

The Prodigal Father

Luke 15

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A. W. Tozer, in his wonderful book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, opens with this statement: “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” Tozer’s statement is right; I think what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. I think it is because life’s greatest problems are solved when we think right about God. There is nothing more important for us than to think right thoughts about God. Anything less than right Biblical thoughts is idolatry.

Nowhere in the Bible do we get a better picture of the heart of God than in the story we commonly call *The Prodigal Son*. I’ve changed it to *The Prodigal Father*. The word “prodigal”—you can look it up in a dictionary—means “wasteful” or “extravagant.” So I used that “extravagant” concept to apply to God’s love. His love is extravagant.

The love of God is greater by far

Than tongue or pen could ever tell.

It goes beyond the highest star

And reaches to the lowest hell.

Could we with ink the ocean fill

And were the skies of parchment made

Were every stock on earth a quill

And every man a scribe by trade

To write the love of God above

Would drain the ocean dry.

Nor could the scroll contain the whole

Though stretched from sky to sky.

The love of God. If there is anything we learn in this story today, we learn that God is love and that God is a seeking love, a finding love, and that God values even the sinner who has wandered away. God wants to restore them back into fellowship with Him.

So I’ve titled this message *The Prodigal Father*. In the Old Testament, God was a Father, but

only to a nation. Then Jesus shows up and He taught us to pray to “Our Father.” He used the word “Abba.” It’s the word by a child saying “Daddy” or “Papa.” “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name.” Jesus talked more about God the Father than anyone else who ever used that term. As a matter of fact, every time Jesus prayed, He addressed Him as “Father.” There was only one time—when He hung on the Cross—He cried Psalm 22: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” But every time Jesus addressed God in heaven, it was to His “Father.”

If you want to know the Father’s heart, you learn it in this beautiful parable of The Prodigal Son. It has both a mirror to see yourself and a window to clearly see God.

In this parable we first see the setting, in verses 1-3. I want to outline this chapter. Verses 1-3 show the setting and the reason the parable was given. It says, “Then all the tax collectors...”—or “publicans” (not “Republicans”)—“...and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.” That is, “Jesus.” “And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, ‘This Man...’—that is, “Jesus”—“...receives sinners and eats with them.” I’m glad Jesus does; aren’t you? They considered it to be a scourge and an attack; “I can’t believe He’s actually eating with sinners and publicans!”

A publican is a tax collector. They were turncoats; they were Jews who worked for Rome. They sold their souls to the devil actually. They were probably the most hated people in all of Israel—not just because they were tax collectors, but because they were their Jewish brothers working for the Roman government. The Roman government required them to collect a quota of taxes. Anything above that they put in their own pocket. So they were taking way more taxes than they needed to take for the government; they were padding their pockets.

They were like the ancient Mafia: they were rich, wicked, affluent, and they were behind all the sin and partying and craziness. The orthodox Jews despised the publicans. That is to say that they stood far off from them and would have nothing to do with them.

The “sinners” were just common folk; they were not committed to keeping the law, they didn’t keep the cleansings and the worship. They were just run-of-the-mill, every day, sinful, common people.

The second group, verse 2, are the Pharisees and the scribes. You can’t get more religious than a Pharisee. The Pharisees were the opposite of the sinners and the publicans. The word “Pharisee” literally means “separate one.” They give their whole life to literally keeping every jot and tittle of the law. So they were a very strict, very religious sect of the Jews.

The scribes were religious leaders, as well. They were the ones who wrote out and transcribed the Scriptures. They were murmuring. This is an ongoing, continual murmur, saying that “This Man receives sinners and eats with them.” I think that is one of the greatest statements ever made about Jesus Christ. It comes out of the lips of His enemies. He “receives sinners and eats with them!” I don’t know about you, but I’m glad He does, because I wouldn’t be saved if

He doesn't. Though they rejected sinners, Jesus receives sinners. That's the message of these parables; He received sinners. In the eastern mind, to eat with somebody, you became one with them.

So aiming these parables, verse 2, at the Pharisees and the scribes with their self-righteous attitude, it says in verse 3 that "He spoke this parable to them, saying..." Now Jesus gives us three parables. We're going to focus on the third parable today. The first parable is The Lost Sheep, the second one is The Lost Coin and the third parable is The Lost Sons and the Loving Father.

