

# May we never forget our inheritance

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Date: 09 October 2016

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[ 0 : 00 ] I really do like children, so I want to read from Luke 15, 11 to 32. It's a long reading. Luke 15, 11 to 32. If you want to look in your Bibles.

Luke 15, 11 to 32.

He swept over the land and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him.

But no one gave him anything. When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, At home even the hard servants have food enough to spare.

And here I am dying of hunger. I will go home to my father and say, Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you. And I am no longer worthy of being called your son.

[ 1 : 26 ] Please take me on as a hard servant. So he returned to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.

His son said to him, Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you. And I am no longer worthy of being called your son. But his father said to the servants, Quick, bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him.

Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet and kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life.

He was lost but now is found. So the party began. Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house.

And he asked one of the servants what was going on. Your brother is back, he was told. And your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.

[ 2 : 32 ] The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him. But he replied, All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to.

And in all that time, you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf.

His father said to him, Look, dear son, you have always stayed with me. And everything I have is yours. We have to celebrate this happy day.

For your brother was dead and has come back to life. He was lost but now he is found. May God bless his word to our hearts. And we're going to sing.

You've probably heard many sermons about the prodigal son, right? You can count them up. I know some of you probably have heard them dozens of times and you've heard it from different ways.

[ 3 : 37 ] I'm sure most of them rightly cover the great love and compassion of the father for the wayward son. Especially as it alludes to the father God's incredible love for us.

While remembering God's incredible love, I want to focus especially on two verses and the one who spoke them. So I want us to, I want to read again what the elder son said to his father in verses 29 and 30.

All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time he never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends.

Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf. The elder son no doubt spoke this from a heart full of anger for years of shame the younger brother had brought on the family.

Not only did it mean more responsibility for their elder son because he had, the younger son wasn't there to help him out, but it possibly affected business association and marital hopes.

[ 4 : 52 ] Back in those days, you know, if the family, if there was somebody that went off the rails and it affected the whole family. And sometimes they were ostracized and kept, could have affected every part of his life.

Now the younger son was welcomed home as if nothing happened. His brother who faithfully stayed home and worked hard was about to blow his top.

We can understand the anger and frustration, not just for himself, but the pain that he felt for his father. The gossip, the humiliation, the wasted money and not knowing for years whether the younger son was alive or not.

We can sympathize with the elder son, but he misunderstood several important things. And these things affect the body of Christ today as well.

And let me read the two verses again. All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time, you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends.

[ 6 : 01 ] Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf. You know, I was thinking of that and meditating on it and I thought, why did the elder son serve as a slave all those years the prodigal was away?

Have you ever thought about that? Think, well, he was just being faithful. But there's several things here I want us to, that he got wrong.

First of all, both sons received their inheritance at the same time. When the younger brother asked for his share of the inheritance, as you read in the scripture, the father divided his estate between the sons.

Both sons were giving their share. The elder, according to tradition, would have received double. He didn't have to slave away for years. He could have had a party anytime he wanted because everything belonged to him.

He just never accepted his inheritance. Too many in the body of Christ are sweating away for God as if they're slaves. When he redeemed us to make us his children, heirs of God, joined heirs with Jesus Christ.

[ 7 : 27 ] He offers us his great and precious promises, exalted us to reign in heavenly places with him. And yet sometimes as believers, we act as if we're slaves.

Sure, the Christian life is tough at times, but we are not slaves. We have inherited an eternal kingdom with incredible privileges, power, and responsibilities. See, both sons received their inheritance.

The father gave it all away. And for years, the son did not accept or walk in his inheritance. All the while slaving away as a servant.

Seething for his younger brother that he was living it up. Angry at his father because his father wouldn't give him things that were already his. And sometimes believers do the same thing.

We blame God for not blessing us and he says, look, I've given you everything. I have given you everything. Why aren't you walking in it?

[ 8 : 39 ] And the second thing, you know, he accused the younger son of wasting his father's money. The younger son didn't waste his father's money.

He wasted his own. The prodigal only lost what his father gave him. It was an expensive gift that he wasted needlessly, but it was his.

The elder son was taking offense for his father against his brother when the father didn't at all. I'm sure the father was heartbroken for the son's actions, but he gave him the freedom to do it.

