

# **“A Glorious Homecoming”**

**Scripture: Luke 15:11-32**



## **A Prisoner Comes Home To Christ!**

**A Message by Dr. Stan Frye**

**President of Gateway International Missions, Inc.**

### **Introduction**

As we begin this great study, I want to take this opportunity to thank Pastor Jerome Walker and all of the leadership of Gateway Baptist Church for the privilege of being here today for your special homecoming service. JoAnne and I are always privileged to return to this great church to participate in any of your services because we will always be indebted to this fellowship for the almost eight wonderful years that we had being your pastor and first lady. We really enjoy being here back in June for your tenth anniversary, and we are very grateful once more for the privilege of being here today. It is truly our prayer that God might bless this day with the moving of His Holy Spirit, and with people coming to Christ. Please know that the primary goal of our lives is to see people come to Jesus. And also, please know that JoAnne and I will always love you folks from the depths of our hearts. So, thank you for your kindness to us, and thank you for continuing to support Gateway International Missions. We just could not continue this great ministry which God has given to us without dear friends like you helping us take the Gospel to the continent of Africa. Although we do not have adequate words to express just how grateful we are, please know pastor Jerome that you and this church family are in our prayers every day. JoAnne and I just pray that God will keep His hand upon this body of believers and that scores of lost people will come to Jesus through your ministry. Please don't ever hesitate to call upon us if we can help you in any way. Now, let's proceed to the text for this message today.

When we approach the study of Luke 15, we come to one of the greatest text in all of the Bible. This chapter follows chapter fourteen wherein Jesus was speaking to his disciples about the cost of discipleship and following Him devotedly. He had just told them that they needed to really count the cost of following Him because it was not going to be easy for them to follow Him due to the many obstacles and the constant deprivations that they would have to endure. And then, to top off everything, along come the arrogant and self-sufficient Scribes and Pharisees who began to criticize Jesus for hanging out with lost and wicked sinners. Thus, as we proceed into this chapter, we discover that Jesus intentionally gives a threefold story about lostness. Some have said that this is three parables in one, but at the base of Jesus' instructions is the fact that all men are lost since man's fall in the Garden of Eden. Of course, this was the problem that the Scribes and the Pharisees had. They were so religious that they did not see themselves lost. Therefore, Jesus gives three stories about lostness, and each one of them represents each part of the Trinity and that part of the Trinity in bringing lost men to Jesus for salvation. The so called parable of the lost sheep has to do with the Shepherd, Jesus the Son, going after the lost sheep until He finds it and brings it back home. Of course, all of us are lost sheep until Jesus finds and brings us into His family. We are all lost because we have an Adamic nature.

The second parable that is mentioned here is the story of the lost coin. In this story, a lady had ten pieces of silver and she inadvertently lost one coin. The coin which represents every lost human being had no part in losing itself, but it was lost simply by falling from where it should have been. This story has the implication that the Holy Spirit goes searching for the lost coin (soul) until that coin or soul is found. It reminds each of us that we didn't go searching for Jesus, but He came looking for us. Because of the light of the candle, the Word of God, we are brought to the recognition of our lostness and through the light of God and the searching of the Holy Spirit, we are found.

The third story or parable in this chapter is our text study for the message today. This story has to do with a lost rebellious son who decides to spurn his Father's love and ask for his inheritance, even before his father was dead. This was truly an arrogant egotistical request, but obviously it is a picture of fallen man and how he believes that he does not need the love of the Father and decides to go it on his on until one day he finds himself in a horrible mess far away from God. But, thank God the Father for His unconditional love that goes far beyond our debauchery and rebellion and gives fallen man the privilege of coming back to the Father. Because this young man returned to his Father, we now have the story of his "Glorious Homecoming".

Now, I know that today is a special time of celebration as many former and past members return to enjoy this special time of fellowship and worship together. It is a time to renew old friendships, to reminisce about the good times in the past, and hopefully, it will be a time to make brand new commitments to Christ and to each other for the future. It is a time of new beginnings, and thus, I believe this is why God has directed me today to preach from this great story in the Word of God. We are going to take an in-depth look at the entire story of what we call the Prodigal Son, but really, it is the story of a wonderful loving Father whose love had made such an impact on His son that even after he went into the hog pens of this world, this love brought him home. It is my prayer today that not one person will leave this special church service without coming back to the Father. Some of you may need to come back to Him for the very first time, while others of you need to seriously consider surrendering your lives anew and a fresh to really serving Jesus. Now, let's take a look at this glorious homecoming and see what God is trying to teach us.

## **I. NOTICE FIRST THE SON AND HIS FOOLISHNESS. vs. 11-16**

In these next few verses we are going to see a young man that was tired of the rules and regulations of living at home. Maybe he didn't want to make his bed any more, or maybe he was feeling so restricted, that he just felt he needed to cut the ties with his father. Of course, to take this rebellious trip, he would need money, and so he comes to his living father and asks him for his inheritance in advance because an inheritance was usually only given at the death of the father.

