

PRODIGAL

THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON



Welcome reader!!!

We're so glad that you're joining us this week for the Collective devotional. Here at the Collective, we honestly believe Jesus Christ makes a difference in our lives, and we are so excited to share our experiences with you. If you've never read a devotional like this before, no stress! Each day, we set out a text from the Bible, a reading (also known as a devotional) on that text and some corresponding questions to think about and apply to your week.

This week's devotional is on the story of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15. It's a story which deals with family, money, sibling rivalry and pigs... what more could you want?! In our reflections on this story, we have also used the book, *The Prodigal God* written by Tim Keller (we also highly recommend this as a good addition to your library).

We invite you to journey with us as we discover through this story the character of God, and its implications for us in our 21st century lives.

Come with us on this journey!

Happy studying,

The Collective Leadership Team

THE COLLECTIVE



DAY 1: A Motley Crew - Luke 15:1-2

DAY 2: The Younger Son - Luke 15:11-16

DAY 3: A Father Who Runs - Luke 15:17-24

DAY 4: The Story Isn't Over - Luke 15:25-30

DAY 5: The Father Acts Again - Luke 15:28; 31-32

DAY 6: Implications of the Prodigal - Luke 15:1-3; 11-32



DAY 1

A Motley Crew

Luke 15:1-2

¹ Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 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:

(NIV Version)



DAY 1

When we look at the parable (a story with a message) of the Prodigal Son, oftentimes, we jump straight into the narrative. However, whenever we read these parables, it is so incredibly important to acknowledge their context, and also the people whom the story is being told to. These verses show us that Jesus is speaking to two very distinct groups of people, and they make up a motley crew indeed!

Firstly, there's the tax collectors and sinners. In Jewish culture at the time of Jesus, these were the people on the lower end of society. Tax collectors were known as collaborators with Rome (the nation that oppressed the Jews), and were responsible for receiving taxes from fellow Jews for Rome. These people were absolutely despised. In a similar way, sinners were those who had done behaviourally 'immoral' things according to the law, and thus were often rejected both by their fellow citizens and the religious leaders.

The second group we have are the Pharisees and teachers of the law. These people were some of the 'top dogs' of Jewish society. They were well educated, were religious leaders, and were seen to be the utmost representations of godliness and morality in their context. To have interactions with tax collectors and sinners was unthinkable (why should they defile themselves by hanging out with traitors and immoral people?)

Yet Jesus chooses to speak to, and interact with both groups. We see a clear picture here of Jesus before the story even begins, he attracts the "best" and the "worst" of society! And as we continue through this week, we'll see that these groups correlate with people in our story, and maybe, just maybe, aren't so different from each other after all.



DAY 1

1. Which group in Luke 15:1-3 do you identify with the most? Do you think our society today treats these groups in a similar way to how they did 2,000 years ago in Jesus' day?
2. What do these verses teach us about Jesus, and the people he attracts?
3. What things could you do this week to attract and relate to people like Jesus did?



That's day 1! We're glad you're going on this journey with us. If you have any questions about what you've read today or if you want to get in touch with someone, here are some key contacts:

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DAY 2

The Younger Son

Luke 15:11-16

¹¹ Jesus continued: “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 the 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.

(NIV Version)



DAY 2

The story starts off with the most well-known character in the story of the Prodigal Son, the actual Prodigal Son (there's actually two prodigals in the story, but more on that later)! And this younger son comes to his father, requesting his "share of the estate". Now, in today's culture, that may not sound like a huge ask, but for listeners at the time of Jesus, this was a shocking request. When a father died in Jewish culture, his estate was divided up between his heirs, with the older son receiving a double portion. However, this only occurred after the father died. For a son to ask his father for his share of the estate while he was living was to in effect say "I wish you were dead". This was a hugely disrespectful request, placing the younger son as an early antagonist in this story.