I hate waste, especially if it's something valuable, especially in a life. Now, my wife thinks I'm a hoarder, so there's a whole lot of things that she thinks are junk, but I, you know, I think has some value.

But the things that are really valuable that we want to keep, you know, I hate it when it's something's just wasted. But God gives us the liberty to make mistakes and the opportunity to learn from them.

[ 9 : 49 ] He has given us his word and his spirit to guide us and lead us from harm, but he's also given us a free will. The father did not take offense at his younger son.

He didn't like or condone what he did. The son's actions were foolish, selfish, and destructive and brought shame on the family. But the father forgave him long before his son came to his senses and returned.

You know, in the story, it reads that the father saw him a long way off and was filled with compassion and love.

The father forgave him long before the son ever came to his senses and asked for forgiveness. The father did not take offense at his younger son.

He hated what he did, but he didn't take offense. John Bevere wrote a powerful book called Bait of Satan, Living Free from the Deadly Trap of Offense.

[10:55] It's about how Satan entices believers to take offense for something someone has done to them or to others. And this was part of the elder son's problem.

He took offense against his brother and allowed it to poison his heart with anger and bitterness. And because it had to be closed his heart to his brother. And I found when you close your heart to somebody, then your heart can't be open to God, can it?

That's why no matter what I found, that no matter what people do, I have to forgive them immediately. Because if I harden my heart, then my heart isn't open to God.

And the brother let his offense against his brother harden his heart. And it closed him off to his natural father and it closed him off to his heavenly father as well.

This happens too often in the body of Christ and not only hardens our heart, but tears churches apart. This is why Jesus spoke so often about the absolute necessity to forgive.

[12:02] Seventy times seven if necessary. And then the third thing. By celebrating the prodigal's return, the father wasn't condoning what he did.

The father was just thrilled that his son was safe. That he had come to his senses, repented of his wrong and returned to be reconciled to God. And his family. To him, the relationship was more important than the money.

His son was back. It's not nice when a believer sins and messes up. It can cause a lot of heartache. Em and I know we went through it when my former senior pastor went off the rails in 1999.

This guy had a powerful anointing for evangelism and bringing leaders together. The church, our church was growing rapidly. People were being saved, healed, and set free from addictions.

We had three congregations and a thriving children's work in a needy part of Edinburgh. Then his sin broke up his family. Turned people off God and put unbearable pressure on the church.

[13:10] And it became a rotten witness to the world. And I know for Em and I, for two or three years, things that we still were under the pressure of this whole thing.

Throughout, however, my fellow leaders and I, as well as the leaders of our denomination, refused to take offense. We were angry with the pastor for his stupidity.

But we only wanted him restored. We knew that this is a man of God that had made a mistake. And so we did everything we could to bring him into restoration.

The problem is that he never did it. But because the church, and not just the leadership, but the church responded and refused to take offense, then it was able to continue to be a witness and the church was able to continue on.

After all, isn't this what God did for King David after Bathsheba and what he has done for you and me? We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, haven't we?

[14:24] And wouldn't we want people to restore us, to have patience and compassion and kindness, so that when we blow it, we know there are brothers and sisters who are there to pick us up and to walk us back into the light.

Speak the truth in love. Rebuke where necessary, but never take offense and harden your heart.

Like the prodigal's father, we are in the business to restore. The elder son received his inheritance at the same time as the younger, yet he never stretched out to embrace it.

He never walked in it. He continued to serve his father as if he was a hard servant who had no choices. He never took ownership of what was his and then had the audacity to accuse his father of not blessing him.

The younger son was selfish, foolish, and wrong to do what he did, but at least he came to his senses, returned to his father, and sought forgiveness. He now recognized what was more important.

On his return, he probably worked hard to make up for the years he wasted and the heartache he caused his family. But the elder son wasted years missing out on the opportunities that were rightly his, as well as missing out on fellowship with his father, then blaming his misery on his father and brother.

[ 15 : 53 ] He could have been enjoying the fruit of his labors and the privilege of his inheritance. He could have developed a closer relationship with his father. Instead, he was paralyzed by wrong thinking and bitterness.

Too many in Jesus' church today suffer the same problem as the elder son. I know I was one of them for a while. They act as if they have no inheritance, forgetting the great and precious promises Peter declares is available to those who will pursue them.

