

LOST YOUNGER BROTHERS, LUKE 15:11-32

Prodigal God #2

◆**Intro:** Paul David Tripp writes: I remember taking my youngest son to one of the national art galleries in Washington, D.C. As we made our approach, I was so excited about what we were going to see. He was decidedly unexcited. But I just knew that, once inside, he would have his mind blown and would thank me for what I had done for him that day. As it turned out, his mind wasn't blown; it wasn't even activated. I saw things of such stunning beauty that brought me to the edge of tears. He yawned, moaned, and complained his way through gallery after gallery. With every new gallery, I was enthralled, but each time we walked into a new art space, he begged me to leave. He was surrounded by glory but saw none of it. He stood in the middle of wonders but was bored out of his mind. His eyes worked well, but his heart was stone blind. He saw everything, but he saw nothing."

◆This my friends is how it is in Jesus parable of the lost sons, which is also the parable of the Prodigal Father. As we will see from the story, the Dad is lavish in love, reckless in spending himself on his sons. And that, after all, is the definition of "prodigal." Strangely enough, the sons live in the same home with this Father and find no appreciation for him. In much the same way, many of us live in the world God created and sustains from moment to moment, while we still manage not to notice him. Today I'd like us to wonder what we can learn from the lost

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younger brother. In later weeks we'll look at the Elder Brother and the Father himself.



◆ **1. I need to get over my selfie.** This is something we are not prone to do. Most of us can't get enough of ourselves. When people take out pictures of a gathering, who do you look for? Your kid? You? We should know this best for we are the Age of the Selfie. That's the younger brother. Myself is not what I need most!

◆ A. The younger brother somehow missed the love of his dad even though it was there. You should know that when the younger son came and asked Dad for his inheritance it amounted to saying "I wish you were dead." Inheritance in his culture was divided up among the sons, the oldest getting twice as much as all the others because he was to live on as protector and providing head of the family in the absence of the father. So in this case, the younger had rights to one third, and the older to two thirds. (If they banked and 5th/3rd Bank, I'll bet it got more confusing.) The slap in the face is that the son asked for it before dad had died! In other words, he wanted what he could get from dad, but didn't care for dad at all.

◆ Now, something else we might not know is that in Middle Eastern culture the patriarch would have been expected to defend his honor against such a slight by driving the boy from home almost abusively! There was great respect for

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family and authority, unlike our day where family seems a nuisance, and children are praised for defying their parents. Not so then. The younger son was taking a huge risk of becoming an outcast, blinded by his own individual self-assurance. It was grossly foolish. However, he does it, and verse 12 says the father divided his property. The greek term here for "property" is "bios" from which we get "biology". It mean's "life". Not just things, but life. In an agricultural society, where your land was your livelihood, to sell off part was a huge disruption. To a Hebrew, your land was your identity. When Israel entered Canaan, every family tribe was allotted a geographical portion of land that would forever stay in that family. Even if you had to sell it the family always retained the rights to buy it back. Every 50 years, the year of Jubilee, the levitical law required it to be given back to the original family no matter what! So you can see how monumental the younger son's request was. The son was asking the father to tear up his life, break up the family business so he could have his part.

- ◆ The sons actions are blanket foolishness. He's walking away from connection, community, future stability, not to mention cousins, nephews, nieces, home. Home! That rare oddity where people have to be connected to you even if they don't like you!
- ◆ **B.** This parable marvels with incredulity at this son. And Jesus is painting for us a picture of the universal human condition. We

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are blind to the artist! The world as we know it is created and sustained by the Father in Heaven. He has hung his works of art all over the walls of nature. The marvel of the butterfly. The language of whales. Not to mention the human animal that engineers a vehicle with 4 million parts that can fly! And Paul says of mankind that "we are his workmanship, created for good works in Christ, which God prepared in advance for us to do!" We are his "artwork." (Eph.2:10)

◆ When we should be walking the globe uttering "Wow!" at most every turn, we stumble along yawning. We're mildly irritated that there's nothing in the fridge that we *feel* like eating. We're upset that the microwave hasn't finished sooner. We're ticked if our shipment from Amazon takes more than two days to get us our trinket from China! We pray, not to discover God, but to feel a little bit better for having prayed. I asked a former church Council once when was the last time any of them had spent any extended time alone to be with God, to think and talk with him. There were no answers.