Once he receives his money, he goes and quickly spends it all on "wild living" (quick little side note: we often hear that this wild living meant sleeping with prostitutes, but Jesus never says that, the older brother just assumes it). Whatever his actions, it is inferred that they probably weren't in line with the moral rules and guidelines set by Jewish culture. Then he loses all of his money, and goes to work for a non-Jew, among the pigs. Now in Jewish religious culture (found in Leviticus), pigs and non-Jews (Gentiles) were considered unclean, and thus working with, eating, or even touching them, could make an individual unclean. Yet the younger son works with them.

This guy has broken so many cultural and religious laws in a mere six verses! Not only is he disconnected from his father, he is also disconnected from his society. For the two groups of people listening, a quick connection could have been made between the younger son, and the tax collectors and sinners. Why is this relevant? We'll find out tomorrow!



DAY 2

1. What are your current thoughts about the younger son? Do you relate to him at all?
2. Do you feel that there are things that you have done which have disconnected you from people you love or from God?
3. How can you reflect and act on this during the week?



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DAY 3

A Father Who Runs

Luke 15:17-24

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants 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 servants.’ 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.

(NIV Version)



DAY 3

There's a lot that happens in these verses! Finally, the son comes to his senses and realises that even his dad's servants have a better life than the one he is currently experiencing. So, he decides to go back - not as a son, that would be expecting too much, but maybe if he offered to work hard for the father, and to follow all of the rules from now on, the father would consider letting him back. But this is definitely a reach. The author of the book *The Cross & The Prodigal*, Kenneth Bailey highlights that in Jewish culture, if a son lost his inheritance in a non-Jewish setting, he would be entirely cut off from his community. This son is hoping against hope he will be allowed to be accepted back, but it's highly likely he will be rejected.

Yet that's not what we see in verses 20-24! The minute the father sees the younger son, he RUNS to him. Now in first-century culture, Middle Eastern men did not run. This would require hoisting up their garments and showing their legs in order to avoid tripping, which was considered a shameful thing to do. Already, the father is going against culture. He then greets his son warmly, doesn't even let him finish his spiel about sinning and orders a party! What a shocking twist for Jesus' audience!

Now, why does this matter? Remember how we said that the tax collectors and sinners would have been associated with this younger son? Well, now we see the parallels between God and the father. Jesus is highlighting through this part of the story that no matter how far you may have strayed, no matter what you have done, there is a God who will risk anything to welcome you back with open arms as a valued member of His family. Not only that, but this story presents a valiant argument against legalism (where we have to DO things in order to be saved and have God love us). The father didn't expect his broken son to change before he was accepted, he was accepted just as he was. It was an important message for the tax collectors, and it's an important message for us today. There is nothing that you have done which will stop Him running.



DAY 3

1. What are your thoughts on the actions of the father? Would you have done the same in that situation and context?
2. How do you think the tax collectors and sinners would have felt hearing about the father's response?
3. How does this knowledge that God accepts us, no matter what we have done, move you to view God, and praise Him?
4. Who can you share this message with this week?



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DAY 4

The Story Isn't Over

Luke 15:25-30

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!’

(NIV Version)



DAY 4

We usually finish the story with the redemption of the younger brother, but Jesus isn't finished yet! He still has one group of people left to talk to. We are introduced to the hardworking older brother, who hasn't even heard about the party because he's been too busy working on his father's land. He's a loyal son, who keeps the rules, and hasn't ever asked his father for his share of the inheritance. No cultural or religious rules broken for this boy!

But then the younger brother comes back and gets a party. The older brother cannot believe that his father would welcome back the younger son after all he had done with open arms. The older brother has always done the right thing, and has never been acknowledged for it. Yet this immoral son gets a fattened calf! How dare the father even acknowledge the younger son, much less offer him mercy?

Sound familiar? Remember how we read about Pharisees and teachers of the law grumbling around Jesus on Day 1? These leaders are morally upright, they don't touch pigs, and they have been working hard for God for years. They cannot understand why Jesus acknowledges tax collectors and sinners, let alone wants to spend time with them. They are the older brother.

Yet despite their righteousness, we see that the older son (and therefore the Pharisees) are still outside the party, and are still disconnected from the father. Jesus is calling them out here, and He is calling us out as well. Do we do the right things, and obey God because we're hoping for a fattened calf (whether blessings, or the promise of Heaven)? Do we get frustrated when people don't acknowledge the good things we've done because we're too busy focused on the converts? It's a confronting passage, but it's one we are called to reflect on.