God gave me the thought here that just maybe this young man had so little respect for his father that he wanted to treat him like a dead man. Of course, this is what happens in the initial stages of rebellion when sons and daughters start to rebel against their mothers and fathers. The ones who have taken care of them and given them every need in their lives is rejected for the selfish and scandalous desires of the world. May I say that rebellion against parents and God is a tragic thing that always ends in disaster. Let's look at these verses more thoroughly.

A. The foolishness of this son included defiant ways. vs. 11-12

In the Old Testament in the **Book Of I Samuel, chapter 15, verse 23**, the Bible says, **“For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry....”** Folks, this simply says that if we are going to rebel against God, we might just as well bow down before an idol and worship it because we are guilty of such gross defiance that we are really guilty of idolatry. Or, we might even say that we are guilty of witchcraft if we are in a state of rebellion against God.

This young man decided that he would ask his loving father for the family inheritance so that he could flee from home and become a blessing to himself, so he thought! How many have been the millions who have followed this same pattern only to lose everything because of their defiant rebellion toward a Holy God? Is that you today? Are you trying to run from God in attempt to find some freedom without responsibility. Let me tell you that there is no freedom without personal responsibility for your behavior. If you sincerely believe this, you have a terrible warped sense of reality, and it will probably take a horrible tragedy to bring you back to a loving heavenly Father. I plead with you to not require this to get right with God. As you have heard so many times through the years, “Sin will take you further than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay.” So, for God’s sake and your sake, don’t continue in your rebellion!

So, the young man had the attitude, “give me mine and let me go.” You will see later in the story that his request for his father to give him something will change to please make me something. It is a great day in the life of any human being when that person comes to understand that life is not about how much we can get, but it is about how great God can make us, and how much we can give to others. Are you this moment a, “give me person, or are you a make me person?”

B. The foolishness of this son included disorderly works. v. 13

So, in a few days, this younger son gets all of his stuff together, collects his money from his father, and off he goes in a state of rebellion and rejection to have a big time, to have a life of partying, and to totally disregard the standards and morals of a loving father. He is now on his own, but my, how soon this life which had some much potential of making him happy turned sour because he wasted all of his money with riotous living. In the beginning Satan always causes us to believe that the money will never run out and that the fun will never cease. But then, along comes poverty, sexually transmitted disease, want, despair, deprivation, and not even one friend. I am sure that as he started away from home with his pockets full of money that he had plenty so called friends. But soon, they would all be gone because they were all there any way, just for his money. His terrible disorderly ways turned into blatant sin, and his blatant sin brought him down to the depths of degradation. And I can assure you that if you continue to run from God in a quest to have it your way, you too will end up like this young son.

C. The foolishness of this son included dire want. v. 14

His dreams and ambitions are now gone. His drive for success and his push for importance have now gone out the window. His rebellious ways have caught up with him, and to beat all, along comes a famine; exactly what he did not need. He has spent every dollar that his father had given him and with empty pockets and an empty stomach, he now comes to understand the dire circumstances of rebellion against the love of a Divine Father! What can he do? Where can he go? Is there someone to turn to? Yes, Satan always give us one more of his thugs in the hog pens just to delay the inevitability of total despair; just to get us further side tracked from the will of God. So, as probably anyone would in his despair, he being a Jewish young man does the unspeakable and goes and gets a job feeding the pigs in the pig sty. What humiliation! What embarrassment! What

despair! He left the the home of a loving heavenly father with plenty of food, plenty of love, clean beds, clean clothes, a life of much respect, and now he has lost it all! Why? Because he wanted to do it his way, not the way of his father! Friend, is this you? Have you taken the same steps to run away from God? Have you just about lost everything? Yes, you may not be eating with the pigs, your pig food may be beer, wine, liquor, drugs, immoral sex, and a thousand other items that we could call pig food. I assure you that you will always be in dire want until you find the satisfaction of Jesus Christ living in your heart. Are you empty today? If so, good! Because if you are empty, I can tell you where to be filled. You need to come to yourself and come home to the loving father.

D. The foolishness of this son included dependence upon the world. v. 15

Well, the young man is now out feeding the pigs! His nice fluffy dreams have all floated away. He asked for the world, and the world took everything he had. It took his money, his health, his dignity, his integrity, his dreams, his ambition, and it took his happiness. What is the world taking or going to take from you? You may not be to the bottom yet, but if you don't come home to the Father today, it won't be long until everything is gone. For some of you young ladies and men, the world has taken your virginity. For others of you, the world has taken your friends, your potential, your mind, and even your hope. All of your self-esteem is gone and you are in a state of nothingness. Yet, there is hope for you if you will come home today. I assure you that Satan and the world will offer and promise you everything, only to give you nothing and leave you in ruins. Satan is a liar and so are all of his cohorts that you go to school with, those you work along side of, those who offer you sexual immorality, others who seduce you to use drugs and alcohol. They are not your friends, but they are your staunchest enemies. Run from them, and run now!

