

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



Absent From the Party

KEY PASSAGE: Luke 15:25-32 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Matthew 11:28 | Luke 15:1-24 | John 3:16 | 1 John 1:9

► SUMMARY

Jesus was a master storyteller who knew His audience as well as the condition of each heart.

When He presented the parable of the prodigal son, tax collectors and sinners in the crowd drew near in order to hear what He had to say, but there were also scribes and Pharisees in the audience who came with grumbling attitudes and critical hearts. Jesus masterfully crafted a story that addressed exactly what both the sinners and the religious leaders needed to hear.

► SERMON POINTS

The 15th chapter of Luke contains three separate stories—a man with 100 sheep who lost one, a woman who lost a coin, and a father who lost his youngest son. In each case, when the sheep, coin, and son were found, there was great rejoicing.

We're probably all familiar with the parable of the prodigal son, and he is usually our main focus. However, there are two other characters in the story, and we learn valuable lessons from them. In fact, we can probably each identify with one of the characters—a wayward child, a loving parent, or a resentful sibling.

The tax collectors and sinners in the audience could readily see the similarity between their lives and that of the Prodigal Son, because he had wasted his life on sinful pleasures and had found himself in the lowest state he could imagine—in a hog pen feeding pigs. He was so

hungry he would have gladly eaten the pods he gave the pigs. The only way out of the situation was to return to his father in repentance as a servant because he felt unworthy to be called his son. But instead of shaming and reprimanding him, his father welcomed him home, forgave him, and threw a party for him.

However, there was one person who was definitely not happy that the Prodigal Son had returned—the older brother who had faithfully remained at home serving his father. As he came home from the field, he heard music and dancing. After asking a servant what was going on and hearing that his father had thrown a party because his younger brother had returned, he became angry and refused to go inside. Even when his father came outside pleading with him to join the party, he refused, and what he said to his father revealed what was in his heart.

The Attitude of the Elder Brother

- **Anger.** This was his first reaction when he discovered his father had welcomed his rebellious younger brother despite all he'd done (v. 28).
- **Jealousy.** He thought his father was being unfair to him. "Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends" (v. 29).
- **Bitterness.** "But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth ... you killed the fattened calf for him" (v. 30).

- **Resentment.** He resented the fact that his father had never recognized him for his faithfulness but rewarded the disobedient son for simply coming home.
- **Rejection.** He viewed his father's celebration of his younger brother's return as rejection of him (v. 29).
- **Unforgiveness.** He focused on his brother's sins and not on his repentance, saying that he "devoured your wealth with prostitutes" (v. 30).
- **Disrespect.** He wouldn't even acknowledge the prodigal as his brother but addressed him as "this son of yours" (v. 30).
- **Accusation.** He found fault with his father because he had never given him a party like the one he was throwing for his rebellious brother (v. 29).
- **Self-righteousness.** He saw no sin in himself.
- **Caustic, Biting, and Piercing Words.** "This son of yours ... who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes" (v. 30).

In the story, the Prodigal Son pictured the tax collectors and sinners, but the older son was an illustration of the scribes and Pharisees who considered themselves righteous. They faithfully attended synagogue every Sabbath, prided themselves in keeping the Law, and looked down on the sinners and tax collectors.

Lessons From the Elder Brother

In the same way, we too may be critical of people who live a sinful lifestyle and make a mess of their lives. Therefore, let's learn some valuable lessons from the attitude of the older brother before becoming too critical of other people's sins.

- **There are two pig pens in this story.** The obvious one is in a far off country where the Prodigal Son ended up as

a result of his wasteful, foolish choices. But the obedient older brother was in a hog pen at home because of his sinful attitudes. He thought he was pious because of his external obedience to his father, but in his heart he was wallowing in a pig pen of resentful, self-righteous attitudes.

- **We can be in a far country without realizing it.** A far off country is anywhere we choose to go outside of God's will. The prodigal left home to go where he could live as he pleased without any restrictions, but although the older brother stayed home physically, he was still in a far off country because his heart was filled with antagonistic attitudes. Even though he'd remained with his family, he was miserable and separated from them emotionally. One brother was feeding on pods for pigs, but the other one had a heart full of unforgiveness, jealousy, and bitter resentment toward his brother and father.
- **The path of freedom from the hog pens of life is paved with repentance and surrender to the will of the Father.** The condition of our hearts is not revealed so much by outward religious behavior but by our attitude toward people and God. The scribes and Pharisees resented Jesus for welcoming sinners who desired forgiveness, but in reality, they were in a worse condition because they refused to recognize the sinfulness of their hearts, and therefore, saw no need to seek forgiveness from God. If we want out of the pig pens of life, we must be willing to admit our sin and come to Jesus for the forgiveness of both our sinful behaviors and attitudes.

► RESPONSE

- Which of the brothers can you relate to the most? Why?
- Have you ever been in a hog pen of sin without even realizing it? What opened your eyes to your condition?

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