DAY 4

1. Can you relate to the older brother in this story? How?
2. Do we, as people in the church, ever get annoyed when someone comes back to Jesus and gets all the praise and adoration, while we've been faithfully following God for ages?
3. What do you think you can do this week to challenge your "older brother" tendencies when worshipping and following God?
4. How does this passage move you to praise and honour God?



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DAY 5

The Father Acts Again

Luke 15: 28; 31-32

²⁸ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So the father went out and pleaded with 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.’

(NIV Version)



DAY 5

We are often very quick to criticise the “elder brothers” in our church, and in our wider societies. They can be judgemental, hardened by religion, and have a very long list of things that need to be done in order to be “good Christians”. They seem to complain about morality leaving the church, and look with disdain at those who worship, dress or act differently to them. We swing to the defence of the younger brother, and give the elder brothers the rejection that their judgement seems to deserve.

Yet Jesus shows us something in these verses that we often forget... He is for the elder brother too. These older brothers are just as much in need of, and able to access, the love and mercy of God as the younger brother. The father leaves the party, leaves the rejoicing, in order to talk with his son, and reassure him of his presence and love. The elder brother is also disconnected from the father, and so the father reaches out to him, encouraging him back into community.

This story represents a call for us to welcome with open arms the younger brothers, but also extend a hand to the elder brothers as well. One may be harder than the other for us, but if we honestly want to follow the example of Christ, we don't get to choose who He reaches out too. Ouch.



DAY 5

1. Do you tend to have more sympathy for the older or younger brother in this story? Why?
2. What do the father's actions suggest about how we should treat "older brothers"?
3. What does this passage teach you about God?
4. How can you apply this message to your life this week?
5. Who (and what) can you share with someone this week?



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DAY 6

Implications of the Prodigal

Luke 15:1-3; 11-32

Read the entire parable again

(NIV Version)



DAY 6

There are many lessons we can learn from this story.

1. Jesus talked too, and attracted a wide range of people, and we should do the same. If our ministry and our missions are only attracting the “religious”, then we need to wonder why that is, and remember that Jesus came for everyone.
2. In the parable, both sons were separated from the father. One, through their actions and remorse felt that he could never be loved and accepted by the father, while the other felt that through their actions and virtue they deserved the father’s love, without having any love for the father. We have to acknowledge where we sit in terms of our mentality to God, and consider what this story teaches about God’s response to us.
3. The father goes out of a place of comfort for both of his sons in this story, because both are incredibly loved. We need to remember this in our interactions with both younger and older brothers.
4. This story is a reminder of the overwhelming love and forgiveness of God. Tim Keller reveals that the word “Prodigal”, is defined as “recklessly extravagant” or “having spent everything”. We certainly see this in the younger brother, but also in the father. The father gave recklessly (which doesn’t mean thoughtlessly) to his sons, overriding culture, cost and personal gain in order to reach out to his sons. What a prodigal father! What a Prodigal God. As we come to the end of this study, think over these points, and allow them to help you gain a greater understanding of God, and His overwhelming love and sacrifice for you.



DAY 6

1. Which son do you identify with the most? Why is that?
2. How have your perspectives on this story changed?
3. What does this story, and the study this week reveal to you about God?
4. How will this story change you?
5. How can you share this story with someone else this week?



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THANK YOU FOR JOINING US!

Our overarching verses for the week were Luke 15:1-3; 11-31, in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son (and the Prodigal Father).

We hope that this devotional has reminded you of the love that Jesus has for you, and his willingness to reach out to you, no matter the cost. We pray you have been blessed by it, and will be able to apply the story's messages to your lives this week.

If you have any questions, comments or feedback, please don't be afraid to reach out to us and let us hear your thoughts! We would love to engage with you on a more personal level.

We want to thank you for coming on this journey with us this week. We hope you've learned something along the way, and we would love to have you along on our devotions in the future!

