



Message: *Two Lost Sons and a Welcoming Father, Part 1* | October 12, 2025

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Week 1: TWO LOST SONS and a WELCOMING FATHER

Welcome to Backroads Church. My name is Bob Koestler and I have the honor of delivering the message for the next several weeks. We are glad you are with us as we work through the worship series called TWO LOST SONS and a WELCOMING FATHER.

Let us Pray and we'll get started

The parable of the prodigal son is one of the most famous of all the parables. (SHOW OF HANDS) How many have heard about this parable? It's always been called the parable of the prodigal SON. Over the next couple of weeks, I'm going to ask you to rethink this story and think of it as the story of TWO LOST SONS and a WELCOMING FATHER. Of course, it's a story of a younger and an older brother. When Jesus was telling this parable to tax collectors and the Pharisees, he was asking us to compare and contrast the two brothers in order to understand the message He was trying to convey. I want to provide a hint of who the three main characters in the story are and who Jesus is equating them to be.

#1 Who is WHO in the STORY?

First, there is the younger son – the guy we thought the whole story was about, right? Well, he's playing the part of you and me. Wayward. Sinful. Selfish.

Second, there is the older son – and Jesus is intimating this is the Church. Which is also us, right? But even more so, church leadership. Remember, he is telling this story to the church leadership of that time, the Pharisees. Power-hungry. Selfish. Jealous.

And third, there is the Father – and He is God, the Father. Loving. Searching. Welcoming. Forgiving.

I ask you to keep these pairings in mind as we go through discussing this different angle to this parable.

OK. Picture this: In a small village nestled among the hills of ancient Judea, just south of Jerusalem, which is now modern-day Israel, there lived a prosperous father with two sons. The household buzzed with the rhythm of daily life with servants tending vineyards, the aroma of fresh bread coming from the kitchen, and the father overseeing it all with his quiet wisdom. But beneath the surface simmered unrest. The younger son, a young man who stirs up trouble with dreams bigger than the family estate, grew weary of the daily routine. Finally, one day, he walked up to his father, his voice steady but full of defiance and said in:

Luke 15:12 "The younger son told his father, I want my share of your estate now before you die." So, his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons."

In that moment, I imagine the air thickened with emotional distress. In those days, if you had two sons, the estate would be divided 2/3 to the older sibling and 1/3 to the younger. But that happened when the father DIED. To demand inheritance prematurely was basically the same as to be WISHING DEATH upon his father, a cultural dagger to the heart. What the younger son is saying is I WANT your stuff, but I don't want you. I want the father's things, but I don't want the father. This was unheard of. But even more unheard of when understanding the history and culture of that time was the father's response. A traditional middle eastern father could only respond in one way. He would be expected to drive the boy out of the house with verbal, if not physical and violent blows. But this father doesn't do that. The father, his face and eyes showing the unspoken sorrow and disappointment, divided his PROPERTY without a word of anger or criticism. The translation here uses the word property. But the Greek word used here is the word BIOS...like bio-logy. What it really says is that the father DIVIDED HIS LIFE between them. You see, the relationship that people had to their land is important here. This father's estate WAS HIS LAND. His land was his wealth. They had no checking or savings accounts where they had money just sitting there. He would have had to sell off a third of his land to give to the son asking for it. They IDENTIFY with the land. To lose your land was to lose yourself and your standing in the community. This son was asking his father to tear his life apart; to tear himself apart. And he does. The father maintains his love for his son even through the pain of his son rejecting him.

#2 The WANDERER goes to TOWN

So, the young man receives and then sells his share of the inheritance, takes all that money, packs his bags, and vanishes into the horizon, bound for a distant country where freedom had been calling for him.

There, in the far-off cities, he plunges into a life full of excess. Days blur into nights of loud festivities, shallow friendships forge in fleeting pleasures, his fortune, all that money, evaporates like a Boscobel morning fog.

Luke 15:13 "...and there he wasted all his money in wild living."

But prosperity is fickle; a severe famine gripped the land, and the young man who once had money to burn, found himself completely broke, hiring out to feed pigs, unclean beasts to a Jew, a symbol of utter degradation. In fact, Jewish leaders pronounced a curse on people who raised pigs because they thought them so dirty. He had nothing to eat and no money to buy something to eat. Hunger gnawed at his stomach, and envy stirred as he eyed the food the pigs devoured. In that pigsty of mud and despair, clarity came to him:

Luke 15:17-19 "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home, even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger. I will go home to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.'"

With tattered clothes and a humbled spirit, he began the long trip home, rehearsing his plea and his plan all the way.

Meanwhile, back at the estate, the older son (the church) worked relentlessly. Fields were plowed under his watchful eye, harvests were gathered without complaint. He was the picture of duty – obedient, reliable, the backbone of the family. But his heart harbored a different kind of longing to wander, one hidden in resentment. As the younger son's absence stretched on, the older son's bitterness festered, though he never said anything.

#3 The Father CHASES AFTER His lost son

Now, envision what the father (God) was doing. Day after day, he scanned the road searching to see if his youngest was coming home; his heart aching for his lost son.

And then Luke 15:20, "...and while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him."

Now understand there is more here than we have seen in learning of this parable in the past. Middle eastern men did not run. Children ran. Women would run. But never fathers, not owners of estates. Running, an act of profound indignity for a Middle Eastern patriarch, with robes hiked up, exposing his legs. Some say that this father didn't act like a father but he acts like a mother here. He runs to his son; he shows absolute emotion and kisses him.

The son began his scripted apology, but the father cut him short:

Luke 15:22-24 "Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found." So, the party began.

#4 The FATHER shows GRACE

You see, grace interrupts as the father won't even listen to the plan the son has for coming back. He runs, hugs, and kisses his son because he is back home. The father says "the best robe". That would have been his. He says I'm not going to wait for you to get cleaned up. I'm certainly not going to wait for you to prove yourself. You're not going to earn your way back into the family. I'M bringing you back.

The father watched and he waited. He was dealing with a human being with a will of his own, but he was ready to greet his son if he returned. In the same way, God's love is constant and patient and welcoming. He will search for us and give us opportunities to respond, but He will not force us to come to Him. Like the father in the story, God waits patiently for us to come to our senses.

Let us Pray

Next Steps:

Read Luke 15

Include in Prayers this week for the lost to come back home

Be prepared with a person(s) to reach out and reconcile with next week