



## river west church

### The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Luke 15:11-31

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The Parable of the Prodigal Son has a life beyond the pages of Scripture. Perhaps more than any other parable, this parable, about a father and his rebellious son, has found its way into pop culture. From TV shows, to books and movies....people make reference to the prodigal son. Usually, these stories have nothing to do with being “a prodigal.”

Prodigal does not mean rebellious.

Prodigal is not a synonym for wayward.

Prodigal does not mean returning after a long absence.

**Prodigal describes one who is wastefully or recklessly extravagant.**

Jesus never uses the word “prodigal” to describe the younger son in this parable. The description is still accurate however, because of the money he spends on “reckless living” as he squandered his inheritance in a distant land.

But there is a problem with this. By calling this the “parable of the prodigal son” we miss the true lesson of the parable! We rejoice when we see the father unconditionally love and embrace his lost son upon his return, but we fail to see that this story is also about his elder brother.

In Luke chapter 15 there are two very distinct groups of people listening to Jesus. First, there are the tax collectors and “sinners.” Second, there are the Pharisees and scribes. On one side you have the “down and out.” They know who they are and they recognize their need for a savior. On the other side you have the religious elite, a self-righteous group blind to their need for anything greater than their own moral law.

Jesus tells His audience three parables. The first two (about a lost sheep and a lost coin) are for the benefit of the “sinners.” But Jesus turns His attention to the Pharisees in this final parable. He draws them in and shocks them from the beginning.

A son requesting his inheritance before his father dies? *Shameful!*

A father who would give in to such a request? *Scandalous!*

But the Pharisees know this is a story of two sons. If the younger son sins so egregiously against the father, surely the elder son is the opposite. He must be the true model—the son who does it right—the son a Pharisee could be proud of!

The Pharisees are on the edge of their seats, but Jesus just shocks them all the more...