

The Journey Home #2: The Hardest Lesson Lost -- *Luke 15:25-32*

Doesn't it **matter**?

Isn't there a part of you that can **understand** why the older brother would say that?

Doesn't this welcome home make grace cheap and obedience unnecessary? The son goes and blows it all and then comes back to be received like a prince! And how can this happen without the older son being invited to the party? How could they not include him in the planning of the party?

Isn't this so **unfair**?

Part of us good-hearted, God-believin', church-goin' folks feels sorry for the older brother. He gets the raw end of the deal. Yeah, he's pouty, ugly, rude, and insensitive. But isn't there something inside you that feels for him? Doesn't he have a right to be angry?

- He's done the **right** things!
- He's stayed **home** with the Father!
- He's done the **work** while his brother played and **wasted** ... everything!
- It's not fair!

I remember a **[story told by James Dobson about his son, Ryan]**, when he was small. He was keeping him one morning and Ryan was about two years old. And he noticed he hadn't heard Ryan for a few minutes. With a two year old, that usually means trouble. Sure enough, Dr. Dobson couldn't find his son in the house. So in a panic, he looked out the kitchen window, and Ryan had snuck out of the house and crawled in the back of a pick up truck of some workers. There is no telling how he got into the bed of the truck by himself, but two year olds are climbers, what can you say. When Dr. Dobson found him, Ryan was trying to desperately get out of the pickup truck bed, but with the gate down on the pickup truck, Ryan had scooted to the edge of the bed and hung his legs off it reaching for the ground. His feet were about 18 inches from the ground and waving wildly to try to touch something firm rather than falling into an abyss he could not see, face down on the pick up truck bed. **As Dr. Dobson moved closer to rescue his son, he could hear Ryan softly saying over and over again, "Help the boy. Would someone please help the boy!"**

Isn't that how part of you feels for the older brother? A little bit sorry for him. "Would someone **help** the **boy**?"

What if I told you that is **why** the story IS told -- **to help the boy!** To help all the older brothers out there, **to help all of us older brothers in here** -- whether we are male or female, young or old, **this story is told to help us!**

To help us know ...

1. there is a party going on that we've been **missing** and we're invited
2. that we are **loved** as much or more by the Father as the younger son
3. that all the good things of the father are ours to **enjoy** right now
4. that we are just as **lost** in the near country far away from home

Let's read the story one more time, the older brother part, beginning with **verse 24** of **Luke 15**.

Notice a couple of things going back to **the forgotten part** of Jesus' story.

- **vs. 25** - **the son wasn't near the father**: not physically and certainly not emotionally, he was focused on the jobs and the fields, the things that were HIS! Go back to **vs. 11** and notice the property was divided between the two sons! **The older son got 2/3 of the daddy's stuff -- money,**

fields, livestock -- already! He didn't know about the party or the brother coming home because he wasn't around the Father. He lived in proximity to the Father, but he didn't live close to the Father in his heart or personal presence!

- **vs. 28** - the Father paid the price for both sons -- the younger son through the humiliation, disrespect, property loss, and loss of status in town. And the Father paid the price of the older brother through the humiliation and disrespect, and sense of loss. The older brother's heart was in a far country nearby, but he was just as lost to the Father.
- **vs. 29-30** - the older brother reveals his heart: he was just like his younger brother. He didn't want the Father, he just wanted what the Father could give him, what he believed he had earned by slaving away for the Father

Look at two **truths** revealed here about "older brothers"

1. **They're hearts are just as far away as the younger brothers' hearts.** Look at **verse 29** - "**slaving away**" all these years ... which gives way to the second realization about "older brothers" ...
2. **They don't want the father, they're just after his stuff.** Look at the end of **verse 29**. He was focused on what the father had given the younger son and what he had not given him!

Thomas' Story -- I can remember it like it was yesterday!

"I hate the younger brother!" Thomas* said this like he was releasing great pressure from deep in his soul. "And I hate it that there are all these people that get to live it up with drugs, alcohol, and sex and then come back and be treated as something special. I haven't done any of that crap. I haven't gotten to do that stuff because I've tried to be good and they come back they're the heroes. I hate it ... and if I am not careful, I hate them."

This spilled out of him in our men's Bible study group that had been reading through Luke. He began his diatribe with a sneer and finished with tears streaming down his cheeks. The rest of us sat there stunned ... bewildered ... and shocked.

Then Danny spoke up, his voice breaking and tears in his eyes, "Oh Thomas, I am one of those guys, and it's not so glorious. I can't rid my mind of the residue left behind by my sin. You have been protected from the 'crap' that still swims in my soul. You didn't miss anything."

"Oh yes you did!" Jackson, an older and very frank member of our group, gruffly interrupted. "You missed a lot of hell. You missed a lot of hell I brought into my life ... and my family's life ... and into my children's lives. And I don't know if I can ever undo the messes I've made for them and in them." By now, Jackson was in a soft sob.

We came to this holy moment unexpectedly all because of Jesus' story he described this way, "There was a man who had two sons." And in this room of men seeking to honor Jesus and not run from their earnest and honest heart-yearnings, we had older brothers and younger brothers broken on the truth of sin and our Father's grace.

Jesus' story is for us. for us older brothers.

- To let us know we are invited to the party! **vs. 28** - the Father went out ... there are three parables told here. In each of the first two parables, someone goes and searches for what is lost. So if we are paying close attention, we notice that the Father doesn't go out and search for the lost son, but waits for him to return. It doesn't fit. Where's the looking? Where's the effort. And it doesn't seem right in comparison to what God has done for us, by coming and looking for us in Jesus.
- To let us know that God has searched us out in Jesus! By listening to the parable again and again, we begin to move our eyes away from the younger son as the focus of the story. It's not told about him. We know from **14:33-15:2** that the "younger sons" were following Jesus. They

had given up everything to follow him.

- So it begins to dawn on us that this parable is told for the religious folks, the folks who are working hard -- slaving away -- to honor God, but who don't know that God is a party God who longs to share everything with them... with us! vs. 31 The Father loves joyous barbecues. He longs to have them for the children he loves now! If only his older sons will just come in and join the party, because it is their party, too!
- So in this story, the third story in *Luke 15*, we do find the Father going out to search for what is lost ... the older brother. He goes and pleads with him to come to the party because every party for any younger brother is our party, too -- a party for the older brother! Any lost brother who comes home to the Father has a party waiting. It's the older son he went in out to bring to the party. He says, "Lost son, please come home. Come know me. Come party with me!"

So our story ends with this open invitation:

- It's an invitation for all of us who have substituted religion in place of relationship with our Father in heaven and have replaced celebration with sullen and suffocating definitions for worship.
- It is an invitation to realize that the whole purpose of our spiritual lives is NOT to get the stuff God is supposed to offer us when we die, but to enjoy the Father while we live and be ready to enjoy the forever party that lies ahead when the Kingdom finally dawns in all of its fullness.

But how? How do we learn to party with the Father? How do we learn to celebrate with the Father instead of feeling straight-jacketed with fear or disinterest? How do we awaken each day with the realization that everything the Father has is ours? How do we offer ourselves to him completely?

[Ask for input via Text Message and email that we will post to the web for your easy access!](#)

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Daily offer ourselves to God using Scripture to reset our focus!

- *Deuteronomy 6:4-9* becomes *Matthew 22:34-40*
- *Philippians 4:4-9* becomes *Matthew 6:9-13*

Final Blessing: *Romans 15:13*