

Bible Studies

The prodigal son

If you are going to interpret the parables of Jesus then you will need to understand two important elements; The cultural background, for example in this parable, Jews despised pigs and were prohibited from keeping them. Secondly; the human element, why the people behaved the way they did. The former is often stressed over the latter. The prodigal son is a human interest story, if you are a teenager or you have teenagers you will identify with the characters.



Read Luke 15v11-24

Prodigal means wasteful or lavish, to give prodigally is to give generously, it comes from the same root as prodigious.

What did the younger son request of the father?

This was acceptable practice, the estate could be divided before the death of the father. In accordance with Deut 21v17, the oldest son would probably have received two thirds and the younger a third. The heirs could sell the land, but it would not change hands until the father died. In the mean time, the father received the income from the property. In the parable, the son ended up with a sum of money, he may have sold his share in the property, or it may have come from the capital within the estate.



Why did you do think he asked for this?

What characteristics did it show in his life?

What did he have in mind to do?

Was the young man greedy, impatient? Clearly he was not content. Clearly he wanted out.

How do you think he felt at home?

It has been said that by asking for the inheritance the younger son was effectively telling his father he wished he would hurry up and die. Dividing property was part of the culture, and was often initiated by the father. It is unlikely he wanted his father dead, he just wanted to get away, be free, be an adult.

Do you think he hated his father? What was his attitude to his father?

What did the younger son do next? v13

The next thing he did was to leave home. He went to a distant country and lived it up.



Why was the time frame short? (not long after)

Why did the young man want to leave home?

Why a distant country?

Why did he adopt such a lavish lifestyle?

He wanted to be free and he wanted to have fun. He wanted to find his own life. He felt he was missing out, that his father was too old fashioned, too frugal.

Do teenagers still experience this?

The father must have had an idea of what his son had in mind and what was likely to happen if he got his hands on the money.



Why did the father give him the money and let him go?

What alternatives did he have?

What would you have done?

What might have happened if the son had stayed?

What risks did the father take?

How do you think the father felt letting him go?

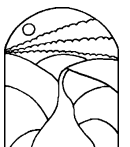
The father in the story is wise, he is after all a type of God! He loved his son, he had seen the frustration build in his life, and he knew that the only way he could keep his son was if he let him go. **(What else could he have tried?)**



What happened next? v14-16

Your going to say he ran out of money and a famine (economic recession) occurred and he was left penniless, alone and miserable, a long way from home. But that is not what happened next. It took him a while to get through his money and life was good! Everything he expected happened, and it was great. He had been right all along. His fathers morality and lifestyle were repressive and found wanting. This was the way to live!

Read Hebrews 11v24-26



What choice did Moses make? Why?
What choice did the lost son make? Why?
What does this passage tell us about sin?

Part of our Christian heritage is to tell people, *'sin is no fun, you won't enjoy it.'* Its continuing popularity would prove otherwise. There is pleasure in sin, but it is short lived. It is the end results that prove the point. Sin leads to misery and death, righteousness to happiness and life. The question is not, *'will I enjoy myself'* but *'in the long term, where is this going to take me.'* The prodigal Son was a victim of his own choices.

And he began to be in need.

What were his needs?

As a good Jewish lad, feeding pigs in a foreign country, was the ultimate low. It could not be worst. His lifestyle led him in to servitude.

No one gave him anything.

What contrast is being made?

How do you think he felt?



What happened next? What was the plan? v18-19

When he came to his senses what did he realize?

On who's terms was he going to return home?

Why did he plan to return home, not go somewhere else?

How did his actions reflect this Fathers influence?

Who had he sinned against?

How had he sinned against his father?

Why did he only realize this now?

How had he sinned against God?

God is creator, owner, lawgiver, and the moral standard of the universe. All sin is primarily against God. **Read Psalm 51v4**



What happened next?

One of the consistent criticisms of this parable is that it contains no theology of atonement. (it is just a parable, you cannot fit everything into a story).

However the sons actions are consistent with repentance. He acknowledged his sin, he confessed it, he returned to the father and asked to be taken back.

How do you think the son felt walking home?

How did the father see him a long way off?

We can only conclude that the father had been watching for his return. This was the day he had been living for ever since he divided the land.



What did the father do? v20 Why did the father behave this way?

The vision of an old, respectable father, running down the dusty road to embrace an emaciated youth, dressed in rags, is the heart of the gospel. It is in interesting that the son never got to finish his carefully prepared speech.

Was what he said true? v21

What did the father do?

What did this mean?

What do you think these things symbolized?

