

Life often seems unfair. Our sense of justice is keenly aware of circumstances that violate our standard and do not even look remotely pleasing and acceptable. Here is a very short list of the reasons we get upset at the unreasonableness of life:

1. We feel we have been cheated, or deprived of a privilege, an honor, or respect that others (less deserving than us) are receiving.
2. We feel someone is getting special treatment or favoritism, that they do not deserve.
3. We feel a person has gotten away with something who should have been punished.
4. We feel our effort or faithfulness has been ignored or unrewarded.
5. We feel that we have been treated more harsh by someone than we deserve.
6. We feel that a promise or agreement has not been kept.
7. We feel that others should reap the consequences for their sinful actions and not be rewarded.

Some of the “unfair” complaints that pastors like me often hear in the ministry are these:

- * *Why can't I have a baby when other women have several children?*
- * *Why do I suffer or have disabilities while others are healthy?*
- * *Why am I so poor while others have great wealth and nice things?*
- * *Why did my friend or loved one have to die?*
- * *Why can't I find a wife or a husband that loves me and the Lord, too?*
- * *Why do I seem to fail while others are successful and promoted?*
- * *Why are others handsome or pretty while I am so plain?*

The list goes on and on... doesn't it?

In today's message... we want to take time to look at the sentiments of the "Not Fair" Syndrome and how to conquer it. ... We are continuing (this week) with a parable that we began last week (in our study through Luke's Gospel) – which we are calling "*The Parable of the Prodigal God.*"

It is often referred to as the "Parable of the Prodigal Son"... but as I pointed out last week... this story is far more about the Prodigal **Father**... than it is about the Prodigal **Son**. ... But before we continue on... we need a short review... to get a running start at where we left off.

The Parable of the Prodigal God is the *third* parable of Jesus that is recorded in Luke chapter 15. ... Each parable tells a story about the recovery of something valuable. In the **first** parable... a foolish sheep wanders from the fold... and in the **second**... a coin rolls into the shadows of a woman's home. ... In both of the first two parables... a diligent search *restored* what had been lost to the owner... and great *rejoicing* among friends and family ensued.

Now the third parable (that we began last week)... involved restoration and great rejoicing among family and friends... (these same elements in the first two)... however... the third parable also **differs** greatly from them.

With the "Parable of the Prodigal God"... the stakes are much higher. Lost sheep can be written off... and lost coins can eventually be replaced... BUT **SONS CAN'T**. ... Furthermore... sheep will wander... and coins will roll away. (They behave *according to their nature*.) ... But sons are responsible for their choices! ... **[P A U S E]** ... How does God deal with lost people... who **WILLFULLY** make bad choices...?

We have seen that the first part of the third parable... teaches us that God (represented by the Father)... runs with exuberant (or lavish) forgiveness to repentant sinners. ... (Yes... even to those making heinous and willfully bad decisions.) ... (And)... through this parable... we got to take a look at what true repentance (the kind that our Heavenly Father responds to)... looks like.

This forgiven boy accepted the consequences of his bad choices. He didn't offer any excuses. He only offered an honest and humble confession. He acknowledged his affront without minimizing it... justifying it... or shifting any blame. He showed that he understood the magnitude of his behavior when he admitted "*I am no longer worthy to be called your son...*"

That is how we are to repent whenever we sin; no playing it down in any way... or qualifying our guilt with extenuating or rationalized circumstances. ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Last week... I pointed out that the very word "*prodiga*" is defined as "extremely wasteful." The son... in the parable... (very audaciously) went to his father and basically said:

"I wish that you were dead. I'm not willing to wait for that... so I want you to sell-off 1/3 of everything you own and give me that money so I can take off and get as far away from you as I can... and impulsively live any way that I want..."

Every reader's jaw ought to drop... when we read that this father (actually) did that. He liquidated (he sold his property) and gave 1/3 to this selfish...ungrateful... and impatient child. The father looks rather wasteful to us... in doing so. "*Anyone with half-a-brain could see that he is just going to go waste the money that the father earned and was living on.*" ...

“You are just throwing that money away by giving it to your ungrateful son...”

(And) the son DID DO THAT! He took the money... moved far away... and threw it all to the wind – through loose and immoral living.

The son was “prodigal” and the father was “prodigal” (by giving his son his early inheritance) – from the standpoint of seeming wastefulness. But “prodigal” also means “extremely generous”... or “lavish” – and this part of the word fits the father – without ANY explanation necessary! The father was “prodigal” (he was lavish) with his grace... mercy... and forgiveness - when the son finally came to his senses and showed true repentance.

Luke 15:17-24

Your escape from the world’s pig pen is worth celebrating (too!) ... We are reminded here that there is hope for the repentant sinner - no matter how far away he has drifted from God. ... Our Lord is a Master at helping us get back on our spiritual feet and helping us to get a new start.

