

BGO Sermon for 8-28-16 – God’s Story, My Story, Our Story: Older Son
I JOHN 3:14-18 (Message) LUKE 6:31-38 (Message) HEBREWS 13:1-3 (NLT) LUKE 15:11-32 (NLT)

We’re going to take a few more weeks looking at that Gospel passage from Luke as part of a “series within a series,” where we’ll look at both the Prodigal story, and I’ll share more of my story with you as we get to know each other better.

Last week we pointed out that the word “prodigal” means excessive, extravagant, lavish even.

So by that, many in the parable are prodigal in their actions.

We shared the story of the younger son, excessively prodigal in his rebellion, how he dove headlong into a world of sin,

after demanding his share of the family property from his father.

We talked about how the smell of the pigsty, of his sin, clung to him as he returned home.

We were blessed by the actions of the Father toward his son:

the father saw him from a long ways off -

that means the father had been looking for him to come home, never stopped looking, never stopped seeking.

The father runs to him, and out of the incredible love he had for his child, he grabs the son in an embrace, kissing his son’s filth-covered neck,

then making a way for the son to be made clean with new clothes, re-covered.

And we praised our Good Good Father God,

who out of love embraces our sin-covered lives,

cleanses us from our unrighteousness and clothes us in Christ.

if we’re coming to him the first time or the hundredth.

We’ve all been that younger son at one time or another;

as the Scriptures remind us, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

The question for us today: how have we been like the older brother?

Remember who Jesus is talking to as He tells this story.

It isn’t to the crowds that came to listen to Him tell about His Father God;

Jesus is preaching to the Pharisees and religion scholars,

the ones who should have known God the best, known God’s heart and will, and the ones who should have been the most receptive to Jesus.

But they were not at all pleased at what Jesus was doing.

As the Message puts it, those “church folks” were grumbling,

“He takes in sinners and eats meals with them, treating them like old friends.”

In response, Jesus tells them 3 stories. He starts with a shepherd with a lost sheep, then a woman with a lost coin, using both stories to show how God looks for and rejoices over the lost souls who come home to God. Then he tells the story of the Prodigals, about two sons, each lost in his own way.

The first thing we hear about the older son, he's out in the fields. But while the father is looking a long way off for the younger son, he's focused on the work - so focused, in fact, that he misses out on the start of the celebrating.

An aside: I have seen that a lot in churches, especially with things like bazaars & dinners.

People get so involved in the work, they miss out on the celebration, on the blessing - sharing with people from the community, working side by side in fellowship, seeing God work in the midst of the busyness.

We have some of those kind of events coming up: be aware of God's blessing.

The older son certainly wasn't open to the blessing; he turns up his nose at his brother and the celebration, stalking off in an angry sulk, refusing to join in.

And just like the father did with the younger son, he's the one who goes out to the older one.

There are so many things wrong with the older son's speech to Dad, besides that angry, disrespectful tone. Let's start from the top:

The son says, "*All these years I've slaved for you*" - well...

when you look at his heart, really the older son has been working for himself, working to increase profits, to build up the farm, and to win his father's approval.

Though he doesn't see it,

he's in it for Dad's stuff as much as his younger brother was.

More than anything else, he's turned himself into a slave.

It's like we said last week: if you're serving your bank account or checkbook, you end up a servant of sin - worst boss in the universe.

Next: *never once refused to do a single thing you told me to* -

I think the Message paraphrase puts it: *never given you one moment of grief*

Any other parents find that statement hard to believe?

If nothing else, the older son was in disobedience right then, by not coming in for the celebration.

you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends –
again, hard to believe on the surface of it, but consider this: early in the parable, Jesus says the father **“agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.”**
It’s my understanding that back in those days, for the Dad to legally do that, he had to dissolve the company, renounce his claims to the property, in effect declare himself legally dead, for the sons to get the inheritance. And as the firstborn, the older son would have received a double portion of the wealth, 2/3rds of the property to the younger’s 1/3. So when the father says **“everything I have is yours,”** it’s not just a saying or a sentiment, it’s a physical fact.

The older son goes on: ***Yet when this son of yours*** - your brother too, remember - ***comes back after squandering your money on...-***
now how does he know what the kid brother spent his money on?
I’ve heard pastors say that’s how the older brother would have spent the money, if he hadn’t been busy following the rules.
I’m not sure that’s it. I think that the older son thinks the worst of his brother, and that was the worst sin that could think of right then.