It meant he accepted him back as a son, he forgave him and planned to be generous towards him. The son no longer had a share in the estate but it is clear from the fathers actions that he intends to provide for him. It is the father in this story who is truly prodigal!



What did the father mean by, 'he was dead but now he is alive'?

How did the father feel on his sons return?

Did the father ever give up on his son?

How did the son feel?

Do you think it was what the son expected?

On who's terms was the son taken back?

What was the fathers greatest attribute?

Why did the father behave the way he did? How else could he have acted?

To be honest and put yourself in the fathers position, would you acted like this? What would you have said? Ah so you've come crawling home have you, you're a disgrace. Dead right your not worthy to be my son, don't you realize the damage you have done. You are going to work as a servant and you will pay back every penny you wasted. And if you ever so much as put a foot wrong you are out on your ear.



What was the final outcome?

How had the son changed?

How had the father changed?

What changed in their relationship?

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What did he have in mind to do?

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How do you think he felt at home?

Frustrated, inhibited, bound, bored,

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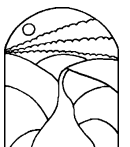
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Bible Studies

From the pigsty to the banquet



Read Luke 15v11-24

This is a story about us and God. God is the father, at this stage we are the prodigal.

What do you think this parable is intended to illustrate?

Is the prodigal a backslider or someone yet to be saved?

Why do we want to leave home?

What do you think the inheritance God gave us is?

How do we waste the things God gives us?

Why did God let us?

What does this illustrate?

When did God give us our freedom?

Why did he do this?

What did God hope to achieve?

What were the alternatives?

What dangers are there in this, for God and for us?

Why do we need to assert our freedom and run away?

Why do we always want what is prohibited?

Why do we run after the things that damage us?

Is running away and returning inevitable?

Why doesn't sin bring us the results we want?

What was the foreign land?

What was the famine?

What was the pig sty?

What were the needs we, 'began to be in'? v14

What was the equivalent of; 'no one giving us anything'? v16

What is the servitude we end up in? v15 (John 8v34)

If we had to '*come to our senses*', what were we before we repented?

How do we return home?

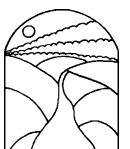
What do we need to do in returning home?

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What kind of a change in attitude does it require?

On what terms do people want to return home?

What are the fathers terms for returning?

Why is it so hard for many to do?

What does this tell us about the father?

What does this tell us about ourselves?

In what way was the father watching for us?

In what way did the father run out to meet us?

What welcome do we get when we repent?

What is the father's attitude to penitent sinners?

What is the father's attitude to non penitent sinners?

What conditions does the father put on us when we return?

What are the equivalents of the ring, the robe and the sandals?

What is the equivalent of the banquet?

What does this passage tell us about the way that we should forgive?

What attitude should we take to those who walk away?

Does God ever write people off?

Do we? Should we?



Who did Jesus want us to understand when He told us this parable?

How does He want us to act as a result?

This parable is one of three that occur in Luke 15 and speak about things that were lost.



Read Luke 15v3-7

Read Luke 15v8-10

what were the three things that were lost?



What elements do all three parables have in common?

What is found in the first two that is missing in the third?

Our father was not content to wait at home, on the off chance that we would return. He came out looking for us.

How did he do that?

Returning home, is a great way of describing the act of repentance and salvation.

What does it imply?

We are going back to where we belong, where we were always supposed to be.



On what bases can we return home?

Bible Studies

From the pigsty to the banquet



Read Luke 15v11-24

This is a story about us and God. God is the father, at this stage we are the prodigal.

What do you think this parable is intended to illustrate?

Repentance, why God lets us sin, God's attitude to sinner, the folly of human nature etc

Is the prodigal a backslider or someone yet to be saved?

Why do we want to leave home?

We did not like all of God's rules we wanted to do what we wanted not God's will, we had the idea that God was keeping us from enjoying ourselves.

What do you think the inheritance God gave us is?

Our life, our free choice, the world around us, love, abilities, time

How do we waste the things God gives us?

By using it in sin, for ourselves and not for God

Why did God let us?

Because God wanted us to serve Him freely not out of compulsion. He knows we will never truly belong to Him unless we make the choice to serve Him

What does this illustrate?

Why God allows us to sin. He respects our choices.

When did God give us our freedom?

The Garden of Eden and every day of our lives.

Why did he do this?

Our freedom is very important to God. He did not want to make us as robots.

What did God hope to achieve?

Our return to Him freely

What were the alternatives?

To give us no ability to sin, make us slaves

What dangers are there in this, for God and for us?

