

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE SON THAT STAYED HOME

### INTRO

On Father's Day—the last full Sunday I was with you—we looked at the Parable of the Prodigal Son and noted *The Path To, Picture Of, and Pattern From our Heavenly Father*. The focus was on the grace, love, and mercy of God and how the prodigal's return is a picture of salvation. It also served as a reminder to us Dad's that we need to be waiting and watching for our "prodigals"—and be willing to welcome them—the way the father did in this parable.

This morning I want to go back to Luke 15, verses 25-32, and look at the often-neglected elder brother in that parable. Jesus begins the parable with the words: "A certain man had **two** sons" (vs 11), yet we often fail to consider what we can learn about God—and ourselves—from the second son; the elder brother. I find it rather interesting that **we** not only neglect the elder son when it comes to studying this passage—he himself feels neglected by the father according to verse 29.

### 1. *The Identification of the Elder Son*

#### A. First, the confusion: True child of God—or not?

There are basically two schools of thought when it comes to identifying who the elder son represents. Some suggest that he is a **true** child of God—someone who has been born again by putting their faith and trust in the shed blood of Jesus—but has lost their joy in serving God.

##### i. **Previous pictures** allow for the possibility that the one who stayed home was saved

The parable begins with **one** lost sheep—out of 100. Not all the sheep were lost—just one. Same with the 10 coins. There were 10 coins, but only **one** was lost. In both of the illustrations given, there was something lost—but also something that wasn't lost. Following that reasoning, it would be natural to expect that with two sons, one would be lost and the other wouldn't.

##### ii. **The dialogue** allows for the possibility that the one who stayed home was saved

--Verse 29 "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment:" In other words, 'I have been faithful to you, have worked hard for you and have been obedient to you.'

--Verse 31 "And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

Mellor writes: "The elder son was one who had always remained at that very home from which the younger had wandered, and to which he had at last returned. He had been a faithful son, doing his father's commandments, and the parable would lose all its point, unless we were to see in it a picture of a father's heart which has depth and warmth enough not only to love a son who **obeys**, but to forgive a son who **disobeys** and repents. The elder son was not therefore a self-righteous Pharisee. He was not a hypocrite. But he was a somewhat narrow good man. He was a type of thousands among the Jews, and of thousands still among Christians, who look with jealous suspicion upon all who have been once abandoned and now have repented and turned to God. They have never fathomed the depths of sin. From their childhood they have walked uprightly."

B. The context. Why did Jesus tell this parable? He doesn't explain the meaning behind it like He did the parable of the sower, so how dogmatic can we be about the lessons we glean from it? The truth is, we **do** have a lens through which we must view this parable. It is not just random teaching; it is in response to an attitude seen in the Pharisees.

Notice the **beginning** of the chapter, verses 1-3.

--Vs 1: Sinners wanted to hear Him

--Vs 2: "And the Pharisees and scribes **murmured**..." Let's pause here. Why do people murmur? Do they murmur because they agree—or disagree? Usually because they disagree, correct?

The word itself is sometimes defined as “a mumbled or private expression of **discontent**.” What were they discontent about? We have that answer, too, don’t we? They were discontent with the fact that Jesus “receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” Jesus loved sinners and came to seek and to save sinners and was willing to spend time with sinners—people that were too “lowly” for the Pharisees and scribes to associate with. So Jesus teaches this parable to show them the heart of the Father—really His **own** heart—that He accepts and forgives and loves and rejoices over sinners that repent—regardless of how much they had sinned against Him.

That’s not the only lesson Jesus was teaching here, though. Jesus emphasized the fact that He was **right** in going after sinners but was also pointing out that they were **wrong** in how they treated the very same people. Not only is it **right** to rejoice when a lost sheep is found (verse 6), or when a lost coin is found (verse 9), or when a lost son is found (verse 24 and 32), it is **wrong** to be angry—like the elder brother was—when his lost brother was saved (verse 28).

C. Conclusion: The elder son is a picture of the Pharisees. It is seen in their disgust of Jesus over His willingness to receive sinners—and it is also seen in their self-righteous arrogance that is pointed out in verse 29: “neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment...”

## **2. The Indicators of Pride in the Elder Son**

Notice again verses 25-28.

--Verse 28 “And he was angry....” Why do people get angry? There are obviously lots of reasons, but in most instances, I believe it boils down to this—we become angry because we are **proud**.

--In our pride we think we should be treated a certain way and when we **are not**, we get angry.

