

I AM HOME

— Prodigals Welcome —

I Am Home | *Field Day* | Chad Bruegman | 9.23.17
LG Weekly

START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer the following question:

Whether looking for an open register at Target, finding an open parking spot at the mall or church, running a 5k, or playing a board game with friends...are you a competitive person? Why or why not?

SHARE

When we hear the word 'home' what comes to mind?

For many that word brings to mind a place of refuge or retreat—a sanctuary where we can be ourselves and leave our socks on the floor. However, for others, the very word 'home' can bring up hurt and frustration. Maybe we didn't have a good home, and the things we have experienced in life have distorted everything a home should be. In this series "I Am Home," we are going to explore what it means to come home and be home through the many facets of the story of the prodigal son.

Mark Twain, speaking of Jesus' story of the prodigal son, reflected that it was "the best story ever told." It is a powerful and intriguing story of family turmoil, heartbreak, struggle, jealousy, grace and redemption. It was the best story ever told, because God is the best story teller. It speaks to the heart of man and the struggle between our prodigal hearts and our ultimate search to find home. In God's Kingdom, home is where He is. When we start walking home, the Father doesn't stand on the porch with arms crossed, rather, the Father runs to us and meets us with a huge embrace and an even bigger party. The picture of the Father running to the prodigal son and walking

him home is at the heart of Red Rocks Church.

We welcome home prodigals.

This week, Chad reminded us that the local church is to be a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints. Being a hospital, means we are a place where we can help people in need, walk alongside them through the restoration process and ultimately help them find a place to serve others. The local church is a beautiful expression of restored people being used by God to restore others.

Unlike the other two parables in Luke 15, the story of the prodigal son doesn't end with the family gathered around in celebration for an epic welcome-home party for the son. What was supposed to be the happiest day of all, became a reason to complain for one individual. See, there was one person that day who didn't want to celebrate.

Read Luke 15:20-30

What evidence do we have that the older brother is a hard-working and obedient son?

The older brother was an owner of two-thirds of the entire estate, paid well, lived well and is served well. Yet becomes angry that his younger brother is welcomed home. Why do you think it upset him so much?

If you could identify with one word what was at the core of the older brother's anger, what would it be?

G R O W

When Jesus describes the "party" the father throws, it's difficult for us to picture the celebration. The elder brother, however, knows something is up as he approaches the house and can hear the party hoppin'. The son's natural response should have been to go in and join the party! Everyone expected him to come home after his day in the field, greet his Father's guests (the other big-shots in the community) and take part in the celebration by dancing the night away. Yet, instead of entering the party like we would expect, he stands outside—distant.

Compare the Pharisee's complaint about Jesus in Luke 15:2 with the servant's explanation of the welcome-home party in Luke 15:27.

As the servant tells the older brother what is going on in the house in verse 27, he exposes the illustration of the Pharisees complaint against Jesus in Luke 15:2 that, "this man receives sinners and eats with them"—which is exactly what the older brother's father had done. The prodigal son was forgiven and welcomed home just like that and the man of the house, the father, was feasting with him...a sinner. For the older brother, his father's grace was not amazing—it was infuriating and unfair.

How can grace be perceived as infuriating or unfair?

Can you think of a time where grace being extended to someone else frustrated you? How do you remember feeling towards the person who received grace and the person who extended it?

Kenneth Bailey in *The Cross & The Prodigal*, describes the older son's actions in the Middle Eastern context,

"The older son's action to not come into the party is a failure to fulfill the cultural courtesy of male members of the family coming into a social situation and shaking hands with guests. His action to not come into the party is a personal insult to the guests and to the father, as host. The older son understands this custom and means it as an intentional public insult to his father."

As a result, the father experiences yet another heartbreaking blow of a son's betrayal. And for a second time, he chooses to disregard the consequence his son deserves. Instead, the father endures shame cast on him for his gracious actions and goes out to welcome his oldest son (the second one in the story to be distant from the father) home. Yet when he walks out of the party to extend his invitation to his son, he is berated with judgment. Bailey writes that the older brother "is consumed with and appears with envy, pride, bitterness, sarcasm, anger, resentment, self-centeredness, hate, stinginess, self-satisfaction and self-deception. Yet he appears to see his actions as a righteous search for honor."

Read Luke 15:31-32

The father, choosing to overlook the arrogance in his son's accusation, begins his reply with a new word for son. It is the word *teknon*—the same word Mary uses when she finds the young Jesus in the temple (Luke 2). The name implies love and affection, and it's the first time we've heard it used in the entire parable! The father uses it here to open his arms in love to his callous older son and continues, not to correct his son or rebuke him, but to defend his own joy at having welcomed his prodigal son home.

By this point in the parable, Jesus is obviously the person of the father and the Pharisees are visibly playing the part of the older son. So when the story just ends at the climax without any resolution, Jesus is pointedly telling the Pharisees, "This is my explanation of why I sit and eat with sinners," and essentially asking them, "what are you going to do about it?"

What comparisons is Jesus making between the Pharisees and the older brother?

If you have begun to see traces of the older-brother heart in your own life, how does this picture of the father's heart, contrasted with the pointed critique of the Pharisees and the older brother, challenge you?

M O V E

The older brother was closer by proximity to the father than anyone else, but had a prodigal heart that couldn't be further from the father. The older brother put his confidence in following the rules to earn his place above others and in doing so crippled his ability to have compassion on his struggling little brother.

A good litmus test for having an older brother heart condition is found in Romans 12:15, "Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep." Can you truly celebrate others when they are promoted or advance in life? Do you have the ability to feel deeply enough to shed tears with others who are in pain, regardless of whether they were responsible for that pain? Within a minute of thinking through those questions, most of us know exactly the state of our heart.

The Apostle Paul had much to say regarding the 'older brother' heart condition. It's easy to allow this judgmental heart condition to creep into our life, because earning

our status sounds good! However, when we put our confidence in that we miss the entire message of Jesus.

Read Philippians 3:1-14

Paul outperformed just about everyone when it came to living by the rules, how does he view the rules according to this passage?

What is it that Paul views as 'loss' and 'gain' in life? Why should this apply in our own life?

What is it that you personally need to forget about or start to view as 'loss' in order to gain Christ and be found in him?

P R A Y

As a group, spend some time praying with and for each other. If you are in a coed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to share more freely.

T O G O

Philippians 3:14

"I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

Recommended Resource: For further reading on the older brother's part in this parable, check out Tim Keller's, *the Prodigal God*.

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