The danger is that we will not come to our senses and return, that in using our freedom we will destroy ourselves

Why do we need to assert our freedom and run away?

Fallen human nature, inquisitive. Temptation of the enemy

Why do we always want what is prohibited?

Why do we run after the things that damage us?

Is running away and returning inevitable?

It depends on how you interpret the parable, if you apply it to a youngster growing up in a Christian home, inevitably backsliding so that he can return all the stronger, then no. Personally all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God. We have all done it.

Why doesn't sin bring us the results we want?

We were not created to sin, obedience to God brings fulfillment. The wages of sin are death. How can going against our creator and what we were created for ever end in good.

What was the foreign land?

Sin going away from God, doing our own thing.

What was the famine?

The trial and grief's that everyone faces in life

What was the pig sty?

The consequences of our sins

What were the needs we, 'began to be in'? V14

Holiness, communion with God, peace, satisfaction etc

What was the equivalent of; 'no one giving us anything'? V16

In the end the world and the enemy do not have the things we need and would not give them to us even if they could.

What is the servitude we end up in? v15 (John 8v34)

If we had to 'come to our senses', what were we before we repented?

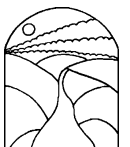
Realize what we have done, our sin, how foolish we have been, see what makes us happy and how sin makes us miserable. See life how it really is not the way the enemy wants us to see it.

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How do we return home?

Turn to God, turn from sin, obey God, do what is right.

What do we need to do in returning home?

Repent.

What kind of a change in attitude does it require?

Humility, acknowledging we were wrong, willingness to change.

On what terms do people want to return home?

I promise to be good, good works, will serve God, won't do it again.

What are the fathers terms for returning?

The Cross

Why is it so hard for many to do?

What does this tell us about the father?

He is only too eager to see us return and so ready to forgive. He is waiting for us to be sick of sin and this world.

What does this tell us about ourselves?

In what way was the father watching for us?

God is always watching us to see when we will return

In what way did the father run out to meet us?

Jesus came

What welcome do we get when we repent?

What is the father's attitude to penitent sinners?

Open arms

What is the fathers attitude to non penitent sinners?

Waits patiently for them, send the famine

What conditions does the father put on us when we return?

Yes we need to repent, yes we need to obey, but there are far less conditions than many of us want to tell people there are. God has made it as easy as He possibly could for us to return

What are the equivalents of the ring, the robe and the sandals?

Ring authority. Robe righteousness. Sandals security
really these thing talk about God's attitude to us rather than specifics.

What is the equivalent of the banquet?

God's blessing and acceptance

What does this passage tell us about the way that we should forgive?

Just like the Father, freely unconditionally and without recriminations

What attitude should we take to those who walk away?

Don't write them off, look for them to return welcome them back.

Does God ever write people off?

Never

Do we? Should we?



What did Jesus want us to understand when He told us this parable?

God's amazing forgiveness and readiness to welcome us back

How does He want us to act as a result?

Return to our Home

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On what bases can we return home?

Bible Studies

The Older Brother

The parable of the lost son splits conveniently into two parts. The first part is centered around the younger son. It is heart warming and inspiring. The second, is about the older brother and is challenging, perhaps a little to close to home. So convenient is this split that the second part is often ignored, or mentioned only in passing. Reading the parable in context we discover that the first part is really a preparation for the second, it is the second part that contains the message Jesus wanted His hearers to understand.

So what did Jesus want to say to His hearers? His primary meaning that has not come out in the previous two studies. It comes as a shock to discover that many of us are not the prodigal but are in fact the older brother.



Read Luke 15v28-32

Read Luke 15v1-2

On the bases of these verses who are the parties in the parable?

The three parables of Luke 15 are told in response to the Pharisees criticism of Jesus. The Pharisees are the older brother and the sinners, that Jesus eat with, are the prodigal.

Jesus concluded a similar parable by warning the Pharisees; *"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. Matthew 21:31*

What did Jesus want the Pharisees to understand? Luke 19v9, Math 9v12

Why did Jesus associate with sinful people?

How did they respond to Him?

Why did the Pharisees have a hard time with this?

Were the Pharisees frightened that Jesus was lowering the standard?

Not the fatted calf!

What was the character of the older brother?

Was he good or bad? Reliable or unreliable? Considerate or inconsiderate?

It would be easy to turn the older brother into the bad guy. He wasn't. He was everything a son should be. He loved his father and cared about him, he worked hard, obedient and faithful. Quite the opposite of the younger!

It would be easy to read into the story an animosity between the brother that predated the prodigals misadventure. If it was there Jesus is silent about it.