E. Well, the foolishness of this son included a desperate willingness. v. 16

As we have already mentioned in our study, in this verse we are told that this young man is now so hungry that he probably ate some of the corn or slop that the pigs would have eaten. Imagine, a Jewish young man eating with the pigs! Not just feeding them, or taking care of them, but now so desperate that he would eat along side of them! This my friend is true desperation! And, if I understand what the last phrase of this verse means, even the other pig feeders would not so much as show him enough kindness to give him some of the food prepared for the pigs. Could you go any lower than this? I don't think so! And so when he got the bottom, it was time for him to reevaluate his situation, and thank God he did so. Will you do so?

## II. SECONDLY, NOTICE THE SOVEREIGN AND HIS LOVE. vs. 17-24

Well, we are about to see a great change in this story. The prodigal has lost everything and he who wanted to go to the top has now bottomed out and is in total ruin. This might be where you find yourself today! You may have started in rebellion with all of the intent and projected energy to take yourself to the height of grandeur and plateaus of happiness, only to have lost it all because of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Your dream has turned into a nightmare, and you are at your wit's end. Well, I have good news for you. Stop, think about your Father back at home who waits for you to return because He loves you very much. Let's look at this father's love and see if you have any hope. I assure you that you do.

A. This Father's love prompted a constant reminder. v. 17

When this young man was back at home like Adam in Eden, he knew the daily fellowship with the Father. He knew the bountiful provisions that always graced the table. He knew the unbroken intimacy that he enjoyed every day, but then sin and rebellion entered in.

So, as this previously stubborn young man wallowed away in self-pity, he finally came to himself and said, enough is enough! Why, even the servants of my Father back at home have far more to eat and enjoy than I do. Why, I stand here perishing when I could be back

home enjoying at least the food and blessings of a servant. So, I have to get my head on straight and get out of this pig pen and hell hole. I must come to myself and arise and go back to my Father.

B. This Father's love produced a conscious repentance. vs. 18-19, v. 21

In these three verses, we see a changed young man. He states that it is time for him to return to the Father, and he is going back differently than when he left. He was going back this time with humility and brokenness instead of the arrogant self-sufficient attitude he had when he left home. He was going home to confess that he was a sinner against God and against his Father. Real repentance always changes not only the mind, but also the attitude and actions. If the attitude and actions don't change, there has been no repentance, and if there has been no repentance, there is no forgiveness.

No wonder Jesus said in **Luke 13:5- "I tell you, Nay: but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."** Without repentance, there is no remission or forgiveness of sin, and if there is no forgiveness, there is nothing awaiting but condemnation and hell. Have you every truly and sincerely repented of your sin? If not, why don't you do so today! Today is the time to start your journey back home. Today is your moment to get out of the hog pen and get on the road to heaven! And one more thing about this repentance. Real repentance doesn't care who knows about your sin!

So, the young son decided to go home. In his heart and mind, he no longer even felt worthy to be called a son, but instead, he was so broken and humble that he was now ready to be a hired servant. He wanted nothing more than just to be near the Father and enjoy the peace and joy of just being out of the hog pen and out of the world that had treated him so horribly. Now he says, "just make me one of your hired servants." No longer is he saying give me, but now he is saying, "make me." Don't you think this is quite a difference? I sincerely believe it is! Things really change for an individual when that person decides it is time to allow God the Father to change his or her life and make something worthwhile out of them. And be sure this is why God made them and us to begin with. God has a purpose for our lives!

C. This Father's love procured a capitulating return. v. 20a

I believe this young man could never get away from the love of the Father. It was this love that kept reminding him that he needed a real and glorious homecoming. So, he arose and went home to his Father. And when he went, he had a submissive heart and a teachable servant spirit. My friends, I want to emphatically say that no one ever really repents and goes home to the Father unless there is a spirit of humility and meekness. And when I say meekness, I don't mean weakness to become a floor mat for everyone to walk over. I mean that when a person really has a broken spirit and a contrite heart, they humbly bow before Jesus and God the Father with a teachable spirit, and not one that runs rough shod over everyone around them. And, a really repentant person will not be harsh and cruel with everyone he or she comes in contact with. Godly people will have Godly people skills with no excuses accepted! It is one thing to stand and boldly declare before a lost world the message of salvation as saved people, but it is another thing to be able to conduct ourselves with meekness and humility before the world around us. So, the prodigal son has come home! Have you? You say, "Dr Stan, how can I know for sure?" Well, the answer is simply this! Have you repented and been changed from a proud arrogant self-sufficient person to a person of humility and self-abnegation? Do you have peace and joy your heart, and is there a smile on your face? If you can't say yes to these things, you probably have not yet come home! Therefore, today is the day for you have a glorious homecoming!

