



July 2020

Dear CWR/PTM Friend and Partner,

While the focus of the parable of the Prodigal Son is normally placed on the wasteful, extravagant (prodigal) son he was not the only one who is depicted as spending his inheritance—so is the father. Though in a different way than his younger son, the father is also, or at least seems to our minds to be, wasteful and extravagant. This parable has three main characters—don't forget the elder brother!

As you probably know, Luke 15 contains three separate parables—before the words of Jesus begin, in the first three verses of this chapter Luke sets the stage:

Now the tax collectors and “sinners” were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Then Jesus told them this parable...(Luke 15:1-3).

Jesus crafted, composed and communicated this story because religious folks were “muttering”—upset because Jesus wasn't where they thought he ought to be—in their religious gatherings, ceremonies and assemblies. They felt Jesus was hanging out and spending way too much time with “sinners.” Jesus answered their objections in three parables, beginning the third one saying:

There was a man who had two sons... (Luke 15:11). This story has three leading characters, three actors in one drama about the boundless and endless grace and love of God.

Whereas the first and second parables in this 15th chapter of Luke speak of the efforts extended to find something that was lost (first the shepherd leaving the flock to look for one “lost sheep” and then a woman sweeping the floor to find a “lost coin”) in this third parable about a “lost son” the father did not launch a search-and-rescue mission to bring his self-willed son home.

The father respected the choice and decision of the son to leave his home. The younger son did not just wander off like a lost sheep or by-chance drop from a table or a pocket like a lost coin—no, no! The younger son willfully decided to leave his father's house. It was no accident that the younger son left his father's house. As much as the father was grieved, he realized that his son had to change his mind if reconciliation was to happen.

When the son returned home the father in the parable behaved in a way religion expects he shouldn't have. There is no public repudiation of his son. There is no gauntlet for the younger son to run—no scorn or condemnation the father insists his son suffer and endure.

For his part, the younger son did not expect grace and forgiveness—all he wanted was a job and three square meals a day (Luke 15:17-19). He was starving, and he knew the hired hands at his father's house at least had a place to sleep and something to eat. He didn't expect amazing grace! The younger son, like his elder brother, just wanted to “earn his keep.” The younger brother was as shocked by his father's extravagant love as his elder brother was!

When the younger son returned home his father didn't say “I hope you have learned your lesson” nor did he insist that his son sign a contract promising to work hard to pay off all that

inheritance money blown in wild living. The father's love and the lavish celebration that followed were not contingent upon the son's pledge to never again do what he had done.

Thus the father does not guard against the son "taking advantage" of him again—a **conditional, transactional, "scratch my back and I will scratch yours" contract would have been religion, not grace**. Such an agreement would not have been God the Father's unconditional, divine, no-matter-what love. The father seems to be recklessly extravagant—he doesn't demand repayment of all he had given his son.

But the younger, wasteful son is not the only sinful son in the story. There is much to say and learn about the elder son. Here's what Frederic Buechner has to say about the elder son/older brother:

The fatted calf, the best Scotch, the hoedown could have all been his too, any time he asked for them except he never thought to ask for them because he was too busy trying cheerlessly and religiously to earn them—("Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale")

The elder son wanted to earn his paycheck. He wanted no hand-outs from his father and despised all those who looked for grace rather than law. He wanted (perhaps even demanded) his father to notice how hard he had worked for him. When the elder son heard all the music and dancing that was part of the celebration given by his father for his younger brother's return home he left the fields and *came near the house* (Luke 15:25).

When he discovered that his father was throwing a lavish party for his no-good brother the elder brother refused to join in the festivities. The elder son was appalled that his father had not recognized all his hard work. When the father came outside of the house and "pleaded with him" (Luke 15:28) the elder son "...answered his father, 'Look, all these years I have been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never even gave me a goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'" (Luke 15:28-30).

Note three things the elder son told his father—listen to what was on his mind:

1) *I have been slaving for you all these years and I have never disobeyed your orders.*

2) *Yet when this "son of yours" comes home he gets a celebration...*the elder son not only refuses to join in the festivities welcoming his younger brother home, he will not even call him his brother.

3) *This "son of yours" squandered the property of the father "with prostitutes"*—maybe he did, but the story that Jesus told about the life of the younger son in the far country did not disclose this detail.

Each character in this parable/story builds on the other, and in order to fully appreciate the entire meaning of this beloved story we also need to focus on the elder son whose part is often minimized or overlooked entirely.

The elder son is the grand finale of three acts Jesus gives to explain why religious people "muttered" about him. After clearly outlining how the younger son and the father were not part of the religious expectations and beliefs of his day, Jesus then caps it all off with the elder son, explaining that the elder son "muttered" just like the religious leaders of his day did. The religious leaders "muttered" about Jesus and the elder son "muttered" about his father—and of course, as Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30).

