1. **Intro:**
   1.1. **The Greatest Story ever told!**
       1.1.1. Some call it, *The Prodigal Son?* - Maybe better titled *The Parable of the Gracious Father* - That’s the true focus.
       1.1.2. It’s an emotional study.
   1.2. The Pharisees are “**still trying to get it!”**
       1.2.1. Jesus is answering the indictment of eating with sinners(2).
       1.2.2. “When I eat with sinners it’s like going after lost sheep; it’s like finding a costly lost coin; it’s like experiencing a prodigal returning.”
   1.3. **Q:** See who do you best relate with in this story?

2. **Riches to Rags to Riches!** *(11-32)*
   2.1. **DIRTY LIL SINNERS!** *(11-20a)*
   2.2. The portion of goods - The older son would get 2/3rds, the younger 1/3rd.
   2.3. **Pods** – *carob pods* when ripe these pods are filled with a dark honey like syrup.
       2.3.1. They were then collected, ground up, and fed to animals.
       2.3.2. They were also eaten by the very poor.
   2.4. So what did he do wrong? – How about disregarding **his responsibilities** as a son toward his Father. - Misusing his **God-given freedom** to seek freedom from a responsible relationship to God.¹
   2.5. **It feels Free…for a time!**
       2.5.1. How many a college students have moved away to a distant land, away from *mom & dad*, away from **accountability**, away from **watchful eyes**, enjoying there new felt freedoms; that often landed them right on their faces. [doesn’t mean don’t ever move out...just a motive check!]
       2.5.2. It is like sky diving, wind in your face, living fast,…with no shoot!
       2.5.3. They felt restrained by home, & attracted by the world.
       2.5.4. **The beginning** of all sin is when we no longer enjoy God’s presence, love, & ways.
           2.5.4.1. **We become restless** when we can’t find **satisfaction** in God.
   2.6. *(13)* **Prodigal** – wasteful. No thought of responsibilities.
       2.6.1. So, sin always wastes; living for self is waste.
   2.7. *(14)* **Fortune** goes & **Famine** comes.
       2.7.1. **Life within & circumstances without** often agree!

¹ Shepherd’s notes; pg.57
2.8. (15) If you don’t **attach** to God, you can be sure you’ll **attach** to someone/something.

2.8.1. It may be drugs, alcohol, money, illicit sex, an employer, a spouse, a sport, hobby, TV show, computer, could be something crude or a refined thing. [Whatever it is it is **swine food** in the end!]

2.8.2. Ok, you’re **free**; you are your own **lord**.

2.9. Why some prodigals don’t come home! – What will my **friends** say? What will my **dad**, **mom**, **brothers**, **sisters** say? What will my **church** friends say?

2.9.1. Come home! - From sin, from a broken relationship, from the sting of this world! **Come Home**!

2.10. He came to himself – like awaking from a dream, he came to grip with reality.

2.10.1. He finally saw himself as he really was & remember his father’s home.

2.10.2. At this point no hope of restored **son-ship**, but hopes for a **servant** position.

2.10.3. **It was not the badness of his life** that brought him to his senses, but **the goodness of his father!** [Oh yah!]

2.10.4. Rom.2:4 “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that **the goodness of God leads you to repentance**?”

2.11. Note his progression – He thinks; remembers; owns it; decides/determines; turns around; & repents.

2.12. **THE PARDONING FATHER!** (20b-24)

2.13. The suffering heart of God!

2.14. Releasing!(12) sometimes you have to let them go & let them find out the hard way!

2.14.1. Let them learn for themselves how good Father’s home is.

2.14.2. This is the parent toughest decision.

2.15. Saw him a long way off! – watching continually, recognizes quickly.

2.16. Compassion! – When a son is lost, who suffers most? (Fathers/mothers can answer that 1)

2.16.1. Oh the suffering heart of God. (we’ll never understand) ☹

2.16.2. Humanity is suffering because it is **away from God**.


2.18. The father rushed to welcome his son & **wouldn’t even let him finish** his well rehearsed confession. (How many times did he rehearse it?)

2.18.1. “Um Lord”, “Yes you are forgiven”! {this helps me with the women caught in adultery, & the thief on the cross}

2.19. Slow are the steps of repentance, but **swift** are the feet of forgiveness.

2.19.1. God can **run** where we can barely **limp**.

2.19.2. But, if we are **limping** toward Him, He will **run** toward us! ☹

2.19.3. “**The Father may be out of breath, but never out of love!**” (Spurgeon)

2.19.4. Could I forgive so quickly? No hesitation, w/o rebuke, not waiting to see if they’ll really stick around.
2.20.1. But wait...he’s not clean! (That’s what he Pharisees were saying about this unwashed crowd! Vs.2)
2.20.2. Can’t you wait till he’s washed? - Until those rags are removed? Until he’s decently clothed?
2.20.3. Shouldn’t you wait and see how he does?
2.20.4. Shouldn’t he be put on probation & see if he does well?
2.20.5. No way!!! – Let me get my arms around him! - Let me pillow his head in my chest.
2.20.5.1. The village could have stoned him to death for the disgrace upon his family & village. (Deut.21:18-21)
2.20.5.2. But if they threw any stones they would have hit the father!