(And) the Bible tells us that the angels rejoice when one sinner repents. If you are in the pig pen of sinful living... you don’t have to stay there. Turn from your sin and get matters right with the Lord and with others you have wronged. ... Your sorrow will be turned to joy. ... This boy was bad... mad... sad... and now he is glad - because he has escaped from the pig pen and restored his relationship with his father.

This should have been the end of the story. ... In the first parable... the shepherd found his lost sheep and everyone celebrated. (The end.) ... In the second story... the woman found her missing coin and everyone celebrated. (The end.) ... When the prodigal son returned home... another

party was thrown to celebrate. (But that was **not** the end.)And so... Act 3 begins (NOW.)

Luke 15:25-30

We must admit that the elder brother had some virtues that are commendable. He worked hard and always obeyed his father. He never brought disgrace either to the home or to the village.

So upon hearing the reason for the music and dancing... he became visibly (but understandably) enraged. The mental picture is not unlike a pot of boiling water... which becomes more and more volatile and then suddenly overflows.

His resentment over the party had less to do with his brother than the deeper issue of **justice**. The prodigal son didn't **deserve** a "welcome home" celebration. He deserved to be tried... convicted... and excommunicated... at the very least! ... The Law called for **stoning** (according to Deut. 21:18–21)! ... If anyone deserved a reward - it was **the faithful brother!**

Let's just admit that something in the older brother's argument strikes a reasonable chord. ... He had indeed remained by his father's side... diligently serving the needs of the household... living obediently as a good son should. ... He undoubtedly won the approval of his peers and the entire town. ... In fact... compared to his wasteful brother... he looked like a saint.

So why shouldn't the older boy be celebrated? It would seem the younger son had been rewarded for his sin. It wasn't fair.

However... Let's stop now and think. ... The young son had been far from the father (in a distant country) because of sins of passion. But the elder son was separated from his father through sins of attitude. ... He was even farther away than his younger brother and he had not even left the farm! Important as obedience and diligence are... they are not the **only** tests of character. ... Jesus taught that the two greatest commandments are: to love God and to love others. (We saw this in Luke 10:25–28). But this older brother broke **both** of these divine commandments.

He did not love his father (who represents God)... and he did not love his brother. ... The elder brother would **not forgive** his brother who wasted the family inheritance and disgraced the family name. (AND) his lack of love for his father... is shown by the fact that - neither would he forgive his father for receiving the younger son back... and celebrating.

When you examine the sins of the elder brother... you can easily understand why he pictures the scribes and Pharisees. ... To begin with... he was *self-righteous*. ... He openly denounced the sins of his brother... but he could not see his own sins. ... The Pharisees defined sin primarily in terms of outward actions - not inward attitudes.

The older brother recounted his years of faithful service and his consistent obedience to his father's commands. ... To underscore that fact... he used a term that the original language of the New Testament expressed as *douleuō* ("to serve as a slave".) ... He essentially said: "*For years... I have been slaving for you.*" ... Then... in order to emphasize his moral superiority... he compared his worthiness to the prodigal's **unworthiness**.

... Notice his manner of resentment in referring to the younger son: “*this son of yours*” - not “*my brother*.”

His brash speech reveals a profound sense of entitlement. ... His word choice and attitude demonstrate that he couldn't have served and obeyed his father out of love... but instead... for what he attempted to gain. ... He tried to reduce the father-son relationship to a system of rewards - in exchange for services rendered. ... The elder brother is focused on his achievements. They are the basis of what he feels he deserves.

People do the same thing today. They feel they deserve special treatment because of their achievements. Their focus on their past achievements clouds their vision of the needs of others (or their present responsibilities.) In this case... the elder brother is unconcerned that his brother has repented and returned home. ... He is not concerned about his brother's needs... or helping him... because he feels his brother doesn't deserve his concern or help. He got what was coming to him. ... He didn't respect his father's values... or he would have valued the reestablished family in a similar manner.

This *unconcern for his missing brother*... is quite appalling. The father watched for the younger son (most likely day after day) and finally saw him coming when he was quite far off. ... This shows us that the father longed for his son's return. ... But even though he knew the younger son's return would make his father happy... the elder brother did not want his younger brother to come home. ... Why should he share his estate with somebody who had wasted his own inheritance? ... Why should he even share the father's love with somebody who had brought shame to the family and the village?

He is so angry that he will not go into the house. He shared his father's house... but not his father's heart. ... He is so close to his father (yet) so far away from him. ... He would rather not have fellowship with his father... than to accept his father's acceptance of his brother. ... He was angry at both his father and his brother... and would not go into the house and share in the joyful celebration.

Interestingly the father went out and pleaded with the older brother to go to the feast. ... Likewise... Jesus ate with Pharisees... as well as the obvious wayward sinners of His day. (You see)... He did not desire to exclude the Pharisees and teachers of the Law from the kingdom. ... The message was an invitation to everyone.

The same father who ran to meet the prodigal - came out of the house of feasting - to plead with the older son. ... How gracious and condescending our Father is... and how patient He is... with our weaknesses! ... [P A U S E] ...

