

# THE PRODIGAL SON (AND FAMILY)

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In Luke 15:11-32, Jesus Christ teaches the parable of the prodigal son. In this parable, a father had two sons and, upon the request of the younger son, he divided his goods between them. The younger son went far away and spent everything living wildly. After a famine came, he fed hogs and had only the husks that the hogs ate for his food. He then repented and returned home. The father saw him coming and had compassion, and ran out and met him and kissed his son. The son confessed his sins and said he was not worthy to be his son anymore and asked to become one of his servants since they had plenty to eat. The father had his best robe put on his younger son along with a ring and shoes and they killed the fatted calf and celebrated. The elder son found out what was happening and got angry and refused to go in. The father came out and the elder son complained that he had always faithfully served his father and obeyed him, but had never been given a kid to celebrate with his friends yet his sinful brother had the fatted calf killed for him. The father told him that everything he had was his but that 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”* (Luke 15:32). Through the three main characters, this parable teaches several important lessons.

## **The prodigal son**

The younger son had turned to wickedness. He “wasted his substance with riotous living” (Luke 15:13), and, if his older brother’s testimony is accurate, he devoured his father’s living with harlots (Luke 15:30). When he sank to the bottom and was feeding the hogs and eating of their food (about as low as one could go in the sight of the Jews to whom Jesus spoke this parable), he “came to himself” (Luke 15:17). He came home and confessed his sins (Luke 15:21) and clearly repented. When he did this, he was accepted again by his father. This teaches the necessity of repentance, which is what Jesus previously emphasized in the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin (Luke 15:7,10). Without repentance, there will be no forgiveness of sins by God (Acts 2:38). The Lord has plainly stated, *“Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish”* (Luke 13:3,5).

## **The elder brother**

The older son was faithful to his father and obedient (Luke 15:29,31). He too was given his inheritance (Luke 15:12), most likely a double portion of what his brother got (Deut 21:15-17), but he did not go out and waste it. Rather, he continued to faithfully serve his father. In this way, the elder son is a good example. But he also exhibited a weakness when his younger brother returned home repentant. Rather than having compassion and rejoicing over his brother’s return, he was angry and refused to participate

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in the celebration (Luke 15:28). The older son expressed jealousy by complaining that he had not even been given a kid by his father (Luke 15:29-30). This is not really objective or accurate, because the father had already divided his living between the two sons (Luke 15:12). Thus, the father was right when he told the older son that all he had was his sons (Luke 15:31). The father corrected his elder son for his lack of compassion and from this we learn what is perhaps the major lesson of the parable: we must have compassion on all sinners and do all that we can to bring them to repentance and sincerely rejoice when they do repent. This is the nature of God Himself. In Luke 15:7, Jesus says, *“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.”* And in Luke 15:10, Christ says, *“Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”* That is also one of the main lessons that God taught the prophet Jonah (Jonah chapter 4).

## **The father of the two sons**

This nature of God can be seen in the father of the two sons. First of all, he was fair in also giving his older son his inheritance when he agreed to give his younger son his (Luke 15:12). Secondly, he did not in any way encourage his younger son to do evil with what he gave him, but the younger son fell into sin because of his own desires. James 1:13-15 says, *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”* Thirdly, when his son returned repentant, the father had compassion on him (Luke 15:20). It even appears as though the father were watching for his son’s return as he saw him coming from a long distance. The father immediately forgave his son and accepted him back with love and joy because his son was spiritually found and alive again (Luke 15:22-24). Finally, we also see the father’s concern for his older son as he also went out to see him when he did not come inside (Luke 15:28). The father entreated his son (Luke 15:28) and taught him that it is “meet” (necessary) to have compassion on his brother who had been recovered from sin (Luke 15:31-32). The lessons of the parable of the prodigal son might be summarized in this fashion. We have all been the younger brother at one time when we were living in sin. Now that we have repented, we have become the older brother and need to grow. Our ultimate goal is to become like the father, but most importantly, our *Heavenly Father* (Matt 5:48).