◆ **C.** What should we do? I have a suggestion. Ask God this week, "Where am I biting the hand that feeds me?" Where have I taken without acknowledgment of grace? Where in my life am I playing the fool that the rest of maturity can clearly see, but I do not? Then sit a while and listen.

◆ Now the younger son comes to his senses but only after hitting rock bottom. He was living large for a short while.

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His donkey was pimped with glow lights under its belly for night driving. His chariot has spinners, and it be bumpin' his tunes in the back. He probably tipped the bar tender nicely, maybe bet huge sums on Leaf Eater to win by a head in the fourth. Bought stock in the Jericho Wall company. But it all came tumbling down and he went from zenith to zero, starving and feeding pigs (v15). Now in our culture pig farming is considered a worthy enterprise, perhaps even a blessing from God! After all it gives us the 8th wonder of the world: Bacon! But for a Jew? Jews never touched pigs. It was against levitical law. Not to mention they have a ripe odor about them. Poor Jews. No bacon. (Well, at least there's other options like sausage, chops, or ham...) So here is little brother tending despicable pigs. It's like joining a cult! He has gone and gotten himself unclean both physically, and spiritually! How low can you go? For a Jew, pigs was pretty much it. (apologies to my friends the Vanderkleeds).

◆ And many of us, maybe all of us at some point may get (no, need to get) to the rock bottom end of ourselves. That my friends is a good thing. This boy came to his senses (v17) and assessed his predicament. Not everyone does! He became aware of the spiritual reality of sin and its offense to heaven itself (v18)! Pity the fool who marches on being his own captain when it's leading him to death!

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Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, was responsible for the deaths of 168 men, women, and children, and the injuries of 800 more. He scribbled out the words of "Invictus" and handed it to authorities as his last words before his execution. That's the title of a short poem by a British poet named William Ernest Henley published in 1875 that ended with these famous lines: "I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul." Really? Hows that working for you, Tim?

◆ Listen folks, the gospel would call you to get to the end of yourself, *preferably before your hit rock bottom!* The fall might be a rush, but its the landing that causes the damage. Don't follow your heart! Don't "do what you gotta do." Don't be your own captain. And don't listen to this nonsense on the commercials that are constantly telling you that you owe it to yourself or you deserve a better insurance agent, or whatever it is. These are subtle untruths that distort our worldview. What does the Word of God say? (the product might be better, or a condition might be desirable, but lets get past this "I deserve it" thing.

◆ *"The human heart is most deceitful and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is?" Jeremiah 17:9, NLT.*

◆ *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death." Proverbs 16:25, NIV.*

◆ **D.** One more thing about the younger son. Though he knows he has a spiritual/sin problem, that he has not just offended Dad,

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but also heaven, he thinks that he's going to cooperate in fixing it. That is, if Dad/God will give him another chance, this time he'll measure up, or at least be satisfied with less. What you probably don't know is that a "hired man" (19) was different from a house servant who lived with the master. A hired man lives on his own in town, and earns a wage. So the son here is not asking for readmission to the home. He's still going to make it on his own with a little break from the powers that be. He still to some degree at least figures that he will fix his life himself.

◆ This is another mistake in the human condition. We need God only for a break here or there, to cut us some slack so we can make something of ourselves. We go to Dad when we need him, but we don't want to need him! Which only shows how little we know him.