D. This Father's love promised a complete remission. v. 20b

Isn't it amazing how God loves us! This amazing love is so demonstrated in the reception that the prodigal son received when he returned home to his Father. A great distance before the son arrived home, his Father was out looking down the road to see if the son was coming home. And, I am sure that this look was only one of thousands of looks since the son had been gone. There is just no telling how long the son was gone, but rest assured that the Father went outside and looked down the road scores of times to see if his lost son was coming home. Today he was not going to be denied. I can just imagine as he first looked, the look was somewhat vague, but the closer the son got to the house, the more clearer the Father could see. He wasn't dressed like the son that left, his body seemed so much leaner, and now the son was stooped shouldered and seemed to be somewhat unkempt. Yet, the Father saw him coming and he started running toward the son. His first steps were a little slower, but as soon as his vision was precise and he knew that it was his son, he ran full speed ahead. His prayers had been answered, his son had come home from the far country. Now, it was time for celebration. Please notice that the Father ran to the son, fully embraced him and began to kiss him on the neck. He hugged him over and over, and I believe he was probably weeping with joy at this very moment. Can you just try to imagine the joy in his heart? And, what about the son? How do you think he felt? I am sure that he was a little embarrassed, but my, what a thrill to receive the kind of love and forgiveness that the Father was extending to him. Not once do we read where the Father said, "I tried to tell you so!" Not once did he say, "you got what you deserved." No, there was not one critical or condemning word, but only love and forgiveness. I mean complete forgiveness! Total remission! And friends, this is the only kind of love and forgiveness we get from God the Father.

The son began to repent and confess his sins, but the Father didn't even mention the sins. As the Gospel song say, "What sins are you talking about?" The son was begging to just be a servant, but the Father would have no part of this. With the possible stench of the pigs, the ragged clothing, the dirty hair and body, the only thing the Father wanted was to embrace, kiss, and forgive this wayward son. No greater love had God ever given to a man! And beloved, this is the same unconditional love that God the Father is extending to each of us. It is the same love that sent Jesus down from heaven to die on the cross to redeem each of us from our bad choices and our rebellious hearts. It was that love that caused Him to go all the way to Calvary and die for the sins of the entire world, be buried at the close of the day, and then on the third day, rise from the grave. It was and is the unconditional, infinite love of a heavenly Father that promises to every man total and complete remission of sins. Have you experienced this love? Have you felt the embrace of this loving Father? If not, you need to come home today!

E. This great love of the Father pledged a celebrated relationship. vs. 22-24

This story just keeps getting better and better! The son is home, his sins are forgiven, his fear was wasted, and now he is secure in the arms of the Father! So, it is time for a real celebration, just as it always is when one of God's fallen creatures comes home in repentance. Remember what the Bible says earlier in this chapter in the story of both the lost sheep and the lost coin. In verses seven and ten, the Bible says, "**I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.**" And, in verse ten, "**Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.**" It was truly time to celebrate because the lost son had come home! It was a time for restoration and the rebuilding of the relationship.

So, the Father sent his servant to bring forth the best robe, a new ring, shoes for his feet, and the fatted calf for this most special celebration. It was time for a celebrated relationship. Let's look at these next few verses and join in on the celebration.

1. It was to be a royal relationship. v. 22a

The servant was instructed to bring the best robe, not the fourth, not the third, and not even the second best! He was to bring the best robe, the one only fit for the heir of the Father. This robe represents the robe of righteousness which God places upon each person who comes home from the far country of sin and shame. It is a robe of purity and godliness! It is a robe that was purchased with the precious blood of the lamb. The servant in this story represents the Holy Spirit, and notice that He was instructed to put the robe on the restored son. And so it is with every person who comes home to God the Father. The Holy Spirit after taking the initiative in drawing the sinner home, then comes to take up His abode in the life of the believer and He becomes the repentant man or women's personal robe of righteousness. And, he becomes the eternal seal of one's salvation. Friend, you can't put on your own positional righteousness. It must be placed on you and in you by the sweet Holy Spirit of God. If you want to know whether you are really saved, just check out your clothing! Do you have the robe of righteousness? Do you have a clean life with clean habits and actions? Are your desires in line with the desires of God? If so, you more than likely have truly been saved and you belong to the royal family.

2. It was also a reserved relationship. v. 22b

In the second part of this verse, the servant was instructed to put a ring on the finger of the son. Just like in our culture, the ring stood for an endless relationship like in our marriage. The circle stands for the unending vows that a bride and groom commit to each other on their wedding day. The purity of the metal in the ring depicts the way that two people should come together in their new relationship. The ring is the outward sign and symbol of the inward spiritual commitment that two people make to each other at the time of their wedding. On that day, the wedding was between the Father and the son. Today, it could be between you and God the Father if you will come home and repent.

I just want to say right here that there is much confusion in the world today about whether a saved person can lose his or her salvation once he or she is saved. But I can assure you just based upon this story and this ring, it is impossible to lose your salvation. Why? Because you may have broken fellowship, but you will never have broken relationship because our relationship with Jesus is permanent. So, why are you doubting if you are really saved! Do not worry! Live your Christian life to the fullest because you have been placed in the family as a child of God and you can't lose that relationship. The son came home and asked to be made a servant or slave, but the Father restored him just like God does to each of us as fallen sons and daughters of Adam. Truly, it is time for a celebration! I think I will shout right here! Glory to God!

