



The Younger Son's Story

Key idea:

The younger son in the parable mistakenly thought that his identity and joy would be found through self-discovery and self-indulgence apart from the father's presence and will.

Key text:

Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³ Then Jesus told them this parable:...

¹¹ “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf

because he has him back safe and sound.’²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

²⁹ 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.³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.’³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

Key points:

1. Jesus told the three parables in Luke 15 in response to the indignation of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law at His relationship with tax collectors and “sinners”. The main point of all three parables is the heart of God towards the lost.
2. The younger son rudely asks for his inheritance early and leaves for a distant country, where he squanders everything and ends up completely destitute.
3. The root of the younger son’s problem is that he is restlessly searching to find his identity and joy in possessions and experiences rather than in the father.
4. The younger son misunderstood his father, thinking that being in the presence of his father meant bondage, but that being away from the father would mean freedom and joy.
5. The realization and return of the younger son provides a beautiful picture of repentance.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday’s text and teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. What did the younger son request? What did he do after he received his request? What was the outcome of his actions?
3. Have you ever seen someone whose actions and attitudes remind you of the younger son? What was the outcome in their life?
4. The younger son is restlessly searching to find his identity and joy in possessions and experiences. The writer of Ecclesiastes did the same thing. Why are we tempted to do this? What does this reveal about our understanding of God and true joy and meaning?

5. Why does the younger son travel to a distant country? What does he think he will find there that he can not find in the presence of his father?
6. In what ways is the younger son rude, disrespectful, and hurtful to his father? Why does he act this way towards his father?
7. How does our culture define freedom? How does God define freedom in Scripture? When I consider my own life, how do I appear to define freedom? Can I think of areas where I am thinking and acting like the younger son?
8. How is the younger son a picture of repentance? What do we learn about the nature of true repentance from his thoughts, words, and actions?
9. Bret listed a number of areas where we are tempted to seek identity and joy apart from Jesus: Wealth and possessions, food, alcohol or drugs, sex, relationships, entertainment, work, or reputation. Which of these areas (or perhaps some other) reveal an area where your heart is being led astray? How can you “come to your senses” and return to Your Father?
10. Can you think of someone with whom you can share what you have learned this week? Pray for them and ask God to open a door for you to share about the true nature of joy, identity, and freedom - and invite them to a meeting.

Our Current Series: Prodigal

Preview of next week: The Elder Brother’s Trouble (Luke 15:1-3, 11-32)