



## The Elder Brother's Trouble

### Key idea:

The elder brother in the parable mistakenly thought that success, life, and joy was found in attempting to keep the rules rather than in relationship with the father, who he misunderstood and disdained.

### Key text:

Luke 15:1–3, 11–32

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

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

<sup>13</sup> “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. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> “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! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’ <sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>21</sup> “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ <sup>22</sup> “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. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

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

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

<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’<sup>31</sup> “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.’<sup>32</sup> 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 focus in the parable is actually much more about the elder brother and his wrong beliefs, attitudes, and actions than it is about the wrong behavior of the younger son.
3. The root of the elder brother’s trouble is a self-righteous, legalistic, judgmental spirit and approach to life.
4. The elder brother’s self-righteous, legalistic, judgmental spirit left him angry and alienated from his father, his brother, and others.
5. The temptation to be like the elder brother is much greater for serious Christians who want to study and obey God’s Word.

### **Questions for discussion/application:**

1. What part of Sunday’s text and teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. What does the introduction in Luke 15:1-3 tell us about who the parable is really about? Is this how we typically approach this parable?
3. Why are religious people so tempted to the ways of the elder brother?
4. How would you describe the relationship of the elder brother with the father? Do you think he is as lost and separated from the father as the younger son? Why or why not?

5. Why is the self-righteous attitude of the elder brother such a problem? How does the Gospel address our self-righteousness?
6. What do you think is the heart of legalism? What distinguishes legalism from true holiness?
7. Why does the elder brother seem so angry in the parable? What is the root of his anger? In your experience, are self-righteous, legalistic, and judgmental people full of joy or anger?
8. What is the relationship between holiness and joy? Is this how we often think of holiness? Why or why not?
9. What about this parable has had the greatest impact on you and your understanding of God and the Gospel?
10. Can you think of someone with whom you can share what you have learned in this series? Pray for them and ask God to open a door for you to share about the prodigal grace of God, and invite them to a meeting.

**Our Next Series: Disciples**

**Preview of next week: Disciples Embrace the Gospel (2 Timothy 2:1-2)**