Too often the focus is on things, ministry, or position, instead of loving relationship with God and fellow believers. Then instead of coming to their senses and seeking God for what's theirs, they act like victims, blame others, or take offense at God for not blessing them.

It's easy for ministers and church members to get this way if their eyes are on others instead of on the Lord. Jealousy can become a destructive agent leading to bitterness, hardness, and division. The Lord taught me a long time ago that it didn't matter what anyone else was doing. What mattered is what God wanted to do in my life. You know, in John 21, I think it is, when Jesus calls Peter to follow him, and Peter looks over at John and says, well, what about him?

[ 17 : 25 ] We do that at times, don't we? You know, God's working in somebody else, and we say, well, what about them? And God says, well, forget tough. I'm talking to you.

It doesn't really matter in one way what he's doing in somebody else. What matters is what he was doing in us.

If I can find my last. So in case you're getting scared, I'm almost done. So what do I want to leave with you? Four things.

The first one is the most important, I believe. However someone leads their life, you're responsible for yours. If we'll take responsibility for our own life and walk in what God has for us, we don't have to worry about somebody else.

Yes, we're to bear one another's burdens, we're to care for people, but we have to give them freedom to live their life, even if they're making a mess of it. And that's where we go to intercession and pray for them.

[ 18 : 33 ] Yes, we can warn them about the consequences of their actions, but we can't live someone else's life for them.

And I know that's especially hard when you have children, isn't it? It's hard when you have children if you think they're going off the rails. But the thing is that we can't live somebody else's life for them. If we're responsible for ours, the problem is the elder son, he was too much involved in worrying about his brother instead of doing what he should have done.

We have to give people the freedom to make mistakes and for us to be there to help pick them up when they come to their senses.

The second thing is we have choices. We're not victims. What are we doing with what we have? We can think, oh, well, that person has more than I have.

[ 19 : 40 ] Of course they can do well. Of course they've got, you know, a higher intellect or whatever. The thing is that God's not asking you to compare yourself to somebody else.

He's saying, what are you doing with your life? We have choices. We're not victims. The third thing is keeping our heart right with God and others is essential.

People will fail, maybe even betray you, but God commands that we forgive no matter how many times they sin against us. We must guard against taking offense.

If we see them as Jesus sees them, our hearts will remain tender, full of love and compassion, ready to restore them when they repent. People are going to hurt us, aren't they?

How many, for those that are married, how many have never been hurt by your spouse? Raise your hands. And you're, all of us have been hurt, haven't we?

[ 20 : 47 ] Now don't ask him for a list of the times I've blown it. We get hurt in the body of Christ, don't we? We misunderstand what people say.

Or maybe they really said something nasty that really hurt us. And it's important not to take offense. Yes, if they need to be told off in love, tell them off.

But don't cut them off as a brother or sister. Don't close your heart to them. But to keep your heart open because this is somebody that Jesus died for.

How would we want to be treated if we are in their place? We would want them to forgive us. So keeping our heart right with God and others is essential.

And as I said before, if our heart is wrong with somebody, a brother or sister, then it can't be right with God. And the last one is remember your inheritance.

[ 21 : 52 ] God has given each one of us more than we can ever imagine. Others may waste or ignore theirs, but we are responsible for what is ours.

Every one of us have been giving something special. Gifts, anointings, callings that other people don't have. Instead of being jealous of somebody else's gifting, the Lord says, find out what your inheritance is and go for it with all of your heart.

May we never forget our inheritance like the elder brother did. And may we never close our hearts to the prodigals, but to keep our hearts open, reaching out with love and our arms wide open to welcome them back.

Let's pray. Lord, Lord, I thank you for the people that were there when I came back that loved me in spite of the mess that I was.

Thank you. Bless them, Lord God, I pray. And I pray that we would be a people and that this would be a church that loves prodigals, that reaches out to them, that looks in the distance praying that they will return.

[ 23 : 17 ] And when they do to celebrate with all of our hearts that someone has come back to you. Father, give us tender hearts towards one another, quickly forgiving, Lord, and never taking offense.

Being quick where necessary to rebuke and love, but then to restore. And we thank you for this, for all the times that you welcomed us back with open arms when we made a mess of our lives.

Father, thank you in Jesus' name. Amen. Let's finish with...