So... What about us? How have we or do we act and think like the older brother?
Are we working for God for what we can get out of it?
Do we think so highly of ourselves in our Christian life that we forget how often we DON’T listen to God’s leading?
Do we think the worst of people instead of showing grace?
Most of all, do we follow the Father’s lead, Jesus’ lead, & seek out the lost to welcome them back, even before they’re “cleaned up” in our eyes?

In his speech to the Father, the older son talks about a feast with his friends. We all do pretty well, at least better, in taking care of & celebrating with our friends.

And while it’s a good thing to do that, it’s not impressive, at least to Jesus.

If you only love the lovable, Jesus says, do you expect a pat on the back?

If you only help those who help you, do you expect a medal?

If you only give for what you hope to get out of it, do you think that’s charity?

Run-of-the-mill, Garden-variety sinners do that!

Instead, Jesus says **“love your enemies.”**

I heard a quote a couple of weeks ago that really puts it into perspective;

“I only love God as much as those I love the least”

Jesus says *“love your enemies. Help and give without expecting a return.”*

That’s the younger brother: he was a washout as a servant, no money left,
had no way to repay either the father or the older brother.

And it did cost the older brother: with the father dividing the property,
the robe, the ring, the calf, all of it really belonged to the older brother.

Really, everything we have came from our Brother Jesus, the Firstborn of God,

We have the family ring because Jesus invited us into the family,

We have the shoes of peace because on the night he was betrayed,

He told the disciples, “Peace I leave with you.”

We wear the robe of righteousness because He was stripped of His robe at the cross.

And we celebrate with the fatted calf because Jesus suffered as the sacrificial Lamb,
declared legally dead so we could live in abundance, here & in the life to come.

It might cost us if we start seeking others see as unlovable:

cost us in time & effort, as well as cost us financially.

But it’s older brother mentality that says I welcome only those who look like me,
who can help with the work in the field, who can help pay the bills.

And it’s older brother mentality that will only welcome in

those who have cleaned up first, and will act like we think they should.

Last week I told you my younger son story,
when I accepted Jesus as Lord & Savior.

It took a fairly long time for me to get to that point;

my becoming “The Older Son” happened very quickly.

After that night of the revival, I soon became a Sunday School teacher,

served on committee after committee, trained to preach as a Lay Speaker.

I got one of those big honkin’ parallel bibles,

with 8 different translations side by side,

I went to a church carrying that Bible, and they asked me if I was the new pastor.

I think I said last week that I used to have a really filthy mouth;

would spout off curse words in long streams.

When I accepted Christ, He took that away from me.

There’s an old saying: “there’s no saint like a reformed sinner.”

I put a sign up in the lab:

“God’s last name is not “Dammit”; ‘please don’t use both in the same sentence.”

I didn’t realize I was doing it, but any time I heard a cuss word,

I’d shoot a look of disapproval that would stop the guys in their tracks.

I went on my Walk to Emmaus weekend.

There was a prayer that weekend for the 1 who needed the weekend the most,
& the 1 with the burden of thinking they needed it the least.

We came to a part of the weekend where we could release our sin to God.

When I did that, much like when I felt the God-shaped hole, I felt the weight of sin
fall off my shoulders like I'd been lugging around a heavy bag of garbage.

I felt the assurance that God would continue to forgive me,
that I'd never have to earn the love God freely gave.

And I realized that I had come in thinking that I needed the weekend the least,
not knowing how much I desperately needed it.

I wish I could say that fixed me of that "holier than thou" stuff.

But that judgmental attitude, that older brother thinking still pops up in my life.

When someone asks for money, I worry about if they are going to use it

"the right way," while Jesus says ***"Don't pick on people, jump on their failures,
criticize their faults—unless, of course, you want the same treatment"***

First John points to how we are to live: sacrificially, not just be out for ourselves.

That's how we came to understand and experience love,
that Christ sacrificed his life for us.

So if we see someone in need and have the means to do something about it
but turn a cold shoulder and do nothing, what happens to God's love?

It disappears. And we made it disappear.

Folks, let's not just talk about love; let's practice real love.

This is the only way we'll know we're living truly, living in God's reality.

Let's follow Jesus' teaching; let's ask what we'd want people to do for us,
then grab the initiative and do it for them!

Let's show real hospitality to strangers,

for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

Help and give without expecting a return.

Live out this God-created identity the way our Father lives toward us,
generously and graciously.

Give away your life; you'll find life given back,

but not merely given back—given back with bonus and blessing.

It's like Jesus promises: we won't regret it.