You know the story of The Lost Sheep: a man had a hundred sheep, one went astray and he went out and found the lost sheep. He put it on his shoulders and came back rejoicing. He said, "My sheep which was lost has been found." Verse 6 says, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost! I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."

That means the ninety-nine have already repented; they don't need to repent again or they don't see their need for repentance. It's not that some people don't need to repent; it's that they've already repented, or they just don't see their need for repentance.

The second parable is that of The Lost Coin, verses 8-10. We go from 100 sheep, one lost, He seeks it out and recovers it to 10 coins. One of those coins, a denarius, a day's wage, is lost. This is a poor woman who lost the coin. "I've got to find that coin!" so she sweeps the house, she lights a candle. Then she found her coin, so she rejoiced, because when you find something that is lost and has value, you're glad that it's lost; right? No.

You may have a dog that you want to get rid of and you're hoping it'll get lost. You don't want to find it. All the dog lovers are looking at me now. "Pastor Miller, I can't believe you said that!" I'm kidding! Kind of.

But she found her coin and called her friends and said, "Let's party! Let's rejoice! That which was lost has been found!"

Here's the theme. There are three key words: lost, found and rejoice. The response to finding that which is lost is to rejoice. I had an episode in my own life this week that popped in my brain last night, so I thought, What a perfect illustration! Friday I was out of town by myself and was coming back into town. It was lunch time, and I was hungry, so I realized I had a \$20 gift card in the console of my car. I decided to go to In-N-Out. Praise Jehovah! I'm going to be by myself, so I'm just going to savor this moment; I'm going to In-N-Out.

When I got out of the car, I grabbed my gift card. There was some trash on my front seat, and it grabbed it all together in one hand. I'm going to go for a hamburger, you know. I'm goin' for the gusto, you know; I'm going to get fries. But I threw everything in the trash, including my gift card.

When I went to the counter, I said, "Here's my gift card." I went "Uh.... Where is that thing?" I

couldn't find it. I thought that it might have fallen back into the car, so I ran back to the car and looked for it, but I couldn't find my gift card. I kind of wrote it off. "Oh well, I'm just going to have to buy a hamburger." But it's a \$20 gift card, so as I'm on my way back in, all of a sudden, the light went on. "I threw it in the trash!" But then I thought, Do I dig in the trash? Seriously. Then I was thinking, \$20! I can't let this thing go! It's too valuable!

So I went into In-N-Out, and I started to pick things out of the trash. I'm going through the trash. I did a little dumpster diving at In-N-Out. I look up and the whole restaurant is looking at me. You could just see what they were thinking: "Oh the poor man. Isn't that Pastor Miller?! The giving must have dropped at Revival."

I literally had to stop and I went over to this whole row of people in these booths. I said, "I lost a gift card in the trash can. That's why I'm digging in the trash. I'm not poor; I have the money, but I don't want to lose the value." So they all got up and started helping me. They said, "Well, you know you can open this door and pull the trash can out." So I pulled the trash can out. We're pulling everything out. Everybody's kind of freakin' out. But we found the card! Covered in ketchup!

I thought maybe this is the picture of the blood of Jesus Christ redeeming this lost card. I had to go into the men's room and wash it off and clean it. But I went back and had lunch and praised the Lord. So if you see me digging in the dumpster at In-N-Out, you know what's going on; okay? Help me. But the result was I was so happy and excited. I found the gift card! This is awesome!

So when you find the lost sheep—notice what the Jews would never comprehend: that God would seek after a lost soul. They knew that if a person repented, God would forgive them. But in their wildest imagination, they never thought that God would lovingly seek after sinners, that God would rejoice over the found.

Notice that twice we have the statement: In verse 7, "There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents"; and then again, verse 10, "Likewise...there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

So the setting: God is telling them that joy is the result of seeking and then finding that which is lost.

Now Jesus moves to the third parable, which is our focus: the lost son and the loving Father, verses 7-24. I want to break it down into pieces.

