup>1</sup>Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him [Jesus] <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes **grumbled**, saying, "This man receives sinners and **eats with them**."* A couple of things here.

Tax Collectors were the lowest people socially and religiously in Israel in Jesus' day.<sup>v</sup> They were sellouts to Rome. And the term "sinners," is a general term that refers to people that were, "especially wicked."<sup>vi</sup> And the Pharisees are the religious leaders of Israel. They were steeped in legalism and Jesus often opposed them. So, the Pharisees come upon Jesus dining with these people and they start grumbling. And grumbling literally means, "constant and intense murmuring."<sup>vii</sup> Like the sound of humming bees.

Why would they be so appalled by Jesus eating with these people? Well, having a meal with someone carried great significance in that culture. It signified acceptance and blessing.<sup>viii</sup> Acceptance and affirmation being two different things. But Jesus accepted and welcomed sinners into His presence. But to the Pharisees, this defiled Jesus. Which is why they grumbled.

So, Jesus hearing this grumbling tells 3 parables back-to-back-to-back. These stories were directed toward the Pharisees to challenge them in their pious approach toward others. Each parable, including the Prodigal Son, all teach the same idea, only increasing in intensity. Here's what I mean. The first story is about a man who finds his lost sheep. He leaves the 99 to find the 1. And when he finds that missing sheep, he has a party with his friends. Why? Because the sheep has value to him.

Then Jesus tells a story about a woman who lost a coin. She tears her house apart looking for the coin. When she finds it, she calls her friends, and they party. The point? Heaven throws a party when a sinner is found.

Now, the sheep is of value, but there were 100 sheep. The coin is of more value because there were 10. When it comes to the story of the Prodigal Son, we see that humanity is of infinite value.

Now, before we look at the story, it's important to understand the culture in which Jesus is speaking. The setting is a Middle Eastern village. And the predominate thought in those days was, "Seek honor. Avoid shame." It was an honor / shame culture. That background is going to bring more significance to the parable as Jesus tells it. Let's begin in verse 11. I'll stop us along the way to understand the particulars of what is going on.

Follow along in your copy of God's Word. Verse 11. *<sup>11</sup>And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>And **the younger** of them said to his father, 'Father, **give me the share of property that is coming to me**.' And he **divided his property between them**.* Two sons. The younger son's request for his inheritance early would have been viewed as very disrespectful. Culturally, this was unacceptable and was associated with shame. One, you didn't talk about inheritance while your dad was still alive. Two, your bringing shame to the family. But he wanted what was coming to him. Essentially, the younger son was saying, "I wish you were dead, Dad."

Now Jewish Law made provisions for how such a request could be handled. First, a family could severely punish the son by stoning him. Or, at the very least, the family would officially disown the son with a ceremony. A third option would be to set up a conservatorship where the son could get his inheritance, but the father would maintain control over how it was spent. But none of those happen in this case. The father divided the property.

Because inheritance was tied up in property and land, it was not liquid. So, to divide the property meant that the father would have had to sell portions of land that was probably passed down through generations. And an inheritance usually meant taking over the family business and keeping the land in the family. But the younger son wanted none of that. He wanted cash.

The Pharisees hearing this would have been appalled by this scenario. They would have cast shame on the son, but also on the father for not getting a handle on the situation. But the story gets worse. Verse 13.

*<sup>13</sup>Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into **a far country** [this would have been a Gentile country. Which would have further upset the Pharisees], **and there he squandered his property in reckless living**.* Reckless being where we get the word prodigal. He wasted everything on wild living. Now the Pharisees are just offended. Verse 14.

<sup>14</sup>And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. This information points to the degree of recklessness of the son's spending. He can't help a famine, but wisdom would have caused him to prepare for emergencies. This guy obviously hadn't taken Dave Ramsey's Financial Peace University. No emergency fund. Verse 15.

<sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields **to feed pigs**. This situation keeps getting worse for the Pharisees as they listen. A shameful son. A disrespected father. Hedonistic lifestyle. Now pigs?! Remember, pigs were considered unclean and were not allowed in the Jewish diet. See, that's why I can't be Jewish. I love bacon too much. Thank God for Acts 10! Amen?

Verse 16. <sup>16</sup>And he was longing to be **fed with the pods that the pigs ate**, and no one gave him anything. By this time, the Pharisees would have torn their robes. The scene that Jesus described was the absolute rock bottom. It can't get any worse.

