

The Lavish God

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As we turn to the parable of the so-called Prodigal Son, you may need to confront something, familiarity breeds contempt. We can become so familiar with something we disregard, devalue it.

Hebrews tells us every time we open God's Word, it is living and active, able judge and heal the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Will you welcome the Word into your heart? "*There was a man who had two sons.*" It's a story of, not just one son but two sons, not just two sons but a father: *the Younger, Older, Father.*

Younger Son

A younger son comes to his father and says, "**Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.**" And he divided his property **between them**" (12). The Father divides the inheritance between his two sons. The older son responsibly remains at home to oversee the estate, while the younger son liquidates his share, strikes out on his own, ends up in another country. What's he doing? Tons of money, a trip to Europe, no moral restraints. Some might say he's *living the dream*. Jesus describes it as living as **recklessly**. The word means *lavish*. It's used in another context of a person washing their feet with, not water, but spiced wine! Some Roman elites took milk baths. The younger son is excessive, over the top. If he's living "the

dream,” we are too. Machines wash and dry our hands; we drive air conditioned cars; people make our food and coffee, sometimes wash our feet and do our nails. There’s a danger when we have plenty, when we’re lavish: it can be difficult to see our need. Why? *Because we’re living under the illusion of self-sufficiency.* I’m responsible for everything I have. The illusion produces tremendous ego blinding us to the true origin of our material blessing. And, unfortunately, it’s often only when that blessing is taken away that we get serious about our faith. The younger son’s money runs out, financial crisis. A famine hits, a health crisis, and the dream comes crashing down. It can be difficult to see our need when we have plenty, but when we lack suddenly God becomes more important. Hit a financial crisis and suddenly elders are invited into the deep recesses of someone’s life. A health scare, and our inbox fills up with prayer requests. Marital conflict, we’re called in for counseling. The absence of prosperity puts us in touch with our need for God. Or does it? *Do you reach out for God or just for the pain to stop? To Christ or to get the finances flowing? To the Spirit or for just a something to be healed?* Is it faith or foxhole religion, active when the bombs are flying...Passive, inert when things are good. Are you using God or worshipping God? The prodigal has worked himself into a hole, feeding unclean animals, hungering for their food. Lowest of the low. Sitting in the muck of his life, realizes he’d be better off as a servant

in his father's house. He rehearses a confession. **Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you**" (18, 21). How do we know it's authentic, that he's not just using God but worshipping God? Notice he says, "I've sinned *against heaven* and before you." Twice. He acknowledges his sin is primarily *against* God, secondarily before others. Anyone can say sorry after a conflict, but for real change to occur we have to go to God and admit the highest offense is against him, that's real faith. In a health scare, crying out not just for healing but for the Healer. In conflict, not just seeking the peace repenting to Prince of Peace. It's often said we have to hit rock bottom before we can truly change. But the Word of God is living and active. I want you to know it's a privilege for us to be there during a crisis, but I want more—for you to hunger for God when there **isn't** a crisis. To put his Word and his Presence **first**. To worship God not just use God. The prodigal has *authentic faith* because he *turns to God* for God. I've hurt you, sinned against you. He exchanges dreams. William Faulkner said, **"A man's moral conscience is the curse he had to accept from the gods in order to gain from them the right dream."** The prodigal has been living "the dream" centered around self. It's only when he welcomes a Word from the outside, that his conscience, his God, shows him the right dream/reality—God first, people second. *Worship.*

Older Brother

What about the older son? Well, after the younger son returns home, his father throws him a party. The older brother comes in from the field, and drawing near to the house hears the commotion. He asks what's going on. When he discovers his father's lavishness towards his brother, he refuses to go in. Forces his dad to come outside, leave the party, and says, "[Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends](#) (29). What's he doing? **Justifying** himself with a list of deeds: I served you, many years, never disobeyed. Never, not once? Self-righteousness skews reality. Ever get in an argument, and throw in a few "nevers"? You never clean the house, never do the laundry. Never is a sure sign we've left reality for the dream of Self-righteousness. He's builds steam, "[But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him](#)" (30)! What's he doing? **Distancing** himself from his brother: "this son of yours" (no brother of mine), he devoured your property, consorted with prostitutes. Don't you see the gaping distance? I deserve at least a goat, but you gave him the fatted calf! Now the tricky thing is that, at one level, he's actually right. He led a cleaner life. *But why?* In v. 25 Jesus describes the older brother as "[drawing near](#)" to the house, the same phrase used to describe people listening to him, "[Now the tax](#)

collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him" (1).

What's this mean? The older brother draws near and the sinners draw near, a scathing comparison. The son who kept his nose clean is just as dirty as the unclean ones. The the sulking self-righteous son isn't any better than the reckless son. To pharisees who were also listening, to all the older sons he says, You think you're worshipping God, but you're just using him to promote yourself. You're in a dream with God as a far second, where God owes you a goat. You think you've put God in *your* debt. Ever think, "Why am I suffering after all I've done for God?" Or try to force obedience out of your kids by saying something like, "After all I've done for you..." Score-keeping, putting God and others in your debt, is a sign you're far from reality. My wife is one of two sisters, one was the black sheep of the family, party animal, several husbands, even stole from her sister. The other sister became a Christian, developed a vibrant ministry, went on to marry a pastor. But since she her sister stole her identity and thousands of dollars, she struggled to forgive. She said to God, I'll forgive when she asks for forgiveness. It sounds noble, but it isn't. She was *withholding* forgiveness. Why? As a form of punishment. You *owe* me. Living in house of her heavenly Father's love for 21 years, she refused to reconcile. Why? She was living in the dream of self-righteousness.

Prodigal Father

We've looked at the younger son, the older son, and now the father. When the **older** son refused to go into the party, what did the father do? Did he say I'm busy? No, he stopped what he was doing and went out to him. What did he do? Does he scold him? No he *implored* him. Begged his son to rejoice, to celebrate, to get inside the true dream, to enjoy grace! But what does the son do? He crosses his arms and says, "But you gave *him* the fatted calf." The father responds, **Son you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours** (31) You've been living on the fatted calf of my love for all these years. Is it so petty that you'd settle for a goat? For a self-righteous life? For punishing others? Come inside the home of my perfect love, let go of your field of judgment, and let's celebrate grace. I'm pleased to say, my wife went into the house and forgave her sister with his love. When the **younger** son came home, how did the Father respond? Does he stand on the porch with his forehead wrinkled scowling at his son? No, he was so happy he threw dignity to the wind, gathers up his garments, and sprints down the road to meet him. When the son begins to confess his sin and unworthiness, the father doesn't even let him finish. He interrupts his narrative of shame with a narrative of grace. Bring me the robe, the ring, the shoes, **For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate** (24). Do you feel unworthy? Perhaps because of

how lavish and recklessly you've lived? Or perhaps because of how you've been treated? The Father clothes the unworthy with his own worth, puts the house shoes on, and says you belong here, in an empire of worth. Jesus also threw dignity to the wind, took our unworthiness and shame and climbed naked onto a cross. Why? To make us worthy. To clothe us with his deeds, to welcome us into the home of his Father's love. He's inviting you into the reality of grace. One requirement: go inside, turn to the Father, feel his embrace. Celebrate and enjoy grace of your lavish God.