

18:20  
Where 2 or 3 are gathered... there am I

## Recognizing & Refocusing Resentment

Read Luke 15:11-32

Before this parable Jesus tells two other stories, one of a woman with a lost coin and one of a shepherd with a lost sheep. Both stories, like the prodigal son, end in reconciliation and celebration. The parallel paths of the three parables, however, seem to end at the invitation to the celebration. The story of the Prodigal Son then goes into the details of the older brother's refusal to participate and the father's response.

- Put yourself in the place of the older brother, can you blame him for not wanting to be a part of the celebration?
- Have you ever felt like undeserved attention was given someone and you disagreed with the response? Please share the experience if you are willing.
- Likewise, is there a time or circumstance in which you felt like you had been faithful and diligent but passed over when the gratitude was extended?

It is easy, when recalling this story, to put the elder brother in the place of the antagonist. "What a terrible brother, who could not – or would not – participate in the restoration of his brother!" But, the reality is, he was the good son. He was obedient, dutiful, committed and faithful. He had an unwavering respect for his father and showed his devotion through honor and faithfulness. He was reliable and his ethics had been proven.

- Can you really blame him for being suspicious of his brother's return? Wouldn't it be natural to be weary as the extravagance was poured out in a party for the one who squandered half the family's worth?

Read the first part of the brother's response, again, in verse 29.

- Who does this brother's anger seem to be directed toward?

It seems that what was once offered in devotion has morphed into duties of obligation. I don't question his faithfulness, just the attitudes that have crept up alongside it. It seems that now he is just as resentful toward his father as he is toward his younger brother.

Note, too, that the resentment toward the father turned into disassociation with anything related to he and his father. The son said, "This son of yours..." while the father replied, "your brother."

Read Luke 15:1-3. This was the pretext for Jesus telling the story of the Prodigal Son. He was telling an allegorical tale of the characters who were presently interacting with him. It seems likely that the complainers were represented by the older brother. They had been faithful to their religious duties, but to a point where they were resentful of anyone who tried to encroach on what God had given them. "Why should we get excited about these heathens coming to hear? We are the faithful and devoted ones!"

Can't you just picture it? "These heathens, these creations of yours don't belong here." While God replies, "Your brothers and sisters are finding their way home! That is cause for celebration!"

Henri Nouwen, in his book "Home Tonight, Further Reflections on the Parable of the Prodigal Son," writes of the relationship between faithfulness and resentment:

*"Resentment, the curse of the faithful, The virtuous, the obedient, and the Hardworking, settles itself in the Human heart and causes*

## Resentment (Page 2)

*Havoc. That is why it's important to think and reflect upon it. All of us who give our lives for loved ones, work hard, and objectively have many virtues to be praised, are sometimes not really free from the burden of resentment in our hearts."*

- Reflect on that quote. What do you think?
- What about today... who, in your life or circumstances might the characters represent?

In many of Jesus' parables I find that it is not too difficult for me to relate to most if not all of the characters. This is no exception. I have no problem seeing myself as the wanderer who blew it and came home to open arms. I, too, find it easy to see myself resentful, at times, of those who don't seem deserving in my personal set of standards.

The amazing thing about it, as much as one might want to vilify the judging and condemning hypocrites in the crowd, I believe in his final words of this story Jesus affirms them while encouraging them to support the prodigal. "All that I have is yours." In other words, "I'm not leaving you to celebrate him. I'm inviting you to come with me. You and I are inseparable and that cannot be taken away!"

The father loved both sons. The father was willing to work with, accept and treasure the whole of each son, mistakes and all. Perhaps we would do well to remember that and seek God from the road that took us so far from home and from the fields of home as well. Either way, let's make a point to join in the celebration!