Verse 17. <sup>17</sup>But when he **came to himself**, he said, 'How many of **my father's hired servants have more than enough bread**, but I perish here with hunger! A turning point. He's come to the realization that his dad is a good man. Here he is a hired servant but doesn't have any food, wanting to eat what the pigs were eating. But his dad's hired servants have more than enough bread. He's beginning to realize his father's goodness.

Verse 18. <sup>18</sup>I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup>And he arose and came to his father. This turning is one of repentance. But look what happens next. **But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.** The father is so moved, he takes off after the son. But the Pharisees would have been shocked. What?! That son needed to be shamed and disciplined. But what we see instead is the reckless love of The Father meeting someone who had been torn and tattered by the recklessness of their sin. More on this in a moment.

Verse 21. <sup>21</sup>And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'<sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly **the best robe**, and put it on him, and put a **ring** on

his hand, and **shoes** on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And bring the **fattened calf** and kill it, and let us eat and **celebrate**. <sup>24</sup>For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. The wayward son never finished his speech. The father interrupted him before he could recommend his own punishment. Then the father took on more expense. He says to get the best robe. This would be an expensive embroidered robe. This would be something that only the dad would wear and on special occasions.<sup>ix</sup> He orders it be placed on his son. The stinky, dirty, rolling around with pigs, son.

Secondly, the father says to put a ring on his finger. Rings were used to conduct official family business by using it as a seal in wax.<sup>x</sup> His son can now conduct official family business.

Then he says, put shoes on him. Hired servants didn't have shoes. This is restoring his sonship.<sup>xi</sup>

And then, fattened calf. Wealthy people of this day would have only had one calf. They would have kept it for a big occasion. Usually, the calf was killed for the reception of the first son's wedding.<sup>xii</sup> It was prime meat, too. I'm talking Texas de Brazil. House Picanha. Par-tay!

Now all this is going on and the older son has no clue. Look at verse 25. <sup>25</sup>Now his **older son** was in the field [working hard], and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. <sup>27</sup>And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back **safe and sound**.' What?! My reckless brother?! The fattened calf?! The one for my wedding?! Verse 28.

<sup>28</sup>But **he was angry and refused to go in**. His father came out and entreated him, <sup>29</sup>but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours [notice it's not my brother. This son of yours] **came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf**[?!] **for him!**' Do you see the checklist the older brother has kept as though the father owed something to him?

And then the father's reply. Verse 31. <sup>31</sup>And he said to him, 'Son, **you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours**.<sup>32</sup> It was fitting to celebrate and

*be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”*

And that’s how the story ends. We don’t know what happened. We don’t know if that final statement was received by the older brother. My suspicion is that the brother stormed off. But what an incredible story.

That’s the parable. Now, let’s look at...

## 2) The Point.

I think the point is very simple. Remember, this parable is directed at the legalistic Pharisees. The point being **God’s has a reckless love toward all sinners**. Regardless of the degree to which you sin, God’s love for sinners is not fully comprehensible. When the son is marred by the most heinous of sin, God, the father, demonstrated His love for the wayward son in the most extravagant of ways. And when a sinner comes to The Father, all of Heaven celebrates.

That’s the point. Now, I want to mention...

## 3) The Practice.

While I think there are numerous applications for this story, I want to make mention of 2 main takeaways. I do want you to spend time reflecting on this parable this week and ask God for specific ways you need to apply the truths in this story.

The first point of application I want to mention is...

### 1) See and show God’s love.

I think the love of the father in the parable is obvious. And, no doubt, it illustrates God’s love toward us. I want to zoom in on verse 20, so we can wrap our minds around God’s love. When we see God’s love, we can show it.

Look again at verse 20. ***20And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.*** Jesus chooses His words very wisely here and I think His point is for us to press into them.

Now, I want you to get this picture. You have a father who has been shamed by his younger son. But his father saw him while he was still a long way off. You know what that means? It means his father was looking for him constantly. I

picture a dad, not holding on to shame and being disrespected, but a dad keeping an eye on the road, every day, hoping to see his son, wondering if he ever would. Asking God to answer his prayers. Those of you that have or have had wayward children, you understand the longing of the father. Is that? Could it be? I believe it is! That’s my son.

And the son, notice, was still a long way from home. Meaning he was still steeped in his sin and shame. More than likely, he still had the contents of the pig pen all over his clothes. Humiliated and emaciated. Yet the love of the father is demonstrated in an expectant return, looking a long way off.

Then, the father is filled with compassion, verse 20 says. The term translated, “compassion,” is a word that means to feel something in the gut.<sup>xiii</sup> It was the deepest level of emotion. That’s what the father feels when he sees his son.