The religious leaders of Jesus' day felt, as did the elder son, that they had been serving and slaving for God. **The religious leaders were not looking for the love of the Father, they just wanted to be paid what they felt they deserved.**

The younger son left home—he was in a far country—he was obviously not living with his father. The younger son accepted the open door of his father's home but the elder son refused. The elder son thought he was at home, but it appears he was so busy working and earning his father's love and acceptance that he had no idea that his father already loved and accepted him.

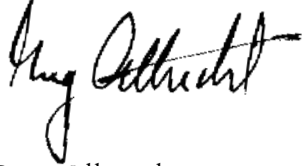
The elder son was working in the field—he was “following all the rules.” The elder son had formed what he felt was a co-operative partnership with his father—the elder son wanted his life judged by his performance, and he was intent on proving his worth to his father.

But his father had never asked for or even hinted he was looking for another hired hand—he was all about loving his two sons. The father offered both his grace and love. Music was playing in his house, but the “music of grace” to which his younger brother danced merely caused the elder brother to put his fingers in his ears.

The music of the gospel of Jesus Christ is not all about succeeding, surpassing, accumulating, earning and proving our worth to our Father—the lyrics and music of the gospel are all about believing, resting, receiving and trusting.

May you all be filled with the deepest appreciation for the unconditional love, mercy, grace and forgiveness of God—and thanks for helping us tell the world all about it!

Your brother in Christ,



Greg Albrecht

President, Plain Truth Ministries

P.S. We share this letter from a friend in Australia. **We can't thank you enough** for your continued prayers and support of this worldwide ministry.

I “somehow” discovered your ministry online several years ago. I am a skeptical person by nature and by experience. I've had several “prangs” (Aussie for car crash) with religion at large. I had given up on religion, but not on God. Your ministry is so excellent and so on target for me. I am devouring all I can from your website, blogs and updates, and you keep providing fresh, new resources! I am really happy to have found you.

And here's one from Ohio:

I can't tell you how much comfort, focus and inspiration you provided my family and me...and some of our friends during the dark days of the pandemic. Thanks for being “there” providing Christ-centered leadership.

CWR/PTM Prayer List—July 2020

These requests for prayer represent just a few of the thousands we receive and pray for. We invite you to join us in praying for these and the others that space does not permit us to include here. Thanks for joining with us as a CWR/PTM Prayer Partner.

Please pray for all the victims of the corona virus pandemic, as well as their friends and family members.—Texas

Please pray for our grand-baby. She has been diagnosed with neuroblastoma, a rare form of cancer.—Washington

Please pray for my family—my older sister recently passed away. She was blinded at age eight and developed inoperable cancer. She said she was tired of being blind and wanted to go home. I'm missing her so much.—Colorado

I suffered from the Shingles virus with a lot of pain for four months. My husband needs a hernia repair surgery but he is now suffering a UTI (urinary tract infection), preventing him from having this surgery. Please pray for us.—Nebraska

Please pray about the financial hardships endured by so many because of the pandemic.—California

I need prayers for my physical, mental and spiritual health. Please also pray for my close relatives who are suffering a lot due to losing family members.—Arizona

We greatly appreciate your ministry of "grace and truth." Thank you for opening our hearts to give to others the love of our Father, whose goodness has no shadow of turning. We are grateful for the Holy Spirit filling our hearts with the Father's love and the Son revealing that love in such stark reality. We pray for everyone at CWR/PTM.—British Columbia, Canada

Please pray for the healing of my lungs and colon. Thank you in advance for your prayers.—Virginia

I thank God for His love and I thank Pastor Greg and CWR/PTM for the teaching of love. I pray that many more would be blessed to be able to know God's love. As I enter these aging days I pray God removes my fear of getting older.—Delaware

Please pray for my friend who is partly paralyzed. Thank you for all you do.—Michigan

Thank you for prayers concerning the large tumor in my neck. Doctors told me that surgery would damage my nerves so much that I wouldn't be able to swallow. Second CT scan, after eight months, showed no growth!—Missouri

Please pray for my son who has terrible stomach pain. The doctors have not been able to help him. He has had this pain since he was nine years old and he is now 53. My heart breaks seeing him in so much pain.—California

Please pray for my wife, who is experiencing confusion and a decline in cognition and mobility. Our doctor stopped a medication that may have been causing the confusion. An infection was also suspect—that was treated, yet symptoms continued. She is now needing 24-hour care.—Washington

I'm going in later this month to have my cataract removed. So please keep me in your prayers.—Arizona

Please pray for our niece's husband who has lower back problems and is in constant pain.—Missouri

I'm 88 years old and I fell down and fractured my right shoulder. Please pray for complete healing and energy to continue living. I'm a widower and living alone, actually not alone, my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is always with me.—California

Please pray that God takes away the pain in my right hip, side and leg.—South Carolina

I pray for all of our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need of comfort and encouragement. May our eyes and hearts be open to the love of God that his love will flow to us and through us.—California

Our Father in Heaven: We thank you for your grace, mercy and love. You love each of these individuals, and we thank you in advance for the answers you will provide for each request. With thanksgiving for our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, our suffering servant who heals us, in whose name we pray—Amen.