The older brother acts like someone who has been hurt, genuinely offended.

How was his character in comparison with his younger brother?

How had the prodigal wronged his older brother?

How did the older brother react when his brother returned?



Was the older brother angry that the prodigal had return?

This is interesting we don't know how he felt about his brothers return! When talking to his father, he referred to him as *'this son of yours'*, not *'my brother'* The father pointedly corrects him *'this brother of yours'*. v32.



What accusations does he make against his younger brother? v30

He certainly wasted the money, but while it was the fathers money it had been given to him. About the prostitutes? We don't know and neither did the brother. No doubt rumors abounded. He was quick to assume the worst.



Did the older brother stand to loose out from the prodigals return?

No, the property was divided and remained his, (as his father pointed out to him, v31) The interest belonged to the father and was his to do with as he wished.



What did the older brother get offended at?

His problem was not his brothers return, but the way his father handled it. *"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."* Luke 15v2

How did his father handle the return?

What accusation did he make against his father?

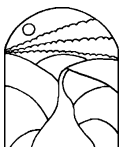
He was unjust in his dealings.

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How would the older brother have wanted his father to handled it?

“Accept him back, sure, he is family after all. There should have been punishment, conditions, trial periods. Why not let him come back as a servant at least to start with. He should be made to learn from his mistakes. We should be justified and at the bottom line he should be just like me.”

How should the older brother have responded?

Why did the father and son react so differently?

What was the older sons problem? Did he understand his father?

What was his labour motivated by? (what word does he use to describe his work)

The older brother understood; discipline, duty, responsibility and obedience. He did not understand, his younger brother, mercy, grace, love or most of all his father. In verse 28 in is interesting that the older brothers indignation and self righteousness kept him outside the fathers house. He did not understand repentance , what it meant to be a son, or more importantly a father. He did not understand why his father behaved the way he did, or his continuing love for such a son. He thought everything came from merit and hard work.

Were James and John right? Luke 9v54

What did Jesus want the Pharisees to understand by telling them this parable?

How does it apply to us?

How were the brothers different? How were they the same?

Of the two sons one was unrighteous, the other was selfrighteous, both rebelled, both broke their fathers hearts, both ended up in a distant country (one physically the other spiritually and emotionally. Both wasted their inheritance. The Father had to come out to both of them and they both received his love.

How did the older son rebel? How did the older brother waste his inheritance?

He rebelled because he disagreed with his fathers actions and refused to enter the house, dispite his fathers pleading It was a very different rebellion, but a rebellion it was. He wasted his inheritance by thinking of himself as a slave.

How do each of them need to receive the Fathers love?

The prodigal need to receive the fathers love by changing his ways. The Older brother needed to change his attitude to his brother and his father.

We act like the older brother when:



The Father's reply to his son.

The older brother biggest failure was to appreciate what he had.



What did he have?

Read Luke 15v29b

What was wrong with this statement?

What kind of thinking did this show?

The brother believed he should receive special treatment because of his hard work. The Pharisees felt the same. **Do you?**

My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' Luke 15v31-32

What two things did the father tell him?

How do these apply to us?



Read 1 John 3v1-2

Who are we?

What is our position in Christ?

Romans 8v16

What do we have?

It is amazing that God should call us His children, that He should promise to be with us all the time and should tell us that all that He has is ours. We need to live in this security.

The older son's attitude caused him to miss out on all the father had for him.

God's estate is very big we have nothing to loose. We have no reason to be petty or jealous. Everything God has is ours, we need to be aware of our inheritance. Our position in God gives us the ability to be magnanimous.

The challenge; to love how God loves; to forgive how God forgives; to accept how God accepts. We need to join the Fathers celebration.

Bible Studies

The Older Brother

The parable of the lost son splits conveniently into two parts. The first part is centered around the younger son. It is heart warming and inspiring. The second, is about the older brother and is challenging, perhaps a little to close to home. So convenient is this split that the second part is often ignored, or mentioned only in passing. Reading the parable in context we discover that the first part is really a preparation for the second, it is the second part that contains the message Jesus wanted His hearers to understand.

So what did Jesus want to say to His hearers? His primary meaning that has not come out in the previous two studies. It comes as a shock to discover that many of us are not the prodigal but are in fact the older brother.



Read Luke 15v28-32

Read Luke 15v1-2

On the bases of these verses who are the parties in the parable?

The three parables of Luke 15 are told in response to the Pharisees criticism of Jesus. The Pharisees are the older brother and the sinners, that Jesus eat with, are the prodigal.