Notice first verse 11. "Then He said: 'A certain man had two sons.'" If you mark your Bible, you want to circle the words "two sons." This story is not just about one prodigal son—both the sons were prodigal in different ways. We're going to learn there're sins of the flesh, and there're sins of the spirit. We're going to learn there are action sins, and there are attitude sins. We're going to learn that God not only looks at what we do, but He looks on the attitudes of our hearts.

The first thing we see in this parable is the younger son rebelling against his father, verses 12-16. "And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me...'"—By the way, 12 times in this passage the word "Father" appears—"...the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal..."—or "riotous"—"...living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything." So we see the son rebelling in that he first leaves the father.

It says there that the he said to his father, "Give me." So the first thing that entered into this younger son's heart was selfishness. Actually, the essence of sin is selfishness. Instead of saying, "Thy will" you are saying, "my will." Rather than doing God's Word, we want to have our way. So he said, "Father, give me."

You need to understand what an insult this was to the father. It was a total insult for this younger son to ask now for his inheritance before the father died. Normally you would wait until your father died and then you receive your inheritance. By the way, the younger son would receive one-third, and the older son would receive two-thirds. In essence this son was saying to his Dad, "I wish you were dead. I want you dead. I don't care about you; I just want my money, I want my inheritance, I want you to sell some of your land." Land was so important and valuable in those days. Their lives were connected to the land. "I want you to give to me what is mine."

Verse 13 says, "And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal..."—or "riotous"—"...living."

Let me say something to parents who have children who are prodigals. The father here represents God. He has only two sons in the story, and one out of the two is a prodigal. So if you are a parent of a prodigal, you can be encouraged in a way that even God has a prodigal child in the story. God allows this son to go his sinful way. Many times you have to take your hands off your children. You have to commit them to God in prayer. I know that it breaks your heart, and I know that you are so concerned about them. Many times you have to say, "Lord, I put them in your hands. I put them in your care. The same thing that is breaking your heart is breaking the heart of God the Father in this parable.

The younger son wasted his substance on riotous living in a far-away country or place. It indicates that he took a long journey far away, that he went into Gentile territory. Where it says, "He...joined himself to a citizen of that country," it means that he was actually bound to this man, who was no doubt a Gentile, who sent this Jewish boy into the fields to feed the pigs or the swine. To what a low, low, low place this young boy had come.

Jesus said, "If you seek to find your life, you will lose it." But He said, "If you lose your life for my

sake and the Gospel's, you will find it." Everyone's trying to find their life: "I need more money. I need a new place."

I remember when I was young, I thought, If I could just move out of San Bernardino, I would be happy. Who, living in San Bernardino, wouldn't want to move out? I just want to get out of this town. So you go to Hawaii. I went to Hawaii for a while. "Oh, I'm in Hawaii; it's beautiful!" After a while, I'm still empty. After a while, you realize there is no joy, because what happens is that when you move, you take yourself with you. Have you ever noticed that? You go with you everywhere you go. That's the bummer. You can't get away from yourself.

You say, "I just need to find myself." Why? When you do, you'll just be depressed. "I just gotta be me. I gotta do it my way. I want to do what I want, and I want out from underneath my father and my parents and the rules. I just want to do my thing." This selfishness and this sin led to emptiness. He was hungry, he was homeless and he was friendless.

He was empty without God in his life. I believe this is a picture of those who turn from God and live in sinful pleasure and a wanton, reckless lifestyle. So he was living in a foreign country. He was first sick of home, and now he's actually homesick.

But finally the son repents. This is where the story turns, verse 17. "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you...'—I can see tears running down this young boy's face as he is there filthy, dirty, smelly, empty, hungry, lonely, broken in this pig pen—"...and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.' And he arose and came to his father."

So we see the son repenting. We hear that word "repent," and many times we have a hard time putting our mind around what that really means, concretely. What does it mean to repent? Notice in this case, in verse 17, he saw his true condition. "He came to himself."

The New Testament uses the word "repent," as it frequently does, using the Greek word "metanoia." It means "to change your mind." But it's not just a change of mind; it's a change of mind that results in a change of direction. It's not only remorse and sorrow for your sin, but you decide that you're going the wrong way.

Sin has this insanity effect upon us. It creates kind of an insanity. Have you ever seen somebody going into a sinful life, and you think, What are they thinking? Why are they doing this? Because they're not in their right mind.

