

MODERN PARABLES Part 6: Prodigal Sons 10.31.10

Luke 15:20-31 ESV

Movie: [Prodigal Sons \[21:00\]](#)

Introduction: I can personally identify with the parable of the prodigal sons. I personally lived the experience as the older son. Growing up with my brother Todd, two years younger than me, I was always the responsible one. Todd, OTOH, enjoyed life to the fullest. *Story of Todd in college, moving to FL, coming to faith on top of power plant, then coming home.* Despite my honest attempts to be as happy as my parents, I found myself being jealous, angry and resentful. **Since then, I've figured out that no matter whether we are the older, responsible, stay-at-home type or the younger, run-away type, we are all prodigals when it comes to God.**

Four Lessons from the Prodigals

Lesson #1: Our heavenly Father loves us so much He

SEARCHES FOR US

Clearly one of the most important things that Jesus wanted to teach us about God the Father is that He searches for us and not the other way around. In fact this is one of the things that greatly distinguishes Christianity as a faith from other religions. Religion is usually described as man seeking God. But Jesus tells us that God is actually looking for us. In Luke 15 he tells us this four different times.

“What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it?” Luke 15:4 ESV

“Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it?” Luke 15: 8 ESV

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.” Luke 15:20b ESV

“His father came out and entreated him.” Luke 15:28b ESV

As you think about your connection with God - regardless of where you are in life or in relationship with God - think about the difference this makes, *that God is madly, passionately* in love with you - that He is more concerned about being with you than you are in being with Him!

Lesson #2: Our relationship with God changes with our response.

The first prodigal - the response of EMPTINESS.

The younger son comes to the end of himself. He loses everything - his wealth, his friends, his dignity. When he was finally empty of himself, he was ready to recognize his need of his father!

“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” Luke 15:21 ESV

If we have truly come to Christ, we've all emptied ourselves. We don't come to Christ because of what we offer Him. Sadly, we tend to forget.

The second prodigal - the response of ENTITLEMENT.

Remember that both sons really started with nothing. Everything they owned was theirs because of the graciousness of their father. But as the older son worked in the family business, he began to believe that what he possessed what what he had earned and therefore he was entitled:

Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. Luke 15:29 ESV

This is one of the biggest problems we have as Christ-followers - a sense of entitlement. After being a Christian for awhile, especially as we become involved in ministry and church, it's easy to begin exchanging our relationship of utter dependency upon Christ for a sense of deserving based on self. No matter how long we've been in the faith - long or short, and no matter what our level of leadership or responsibility - we are never *entitled to God's love*. We serve in the family business... and it's all up to God! We come to the throne of grace boldly because of what Christ has already accomplished and what the Holy Spirit continues to accomplish in and through us. We are sinners saved by the grace and mercy of God. **So then, where does this Christian sense of entitlement come from and how can we identify it in our own lives?**

Lesson #3: Entitlement comes from misguided understanding of...

A. Who others are - We **STANDARDIZE OUR RELATIONSHIPS**
"But when this son of yours came..." Luke 15:30a ESV

It's normal for us to like people who are like us. In fact when people go to a new church they tend to look around to see if there are other people who are like them. We measure on the basis of lifestyle, appearance, marital and family status, career, age. We want to hang with people like us. But church especially should not be like that. We are family. That means we are not just sons and daughters of God, but we are brothers and sisters in the faith.

B. Who we are - We **OSTRACIZE WITH JUDGMENTS**
"...who has devoured your property with prostitutes,..." Luke 15:30b ESV

It's so much easier to be critical and judgmental of others than to be realistic about our own faults. It's not that what the older brother said was false... it's that it ostracized him from both his brother and his father. And it ignored whatever it was that also caused his father grief. Here's another insight. We tend to be the most critical of others in areas that we also struggle. Be careful of thinking more highly of yourself than you should.

C. Who God is - We **SCANDALIZE GOD'S GRACE**
"... you killed the fattened calf for him." Luke 15:30c ESV

Grace is scandalous. It's outrageous. It is unfair, undeserving. We are so ready to accept such grace when it comes to receiving mercy for our own sins. But when someone has offended us, sinned against us, robbed us of something or someone important in our lives, we are

not in a hurry to forgive or see God's grace at work. It's almost as if we could somehow understand how God's son would give his life on a cross for us - after all, we are someone special who didn't do all that much wrong to begin with - we couldn't help that we were born in sin - but THAT person... how could God possibly give His son for him or her? And even more to the point... how could God expect me to accept him (or her) into the family and call him brother or sister? The reality is that we shall all one day be surprised by who is in Heaven with God, as well as who is not!

Lesson #4: Regardless of our position in Christ, **S.O.S.** is code that we must **EMPTY** ourselves of **ENTITLEMENT**.

One of the things that we have learned in this Modern Parables series is that we have the tendency to apply the parable to someone else and not to ourselves. We place ourselves in the story as the good guy, not the bad - the Good Samaritan not the priest, the widow, not the judge, the younger brother not the older. But this evening I want you to consider yourself as the older prodigal. What is there in your life that you need to empty yourself of? What entitlements have crept into your relationship with God - causing a distance and separation? This evening God, YOUR heavenly father is saying the same thing to you that the older son's father said:

“And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’” Luke 15:31-32

Conclusion: The S.O.S. signal is now famous and sounds like this: “...---...” (makes morse code sounds.) It means Save Our Souls and for more than a century has been the international distress signal. Whenever we hear it, we are supposed to drop everything and help. Sadly, for many Christians comfortable in their own version of the faith and in their family and wealth and friends, we reinterpret the SOS as “sink or swim.” We keep ourselves safely separate from the many souls that God wants to save! We forget that we are in the same position - as souls needing saved!

First SOS - The first recorded American use of "SOS" was in August of 1909. Wireless operator T. D. Haubner of the SS Arapahoe radioed for help when his ship lost its screw near Diamond Shoals, sometimes called the "Graveyard of the Atlantic." The call was heard by the United Wireless station "HA" at Hatteras. A few months later, this same wireless operator T. D. Haubner of the SS Arapahoe received an "SOS" distress call from the SS Iroquois. Radio Officer Haubner therefore has the distinction of being involved in the first two incidents of the use of "SOS" in America, the first as the sender and the second as the receiver.

When it comes to God's mercy and grace, we also (like T.D. Haubner) are both a receiver and a sender of the SOS signal. We never stop sending SOS ourselves, never stop being in need of God's grace. When we are constantly sending out the signal, it's easy to hear it from others, and therefore to love and accept others as fellow souls needing saved. What imaginary entitlements are keeping you from sending and hearing the SOS tonight? God still searches. Are you part of His search and rescue team?