--In our pride we think we shouldn’t be treated a certain way but when **we are**, we get angry.

--In our pride we think only good should happen to us and when **bad** happens, we get angry.

--In our pride we think everyone should see things our way and when they **don’t**, we get angry.

Let’s look now at the indicators of pride in this elder son—which Jesus used to point out the pride of the Pharisees—and which God has in His Word for us to see if these things are in **our** hearts or not.

### A. Promotion of self

--Vs 29a “Lo, these many years do I serve thee...”

--Emphasizes how **long** he has served

--Also emphasizes how **hard** he has served. There are two Greek words translated “serve.” One is “di-awh-kon-eh-oh” from which we get our word “deacon.” That word is not used here. Instead we see the word “dou-lou-oh” which carries the idea of slavery. In other words, the elder son was saying, ‘I haven’t just **served** you—I’ve “slaved” for you!’

--Vs 29b “Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment”

--What a model son—never failed to carry out one command! If that does not wreak of pride, I don’t know what does! Can’t help but think of the rich young ruler’s response when Jesus told him he needed to keep the commandments. His response? “All these have I kept from my youth up” (Lk 18:21).

Is not that the essence of pride—promoting ourselves and claiming to be greater than we really are? Not only was there a promotion of self, there was also....

### B. Pity regarding self

--Middle of vs 29 “and yet thou never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends”

You can almost hear the whine in the elder son’s voice: ‘He gets the fatted calf; I don’t even get a measly goat!’ Fails to acknowledge that he got a double portion of the inheritance (according to Deuteronomy 21:16-17) the same time his younger brother got his portion. A double portion means that he got twice as much as the younger brother—2/3 compared to 1/3. Instead, he laments that a party was never thrown for him.

Indicator #1 of pride—promotion of self; thinking you are greater than you really are.

Indicator #2—pity on self; thinking you have not gotten all the good you deserve.

Indicator #3 is C. A Problem with authority

--“Problem” is probably too weak of a word for the attitude this son had toward his father

Notice again verse 29: “**Lo**, these many years....” Commentators point out something that is easy to overlook surrounding the word “Lo.” The Greek word it comes from is often translated, “See” or “behold” or “look.” In verse 21 we see that the first word out of the straying son’s mouth was “Father.” The first word from the staying son? “Look!” “Look” indicates not only a disrespect—but also a desire to correct. The elder brother dishonored and disrespected his father by not properly addressing him.

--He also dishonored his father by refusing to go in to the feast. The party, if you will, was to celebrate and rejoice with **the father**—it was to share in the joy of the father as opposed to honoring the youngest son. This elder brother did not want to rejoice with his father—“he would not go in” we read in verse 28.

--We also see this elder son’s criticism of his father in verse 30. ‘He devoured “thy living”—what you gave him—“with harlots” and you throw a feast? You ought to be shaming him for the shame he brought on you—not celebrating!’ So we see here a critical, fault-finding attitude that says ‘this lavish celebration for a wayward son has been blown way out of proportion.’ Was not that the attitude that the Pharisees had toward Jesus? They hated the fact that He accepted and forgave and loved and rejoiced in the salvation of sinners!

Indicator #4 of pride: D. Passionless regarding his brother

--The elder brother is **passionless** regarding the return of his brother; he has no emotions or feelings for him. In fact, he does not even refer to him as his brother! Notice verse 30 “But as soon as this **thy son**...” You can almost hear the disdain and disgust in the tone of the elder brother.

--The father has joy (v 23); the elder son has anger (v 28)

--The father sees humility and repentance (v 21); the elder son reminds the father of sin—“which hath devoured thy living with harlots” (v 30)

--The father says it is right—“meet”—to rejoice (v 32); but the elder son would not go in (v 28)

Oh, the wretchedness and wickedness of pride! It overestimates self-worth and pities itself for lack of reward and murmurs over the goodness of God and refuses to rejoice with those who have been saved! Beware, beware of the pride of the Pharisees!

### **3. The Illumination of Jesus in light of the Elder Son**

I’m using illumination here to mean to reveal, “to throw light on” the person of Jesus. What can we learn about Jesus from this parable, particularly in light of the elder son? As is the case with all parables, we need to recognize there are limitations as to how far we can “drill down” when making application. For example, we have to be careful in suggesting that *coming home* is “salvation.” Why? Because they BOTH **started out** at home! If “coming home” signifies salvation, then the younger son was saved—then lost—then saved again which we know to be **contrary** to Scripture. It would also suggest that the elder son—because he never left home—didn’t need to be saved because he always was saved! That, too, is a concept that is contrary to Scripture.