3. It was also a redeemed relationship. v. 22c

As I said before, this story just keeps getting better and better, and gooder and gooder! Now the son is brought the shoes of sonship because he is no longer a slave and barefooted. Instead he has been cleaned up, restored to the family, and now he must have those shoes which indicate he is a valuable son. You see, this is what Jesus did for us when he purchased us from the slave block of sin and shame, and took us to Himself as our Master and placed spiritual shoes on our feet and declared that we are His by redemption! He bought us, he restored us, and now we are part of His glorious family. No wonder that this homecoming for this dear son was so glorious! And, it is truly glorious for any person who comes to himself or herself and comes home to the Father! There truly is no place like home! Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it!

4. It was also a rejoicing relationship. v. 23

Well, it just keeps getting better and better! What's next? The servant is instructed to go kill the fatted calf for it is time for a party and celebration. Please bear in mind that in the Jewish families, the fatted calf was never killed and served unless the occasion was of extreme importance. But this occasion merited the best there was to share. So, the fatted calf was killed, and the Father and the son, along with the other guests and friends shared the delicacy of the freshly killed calf. It was truly the greatest of the greatest celebrations because the son had come home from the far country. The Father's prayers had been answered and his long days of loneliness and longing were now over. What else could there be but a festive time of celebration.

And, let me tell you right here that when a lost sinner comes home to God the Father, there should be a great celebration down here on earth just like there is in heaven. If there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels in heaven, there should surely be rejoicing in the presence of the family of God down here on earth. May God pity the congregations that have removed the times of celebration from the invitation when people come to be saved. If there is ever a time to rejoice in the church, it should be when the lost children have come home! Yet, in too many of our churches, we are too interested in getting out and beating our friends and foes to the restaurants on Sunday afternoon. May God help us to stop this foolishness! Yet, if souls are not coming home in our worship services, maybe we need to go after the lost sheep and bring them to the fold so that there is reason to celebrate. If there is not restoration to sonship, there is no need for rejoicing and celebration.

5. It was a resurrected relationship. v. 24a

In the first part of verse 24, we are told that the Father stated, "**This my son was dead, and is alive again....**" Folks, on this special day, there was a resurrection. The son who had been long dead and gone had now been resurrected and restored to complete and total wholeness. The Bible says in **Ephesians 2:1, "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins:"** In other words, the person who is lost and in sin is spiritually dead and needs desperately to be resurrected from the dead spiritually. During all of the months and years that the son had been gone from home, it was as if the son was dead. And truly, so it is with each person that does not know Christ as Savior. But one day, when God's blessed Holy Spirit speaks to the heart of the spiritually dead man, this dead man's conscience is illuminated enough to see the mess that he is in, and he begins to see the need for going home. Many months and years may come and go before he actually goes home, but if God is patient with Him and he responds positively to what light God gives him, one day he will also arise and return to the Father. Maybe this is the day for you to arise and come home to the Father. If you do, He will resurrect you from spiritual death and give you eternal life.

6. And finally, it was a recovered relationship. v. 24 b

In the last part of verse 24, we are told that the young man was lost and now is found. What a thrill it is for someone who has been lost and missing for a long time to suddenly be found. This fact is so revealed in the recent discovery of the young lady that was discovered after having been kidnapped and abused for eighteen years. What a thrill for her to be discovered and reunited with her mother after all of those years. Those years were filled with abuse and brutality, but now she has the opportunity for a new beginning. This is what God the Father does for any one of his wayward children. For this son, he had been recovered because he never got away from the love and goodness of the Father. And, so it is with those who try to continue to run from God because of their lostness. It is

truly impossible to find a country far enough away from God to not be bothered by the remembrance of the Father's love. And, I don't know about you, but I surely praise God for this fact. I thank Him for the privilege of being recovered!

Now while the celebration was going on and everyone was rejoicing, things were about to take a sudden turn in a different direction. You see, out in the field there was an older brother who in this story represents the scribes and Pharisees who were present at the time Jesus was giving His disciples these great stories about lostness. Let's just remember who was there when Jesus gave the story. First, there were the disciples whom Jesus was trying to teach about the importance of counting the cost for following him. Then, there were the publicans and out right sinners that most people hated and wanted nothing to do with. And finally, there were the phony **religious scribes and Pharisees who were so proud of themselves and their devotion to God.** So, the stage was set for the impact of this story about God's love for sinners to be taken one step further and confront the religious bigots who resented Jesus spending time with sinners. So, get the picture! The son has come home, he has been completely forgiven and restored to the family as a son and not a servant. Yet, he did come home with a servant spirit and this is why he was restored to sonship. Now, the party celebration of acceptance was producing some dancing and loud music, and the arrogant self-sufficient sibling out in the field became angry and began to make a fool of himself because of his selfishness. Let's go one step further and see the selfishness of this older brother.

