



Parable of the Prodigal Son: reflections

This Leader's Guide will help you to deliver teaching and leadership about God's reconciliation. Sessions at the Clergy College will also help you to lead this session.

AIMS

- to understand that we must be agents of reconciliation if we are to follow God's will
- to help participants think what God's reconciliation means for each of us personally, for our church and our community and for whole of creation
- to begin to see how and where we can participate in a ministry of reconciliation.

RESOURCES

- Bibles, Paper and pens
- Flip chart and pens (optional)
- Digital projector, speakers and laptop if using the video
- Copies of the hand-out for participants.

The Powerpoint presentation is available to download from the Accompanied Ministry Development team. Please ensure you have a working version before the session and that the technology and the space you plan to use are appropriate for your audience.

SESSION PLAN

Note: the timings are approximate—they are intended to allow plenty of time for discussion

Notes

In Luke 15:11-32 Jesus tells about the youngest son coming to his father to ask for his inheritance ahead of time.

He then took the inheritance and ran away to spend it all on having a good time. He had plenty of "friends" to help him spend it but quickly ran out of his inheritance funds. Then he was reduced to working in a pig pen and the pigs ate better than he. For a Jew, to tend to pigs was the height of humiliation since they were deemed unclean according to the Old Testament dietary laws. He thought of his father's servants who were at least fed well and had shelter at night. The young son had reached the end of his rope and came back home. He was accepted with open arms by his father.

The older son was outraged; he was angry that his father had allowed his brother to return and even more disturbing was the gift of a robe, a ring, and a pair of sandals and a huge feast, in his honour, with the choicest of the fatted calves.



Jewish Culture and Background

- Typically, a son would receive his inheritance at the time of his father's death. The fact that the younger brother instigated the early division of the family estate showed a rebellious and proud disregard for his father's authority, not to mention a selfish and immature attitude. The youngest son would only receive one-third of the father's inheritance in accord to the Old Testament laws in Deuteronomy 21:17. When the young son came to his father to ask for his inheritance, in the Jewish culture of that day, it was like he was saying, "I wish you were dead!" This was highly unconventional and was insulting of the father.

This is what the Jewish leaders understood and in their minds, they would not have received the young son back into the family. In fact he would have been disinherited or even stoned as was done in the ancient Jewish culture in the Old Testament. He would have been disowned and he would not have been allowed to return at part of the father's family.

- Pigs were unclean animals. Jews were not even allowed to touch pigs. When the son took a job feeding pigs, even longing for their food to fill his belly, it reveals that he had fallen as low as he could possibly go.
 - When the father sees the son approaching, indicating that he had been watching for him, he runs to him and embraces him with open arms. The Jews considered this highly undignified in their culture. The patriarch never ran or never made the first move in such a situation.
 - The older son refuses to join the banquet, this is an intentional public insult.
 - The father comes to him and entreats him. "It is almost impossible to convey the shock that must have reverberated through the banquet hall when the father deliberately left his guests, humiliated himself before all, and went out into the courtyard to try to reconcile with his older son." (Dr. Ken Bailey)
 - The father asks his son to stand alongside him and to look at the world from his perspective.
 - When the father addresses his son in verse 31, he does so with a special word, teknon, a Greek word for son that has a connotation that conveys love and affection. It's the same word Mary uses to call to Jesus when she finds him in the temple.
 - In contrast, when the older son speaks to the father, the son purposely omits the title father, a sign of disrespect.
 - Bitterness and resentment keeps the older son from forgiving his younger brother. It blinds him to the treasure he freely enjoys through constant relationship with the father.
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25-30 minutes

Read through the story together. Split the group into small groups.

Ask them to consider some of the following questions:

- Who does the youngest son represent?
- Have the lost ever been children of the father?
- Who does the eldest son represent?
- Why would Jesus tell this parable with the religious leaders and the Jewish crowd there?
- What would their reaction have been?
- Why did Jesus feel the need to tell this parable to the Jewish leaders?
- Use these questions for small group discussion, either during the service or in midweek groups:
- How does Jesus extend our understanding of God's love and forgiveness by the way God is portrayed in other parables? (Examples from Luke: the lost coin 15:8–10; the lost sheep 15:1–7; the sower 8:4–15; the vineyard 20:9–16; the friend at midnight 11:5–8)
- Why are parables a good way of getting this across?
- Which of these characteristics would you hope to find among Christians?

Regroup and feedback. Write responses/notes onto flip chart.

15-20 minutes

Ask the following and discuss as either whole group or small groups and feed back.

- When, and from whom, have you known completely unconditional love? What was it like? What effect did it have on you?
- In what ways has your experience of faith been similar to, or different from, that human experience of unconditional love?

10-15 minutes

Read the following:

'God sent into the world a unique person - neither a philosopher nor a general, important though they are, but a Saviour, with the power to forgive. Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.' (Queen Elizabeth II)

'Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith' If we believe this, how might that inform our relationships within Parish and Deanery.



You may choose to take some time to use the 'personal reflections sheet' now if so the following might be useful to download.

- Prodigal by Casting Crowns is a useful modern song which might help to aid reflection.
- There is a You Tube video which contains various artists' interpretations of the prodigals return. Please view before using as there are some images of Christ at the end of the video that may need comment prior to showing depending on your audience. (There is also an ad at the beginning)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zt-LUMBWi30>