

The Parable of the Loving Father

Luke 15:11-31

Central Thought: Coming home means walking step by step toward the Loving Father who awaits us with open arms and wants to hold us in an eternal embrace.

Observe in the parable: the younger son's selfishness, the older son's self-righteousness and the father's sacrifice.

1) The Younger Son:

- With one request, the younger son breaks the father/son relationship.
- Unlike the lost coin or the lost sheep, this is the story about a young man who **chooses** to be lost.
- The father gives his son the freedom to break his heart.
 - The younger son disrespected his father in a very cruel and unusual way.
 - The son failed to realize: He was so loved by his father that he was free to actually leave home.
- The issue here is not lost money, it is about broken relationship.

2) The Father:

- The father doesn't just forgive the son, he restores his sonship.
- The first two stories did not humiliate the shepherd or bring disgrace upon the woman who was searching for her coin.
 - Relationship is the most valued of all possessions.

3) The Older Son:

- The older son refuses to go into the house and causes a scene.
 - The older son embarrasses and humiliates his father in front of the entire village.
 - This insult to the father is no less severe than the insult from the younger son.
 - There is now little difference between the law-breakers and the law-keepers.
- The father is dealing with two prodigal sons
 - The father's unreserved, unlimited love is offered wholly and unconditionally to both sons.
 - The law-keeper was just as guilty of breaking his father's heart as the law-breaker.

4) Jesus is speaking to us:

- The father offers unconditional love, just as God has for us through Jesus. Romans 5:8; Titus 3:5
- The Father's love is unconditional, no matter the sin we commit.
 - Those who repent receive forgiveness and are welcomed back into the family.
 - Each of us must take a step of repentance before the Father, confess that we have left Him to go our own way. Romans 3:10; Romans 3:23
 - As soon as we begin the journey home, the process of restoration and forgiveness begins.

- The older son was a responsible person with admirable qualities.
 - His pride led him to become jealous, angry, self-righteous, and resentful.
 - He wore a mask of goodness but had a heart of resentment and jealousy.
 - It is easy for us to slip into these thought patterns:
 - We believe we deserve our own party.
 - We complain when others get what we want.
 - The youngest son can easily recognize the sin, but the oldest son had a hard time believing he needed a savior.
 - The older son is obedient as long as things went his way.

5) Whether we are law-breakers or law-keepers, there is no greater joy to the Father than a repentant child. God is love – His love is only dependent upon Himself.

- We must ask ourselves where we are in this story.

For reflection and Life Group facilitation:

- 1) Tell us about a time when you experienced undeserved, unconditional love from your Heavenly Father. What did your 'speech' sound like?
- 2) Have you had the opportunity to behave like the father in Luke 15 and demonstrate your unconditional love to someone else?
- 3) In your life is there a prodigal son/daughter/father/mother/spouse/brother/sister who our Life Group can be praying for?
- 4) Have you ever had the joy of seeing a prodigal welcomed back into the family?
- 5) Is there a broken relationship with someone that you know that needs to be mended?