

*Prodigal Son*

11 To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. 12 The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

13 “A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. 14 About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. 15 He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. 16 The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

17 “When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.’”

20 “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. 21 His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’[b]’

22 “But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. 23 And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, 24 for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, 26 and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’

28 “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, 29 but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. 30 Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’

31 “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. 32 We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”

Luke 15: 11-32 (NLT)

*Note: James’ sermon looked at this parable and how it can impact our view of hospitality and pursuing the lost in our church. This parable can/should also be looked at through the lens of the good news and salvation offered to us and to the world. It gives an amazing view of God, and of religious folks, and of the world (which of course, is what James used as the springboard for the angle he took the sermon on Sunday).*

*This guide is developed with both the broad parable (gospel/salvation/God) as well as the angle of hospitality/welcoming in our church.*

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\* As discussed in Riverside’s HGLT (Home Group Leader Training), these guides are to be starting points for home group leaders to develop their own guides and approaches to leading group discussions. This is a resource tool, not a rigid “go through this guide word-for-word.” There are intentionally too many questions for a single home group time. This guide relies heavily on a few different study guides; including the Serendipity NT for Groups by the Young Life ministry (ISBN is N/A).

**Observation** (what does the text say?) **Interpretation** (what does it mean?) **Application** (what does it mean to me/us?)

### **Discussion/Topic Starters** (Ice Breakers)

- What is the craziest thing you ever did growing up (or, what did you do growing up that got you in the most trouble)?
- O: What things in the text strike you or jump out at you? Why?

### **Parable of the Prodigal Son**

- O: Note/Discuss the context of this parable. Context is key to understanding how it should be interpreted and viewed.
- O: Discuss the storyline of the parable; how would you describe what is going on in the story to someone who had never heard it before? (I would not recommend asking each of the following questions, but they are there to help spark discussion on the story line if needed.)
  - \*What did the younger son ask his father to give him? (what is this like saying to the father?) (v.12)
  - \*What made the younger son want to go back to his father? (v.16)
  - \*What was he willing to do when he got home? (v.19)
  - \*The father saw his younger son coming home. What did the father do when he saw him? (v.20)
  - \*The father was happy that his son had come back. How did the father show that he was happy? (v.23)
  - \*What did the father do when the older son refused to join the party? (v.28)
  - \*Why did the older son think that he was better than his brother? Why was the older son angry with his father? (v.29)
  - \*Why was the older son wrong to complain? (v.31)
  - \*Why was it right for the father to have a party? (v.32)
- O: How does the father greet this son? Does this surprise you?
- O: The older brother at the end (v.25-32) is not happy! In some ways, the older brother represents the religious leaders of Luke 15:1. If this is a legitimate reading, what are their hearts like? What should their hearts be like instead?
  - Follow-up - Jesus told this story to a group of people comprised of some that were “not too interested in religion” (tax collectors/sinners) as well as the “very religious” (Pharisees) types. What do you think he wants to communicate to each of these groups of people?
  - Follow-up - How does the father respond to the older brother? *(Note: He pursues him, notices he's not content with the father as well; wants him/pleads with him to enjoy life at home with him as well; saddened that the older son doesn't get it, doesn't realize what the Father wants to give him)*
- I: If we look at the story from the father's perspective, what is the main point? Do the same from the perspective of the younger and older son.
  - Follow-up - Why do you think the younger son desires to return home? What makes him “come to his senses”?
  - Follow-up - How does the father greet this son? How would you expect him to greet him?
  - Follow-up - How do the above perspectives shed light on the person and the work of God in Christ?
- I: How are the younger and older brother similar/different?
  - HINT - *similar*: both are missing out on what the Father wants to give them; they both have an incorrect perception of the heart of their Father
  - different*: younger son is desperate, comes to his wits end and returns with nothing to offer, realizes he can't “earn” favor with his father but must rely on his mercy; older son sees his relationship with father as works-based... favor earned through working for father/acting appropriately)
- A: Which brother do you connect more with? Why?
  - Follow-up: What about our church? How can we as a church display the love of the father in the parable?
- A: Where would you say you are in your spiritual journey? In a distant country? At home but not feeling like a son/daughter? Coming to your senses? Partying with your father?...And, where do you want to be?