Do you wonder how older brothers get this way? ... It is very easy to forget what we were like - before we came to the Father! ... As time passes we begin to imagine we are "good people"... because we have avoided sins of passion — and all the while - sins of attitude run rampant within us. ... We do not regard our jealousy... pride... and judgmentalism - as sins. ... We call them "faults" or "shortcomings." ... (And so) we grow in our critical... judgmental... and unloving attitudes. ... Is God needing to step outside with you...? Have you been caught-up in the "NOT FAIR syndrome"?

People that feel they deserve honor... rewards... power... or possessions... struggle with the sentiment of the "Not Fair" Syndrome

when they don't receive these things. ... They get focused on their rights instead of their responsibilities... and end up being miserable. ... They also make life miserable for others... just as the older son was making matters miserable for his father.

When we become ungrateful for what we have... we start griping... and this is what this older son was doing. ... With his inheritance from his father... he could have killed a goat and thrown his own party - any time he wanted. (This was the message of his father when he stepped outside to talk to him.) He owned all the goats and calves.

When we are jealous and ungrateful... we fail to see the blessings we possess. God wants us to learn to be thankful for and content with His provisions and blessings.

Luke 15:31

The father had a ready reply. He spoke to the son's concern of unfairness – first - and then to the issue of his brother's value to the father... (which we will see in the next verse 15:32.)

But first of all... please notice that the father's reply is as gentle... as the son's complaint was harsh. ... Remember how the older son harshly referred to his brother as "*this son of yours*"...? ... The father addressed this older son tenderly.... He calls him τέκνον (*teknon*, child)... an affectionate name that could easily be rendered "*my child*." ... He affirms that the harsh older brother contained a special place in his heart. ... He accepts that this son has always been at his side. ... He reminds the son that all he owns belongs to him. The father's throwing this celebration...

because of the brother's return... (in any way) diminishes the older brother's status.

The father's message is very emphatic. The double use of the Greek word πᾶς – (“all” and “always”) emphasized that just as the elder son is “always” with the father... so too he has “all.” ... The older boy should not lose sight of the benefits he has always had because of his access to the father. ... In a sense... he has always had access to the celebration. The animals are his! The older son could have slaughtered a calf and celebrated with his friends anytime he wanted. As a son... he owns the whole herd!

Luke 15:32

Second... the father addressed the issue of values. ... The father shows that he valued the son's life more than possessions. ... He barely gave any thought to the fortune that the younger son had squandered. ... The older son couldn't see past the fairness issue long enough to celebrate his brother's return. This fact proved beyond any shadow of doubt that the older brother was no less a wayward sinner than the prodigal who actually left the country.

In the end (however) the father gained a genuine son for the first time. Repentance and forgiveness gave birth to an authentic father-son relationship based on grace.

The future of the oldest son (however) remains in doubt by the end of Jesus' story. ... The Lord left the ending of this parable unresolved... most likely to prompt a response from the Pharisees. ... In the first parable... the shepherd “called together his friends and neighbors” to rejoice with him. ...

In the second... the woman “called together her friends and neighbors” to rejoice with her.... Both stories use almost identical language... suggesting **everyone** responded.

Everybody in this chapter experienced joy - except the elder brother. The shepherd... the woman... and their friends - all experienced the joy of finding. ... The younger son experienced the joy of returning and being received by a loving... gracious father. ... The father experienced the joy of receiving his son back safe and sound. ... But the elder brother would not forgive his brother... so he had no joy. ... He could have repented and attended the feast... but he refused... and for as long as he stayed outside - he suffered.

The father’s explanation that he “*had to celebrate*” left the son with a decision: either continue in his own brand of rebellion or repent and join the celebration.

You know there are a lot of people who sit in our churches every week... who are just like this older brother. They prefer nursing an anger with unforgiveness – than enjoying the fellowship of God and His people. Because they will not forgive... they have alienated themselves from the church and even from their family; they are sure that everyone else is wrong and they alone are right. They can talk loudly about the sins of others... but they are blind to their own sins.

“*I never forgive!*” General Oglethorpe said to John Wesley... to which Wesley replied, “*Then, sir, I hope you never sin.*”

Jesus teaches two major truths in this parable. First... an absolute reversal results from repentance... in that not only is the repentant one restored...

but also welcomed by the heavenly Father with ENORMOUS joy and total acceptance. ... The Father runs and receives such a one with open arms. Great celebration erupts when a sinner comes to the Father to enter into His care. ... If you are the son who went away to a far country... you can come back to the Father by confessing your sins to Him.

Second... there is a call to respond to apparent unfairness - not with comparison or jealousy... but with joy that reflects the Father's goodness that He has shown all along to you. ... Perhaps you are like the elder son who was out of fellowship. He had no concern or love for his brother. He thought he was serving God. He had never (overtly) sinned with obvious external sin... as his brother had. Yet he had never enjoyed a feast with his friends. The Father says to you: "*All that I have is yours.*" How wonderful to have a Father like this!

Don't stand outside! Come in and enjoy the feast!