

Lost

How we perceive God is how we receive from God. Living *The Blessed Life* that Jesus promised is greatly dependent on our ability to receive from God. Many of us try to earn God's blessings and favor. Is this how it works?

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

The relationship between and among siblings is complex. A great deal is made of birth order in a family. Many stereotypes are attached to firstborn, middle, and youngest children. Birth order certainly explains many characteristics of people, but is certainly not the reason for all traits. Did Jesus tell us a story about birth order? I think not. What is the purpose of his story?

I believe the title *The Prodigal Son* is a misnomer. It should be called *The Two Prodigals*. Actually, Jesus told three parables in this setting all concerning things Lost: lost sheep, lost coin, lost sons. The theme is how much The Father loves and seeks those who are lost.

Father divided the inheritance to both sons. The Father's will was not for either son to fail. Yet, sometimes the only way to grow is through the painful process of trial and error. When you fail, and you will fail periodically, fail forward. The relationship Father God desires for all of us is not that of Father and young child. The relationship He desires is that of Father and grown sons and daughters. His desire was for his sons to grow into fatherhood themselves.

The younger son in living for today disregarded his past (upbringing) and gave no thought for his future and failed famously. The older brother clung tightly to the past, lived only for future reward and failed to live in the present. His failure lacks drama completely and many fail to see it as failure. These sons represent the inalienable right of all humanity to pursue of life, liberty and happiness. You don't need to run away from God to be happy. You don't have to be God's slave to be happy. Life, liberty and happiness are found in knowing the Father's love and approval of you. He loves and accepts you unconditionally.

Younger Son

- Shows how much we really do choose our own path in life. We are not puppets in the hand of God.
- His relationship with the Father was utilitarian (useful). What can Father give me.
- He took everything the Father gave and wasted it selfishly. Many people take God's gifts and waste them selfishly (talent, ability, opportunities, time, money, experience, education, etc.).
- Lived only for today, with no respect for his past or responsibility towards his future.
- He had to false belief about what brings happiness. Carlin Flora studied what brings happiness for many years and wrote the *Pursuit of Happiness*. Here are a few of the findings:
 - [Getting what you want does not bring lasting happiness](#)
 - [Mindfulness, a mental state of relaxed awareness of the present moment, marked by openness and curiosity toward your feelings rather than judgments of them, is a powerful tool for experiencing happiness when practiced regularly. If you bring mindfulness to bear on negative feelings, they lose their impact.](#)
 - [Money buys happiness up to the point where you live comfortably. Beyond that, more money does not boost wellbeing.](#)

- Generosity brings true happiness. Striking it rich could underwrite happiness, if you were to give it away.
- Options make us more miserable. Our world of unlimited possibilities imprisons us more than it makes us happy. Barry Schwartz calls this: "the paradox of choice. Facing too many possibilities leaves us stressed out and less satisfied. We wonder about all the opportunities we might have missed.
- Happiness is other people. Strong relationships are buffers against the damaging effects of all of life's inevitable letdowns and setbacks.
- Happiness is living your values. If you aren't living your values, you won't be happy, no matter how much you are achieving.
- He hit rock bottom and became desperate.
- He came to himself!
 - Reminded himself that his father treats his servants with dignity and generosity.
 - Repented to heaven and to his father
 - Humbled himself
 - YET, he still did not understand the Father's love. He still thought of his Father as useful. "I'll be happy serving my Father."

Father's response

- Compassion, total forgiveness and restoration
- Ran, fell on his neck and kissed him (*My Son*)
- Notice that the son was not made to pay for his sins before the Father accepted him and restored him completely. The separation was never on the Father's side of the equation. The son ran away. Father was always waiting, watching and ready for his return home. There was no probationary period. God's love and forgiveness are always unconditional.
 - Best Robe—"I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness." - Isaiah 61:10
 - Ring—authority of the family name..."in my name"
 - Sandals—servants are barefoot, but sons wear shoes!
 - Threw a feast in his son's honor—"Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents." - Luke 15:10
- God does not love you when you act right. God loves you, because you are his son or daughter!

Older Son

- Consistent, hard working & faithful
- He is at much greater risk than his younger brother. You are at great risk when you are near to Father's house without knowing Father's heart.
- He did not understand what it means to be a son.
- Apparently believed that his Father's love and acceptance must be earned
- Lack of joy and appreciation: "Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation." - 2 Corinthians 9:5
- Many serve the Lord with grudging obligation. They fail to understand themselves to be sons and daughters of God.
- He did not live in the present at all, only clinging to his past and in fear of the future.
- He did not receive grace, nor did he extend grace to his brother.

- He was not grateful, but bitter about what he did not have. Yet, everything the father possessed was his to enjoy and to use.
- God's radical grace (charis—gift) to us allows and motivates us to live in radical service to him and to humanity.
- We are the sons and daughters of God. We choose to be his bondservants.

Conclusion

- Younger son repented. He had a much healthier view of the father's compassion, love and forgiveness.
- Older son felt he deserved more. His self-value was determined by his own effort, not by the father's grace.
- The father had two prodigal sons. The younger humbled himself and received his father's grace. The older complained and justified his bad behavior, never repented and did not receive his father's grace. He only received rebuke.
- Do you matter? Does your life really matter? (YES!)
- Father God loves you and he accepts you. You are the son or daughter of God.
- You can love and be loved. You can live happily in the present, because your past is clean and your future is secure.