

## **The Parable of the Dysfunctional Family**

*(Luke 15:11-32)*

### **Parable of the Clueless Father**

I have two sons. They are my heart's delight, my two boys, but they couldn't be more different from one another. My elder son is my rock – reliable and sensible and independent. My younger boy, though – he's another story. He's always been a bit wild, a bit impulsive. Not in a cruel way, mind. He's just always been more interested in having fun than worrying about the future or other people's expectations. He's the life of the party, my younger son is.

And maybe I've always been a bit too indulgent with him, let him get away with a bit too much. So I wasn't terribly surprised when, one day, he came up to me and said: "Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me." Maybe I should have said no – but I've never been good at saying no to him and I could afford to give him his share now so I said yes.

The next thing I knew he was gone. He left home, left town, left the whole country. Every once in a while, word would travel back to us about the nonsense he was getting up to. It was embarrassing. It was worrying. It was lonely. I didn't think I'd ever see him again. Meanwhile, my older son and I just kept at it, running the farm and getting on with life.

Then, one day, I saw someone off in the distance, heading towards the house. I knew it was him - my boy had come back! I took off running and threw my arms around him. He was saying something about having sinned against heaven and against me and not being worthy to be called my son but I wasn't listening. My boy was home and nothing else mattered.

He was in terrible shape, my poor, lost and found boy. Practically naked, shoeless, obviously hungry. I called to the slaves, "Quickly, bring out a robe - the best one - and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!"

The party was in full swing when I spotted my older son, out at the edge of the yard looking mad. I realized I had forgotten to send for him! I went out to him and pleaded for him to come in to the party and welcome his brother home. He let me have it, saying, "Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!"

I stared at him a moment. I was heartbroken that I had made him feel this way and I was heartbroken that he couldn't be glad of his brother's return. "My son," I said, "you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found!"

## **The Parable of the Dysfunctional Family**

*(Luke 15:11-32)*

### **Parable of the Selfish Son**

Some time ago, I went to my father and asked him to give me my share of the property. We are a wealthy family with many slaves and rich harvests. There is always plenty of food and a very nice home, but we didn't have any fun.

After considerable thought, my father divided the land and gave me my share. I was finally free and could have some fun for a change. I sold the land for what I thought was a good amount of money that would set me up for a good life. But I needed to travel far away to really enjoy myself.

I met new friends in these new lands. They liked me and we partied hard with alcohol, drugs and women. I was having a great time, and I was glad I had left the drudgery of my home life.

After some time, I noticed that I had very little money left and there was a famine in the land and food and daily living was costing considerably more. My new friends didn't come to visit as there was no money for parties.

I was hungry and lonely and knew I needed to work to get food, so I found a job working in the fields feeding the pigs. I was so hungry I would have eaten that pig food myself. There was no one in this new land that was willing to help me. I started to think about my comfortable home and how I knew my father treated his slaves much better than the life I was living

I decided I must return to my home, but I realized that I needed to be repentant. I had not honoured my father as the laws had taught me and I had sinned against heaven. I would tell my father that I was truly sorry and no longer worthy to be his son, but could I be a hired hand in his household.

So, I made the journey home. As I approached home, I was afraid but to my surprise my father had seen me approaching and he ran to me. He hugged and kissed me. I told him I was not worthy to be his son, but could I be a hired hand. He did not seem to hear this or ignored it and had the slaves dress me in new clothes and even gave me a family ring. He asked the slaves to start preparing a feast. My father said that I had been lost and now had been found. That welcome home felt so good

During the feast, I noticed that my brother was standing outside but would not come in. I was sure he was angry with me. I did not want to see him. But my father did go to him and I heard him explain that my foolishness with money would not affect my brother's inheritance but my disappearance had been a death and now my reappearance was a new life and that needed to be celebrated.

## **The Parable of the Dysfunctional Family**

*(Luke 15:11-32)*

### **Parable of the Resentful Son**

My father has two sons. I am the oldest and my father depends on me. We've always worked together and I try to honour him and our home. My younger brother, on the other hand...

A while back my younger brother went to our father and asked for the share of the property that would be his when my father dies. And, of course, my father gave it to him! Then my brother left for a distant country where he squandered it **all**. I can only imagine what he got up to, with no one to keep him in control. Obviously, he ended up in trouble and desperate and came crawling back. And of course my father took him in.

I didn't know he was back, though – not at first. I was on my way back home after another day of working in the field when I heard music and dancing. I called one of the slaves over and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.'

I was so angry that I refused to go in. My father came out and began to plead with me but I let it all out. "Listen!" I said, "For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!"

My father replied, "Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found."

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### **Reflection Questions**

What are the strengths and weaknesses of these different characters?

In what ways are you like or not like each of these characters?

How do the lessons of the story change depending on which character is the "main" character?

What does this story teach you about living in the family of God?

How does it challenge you to grow as a member of the family of God?