

son was surprised when he was restored back into the full privilege of being his father's son. This is what God's grace does for a penitent sinner. Not only are we forgiven but we receive a spirit of sonship as His children, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, of his incomparable riches. The father gives his son a robe, a ring and sandals, all represent what we receive in Christ upon salvation. Fatted calves were saved for special occasions, this was a special celebration. Under the Law, the boy would not have this celebration. This reflects that the Lord does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.

Now we turn to the final character in the parable, the oldest son, who illustrates the Pharisees and the Scribes. Outwardly they lived blameless lives, but inwardly their attitudes were abominable. This was true of the older son who upon his brothers return did not show love for father or brother. One of the duties of the eldest son would have included reconciliation between father and his son. He would have been the host at the feast to celebrate his brother's return, Instead he remained in the field. This act alone would have brought public disgrace upon the father. Yet the father, with great patience, went to his angry son, and did not rebuke him of his actions. The older son was saying that he was the one worthy of the celebration.

The older brother's focus was on himself. He was too self-consumed with issues of justice and equity that he failed to see the value in the fact that his brother had repented and returned. He failed to realize that anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in darkness. He allowed anger to take root in his heart to the point that he was unable to forgive or show compassion towards his brother, and for that matter the perceived sin of his father against him. He preferred to nurse his anger rather than fellowship with his father. He saw his brother's return as a threat to his own inheritance.

The wise father seeks to bring restoration by pointing out that all he has is and has always been available for the asking to his obedient son. The son never utilized the blessings at his disposal. Just like the Pharisees had a religion of good works. They hoped to earn blessings from God and in their obedience merit eternal life. They failed to understand the grace of God, and failed to comprehend the meaning of forgiveness. It was therefore not what they did that became a stumbling block to their growth but rather what they did not do, which alienated them from God. They were irate at the fact that Jesus was receiving and forgiving "unholy" people, failing to see their own need for a savior. We also know that the Pharisees continued to oppose Jesus and separate themselves from his followers. Despite the Father's pleading for them to "come in" they refused and were the ones who instigated the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. A tragic ending to a story filled with such hope, mercy, joy and forgiveness.

*(excerpted from: www.gotquestions.org)

Parable of the Prodigal Son



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A parable is a short, fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle. Parables are never meant to be taken for the letter of their word. When taken literally, at face value, the entirety of its meaning is lost.

*The parable of the Prodigal Son is found in Luke chapter 15, verses 11-32. The main character in the parable, the forgiving father, whose character remains constant throughout the story, is a picture of God. In telling the story, Jesus identifies Himself with God in His loving attitude to the lost. The younger son symbolizes the lost (the tax collectors and sinners of that day- Luke 15:1), and the elder brother represents the self-righteous (the Pharisees and teachers of the law of that day-Luke 15:2). The major theme of this parable seems not to be so much the conversion of the sinner, as in other parables, but rather the restoration of a believer into fellowship with the father. The main difference being that the owner went out to look for what was lost in other parables, whereas in this story the father waited and watched eagerly for his son's return. In this parable we see God's relationship to one in one (Luke 15: 11-32); demonstrating God's love for each individual and His personal attentiveness towards all humanity. We see in this story the graciousness of the father overshadowing the sinfulness of the son, as it is the memory of the father's goodness that brings the prodigal son to repentance.

The parable begins to unfold its meaning at verse 12 wherein the younger son asked his father for his share of his estate; which would have been half of what his older brother would receive; in other words 1/3 for the younger, 2/3 for the older (Deut. 21:17). Though it was perfectly within his rights to ask, it was not a loving thing to do as it implied that he wished his father dead. Instead of rebuking his son the father patiently granted him his request. This is a picture of God letting a sinner go his own way (Deut. 30:19)...A sinful state is a departure and distance from God. A sinful state is also a state of constant discontent. This son learned the hard way that covetousness leads to a life of dissatisfaction and disappointment. He also learned that the most valuable things in life are the things you cannot buy, nor replace.

In verse 13 it says the son traveled to a distant country. It is evident from his previous actions that he had already made that journey in his heart, and the physical departure was a display of his willful disobedience to all the goodness His father had offered. In the process, he squandered all his father had worked so hard for, on selfish, shallow fulfillment, losing everything. His financial disaster was followed by a natural disaster in the form of a famine which he failed to plan for. At this point he sold himself into physical slavery to a Gentile and found himself feeding pigs, a detestable position and job to the Jewish people. What an irony, he had to work for a Gentile stranger, the very thing he refused to do for his father. To top it off, he apparently

was paid so little that he longed to eat the pig's food. Just when he must have thought life could not get any worse, he could not even find mercy among the people. Once his wealth was gone, so were his friends. Even the pigs seemed to be better off than he was at this point. This is a picture of the state of the lost sinner or a rebellious Christian who has returned to a life of slavery to sin. It is a picture of what sin really does in a person's life, when they reject the Father's will. "Sin always promises more than it gives, takes you further than you wanted to go, and leaves you worse off than you were before" (John 6:23). Sin promises freedom but brings slavery.

The son began to reflect on his condition and realized that even his father's servants had it better than him. He began to see his father in a new light and it brought him hope. This is reflective of the sinner when he/she discovers the destitute condition of their life because of sin. It is a realization that apart from God there is no hope. This is when a repentant sinner "comes to his senses" and longs to return to the state of fellowship with God which was lost when Adam sinned. The son devised a plan of action. While at first he may not be truly repentant, but motivated by hunger, he is willing to give up his rights as his father's son and take on the position of his servant. This demonstrates true humility and true repentance, not based on what he said but was willing to do. He realized he had no right to claim a blessing upon return to his father's household, nor did he have anything to offer, except a life of service, in repentance of his previous actions. With that he was prepared to fall at his father's feet and hope for forgiveness and mercy. This is exactly what conversion is all about, ending a life of slavery to sin, through confession to the Father and faith in Jesus Christ, and becoming a slave to righteousness; offering ones body as a living sacrifice.

Jesus portrays the father as waiting for his son...and noticed him while he was still a long way off. The father's compassion assumes some knowledge of the son's pitiful state, possibly from reports sent home. It was the custom of that time of men not to run, yet the father ran to greet his son. The father loved his son and was eager to show him that love and restore the relationship. When the father reached his son not only did he throw his arms around him but he also greeted him with a kiss of love. He was so filled with joy at his son's return that he did not even let him finish his confession. Nor did he question or lecture him; instead he unconditionally forgave him and accepted him back into fellowship. This is a picture of how our Heavenly Father feels towards sinners who repent. God greatly loves us, patiently waits for us to repent so he can show us His great mercy, because he does not want us to perish by the fire. The