### III. NOTICE THE SIBLING AND HIS SELFISHNESS. vs. 25-32

A. First, let's look at the cause of this selfishness. v. 25, v. 29, v. 31

1. This selfishness was caused by positional pride. v. 25

It is obvious right up front in this verse why the elder brother was so mad. It was because he was the elder brother and when he heard that his little brother who had wasted everything had come home and was getting this special attention, he flew into a fit of rage. He just couldn't believe what the father was giving to this wayward and delinquent brother. Why, he had remained home, worked hard been faithful, lived a seemingly righteous life, and his father had never given him a party. Of course, this is the way that selfishness always looks at anything. It is the idea of, "what's in it for me?" I deserve the attention because of my position in the family. And friends, there is no more deadly attitude on earth than this horrible selfish attitude which always results in jealousy and a spirit of retribution. So, the cause of the selfishness was the sibling's position as the elder brother.

2. This selfishness was caused by professional pride. v. 29a

In the first part of verse 29, the elder brother says to the father, "**...Lo, these many years do I serve thee....**" He was just simply saying, I have been faithful and worked hard. I have stayed here at home to help you while this defiant son ran away from home and squandered his wealth. So, I deserve better than he does. Are you getting the picture? All the elder brother could say was look at what I have done. In the context of this scripture, this elder brother represents the scribes and the Pharisees. Therefore, this is a picture of the person who sees himself seriously religious and he compares himself to others and only sees the good he has done. There is no humility, but only pride and arrogance about what he has done and accomplished during the years that the younger brother was gone. In other words, he deserved this special attention because of his positional and professional pride.

Know anybody like this today? I surely do, and most of them are devoutly religious but definitely lost without Jesus. Religion looks for appraisal of one's accomplishments and works, while repentance and brokenness begs for mercy and brags about nothing but being unworthy to call upon the name of the Father.

3. This selfishness was caused because of pious pride. v. 29b

In the second part of this verse, we learn that the elder brother was totally wrapped up in his own piety and self-righteousness. He was proud of the fact that he had been faithful to his Father and had broken none of the laws of his Father. Yet, it is so obvious that in the heart of this elder brother, there was no spirit of grace and congeniality. He probably was a bitter and harsh man, even before the lost brother came home. He felt so much holier than everyone else, and he thought for sure that if anyone should be esteemed highly, he should be the one. In other words, he had become the legalist and his brother was the wicked sinner.

Almost everywhere we look today, we can find men and women just like this elder brother. They have been members of the church all their lives. They faithfully attend services, give their tithes and offerings, and they just feel that when it comes to spiritual things, they have all the answers. They read themselves as being able to ascertain the will of God better than anyone else, and they look down their condescending noses at others; especially those low down sinners! They also have no compassion for those they are trying to minister to, but they only do what they do for others in ministry in order to prove to others how great they are. And, many of these people brag with pseudo humility about what they

have given up for the cause of Christ, while still retaining a hard heart which when confronted lashes out with putrefying vile and disdain for those simple and ignorant brothers and sisters around them. They never see their own faults, but they are quick to judge and point out the faults of others. Yet, they consider themselves to be righteous and worthy all respect and regard. They are in Biblical words, Pharisees just like the elder brother. Know anyone like this? I do, and I can't stand to be around them!

4. This selfishness was caused by playful pride. v. 29c

I love the last part of this verse! In it Jesus says that the elder brother began to complain to his Father that he didn't give him a fatted calf to make merry with his friends. Wow! I almost get angry when I read this verse! How could this cold blooded and hard hearted brother have such an attitude? I tell you why! He was empty on the inside just like his little brother who had run away from home trying to satisfy his emptiness. The difference was that the young brother ran away and began to play until reality set in, while the older brother stayed at home with an immature and childish attitude of resentment and jealousy. What do I mean? I mean that the elder brother wanted to do what his younger brother had done, but was probably regretful because he didn't have the unholy audacity to run away. Now, his religious pride was just dripping from his piety and profession. He now wanted to have the opportunity to play because he had been living by the same rules and regulations which the younger son had run away from in the beginning. Now, he felt rejected and hurt because he was not getting the attention after all that he had done. This is piety on parade with the band playing envious music!

5. This selfishness was caused by physical pride. v. 31b

Have you ever walked into a large forest and been so overwhelmed by the size of the forest that you actually missed seeing the individual trees? Well, I have and that is what we see when we take a look at this older brother and see him complaining about the father not giving him a special party. The kind and loving father tells him that since he stayed at home and lived there every day, he had access to all of the father's bounty. Of course, Jesus is telling this story to the Pharisees who were so close to the real God through their religious zeal that they actually missed seeing God because of their strict religion. In other words, they had a belief in God in their minds, but they didn't know him in their hearts. This is exactly how the older brother was. He had been privileged to so much that he took for granted every good thing that the father had provided.