So God, in His grace, came to this boy and all of a sudden a light went on. If a light has gone on in your heart and in your mind, you come to the realization that you are a sinner before God. Praise God for that! As a matter of fact, the Bible says, "Now is the acceptable time of the Lord. Today is the day of salvation. If today you hear His voice, harden not your heart." So if God has brought you to your sanity and you realize what a sinner you are—This boy had to hit

rock bottom.

I remember when I was a senior in high school, I got involved with some guys who were breaking into cars and stealing. I kind of got in the act with them. We all got arrested. We got thrown into juvenile hall. Your pastor is an ex-con. I spent one night in juvenile hall. I'm not proud of it, but I needed it. All my friends were in a cell across the hallway, goofin' off and makin' fun. God had me put in one by myself. I'm lookin' at them havin' a good time, and I'm all by myself. I lay down on my bed, looked up and realized that I needed God in my life. That was my turning point.

My parents were praying for me; I was raised in a Christian home. But I was a prodigal, who wondered far from God. My parents were praying for me. What they said was, "Lord, just convict our son." They sent what is called the Hound of Heaven after me. We were arrested in San Diego, so they drove all the way from San Bernardino, picked us up, drove us back, but they didn't say one word to me. But the Holy Spirit was just hammering me. It's like, "Yell at me, scream at me, kick me, beat me—do something!" But they just kept quiet. The Holy Spirit convicted me. That was the turning point in my life; I turned back to God and realized I needed Him in my life.

Notice the second step in this younger son's repentance in verse 18 where he has an honest confession. "I have sinned against heaven and before you." So he came to see his true condition, and he had an honest, contrite confession. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," 1 John 1:9. God will forgive you. "Confess your sins" means that you agree with God that you've sinned.

Notice here that he recognized that true confession and repentance involved saying that "I have sinned against God." It's not just that "I'm sorry I got caught." I don't just feel bad that I got thrown in jail—"Next time I'll be a little more careful." It means I'm actually sorry toward God. All I care about is that I get right with God. That's a godly sorrow that works repentance.

But he also saw the goodness of God that would lead to repentance, in verse 17. "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!" He's a good father. "His own servants have more than I do." Many times it's the goodness of God; remember how good it was to walk with God? He brings you to your senses, and you confess your sin?

Thirdly, he came with humility and brokenness, verse 19. "I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." I see his humility and unworthiness felt in brokenness. The Bible says, "A broken and contrite heart God will not despise."

Then in the first part of verse 20, "He arose and came." Praise God! What could have happened was he could have come to his senses, realized his sin, he could have prayed a prayer, but if he didn't turn and actually begin to go back to the father, there would never have been full repentance. A lot of people will come to church, hear the Gospel, they'll feel bad and

feel sorry and say, “God, I’m sorry,” but they won’t truly turn back to God. They just get emotional.

The Bible says that demons believe in God and they tremble, they have emotions, and they have right belief, but they don’t get saved. We need to turn, to return back to God. So I love that statement in verse 20: “He arose and came.” I love that. We need to turn back to God, knowing that He will forgive us, and He will restore us back into fellowship.

Now we have the picture of this prodigal father, verses 20-24. “But when he was still a great way off...” Jesus says. He is still telling this story, and everyone is listening. “...his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.” The Greek says that he kissed him “affectionately” and “repeatedly.” “And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’” The father stopped his son’s confession. “But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fatted calf here 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.”

How many of us, looking in the mirror right now, see ourselves as this prodigal son? We were in a far country. We were living in rebellion and sin and selfishness. We were following our passions, and we were far from God and hit rock bottom. Then God brought us to our senses and we turned back to God and realized our need for Him.

But notice that the father saw him “when he was still a great way off,” which would indicate that the father was looking every day and anticipating and wanting and longing for his son to come home. He hadn’t written him off. He didn’t say, “I don’t want to see his face.” He was looking for his son.

Then he “had compassion and ran.” In the Middle East at this time for an elderly man—especially a man of this stature described in this story—to physically run, was undignified. Men didn’t run in those days. And then he “fell on his neck and kissed him.”