Jesus concluded a similar parable by warning the Pharisees; *"I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. Matthew 21:31*

What did Jesus want the Pharisees to understand? Luke 19v9, Math 9v12

Why did Jesus associate with sinful people?

How did they respond to Him?

Why did the Pharisees have a hard time with this?

Were the Pharisees frightened that Jesus was lowering the standard?

Not the fatted calf!

What was the character of the older brother?

Was he good or bad? Reliable or unreliable? Considerate or inconsiderate?

It would be easy to turn the older brother into the bad guy. He wasn't. He was everything a son should be. He loved his father and cared about him, he worked hard, obedient and faithful. Quite the opposite of the younger!

It would be easy to read into the story an animosity between the brother that predated the prodigals misadventure. If it was there Jesus is silent about it.

The older brother acts like someone who has been hurt, genuinely offended.

How was his character in comparison with his younger brother?

How had the prodigal wronged his older brother?

How did the older brother react when his brother returned?

Angry, resentful, jealous, bitter, hard done by, wronged, sense of injustice



Was the older brother angry that the prodigal had return?

This is interesting we don't know how he felt about his brothers return! When talking to his father, he referred to him as *'this son of yours'*, not *'my brother'* The father pointedly corrects him *'this brother of yours'*. v32.



What accusations does he make against his younger brother? v30

He certainly wasted the money, but while it was the fathers money it had been given to him. About the prostitutes? We don't know and neither did the brother. No doubt rumors abounded. He was quick to assume the worst.



Did the older brother stand to loose out from the prodigals return?

No, the property was divided and remained his, (as his father pointed out to him,v31) The interest belonged to the father and was his to do with as he wished.



What did the older brother get offended at?

His problem was not his brothers return, but the way his father handled it.

"This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Luke 15v2

How did his father handle the return?

What accusation did he make against his father?

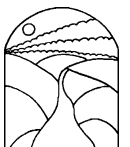
He was unjust in his dealings.

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**How would the older brother have wanted his father to handle it?**

“Accept him back, sure, he is family after all. There should have been punishment, conditions, trial periods. Why not let him come back as a servant at least to start with. He should be made to learn from his mistakes. We should be justified and at the bottom line he should be just like me.”

How should the older brother have responded?**Why did the father and son react so differently?****What was the older son's problem? Did he understand his father?****What was his labour motivated by? (what word does he use to describe his work)**

The older brother understood; discipline, duty, responsibility and obedience. He did not understand, his younger brother, mercy, grace, love or most of all his father. In verse 28 it is interesting that the older brother's indignation and self-righteousness kept him outside the father's house. He did not understand repentance, what it meant to be a son, or more importantly a father. He did not understand why his father behaved the way he did, or his continuing love for such a son. He thought everything came from merit and hard work.

Were James and John right? Luke 9v54**What did Jesus want the Pharisees to understand by telling them this parable?****How does it apply to us?****How were the brothers different? How were they the same?**

Of the two sons one was unrighteous, the other was self-righteous, both rebelled, both broke their father's hearts, both ended up in a distant country (one physically the other spiritually and emotionally). Both wasted their inheritance. The Father had to come out to both of them and they both received his love.

How did the older son rebel? How did the older brother waste his inheritance?

He rebelled because he disagreed with his father's actions and refused to enter the house, despite his father's pleading. It was a very different rebellion, but a rebellion it was. He wasted his inheritance by thinking of himself as a slave.

How do each of them need to receive the Father's love?

The prodigal needed to receive the father's love by changing his ways. The older brother needed to change his attitude to his brother and his father.

We act like the older brother when:

*We get jealous of what God does for someone else.
We put conditions on people's faith that God does not.
We think our efforts deserve God's reward.
Get bitter about our position before God.
We get into legalism. We act like God's slave.
We refuse to accept people back the way God does.*

The Father's reply to his son.

The older brother's biggest failure was to appreciate what he had.

**What did he have?****Read Luke 15v29b****What was wrong with this statement?****What kind of thinking did this show?**

The brother believed he should receive special treatment because of his hard work. The Pharisees felt the same. **Do you?**

My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' Luke 15v31-32

What two things did the father tell him?**How do these apply to us?****Read 1 John 3v1-2 Who are we?****What is our position in Christ?**

Romans 8v16

What do we have?

It is amazing that God should call us His children, that He should promise to be with us all the time and should tell us that all that He has is ours. We need to live in this security.

The older son's attitude caused him to miss out on all the father had for him.

God's estate is very big we have nothing to lose. We have no reason to be petty or jealous. Everything God has is ours, we need to be aware of our inheritance. Our position in God gives us the ability to be magnanimous.

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