2.21. Best Robe! – Wait! Isn’t this the #1 sons? (Isn’t everything?)
2.22. Ring! – Full welcome. Indicate proof of son-ship.
2.23. Sandals! – Entire restoration. Again indicate son-ship was restored, not a servant.
2.24. Fatted Calf! – Veal!
2.25. Eat & be merry! – I’m sure the prodigal was happy to be home...but never to be compared to the joy the Father has of him coming home.
2.25.1. An unending party? – they began to be merry...(24)

2.26. CLEAN SINNERS! (24-30)
2.27. You may think the elder son has a pretty good beef! [Speaking of beef, that's mine isn't it?]
2.27.1. Then you’ve missed it completely!

2.28. One younger son was an open sinner; the older brother a hidden one. One an unrighteous son; the older a self-righteous son. One extremely wicked; the other extremely moral!

2.29. Don’t miss it...the elder brother IS the Pharisee!
2.29.1. This is for those who come to church week after week & think the Scriptures are for everyone else!

2.30. This son was devoted to his fathers law, & his fathers service, but entirely out of sympathy with his fathers heart!!!
2.30.1. Listen to him speak directly to the Pharisees & Scribes, with such compassion. (This comes before the Woe unto you’s)
2.30.2. They were so devoted to the law & service of God but completely missed His heart! “If you had the heart of My Father, you couldn’t look with contempt upon these men outside, with who I’m mixing.”
2.30.3. He should have imitated his father’s heart toward the returning prodigal; instead he turned into one...hard, cold, & unforgiving!

2.31. Wouldn’t go in – Pouting on the porch!
2.31.1. Was really an issue with dad! (not brother)
A problem with dad’s forgiveness, resentful towards mercy, angry towards grace…thus he wouldn’t go in.

“But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.” (Mt.23:13)

They wouldn’t understand the death bed conversion of the thief on the cross; nor the forgiveness shown the woman caught in the very act of adultery.

Q: When you see sin, do you react with discuss & not compassion?

So what’s this son’s issues?

His relationship with his father was as if it was Master-Slave! (29a)

“Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you.”

Exposed: It had been years of grim duty not of loving service!

I’m looking for a son not a slave!

Acts 17:24,25 “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.”

His relationship was that of a Commander-Subordinate! (29b)

I never have transgressed your commandment at any time!

Oh my…how about NOW! (not coming in house)

I’m looking for a son not a subordinate!

THE PARDONING FATHERS RESPONSE! (28,31,32)

His response was so gracious & patient. The patient heart of God!

Again, he helps this son with just as much compassion & love.

His father came out – He didn’t get mad. He came out.

This father came out of the party…Jesus came out of heaven!

Pleased with him – Didn’t command him to come in. He could have demanded the servant to drag him in there, instead he pleads.

Come in son & rejoice with me(6,9)– but the Pharisees couldn’t rejoice.

The imperfect indicates “he kept on beseeching him”! (LKGNT)

See, Jesus came to save hypocrites! 😊

He doesn’t want to hear “I’ll come to church”, “I’ll keep clean”, “I’ll be good”, that’s not what He wants! – He wants relationship with you.

Son – not my servant, not my slave, he never joins him on his turf.

You are always with me – we eat together, we live together.

But, you never gave me a young goat! A goat? (you’re the heir!)

I don’t want you father, I want a goat feast with my friends!

He’s a prodigal without the guts to leave! (John Piper)
2.40.4. He isn’t home. He doesn’t love being w/his father.
2.40.5. We old Christians are so vulnerable to this!
2.41. [5] All that I have is yours – His is an inheritance to sons; not wages to slaves.
2.42. (32) It was right – the story is left open-ended…
2.42.1. The curtain fell w/o hearing the older son’s response to his father’s entreaty.

2.43. End:
2.44. You don’t have a choice to sin or not to sin, only what category it will be in!
2.44.1. Outside of Christ, you either fit into the category of the **prodigal** or the **elder brother**.
   2.44.1.1. **Prodigal** symbolizes tax collectors & sinners;
            **Elder brother** symbolizes Pharisees & Scribes.
2.44.2. Either extremely wicked or your extremely moral!
   2.44.2.1. There are sins against the **flesh** & some against the **spirit**.\(^2\)
   2.44.2.2. One guilty of gross things; the other guilty of a critical & unloving spirit, pride, & an unwillingness to forgive.
2.44.3. Q: Are you the **open sinner** or the **hidden one**? [I think I was both!!!]
2.44.4. Q: Who do you best relate with in this story?
2.44.5. There is no case **hopeless**, no situation **too dire**!
2.44.6. Come out of the **pig sty**, or **Come off the porch**…but **Come**!
   2.44.6.1. **Come prodigal sons**, **prodigal daughters**; **prodigal husbands**, **prodigal wives**; **prodigal grandmothers**, **prodigal grandfathers**
   **Come**!

2.45. Illustration: Once **Lincoln** was asked how he was going to treat the rebellious southerners when they had finally been defeated & had returned to the Union of the United States. The questioner expected that Lincoln would take a dire vengeance, but he answered, “I will treat them as if they had never been away.”

\(^2\) 2 Cor.7:1