You would think that the father would actually say, “Go clean up. Take a bath. Change your clothes. Then you come back, and we’ll talk about it.” The Bible teaches that when we come to God, we come just as we are; we come with our sin, we come with our smell. To think that the father would actually throw his arms around this boy who had been with pigs—he probably still smelled like pigs.

The fact that he would give him “the best robe” indicates that it was the father’s own robe. It was a special robe that the father used only for special occasions. It would be like a kingly robe, reaching way down to the feet.

Then the father said to “put a ring on his hand.” That speaks of sonship. It wasn’t just for decoration. It was a sign of being reinstated as a full son.

Then the father told them to put “sandals on his feet.” It is true that slaves in the man’s household were barefoot. Only the sons wore shoes. Like that Black spiritual of old: All God’s Children Got Shoes. I love that. Because we belong to God, He gives us shoes.

So the Father robes him in His righteousness. He gives His Holy Spirit—the down payment of the Spirit—and He gives us the ability to walk in the paths of righteousness.

There is a beautiful picture of God reaching out, running, welcoming the sinner who returns. And remember that this parable is directed toward the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes in verse 2. The whole reason Jesus is telling this parable is because they murmured that He received sinners and eats with them.

I want you to know how deep the Father’s love is. There is no one beyond His love. There is no sin too great, but that God’s grace and forgiveness is greater still. If you realize you’re a sinner and you repent and receive Christ, He will forgive your sins and restore you back into fellowship.

Now there is one last section, verses 25-32. We have now the lost, older son, the elder brother and the pleading father. Let’s talk about the elder son. By the way, the elder son is a picture of the Pharisees and scribes of verse 2. This is the conclusion and application of Jesus’ parable. “Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house.” So it was the end of the day, and it was dinner time. He had finished his chores, and he was coming back home. “He heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants,” because this was out of the ordinary. You don’t come home from the fields and find music and dancing going on. He “asked what these things meant.” The servant, no doubt with great enthusiasm said, “Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fattest calf.”

Now you would think the elder brother would say, “Praise God! I can’t wait to see him!” But notice what verse 28 says: “But he was angry...”—Again, that was the attitude of the Pharisees and scribes—“...and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.” What a picture this is. Just as the younger son insulted the father by saying, “I want my inheritance now before you die,” so the older son is insulting and embarrassing his father by not going in and forgiving his younger brother and being a participant in the party.

The father graciously and lovingly and mercifully went out to plead with his older son. “So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.’” Notice all the personal pronouns in this speech: “I’ve served you,” “I did this,” “I did that,” “I’ve never transgressed your commandments,” “You never gave me a party like this.” He probably never expressed his desire for one to his father.

In verse 30, he said, “But as soon as this son of yours...”—not “my brother”; he doesn’t even acknowledge his own brother—“...came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots...”—There is nothing said about that in the story, but he just puts that in there—“...you killed the

fatted calf for him. And he said to him, 'Son...'—in the Greek, it's actually "my child—"...you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found."

I can imagine the Pharisees and scribes as they listened to the story. When they heard that the younger, rebellious son was in the pig pen, they probably thought, That's where he desires to be. Good. But as Jesus continued the story and said that he came back to the father, they thought, Well, the father's going to punish him; right? But when Jesus said that the father put his arms around him, embraced him, forgave him and welcomed him, they thought, That's unheard of! That can't be!

You see how out of sync the religious community was with the heart of God? And we can be so out of sync with the heart of God. God values and loves the lost. We don't love their sin, but we love the sinner. We need to reach out to them and seek to win them back.

So the story went on and the father forgave the younger son. Then the older son comes along. The Pharisees and scribes can understand this kid; he worked hard and did everything right and on the outside, he looked like a perfect son.

Listen to me you parents. On the outside, he looked like a perfect son. He came home on time, he worked hard, he got good grades, he made his bed and cleaned his room, did everything his parents asked him to do, but something was happening in his heart. There was a storm brewing beneath the surface that no one could see. He said, "All these years I've done this and that."

I want you to look at the characteristics of this older brother. He was angry; he was stubborn; he would not go in; he was self-righteous, verse 29—"Look what I have done, and look at how good I've been"; he was loveless and he was unforgiving, verse 30—"This son of yours came."