As I studied and thought about the parable some more, here are some things that I believe are revealed to us about Jesus.

#### A. Jesus seeks the salvation of sinners

**In Luke 19:10**, Jesus plainly declares that “...the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” This parable illustrates that very fact. Although we often consider the “father” in this parable being God the Father, it is probably best to think of this father as a picture of **Jesus**. Jesus is the one who welcomes sinners (v 1) and Jesus told the parable because the Pharisees did not think it was proper of Him to do so. Jesus waits for—and welcomes—the straying sinner and it is noteworthy that Jesus **entreats** the self-righteous elder

brother to come to the feast (v 28). He did not command him; he intreated him—he begged him—to come in, but the elder son refused. Jesus pointed out the sins of the Pharisees not to purposely offend them, but because they were so proud and blind they couldn't see their sin themselves.

Not only does Jesus seek the salvation of sinners,

B. Jesus rejoices in the salvation of sinners

That is one of the main points—if not **the** main point—behind this parable. The common element between the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost sons—besides the fact that something is lost—is the rejoicing over that which is found!

**Luke 15:6-7** “And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, **Rejoice** with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise **joy** shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.”

**Luke 15:9-10** “And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, **Rejoice** with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is **joy** in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”

**Luke 15:23-24** “And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and **be merry**: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to **be merry**.”

**Luke 15:32** “It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”

C. Since Jesus is willing to receive sinners, we should be willing to receive them, too

One problem—among many—of the elder brother—and ultimately with the Pharisees—is that he deemed himself too holy and good to be around sinners like his brother. Jesus did not have this mindset because that is who He came to save. Although we are reminded in Proverbs to be careful who we associate with, we need to be careful not to become such an **isolationist** that we have no dealings with lost people. Paul wrote that very thing to the Corinthians:

**I Corinthians 5:9-11** “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of **this world**, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called **a brother** be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.”

In other words, if you are going to avoid sinful people **altogether**, you will have to get out of the world **altogether**. Additionally, the ones you should shun are Christians who practices these sins—not sinners who practice these sins. In order to win the sinners of the world, we obviously need to have some contact with them!

Lastly, it is important to remind each one of us that...

D. Since Jesus is willing to receive sinners NOW; the unsaved sinner should be willing to receive Him now!

There was no probation period or waiting period before the feast was given—it was given right away! Salvation is the same way. It is free—and immediate—and is as simple as A, B, C. We need to **admit** we are a sinner and are deserving of hell and that we can't save ourselves. We need to **believe** that Jesus died for us and that His shed blood is the only satisfactory payment for our sin. And, in simple faith, we need to **confess** our sin to Jesus and “call upon the name of the Lord” (Romans 10:13).

Have you done that? If not, you need to do that today. **II Corinthians 6:2** “Behold now is he accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

One last thing I had never considered before, but found quite intriguing, and it is this: the seeming...

#### **4. Incompletion of the Response of the Elder Son**

How does the elder son respond? Does he “come to himself” like his younger brother—and repent of his pride—and accept the invitation to salvation—or does he remain as he is? We don’t know—or do we? The parable, in fact, seems to come to an abrupt halt.

Some suggest the ending is **not** written because each of us needs to see ourselves in this parable—and decide for ourselves how to write the ending. MacArthur, however, takes a different approach. After giving a couple of examples of how he would write the ending, he writes:

*“But you know what? I don’t get to write the end. Who wrote the end? The Pharisees wrote the end. Here’s the end they wrote. ‘And the older son being outraged at his father, picked up a piece of wood and beat him to death in front of everyone.’ That’s the ending they wrote. That’s the cross. And that’s what they did just a few months after this....”*

#### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:**

1. Where are **you** in this parable? Whether you realize it or not, every **one** of us is represented here. We are either the **straying** sinner who is far from God...the **self-righteous** sinner who thinks their ability to obey the commandments will earn them heaven...or the **saved** sinner who has come to Jesus for forgiveness and is enjoying the feast of salvation.

Jesus is waiting for the wanderer—and is pleading with the proud to humble themselves. Have you come to Him?

2. Second, we all battle at times the pride of the Pharisees. Are you focused on promoting yourself...or pitying yourself? Are you angry with how God does things? Do you have a condescending attitude like the Pharisees who thought they were too good to be around certain people?

3. Third, Jesus rejoices in the salvation of sinners. Do you? Do you strive to be an instrument God can use to reach others?