◆ **2. My Father wants to be my Dad.** And when I say that I'm talking about my Heavenly Father. God. God wants to be your Dad. Equally shocking to the son's request to tear up his life, is the fact that the dad would do it!! There is nothing in the father of this story that we expect and everything we do not. We expect the father to be offended, to save his honor, to reprimand and chase off. Normally when someone rejects us we like to reject them as well, it kind of eases the pain. ("Oh yeah? We'll I never wanted to be your friend anyway!") I remember one summer in college when I worked in a transmission repair shop. I was

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constantly harassed for my faith by the other employees who did their best to regale me with their stories of midnight exploits in hopes of making me uncomfortable. It wasn't a joy working there but I needed money and wasn't going to sell my body! The following summer I stopped back because I was again in need of a job. I hoped to return to college, you see. When one of the employees saw me he said, "I hope you aren't here looking for a job!" I was, but I said, "Of course not. Why would I want to work here?" It seems like it hurts less if we swing back at the other person. But it doesn't. Here's the strange thing: the father doesn't swing back! And later, when the son returns with his tail between his legs, it's the perfect opportunity to fold his arms across his chest, raise his nose a level or two, and demand and explanation, make him grovel a little bit. Put him in his place (all things that make us feel big and better). Dad does none of this!

◆No, Dad's heart is in love with his wayward son. He sees him a far way off (v20). That tells you he was likely watching, hoping, looking into the distance. And when he recognizes the his shadow, his gait, the sway of his walk, how his shoulders hang –well he knows who it is even without binoculars. What goes through his mind? ("There's that no-good son of mine. I'll bet he blew everything I gave him. Lets just see what story he comes up with this time. If he thinks for one minute I'm going to be contribute to his delinquency he's got another guess coming!") Excitement.

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Joy. These go through his mind! He runs. What we probably don't know is that Middle Eastern patriarchs don't run. Not even with Nike shoes. That would require raising your long robes, also called "girding up your loins", and baring your legs to the world. Well, a servant could do that but not the Father of the clan. It would be like a mob boss driving his own car or lighting his own cigar. Or a PGA pro carrying his own clubs. It's just not what cool people do. This dad runs. Forget protocol! The original language tells us he "was moved in his inner parts, he ran, he fell upon his neck (trachelos) and kissed him furiously!"

◆ It is important to note that Dad is not concerned with the explanation. Dad isn't hung up on the stories of the gutter. Dad isn't suspicious, or asking for a signature, or checking references to see if the change of heart is for real. And no, the son isn't going to earn his own way. Dad loves his kid! Here's the point: God is a love-crazy Dad. No matter who you are, or what you've done, he wants you to come home. And when you do he will receive you and welcome you with grace.

◆ **B.** This is an important truth to keep reminding yourself of. Many people tell me that after they have done evil, or chosen wrong, or gotten addicted, or had a fling of some sort, -what they hear in their head is "Well, this is shameful. You should not show your face. You should not come around the church. You

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need to clean up your act for a while before you come back.

NOOO! The church is not for people with clean acts.

◆ *Verse 2: "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them!"*

◆ We hear the voices in our heads: "Keep a low profile. Stay away from home for awhile. You are really a baad person. You'd be better off dead. You don't deserve friends or family." These are demon-voices friends. They are not the voice of Our Dad in Heaven. He is not like that. Reject those voices that are not your Dad's! He doesn't talk like that. When you do badly, go home to Dad. He's a good good Father. It's who he is!

◆ **Conclusion:** What Jesus is showing us in the younger brother is that all us us need to get to the end of ourselves and come back the Father of us all. Come back. Never hesitate to come back. One thousand times come back. As often as we return he will forgive. Jesus bought that for you. It's why he came. That's one thing the parable shows us, but it really isn't the main thing.

◆ The main thing the Pharisees needed to learn was about the Dad. Jesus is telling us that everyone on earth is wrong about what God is like. The younger son, and the older son. The party animal, and the religious Pharisee. The rebel and the religious; none us us really knows how much Dad really loves. More on that next week.