

"The Elder Brother"

by Rev. John C. Tittle

Scripture Reading: Luke 15: 1-3, 11b, 25-32 NRSV

Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³ So he told them this parable: ¹¹ "There was a man who had two sons...

²⁵ "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷ He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' ³¹ Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

Discussion Questions:

1. What jumps out at you about the parable of the elder son?
2. Make the case for an audience: *Why this parable is Jesus' best parable?*
3. Why do you think the elder brother gets so neglected in this famous parable? Why is he not even in the title of the parable? Why is the father not in the title either?
4. When have you been a prodigal son/daughter in your life? When have you been the elder brother/sister? When have you been the compassionate father/mother?
5. Imagine this scenario: Cliff Notes has asked if you could write a character analysis of the three characters in the story. How would you describe the elder brother's personality? The prodigal son? The father?
6. In what ways was the elder brother so very far from home, even though he literally never left home? How was he lost? Do you think he was more lost than the prodigal son?
7. How do you think the elder son became so resentful and bitter? Was it a long process or did it only happen once the prodigal returned?
8. Why can it be so easy sometimes to be miserable and not go into the party and rejoice and eat the delicious fatted calf?
9. How do we create safeguards to protect ourselves?
10. Choose your own ending: Do you think the elder son went into the party? Or did he stay in the fields? Why?