But the love of the father goes even further! After seeing him and being moved with compassion, the dad takes off running! Now understand the significance of this. I want you to wrap your mind around the father running to the son.

In this culture, grown men didn’t run. Moreover, to be able to run, the dad would’ve had to pull his tunic above his knees. You don’t run, but you for sure don’t show your knees. It was shameful. But the father didn’t care!! His son was back! He’s so overwhelmed with compassion, he loses all dignity, and in shame takes off toward the son.

The father then embraced the son. I love this so much. The literal translation of embraced him is, “he fell upon the neck of him.” The idea being that he seized him, the father taking possession of the son.<sup>xiv</sup> It’s unreal! I can’t imagine how dirty and nasty and stinky the son was. Mud and refuse from the pig pen on his clothes. No bath in no telling how long. Skeletal from going without food.

But the picture I see is the father cared less about the condition of the son, because he was overjoyed by the presence of the son. So, the father embraced him in such a way that the muck of the pig pen wound up on the father’s clothes. The stench of the son now worn by the father.

And then, then father kissed the son. The word translated, “kissed,” literally means kiss repeatedly and earnestly.<sup>xv</sup> In other words, the dad, overcome with joy, kisses the face of this foul son. His lips, pressed into a mud-covered face.

Do you see the depths of the love of the father? In shame, the father ran to the son and embraced him. The son's filthiness becomes the father's filthiness. This demonstrating perfectly the love of God, The Heavenly Father. Romans 5:8, *"**but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners** [or while we were still a long way off], **Christ died for us.**"* Hebrews 12:2, *"**looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame** [the cross brought], **and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.**"* And 2 Corinthians 5:21, *"**21 God made him [Jesus] who had no sin [on him] to be sin for us** [to take on our sin], **so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**"*

For God so loved the world, the shameful sinners, steeped in sin, you and me, that He came running, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, taking on the filth of our sin, so that we can be adorned with the ultimate robe, the righteousness of Christ. Oh, do you see the reckless, prodigal, love of God?!

Beloved, if you have experienced such lavish love from God, then by all means, show it to the world. Dine with sinners. Invite them into our presence. Not to affirm and join in sin, but that sinners might see the love of God toward them. I believe with all my heart, that whomever God has given breath, He longs for them to come to Him, looking toward the horizon, just for the turn, ready to run after the vilest of sinners to welcome them into His presence. And we are the instrument that God uses to show His love.

See and show God's love. Secondly, ...

## 2) Live grace based.

The most often overlooked part of this story is the older son. But the older son is just as lost as the younger son. In fact, in this story, I think is the same as his younger brother. Look at verse 28. *"**28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.**"*

The word translated, "entreated," carries the idea of begging. So, the father leaves the party and comes to where the older son was. He did the same for the older brother that he did for the younger brother. While still on the outside, the father ran to him, leaving the party. The dad begged the older son to be a part of the wonderful, miraculous return of his brother. But he wanted nothing to do with the father's joy. The older brother was just the same as the younger brother, wanting nothing to do with his father.

Instead of being excited for his brother's return, he responds in legalism. That's the opposite of grace. The dad showed grace, but the older son held onto self-righteousness.

He said, "Look at me! All these years, all the things I've done for you. I never disobeyed you." Yeah right. The dude is so self-righteous he can't even see his own sin. The older son goes on, "You've never thrown a party for me." Like all of his good deeds should have resulted in him getting more things.

Don't we tend to approach God the same way? We tend to be legalistic. God, I've done so many good things, You owe me. Beloved, God owes us nothing. Remember we, in our sin, have offended a Holy and Righteous God. He owes us His wrath. But in His loving kindness, in His grace-based approach, God loves us and draws us to Himself.

Look what the dad tells the older son. Verse 31. *"**Son, [I don't understand] you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.**"* But the older son didn't really want his dad's presence, he wanted his dad's presents, gifts.

We tend to do the same with God. That's what legalism does to us. God, you owe me. But isn't His presence enough? What more could we want than for God to be with us?! If everything was stripped away, would we be satisfied with just God's nearness? Or would we present a laundry list of reasons why we think God owes us. Listen, legalism will destroy you but grace will give life.

I think there's also another way to look at the grace-based approach. If you were to die today and stand before God. And we certainly hope that doesn't happen. But if it did, what would you say to God when He asks you, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" I think the older brother would talk about his list. "Well, look at all the good I've done. I've served others. I tried to obey the 10 commandments. I gave money to people who needed it. I went to church. So, I think that deserves Heaven." To which God would say, "Your good deeds are like filthy rags to a holy God." And the older brother is still on the outside.

