

God's Hunger for Us
The Searching Father
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32
Sermon Outline

Introduction: It is telling that we have chosen to call Jesus' story in Luke 15 "The Parable of the Prodigal Son" when it might be better described as "The Parable of the Searching Father." As usual we want to make every story in the Bible a story about us (or about the sort of people that we are not). But the great story of the Bible, the story we celebrate in a vivid way every Advent, is about God's search for us, not our search for him. The story before us urges us to think of parenting at its very best—to think of our yearnings for our children—and let that be a window upon the heart of God. We will think about three relationships: (i) the father and the younger son, (ii) the father and the elder son, and (iii) the father and the missing son.

I) The father and the younger son

A) The son

Bad news

B) The father

Surprising and shocking behavior

II) The father and the elder son

A) The son

- 1) Dutiful
- 2) Bitter
- 3) His real problem

B) The father

Not about to stop the party

Nevertheless, refuses to write the 'Pharisee' off. *He came out and entreated him... (v 28)*

Dealing with bitterness

III) The father and the missing son

A) No search, despite the context

B) Why?

- 1) Jesus indicting the grumblers
- 2) Jesus explaining himself
- 3) The cross and the heart of God

Questions for Reflection this Week

- 1) Why is “The Parable of the Prodigal Son” a misleading title for the story Jesus tells in Luke 15:11ff?
- 2) Itemize the offenses of the prodigal—against his father and against God (through v 19). Do you think his repentance is pure? Why? Why not? Imagine what Jesus’ hearers (see v 2-3) would have thought of him. Would you ask him to work for you or teach in the Sunday school?
- 3) Itemize the father’s response to the prodigal—(vv. 12, 20-24). Why does Jesus go into such vivid detail to describe the father’s behavior? How do you imagine his listeners responded? Do you believe God is really like this towards people who return to him (especially when their repentance is not completely pure). Do you believe that this describes God’s attitude toward you? Why? Why not?
- 4) Itemize the elder brother’s response to the party and to his father? Is it wrong to be dutiful and hard-working (the elder brother was these things)? If not, then what is wrong with him?
- 5) Reflect on the following: “The elder brother’s real problem is that he is not like his father. And this is so because he has not really wanted his father. He sees himself as a slave because he has chosen not to see himself as a son. His obedience has been a calculation. The party he complains about being deprived of does not even include his father. He, in his own way, has been as mercenary towards his father as was his younger brother—expecting a quid pro quo arrangement in which the father isn’t a father at all—just some sort of blessing machine.”
- 6) There are elements of both sons in us. Identify some of those elements in you.
- 7) What does v 28 tell us about God’s attitude toward elder brother types?
- 8) How is Jesus the elder brother that the elder brother was not? How by his life and death does he demonstrate the heavenly Father’s heart? Spend some time thanking the Father and committing yourself to him afresh.