

The Prodigal Son and His Brother

The Heavenly Doctrine tells us that the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son represents the Lord who loves us all and is always ready to forgive our trespasses and rejoice when we, his sometimes wayward children, turn to Him. So the father in the story embraced his repentant younger son and joyously welcomed him home.

But there are times in our lives when we may feel like more like the older brother in the story than the younger one. It can often seem as if those who cause trouble get all the attention, while those who follow the rules get neither the fleeting fun of “prodigal living” and rebellion nor the loving care given to those who repent. But is this what the parable from the Word really says?

The younger son’s various actions and their consequences are pretty obvious. And by reading the story in Luke 15:11-32 carefully we can also learn quite a bit about the older son. Let’s compare some of the qualities and activities of the two brothers and see what they teach us.

1. **Good Qualities:** The younger son is repentant at the end of the story. He humbly asks his father’s forgiveness in verse 21. What are the good qualities of the older son? (see verse 29)
2. **Negative Qualities:** The younger son seems to be greedy for his inheritance and then wastes it all on his own pleasure (see verses 12-13). What negative qualities do you see in the older son? (see verses 25, 28-30)
3. **Turning Away:** The younger son rejected his father by traveling to a far country in verse 13. How does the older son also reject his father? (see verse 28)
4. **The Father’s Love:** The father shows love for his younger son by running out to meet him, kissing him, giving him clothes and preparing a feast in verses 20 and 22-24. What does the father *do* and *say* that shows his love for the older son? (see verses 28 and 31).
5. **Verse 32:** Read the last thing the father says to the older brother in the parable. Which brother is this verse showing love for?

What do these comparisons tell us about human nature? Do some people need the Lord less than others? Are some people more deserving of the Lord’s love? Does the Lord treat different people differently? You may wish to discuss these questions with someone—responses may vary and lead to interesting conversations—or write your thoughts down on the back of this page. Finally, how can you ready yourself to “make merry and be glad” with your Heavenly Father?