







A Story of Three Prodigals?

Prodigal – “recklessly spendthrift”
(Webster); characterized by
wasteful expenditure of resources

Prodigal #1: A lost younger brother

- His request is a rejection of his Father's care and wisdom. He thinks only of himself and rebels against the Father's love.
- He breaks a relationship but not a law. (Deut. 21:17)
- He asks for privilege without responsibility. He turns his back on home and family... his true inheritance.

Prodigal #1: A lost younger brother

- He represents a reckless wasteful expenditure of what is most precious in his life and ends up alone and destitute.
- This type of prodigal says, “I am the only one who can decide what is right or wrong for me. I am going to live as I want to and find my true self and happiness that way.” (T. Keller)

Prodigal #2: A lost older brother

- He knows what transpired between his Father and younger brother and receives possession of two-thirds of the family estate (but not the right of disposition).
- He refuses to be the mediator of this family dispute. We may assume that he hates his younger brother and does not care about his Father's broken heart. His silent refusal to be the eldest son may be part of the reason why his brother leaves.

Prodigal #2: A lost older brother

- Outwardly he stays at home but inwardly he is resentful of the Father's reckless grace. He wants the Father's resources but not the Father himself. He also keeps the law but breaks the relationship.
- This brother is an illustration of “moral conformity” without gratitude. (I do what tradition and the community expects me to do and I expect to be fully rewarded for my effort.)
- He recklessly expends his inner resources on criticism, complaint, and resentment and wastes his Father's love and grace.

Prodigal #3: A compassionate Father

- In granting his younger son's request he does what no village Father would do: he gives his children freedom to turn away from his love and care.
- He loves both sons equally and does not sever relationships in response to their attitudes and actions.
- When he sees his younger son returning, he races to embrace him, humiliating himself before village and family. This prodigal love protects his son from humiliation (practice of “Kezazah” - K. Bailey).

Prodigal #3: A compassionate Father

- When the older son refuses to join the feast and share his joy, the Father humiliates himself again by going out to his older son to urge him come into the celebration.
- This Father recklessly expends grace and love to both sons. His heart is to see them together again as brothers around the family table.

Questions to ponder in closing: What does this parable teach me about God and his Kingdom?

1. God's love and forgiveness can pardon and restore any kind of sin and rebellion.

2. Jesus redefines commonly held beliefs about what is required to connect with God. The gospel is not irreligion or religion. Jesus says the humble are in the proud are out. (Luke 18:14) "The only prerequisite for receiving the grace of God is to know you need it." (T. Keller)

Questions to ponder in closing: What does this parable teach me about God and his Kingdom?

3. God in Jesus Christ humbled himself and came looking for his lost children and made it possible for us to come home. (Phil. 2)

4. If God is loving and gracious towards lost sons and daughters, then certainly those who love God should be compassionate towards lost brothers and sisters as well.

Which prodigal do I most resemble?

“Becoming like the Father is the very heart of Jesus’ teaching. Once we are in God’s house as sons and daughters, we can be like him, love like him, care like him.” (H. Nouwen)