

The Hard Part about Being a Family
Luke 15:11-32

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Text Introduction: In Luke 15, we find one of the most well-known stories of the Bible. We usually call this story the Parable of the Prodigal Son. I have preferred over the years to refer to the story as “The Parable of the Lost Boy” because it comes in a sequence of three stories—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost boy. In each parable, something is lost, and then found. In each story, when the “something that is lost” is found, there is great rejoicing. Jesus uses these stories to show the Pharisees that rejoicing should take place over the salvation of every lost sinner. Beyond that application, I have often found that in particular with the third parable, there are several important ways that we can apply this story to illustrate the importance of grace in our lives. This morning, specifically, with the grace of God being our backdrop, I want to use this parable to give us a pointed application in regards to the grace we need in families. Let’s face it—being a part of a family—whether your physical family or your spiritual family of the church—is hard.

So, we have this charge in the form of a parable.

Text: ¹¹ He also said: “A man had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.’ So he distributed the assets to them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. ¹⁵ Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to eat his fill from the carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one would give him any. ¹⁷ When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I’ll get up, go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. ¹⁹ I’m no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired hands.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. ²¹ The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “But the father told his slaves, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let’s celebrate with a feast, ²⁴ because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he summoned one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ ‘Your brother is here,’ he told him, ‘and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “Then he became angry and didn’t want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he replied to his father, ‘Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your

orders, yet you never gave me a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.'

³¹ "'Son,' he said to him, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

Introduction:

This week families will gather. It's Thanksgiving. All across the nation, wonderful families will gather and give thanks. Today, we see these wonderful families bring their children before you and before God and offer themselves in dedication. Both of these scenes are pretty wonderful and perfect pictures of family. But, then on the other hand, our families are not perfect. There are those children who rebel. There are those husbands and daddies and wives and mommas who rebel. And because of that, "being part of a family is sometimes hard." And because of that, these things tend to get rather complicated around the holidays.

So, let me offer a couple of applications today from a very familiar story—the story that we call "The Prodigal Son."

Understanding the Parable:

Before we get to the application, let me just take a couple of moments to help you to understand the details of this story. Jesus' use of the parable is more than just simple illustration of spiritual truth. Jesus used the parable to capture the attention of his hearers. The way that he captured attention is to present a story that would be almost opposite of cultural expectations of His day. The "surprises" of His story would arrest the attention of the hearers.

As I understand it, there are a number of very unusual cultural features of this story.

- Asking for the inheritance early—This is more than a selfish and greedy boy. This is a boy who is saying, "You are as good as dead to me."
- Among the swine—In Jesus' day, speaking to Pharisees, nothing could be worse than a boy working, yea, even eating among the pigs in a foreign land. Culturally speaking, he cannot be worse than living in Gentile territory, eating from ceremonially unclean pigs.
- The Father's Acceptance—Perhaps what often gets overlooked in this story is the father's reaction. We kind of get caught up in our 21st century look at this family and consider the joy of the boy's return. In the first century world, for a father to show emotion toward an obedient son would be out of the ordinary. For a father to run and embrace and kiss his wayward son was something not just unheard of, but unimaginable.
- The Meal—Meat was rarely eaten, let alone butchering an entire calf.

All of these details arrest the attention of the Pharisees. What is this man saying?

What is He saying to us this morning? Again, as we think about our less than perfect families and as we think about the holiday season upon us, would you consider these lessons today? They are hard, but I think we need to hear them.

1. No rebel can be allowed to ruin the rest of the home.

Certainly Jesus told this parable as a story. We ought not to assume that he had a particular family in mind or that He knew of an actual family where this had occurred. However, it is also true that the younger son in this story is rebellious. Again, more than just greedy, he is rebellious. We can further assume his rebellion by his immediate actions when he is on his own. The rebellion must be dealt with before the whole home is ruined.

I have dear friends who have experienced this very thing in their family. It is hard. You are going to feel like you are giving up. But can I help you to see something this morning? What do you want as the ultimate outcome? Do you want more rebellion? Do you want more sin? Doing nothing is going to lead to more rebellion. Taking action puts into motion the opportunity for repentance. Keep thinking about the parable.

2. If rebellion necessitates separation, let it happen.

So, and I know it is hard, but sometimes in order for repentance to occur there has to be something as serious as separation. Remember, it is not giving up; it is giving God a chance. Think about what would not have happened in the parable if there would not have been separation. The younger son would not have come to the end of himself and realized that he needed home—that he needed his father.

3. When separation happens, let go.

Did I say it is hard? It is, but remember the desired outcome. I love this part of the story of the father “seeing his son from a long way off.” He didn’t go looking for him, but then again he was constantly looking for him. And don’t forget that is the way it is with God toward us. He is always looking for our return.

4. When true repentance happens, let true grace abound.

The son’s return is the most excited part of the story, but there is a twist. There is someone else at home that is not all that excited about this turn of events. I am reminded that showing grace is also hard.

One of the more public prodigals of all time is Franklin Graham, son of Billy and Ruth Graham. He tells his story in his autobiography, *Rebel with a Cause*. His rebellion started early in life. After being kicked out of a Christian high school and then later a Christian college, Franklin’s rebellion came to a crossroad. As a young adult he persuaded his parents to lend him enough money to buy a Land Rover so he could do “missionary work” in Turkey. Lying to them, instead, he went joyriding through Europe with one hand on the steering wheel and the other on a fifth of scotch, as he described it. He felt he could drive better if he was relaxed.

Finally, his father had had enough. Billy Graham told Franklin he had to decide whether he was "going to

live [his] life for Christ or [himself]."

"It really ticked me off when he said that," says Franklin, "because he was right." (GQ Magazine off of Internet) About three weeks later, in a hotel room all alone, Franklin committed his life for the first time to Christ.

So, where do you find yourself in this story of the Prodigal? One of the beauties of this story is that almost everyone can find themselves somewhere in this story.

Have you rebelled? Come clean. Do you have someone rebelling? Seek God's wisdom to be active in that which gives the greatest opportunity for repentance. Do you need to extend grace? Do it—It is what God did for us.