But the younger brother's response would be different. Wouldn't it? God says, "Why should I let you into my heaven?" The younger brother would say, "You shouldn't. I've made massive mistakes. Look at me. I'm covered in sin and shame. The level of my sin is a stench in Your nostrils. I've squandered what You've given me. I owe you everything. I'm no longer worthy to be called Your

child. You shouldn't let me into Your heaven, but by Your grace and mercy, and by the blood of Jesus, I come to You." And to that reply, God would say, "*Bring quickly **the best robe**, and put it on him* [a crown on his head], *and put a **ring** on his hand*, [put] ***shoes** on his feet.* <sup>23</sup>*And bring the **fattened calf*** [we've got a banquet to put on], *and let us eat and **celebrate*** [all of Heaven]. <sup>24</sup>*For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.*'

### **CONCLUSION:**

We know the father in this story represents God. And we identify with the sons. But the question is, "Which son are you?" Are you the older brother? Legalistic in your approach toward God. Looking for God to give you something, as if His presence in your life is not enough. Hanging onto your good deeds like some badge of honor. Looking down your nose as those heathens that need to change their ways. But just as lost and apart from a relationship with God.

Or, are you the younger brother? Maybe you've already come home and experienced the love of God the Father. And out of your gratitude, you show it toward others.

Or maybe, you're the younger brother still far away from God, riddled with sin. You may not realize it, but God loves you. He's watching; for just a turn. You don't have to get cleaned up before you come to Him. By faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior of your life, God will embrace you, take your sin and separate it from you. He'll give you new clothes, a new life. And all of Heaven will party because of you coming home to Jesus.

If that's you, at the end of our service today, our elders will be here at the front. We want to visit with you about how you can be born again unto a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Maybe you're here today and you find yourself dealing with some hardship. Maybe it's a relationship that is strained. Maybe it's a medical concern. Maybe you are seeking wisdom in prayer. We would love to pray with you and over you.

I'm going to pray. We will stand and sing. Let's all reflect on what The Lord is speaking to us. And then let's respond to His prompting. [PRAY]

### ENDNOTES:

<sup>i</sup> Works consulted in preparation for this message: Thabiti Anyabwile, "Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in Luke," Holman: Nashville, 2017; John MacArthur, "The Tale of Two Sons," sermon published by Grace to You, March 10, 2006, accessed online: <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/GTY104/the-tale-of-two-sons>; David Guzik, "Enduring Word Commentary: Luke 15 – The Joy of Finding the Lost," published by Enduring Word Ministries, accessed online: <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/luke-15/>; Mark A. Copeland, "The Parables of Jesus: The Prodigal Son," published by Executable Outlines, accessed online: [https://executableoutlines.com/topical\\_series/parables-of-jesus/pa\\_28.html](https://executableoutlines.com/topical_series/parables-of-jesus/pa_28.html); Nate Heitzig, "No One Loves Like My Dad," message taught at Calvary Albuquerque, June 19, 2022, accessed online: <https://calvarynm.church/connectwithskip/teachings/#/series/322/sermon/4685/play>; J.D. Greear, "Unquenchable Love," sermon preached at Summit Church, March 7, 2021, accessed online: <https://summitchurch.com/message/unquenchable-love>; John Elmore, "The Forgiving Father and His Two Lost Sons: The Prodigal Son" sermon preached at Watermark Community Church, accessed online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNTBT\\_j2hcs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KNTBT_j2hcs); Timothy Ateek, "A Warning to Rule Followers," sermon preached at Watermark Community Church, accessed online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mvamPD\\_o2o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3mvamPD_o2o).

<sup>ii</sup> Article adapted from article in the Chicago Tribune, accessed online: <https://www.chicagotribune.com/1987/06/21/childs-eye-view-of-dad-through-the-ages/>.

<sup>iii</sup> Copeland.

<sup>iv</sup> Enduring Word Commentary.

<sup>v</sup> MacArthur.

<sup>vi</sup> Strong's Concordance, 268, hamartólos.

<sup>vii</sup> Strong's Concordance, 1234, diagogguzó.

<sup>viii</sup> Ingram.

<sup>ix</sup> MacArthur.

<sup>x</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiii</sup> Strong's Concordance, 4697, splagchnizomai.

<sup>xiv</sup> Strong's Concordance, 1968, epiptó.

<sup>xv</sup> Strong's Concordance, 2705, kataphileó.