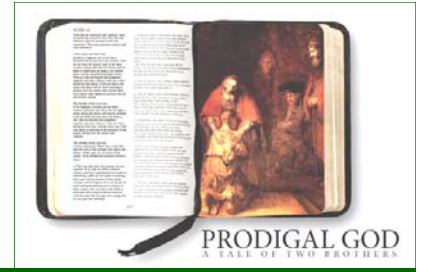


Most people who read and study The Parable of the Prodigal Son concentrate completely on the character of the younger son, his repentance, and the father's forgiveness. And yet look at the text. Almost half of the story is about the older son.



**Luke 15:25-32** "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

## Reflections

Jesus often speaks of sin and salvation under the metaphors of being "lost" and "found." Luke 15 contains three parables. The first is about a shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is lost. The second is about a woman who discovers that one of her coins is lost. The third is about two sons who are lost.

What does it mean to be spiritually lost? The younger brother's lostness is clearly seen when he ends up the pigsty. However, Jesus wants us to see another more subtle lostness – elder brother lostness. It brings as much misery and strife as the other kind.

The elder brother "became angry" (v. 28). His words were full of resentment. The first sign that you may have an elder brother spirit is that you become angry and bitter when things don't go your way. Elder brothers believe that rewards come from living a good life.

What happens to the "elder

brother" within you when things go wrong and you think you have been living up to your moral standards? You will be furious with God. You don't deserve this. What happens to the "elder brother" when things go wrong and you know that you have fallen short of your standards? You will be furious with yourself – filled with self hate and pain. When things are going wrong and you're not sure if your life has been good enough, you may swing between being furious with God and being furious with yourself.

Elder brothers' inability to handle suffering arises from the fact that their moral observance is results-oriented. The good life is lived not for delight in good deeds themselves, but as ways to control their environment. Elder brothers expect their goodness to pay off (verse 29) and when it doesn't there is resentment and anger. If you think goodness is the way to get a good life from God, you will always see someone who is doing better than you. This resentment is

your own fault. It is caused by your efforts to control your life through your performance.

In the gospel reading we see that the elder brother felt superior to the younger brother. He pointed out that his moral record was better than the lover of prostitutes. He didn't even recognize his brother as a brother anymore – "this son of yours" (verse 30).

Jesus aimed this parable at the Pharisees, but this parable creates a problem for the thoughtful listener. He shows the world's two spiritual paths. However, He exposes them both as dead ends. He clearly wants us take a radically different approach, but what is it? Where do we find it?

—Mickey Kibler

### Series Resource:

The Prodigal God, Timothy Keller, Zondervan, 2008.

## Readings

### Sunday, March 7

Matthew 15:25-32

What emotions did the elder brother experience? How did they impact his actions?

### Monday, March 8

Matthew 7:1-5

How does the elder brother view himself? His brother? His father? Who do you need to release from judgment this day?

### Tuesday, March 9

1 Timothy 1:12-17

What truths could the father have pointed out to the elder brother? What truths could God say about your behavior? And yet He offers you mercy.

### Wednesday, March 10

Proverbs 3:7; Romans 12:3-5

What characteristics do the elder and younger brother have in common?

### Thursday, March 11

Proverbs 27:4

*"The first sign that you have an elder brother spirit is that when your life doesn't go as you want, you aren't just sorrowful but deeply angry and bitter."* (Keller) What thoughts, feeling and assumptions lead to such anger and bitterness?

### Friday, March 12

Luke 11:37-53

How would the attitude of the elder brother make it more difficult for the younger brother to come home? What does this teach us about the way our attitudes affect lost people who seek Jesus?

### Saturday, March 13

Psalms 32

Do you tend to behave more like a younger brother or an elder brother? How does this parable help you reassess your attitudes and actions?

***Don't have a Bible? Access these scriptures at [biblegateway.com](http://biblegateway.com).***