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~ **The Prodigal Son and His Prodigal Father Part 3** ~

You can learn much more about this story by doing these three things:

1. Read Luke 15:11-32.
2. Discover key cultural and historical insights.
3. Answer the reflective questions.

1. Read the text of the story.

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Luke 15:11-32 NASB	Luke 14:1-24 NLT
<p>And He said, “A man had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.’ So he divided his wealth between them. ¹³ And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. ¹⁴ Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving <i>anything</i> to him. ¹⁷ But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.”’ ²⁰ So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion <i>for him</i>, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; ²³ and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to celebrate.</p> <p>²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and</p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.”’</p> <p>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.’</p> <p>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</p>

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<p>dancing.²⁶ And he summoned one of the servants and <i>began</i> inquiring what these things could be.²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’²⁸ But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and <i>began</i> pleading with him.²⁹ But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and <i>yet</i> you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends;’³⁰ but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.’³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and <i>has begun</i> to live, and <i>was</i> lost and has been found.”</p>	<p>now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.</p> <p>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.’</p> <p>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!’</p> <p>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!”</p>
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2. Discover key cultural and historical insights

From *Poet and Peasant* by Kenneth Bailey (Numbers represent page numbers)

The Opening Scene

- For the son to ask for the inheritance was an unimaginable insult. At the best, it showed unbelievable greed and insensitivity. At its worst, it showed that he wanted his father to die.
- If a father divided his estate while he was alive, it was to settle disputes, and he would take the initiative. He would never do it under pressure. However, there is no recorded case in all Middle Eastern literature where a father does this at a son’s request.
- If a father divided his estate while living, he expected to receive benefit from that estate. It might become the property of his sons, but it was not at their disposal if the father lived.
- The younger son became the legal owner of his share. Although the story does not mention it, it is assumed that he asked his father for the right to dispose of his share. What should have never been asked for, and then, when asked for, what should have been kept for the care of his father until his death, is sold.
- In the ancient world, one would expect the father to erupt in anger and discipline his son because fathers had absolute control of their family.
- In that setting, no father would have granted such a request without at least requesting the son to agree to care for him when he becomes old. But this father does not do this, which makes the situation so remarkable. Here is love beyond anything the world has ever seen.

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- Legally, a father could not grant an inheritance if there was any duress. He could only do it if the action was purely voluntary. If there was duress, the transfer was invalid. Thus, the father had to act as if his action were voluntary. He had to hide his distress.
- If a person married an impure woman or sold property to the Gentiles, he was cut off. This was called a qesasah, “the cutting off” and showed community solidarity. When the prodigal returned, it would be found out that he lost everything to Gentiles and the family and the community would cut him off.
- The older brother receives his inheritance at the same time as the younger one. The story says that the father, “divided the inheritance to *them*.” And “*All that I have is yours.*” The older son should have loudly protested receiving his share of the estate which would have shown his disgust with his brother and a proclamation of his loyalty. But he kept silent, and benefited from his younger brother’s brashness.
- Jesus said the son sold his share “not many days” after he received it. He acted quickly because the community would turn against him for his family betrayal. He wants to get out of town as fast as he can.

The Older Son

- The music and dancing would have been loud and boisterous so that the older son would have heard it before he arrived home.
- The older son could tell by the music that a joyous occasion was taking place. Normally, a son would enter the joy but this son is cautious.
- He asks a young boy. Young children would congregate outside to talk, dance, and play. It is natural for the older son to meet them first and to ask one of them what is happening.
- The Greek text says that the older son kept asking questions. He wanted to find out the condition of his brother, particularly if he is rich or poor, and he gets his information from the boy.
- Normally, the older son would have the responsibility to ensure everyone was having enough and having a good time. All this would be to honor the special guest. He would be expected to embrace and congratulate his brother and receive compliments from the guests on the return of the brother.
- Not to enter was an insult to the father that is doubly an insult when he argues with his father in public.
- After such an insult, the community would expect the father to rebuke his older son and re-enter the banquet. Instead, the father shows love to the older son and seeks to reconcile him.
- After the reconciliation attempt by the father, the older son addresses him but without a title. This is another insult.
- The younger son was rebellious outside the house. The older was rebellious “within the house.”
- The older son calls the prodigal, “your son,” instead of “my brother”, thus alienating himself from his family.

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- “He took your living.” This was the older brother’s reminder that the younger son should have kept his part for his father. He is saying that the younger son doesn’t love his father.
- The older son adds “harlots.” This is the first use of it in the parable. It is an exaggeration and an attempt to make him seem worse.
- The father could have ordered the older son into the house to save face, but that would not have changed him and would have kept him in his condition of slavery.
- When the father speaks to him, he uses the tender word, “my child.”
- “All that is mine is yours.” The father assures the son that his rights are protected.
- “You never gave me a kid.” The older son also received his share of the inheritance, but it seems he never used it. But now that he mentions it, it sounds like he wants his father dead just as the younger one had wished. The younger son had all the banquets he wanted, and the older had none. Now the older son wants a banquet, too.
- Jesus does not finish the story. He leaves everyone to make up his own conclusion. As He gathers the outcasts of Israel in his compassion – the tax collectors and sinners – He invites the religious authorities to join him in celebration. But they must choose to “come in the house with Him for the celebration.”

3. Answer these reflective questions.

What kind of story would it have been if the prodigal son had refused his father’s lavish gifts and had insisted that he be hired as a worker?

What kind of story would it have been if the father had agreed to hire his younger son as a hired worker rather than receive him back as a son?

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Read Romans 8:28. What is your favorite part about this verse?

Read Joel 2:21-27. What do you like most about this section of scripture?

Do you believe God is able to cleanse you and work out everything for good in your life?