Isn't this just like us today? We, especially here in America, have been blessed with so many blessings, so many churches, so many Bibles, so many believers, so much food, and so many other good things, that we just simply take for granted what God has given us, and we are prone to complain so much about what we don't have. Having worked in Africa for 25 years, I am especially aware of how America is so blessed and we just fail to appreciate the bountiful goodness of God. Yet, in Africa, the smallest thing means so much to an African, and whatever the gift or blessing is, most Africans really appreciate it with so much gratitude.

Therefore, we find the older brother complaining about what he did not have and the attention he didn't get, and because of his selfish heart, he took for granted all of the blessings from the father which he had been receiving for so long. May God help all of us to not make this same mistake. And, because of the religious pride of this older brother's heart, he not only complained about what he didn't get, but he also had the unholy audacity to declare that he had not broken one commandment of the father. My, how this sounds like a typical lost American! We see multitudes of sinners dying lost without Jesus, simply because they don't see themselves as lost, but instead they mistake their religiousness for real salvation. And, sad to say, those who make this tragic mistake end up by missing heaven and spending their eternity in hell. If you are lost here today, I pray that you won't make the same mistake!

B. Now, let's look at the catastrophe produced by this selfishness. vs. 28-32

Well, the selfish pride of this older brother caused him to miss many great blessings which he could have enjoyed. But rather than humbling himself and coming in and joining the celebration, he sat on the outside complaining about how he had been mistreated. He was so wrapped up in himself that he failed to see the table spread right before him. And, as we have often heard said, "The smallest package in the world is someone who is wrapped up in themselves." And, so it was with the older sibling! Now, let's take a look at the terrible catastrophe which this proud and selfish son brought to himself.

1. The catastrophe included the loss of fellowship with his family. v. 28

In verse 28, the Bible says, "**And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.**" This sounds so like a father having to deal with an immature child. He didn't get his way, and so if he couldn't have his way, he would not participate in the celebration. So, while he could have been inside enjoying fellowship with the family, he was on the outside of the house angry and miserable while the rest of the family and the guests were inside enjoying the fellowship and celebration with the family.

I want to stop here and interject something that is very personal to me at this point in my life and ministry. Most of you know that JoAnne and I have been traveling all over America since we left Gateway Baptist Church somewhat over two years ago. The purpose of our travel has been to preach Jesus and to present our work about winning people to Jesus in Africa. During these past two plus years, we have really gotten an education. I mean that we have seen church after church and pastor after pastor which was only interested in any project or ministry that they originated, or one that had been instigated by their particular denomination. We have, like the elder brother, this selfish attitude that if the ministry didn't start with us, or if the recipients of our ministry in Africa are black and in prison, that we just can't support this ministry. So, like this older sibling, we stand outside and complain to our friends and neighbors about how few people are getting saved, while all the while we could join a ministry that is winning thousands to Jesus! My, I think this smells of almost heresy. Friends, all of the Pharisees were not just in the days of Jesus, but I believe many of our modern churches are filled with them.

So, the elder brother stays angrily outside while the party is going on inside. This also reminds me of those people within the churches who don't even have a few extra moments at the conclusion of a Sunday morning service to rejoice with those who got saved during the invitation. Almost every pastor I know has to deal with people leaving prematurely before the last Amen just so they can truly be the first to the steakhouse or some other restaurant. And, probably most of them leave church complaining about the length of the service. There is no joy over someone getting saved and missing hell, especially when a fat carnal stomach and an insatiable appetite is at stake! May God forgive this elder brother attitude!

2. The catastrophe included the loss of festivity with his friends. v. 29

Well, without hopefully becoming too redundant with this point, let me just state that the elder brother missed the party because he was so full of selfishness and jealousy. For over 44 years, I have seen this happen hundreds of times. Rather than biting their lips and humbling their proud calloused hearts, many have gone away from the house of God rather than to come in and enjoy the celebration for another sinner which has come home from the far country of sin. What a terrific catastrophe for any individual to be so full of pride and anger that he or she would miss the celebration with his or her friends. I would rather have one humble son who comes home to be a servant than to have a thousand arrogant religious people who know nothing of brokenness and humility. The bottom line was that the elder brother needed to be saved just as much as the prodigal, but the difference was that the prodigal saw his need for repentance, and the elder brother did not.

3. The catastrophe included the loss of faith in his father. v. 31

In verse 31, there is truly an implied truth that is not stated. The father was trying to explain to the elder son that he had had access to all of the father's blessings the entire time that the younger son had been gone. But, the older brother had overlooked how good the father had been to him, and now he was actually accusing the father of being unkind and unfair to him. Thus, his faith and trust in his father was now gone. And, so it is with those who are always blaming God and others for the way they have been unfairly treated. They end up bitter toward God and others just simply because their faith and confidence was conditioned upon what God could and would do for them, and what others would do for them as well. If faith is based upon what you receive, then your faith is in the objects God and others can give you, and not upon the character and integrity of God and others whom you have called your friends. If you don't have a faith that trusts God even when there are no goodies coming from God, then you are really going to

have a hard time when God allows storms to come your way. We all better be careful with determining our faith based upon how much God gives us. Remember what Job said! To paraphrase his words, he said that it is God's prerogative to give good and allow bad, and it is our choice to trust him regardless of what comes our way. All of us can trust Him faithfully when we all have good jobs, the family is well, there is money in the bank, and everything is fine. But the question is, "How will we trust Him when the rug is pulled out from under us." Great Christians trust God regardless of whether He prepares for them the fatted calf or He decides to give them the vegetables without the meat! What's your attitude toward your heavenly Father today?

