

Parables of Relationships: Our Father (Luke 15:11–32)

Jesus’s longest parable shows the compassion of God. It’s full of allusions to all the major stories of Genesis, and through them provides a number of lessons to us. It also challenges Christians today to turn away from self-interest and to model the grace which God shows.

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I. Introduction

- A. 388 words: Younger Son 62% of the story; Older Son 38%
- B. The story is a single paragraph in our earliest copy
- C. The story may be read in two sections, each ending with the Father saying that the Younger Son “was dead, and is alive again, and he was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:24, 32)

II. Setting

- A. Two groups in audience
 - i. Tax collectors and sinners (“drawing near” to “hear”, like Luke 14:35 and Deuteronomy 6:4)
 - ii. Pharisees and scribes: “grumbling”, like Israel in the wilderness
- B. 100 sheep: 1 lost and found, by going away from home
- C. 10 coins: 1 lost and found, at home

III. Story

Scene 1 (Luke 15:11–24)

- A. “A man had two sons” (Luke 15:11) is like Matthew 21:28–32
- B. The Older Son probably gets more (Deuteronomy 21:17)
- C. The Younger Son “wastes” possessions, like the Unjust Manager in Luke 16:1
- D. The famine is easily forgotten and means the Prodigal is both unwise and unlucky
- E. He “wakes up” and begins to address himself
- F. He returns and is given amazing welcome: ring, robe, shoes, feast

Scene 2 (15:25–32)

- A. “Look” (15:29) – the Younger Son always says “father” (15:12, 18, 21)
- B. “all these years I have slaved for you” – he’s actually been building up his own business
- C. “you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends” (15:29) – he wants to celebrate without his father
- D. “This son of yours” (15:30) disowns his brother
- E. How could the Older Son know his brother in a distant country wasted his possessions with prostitutes?

IV. Deeper layers

Jacob and Esau

- A. Isaac was the most famous man to have two *and only two* sons
- B. A younger brother going into a far country
- C. The younger brother herding animals in that far country
- D. Someone saying they are dying of hunger
- E. A younger brother wearing best robes
- F. An older brother coming in from a field
- G. An older brother being angry
- H. Meal of young goats

The most striking connection:

- A. “But while he was still far off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and *ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.*” (Luke 15:20)
- B. “But Esau *ran* to meet him and embraced him and *fell on his neck and kissed him*, and they wept.” (Genesis 33:4)

Jacob and Laban

- A. “These twenty years I have been in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock” (Genesis 31:41).
- B. “Look, for so many years I have slaved for you” (Luke 15:29).

Joseph

- A. “Then Pharaoh took his signet *ring* from his hand and put it on Joseph’s hand, and clothed him in *garments of fine linen* and put a gold chain about his neck.” (Genesis 41:42)
- B. “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring out the *best robe*, and put it on him, and put a *ring* on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’” (Luke 15:22)
- C. “And he identified it [Joseph’s robe] and said, ‘It is my son’s robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.’” (Genesis 37:33)
- D. “For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” (Luke 15:24)

Judah

- A. Older Son speaks of the *goat + friends + prostitutes*
- B. This combination is only elsewhere in Genesis 38:20–22

Abraham

- A. The archetypal father: “father of a multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:5)
- B. The Bible’s first host, providing a feast, including a calf
- C. The Bible’s only other aged figure who runs: “He lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing in front of him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent door to meet them and bowed himself to the earth” (Genesis 18:2; compare 18:7).
- D. The first person in the Bible recorded as running.
- E. Like the Father of Luke 15:22, his first word is “Quick” (Genesis 18:6)
- F. The only Old Testament person to give away the inheritance while he was still alive (Genesis 25:5–6).
- G. Ishmael was disinherited through despising the feast given for his younger brother (Genesis 25:8–10)
- H. The Older Son in Jesus’s story, like Ishmael, despised the feast for his younger brother (Genesis 21:9–10)

Cain and Abel

- A. First brothers in the Bible
- B. First family conflict
- C. Bible’s first record of anger is from an older brother envious of the acceptance of his younger brother (like in Luke 15)

V. Significance

- (1) Jesus knew and used the Scriptures, so should we.
- (2) We must reflect our Father’s orientation towards the lost.
- (3) A Father’s warning and invitation to the upright.