How graphically that pictures the self-righteous, religious man or woman today. These people are found in churches. They are in this church. Some sinful person comes on Sunday morning, and maybe he's dressed the way you think a Christian shouldn't be dressed. Maybe the skirt is too short, or there's too many tattoos or the hair is too spaced out. Maybe they've got something on their tee shirt that you don't think is appropriate to wear to church.

The church is not a museum for saints. It's a hospital for sinners. You got that? Let's not forget that. There have been times that I've seen guys with long hair, all spaced out, kind of wasted looking. I say, "Look at that guy. He's messed up." My wife said, "That's what you looked like before you got saved." I hate that. But she's right.

Don't forget the horrible pit God brought you out of. Let's not pull up our self-righteous robes around us and say, "Oh, look at that person. Cooties! Let's not sit in that row. We might contract their defilement." God, help them.

We so often look on the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. Many times

unbelievers come into this church. Many times people who aren't Christians come into this church. We should welcome them. We should reach out in love to them. Don't worry about how they look or how they smell or what kind of clothes they have on. God starts in the heart and changes, by His Spirit. We were one time in sin, and we came to Christ, so He can change us.

So the older son is angry, stubborn and self-righteous. There are so many who are so proud and think that they're so good that they can earn their way to heaven.

Let me give you these points on this older brother: He was in the father's house, but he didn't share the father's heart. That's a dangerous place to be. He was further from the father than the prodigal in the pig pen.

Secondly, he thought he could earn his father's love by his good works. "Look what I've done. Look how good I've been." There are Christians who sometimes think, I've prayed a lot. I've gone to church. I tithe. I've been a good person. God, why haven't You done this for me? Why haven't you killed the fatted calf for me so I could have a party with my friends? Look at that guy! He was doing drugs and he was a criminal. Look at how You're blessing his life, but I've been a good Christian my whole life! I've never gone off your path. Why haven't You done for me what You've done for them? It's all of God's grace. None of us deserve anything God would do for us. He had this false concept that you could earn the blessings of God.

Thirdly, I would say that there are two categories of sin: action sins (the younger son), and attitude sins (the older brother). Sins of the flesh (the younger son), which Christians are so quick to condemn, and sins of the spirit, which are pride, self-righteousness, unforgiveness and bitterness that God sees and are heinous in God's sight.

Fourthly, he was the only one not rejoicing; he was outside of the party. Are you missing the party right now? There's a party going on now. There is a party in heaven over one sinner who repents. The only person in the whole story who wasn't rejoicing was this older brother. He was so good on the outside, yet his heart wasn't right. God is looking at your heart.

I don't know if you've noticed it, but I can't resist. The story ends abruptly without telling us what happened to the older brother.

The other day my wife and I were watching, as we often do, a Hallmark movie. Pray for me. They're all the same story line with all the same actors. I love my wife, so I'll watch a Hallmark movie with her. It's June wedding month, or something like that. Everyone's getting married. We watched one the other night and both of us—even my wife, who doesn't cap on Hallmark movies very much—noticed that it just ended without letting us know what happened. "Did they get married? Did they have kids? Were they happy? Did they get along?" The story just ended. Uhhh! I was traumatized by a Hallmark movie.

I thought, That's like the prodigal brother, the older brother! I believe that Jesus ended the story abruptly and intentionally so that it would hit the Pharisees and the scribes right between the

eyes.

Remember that I said the parables are mirrors that you look into? I wonder if you've seen yourself in the mirror today. Are you the younger son living a riotous life far from the father in a far-away country? Or are you self-righteous and very dignified, but your heart isn't right with God? You're living with anger and unforgiveness? Maybe there are family members or friends who you've written off or you won't forgive or talk to, and you're missing the party. You're far from God.

Have you seen the window of God's love and God's compassion? God reaching out and forgiving the sinners? If you are far from God today, God will forgive your sins and will welcome you back.

Don't stand outside and miss the party. We sing:

How deep the Father's love for us,

How vast beyond all measure.

That He should give His only Son,

To make a wretch His treasure.

I think of the great song Amazing Grace by John Newton:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found;

Was blind, but now I see.

Let's pray.