4. The catastrophe included the loss of feeling for the faithless. v. 32

We now come to the last verse in the text! We will go back and study a few previous verses before we close, but let's look at the lack of feeling that the older brother had for the younger brother. You would think that he would at least have a little joy about his lost brother coming home. But no, religion has no real feelings, only ritual and routine.

In this verse, the father tells this older son that it was only right for them to have the celebration for the return of the prodigal. And, he tells this older sibling that it was right because the younger son had been assumed dead, but was now alive. He had been truly lost, but now was found. In other words, there was truly a great reason to rejoice. But, the older brother just didn't see it because he was blinded by the brightness of his own stinking selfishness and ego. Are you like this older brother? I pray that you aren't, but if you are, you need to ask God to forgive you and not end this study without being right with God.

C. Let's look at the cure for this selfishness. vs. 17-20

I really wish that this chapter didn't end the way it does. Why? Because there is no evidence that the elder brother repented and got right with God. We really don't know how the story ended, but we can rest assured that what the older brother needed was to come to himself and discover the same cure for his sin that the pagan younger brother did. Let's look at the cure for this horrible selfishness, and be reminded that the elder brother went away without being right with God. May we not make that same mistake today.

1. First, to find this cure, there must be a realization of this selfishness. v. 17

If we are to discover the cure for the selfishness which the elder brother demonstrated, we have to go back to verse 17 where the scripture tells us that while in the far country the younger brother came to himself and remembered the blessings of the father's house and he confessed his helplessness. And, if this elder brother would have been forgiven, it would have been because he readily confessed his despair and hopelessness and turned to the father for help. But he did not! And thus, he went away angry never to be heard of again just like those who only have religion and don't have salvation.

2. Secondly, to find this cure, there must be a repentance of this selfishness. v. 18

Well, we now turn back again to verse 18 where the younger brother made the decision to change his mind about the way he was living and start back home to his loving father. And although there is no evidence that the elder brother got right with God, he could have if he would have just repented and returned to the father and asked his forgiveness. He could have been forgiven of his selfish religious pride just like the younger brother was forgiven of riotous living. Yet, I believe the reason that the elder brother did not repent was because he never saw himself in comparison to the goodness of the father, but he only compared

himself to his younger brother. And may I say, our family members and friends are not the measuring rods for our personal righteousness. But Jesus is, and no one can compare himself to Jesus without seeing himself as a rotten sinner in need of forgiveness. If there is no repentance, there is no forgiveness. So obviously, the elder the brother went away from this occasion bitter, jealous, and filled with vile wickedness with an attitude of revenge. May it not be with us today!

3. Lastly, to have found the cure, that must have been a restoration for this selfishness.  
v. 20

I love verse 20! What a powerful verse it really is! The father ran out to meet the wayward son, and he embraced and kissed him non-stop because he was so happy to see him come home. If this elder brother would have seen himself in need of forgiveness, I am positive that the father would have reacted to his confession the same way he did to the younger son. And yet, the elder brother did not ask for forgiveness and he is never heard from again.

Could I please ask you today which one of these brothers best represents you and your life? The younger who went down into the absolute pits of degradation, but lived to repent and be changed by the loving hand of the father? Or, does the elder brother best represent you because your heart is filled with bitterness and jealousy? I pray that it is the younger and that you have really repented and come back home to the father.

## Conclusion

Well it has finally happened! This long sermon has finally come to a written end, but the story lives on forever and forever. Truthfully, I could just keep going on and on sharing my heart about this family which had so many problems. And, like today, one family member got right and one did not! One was broken and saw himself as a guilty sinner, and the other arrogantly saw himself as having kept all the rules. Yet, the one came home and found forgiveness and complete restoration while the other stood on the outside of the party and celebration grumbling about what he had missed out on, while having had access to everything the father had for him all along. You know, one day, some of you who have heard this sermon, and some who have read it, may truly have missed the opportunity of really repenting, but I pray not! Today is your day of salvation, and it is also the time for those of you who only have religion to really get salvation. This may be your last opportunity and if it is, I promise you that you will always remember this special homecoming celebration here at Gateway Baptist Church, but you will have missed out on the “**Glorious Homecoming**”, which is yet to come. If you have not left the far country to come back home, please follow the pattern of the prodigal son and return home today. This may be your last opportunity!