

## **THE SECOND GREATEST LOVE STORY EVER TOLD**

### **Everyone's In This Story**

**Luke 15:11-32**

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**LISTEN:** <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/everyones-in-this-story/>

“Dad, I can’t wait for you to die!” Wouldn’t that be a kick the gut? Our story of the father and the two sons begins that way (vv. 11-12). The younger brother usually received his share upon the father’s death. But this son was in a hurry.

I once saw a really nice RV on the highway. The bumper sticker on the truck read, “We’re spending our children’s inheritance!” Maybe the father in this story wished he had made other plans with his estate!

But the younger son liquidates his assets and takes off (v. 13). Why a far country? Why not a near one? What is he running from? Possibly himself? What are you running from? He’s looking for a land with no rules, no one telling him what to do. No one making him take out the trash and do chores. Yes, in a distant country, no one is there to see if you do wrong; but no one is there to help you decide what is right or wrong. In a distant country, no one makes you take out trash; and no one is there to keep you from living in the trash. Here is a teachable moment. What if God’s rules are not here to spoil our fun but to protect our freedom?

Here is the sad news (v. 14). In that distant country, the son spent everything (the word prodigal does not actually mean wayward, disobedient; it means wasteful, not carefully managing). When he ran out of money, he ran out of friends (funny how that happens). He began to be “in want” (the same Greek word as Romans 3:23, “fall short”). Sin is our emptiness, our lack. Perhaps his turning point was feeding pigs, the ultimate indignity for a Jewish boy (v. 15).

Then the young man models for us repentance. He comes to himself, he turns around, he confesses (v. 17ff). And scripture says the father saw the son before the son saw the father—because the father never stopped loving, never stopped forgiving. The father kissed and hugged him. But picture this. What does the boy probably smell like? He is hot and sweaty. And his last job was NOT in the cologne department of Dillard’s. It was in a pig pen! But the father hugged him anyway. No matter how badly our life stinks, God loves and receives us. What keeps you from coming home? Come see what love can do! An older, wiser pastor once told me there are really only three moves in this part of the story: 1) Sick of home; 2) Homesick; 3) Home!

But v. 25 reminds us this is a story about two sons. The older one is outside, pouting about all the attention his brother is getting. (If you’re a parent, can you relate? You just get one child straightened out, and the other one starts acting up!). You see, Older Brother is a goodie-two-shoes. In v. 28, we see him acting out. Dad: “What’s wrong, son?” Older son: “Nothing!”

Remember why Jesus told this story (15:1-2). It was church people who saw themselves as better than others. And I must say, if only time you feel good about yourself is when you’re feeling bad about others, you need to come see Dr. Jesus and get healed! You need to come see what love

can do. The great preacher George Buttrick once said that if, on his way home, the younger brother had met the older bro instead of meeting his dad, the far country would have looked pretty good!

While there was a repentance party going on inside, there was a pity party outside. The story reminds us that there are two kinds of lost people. Two kinds of far countries. Two kinds of sinners. Those inside and those outside the church. And to God, the sin of rebellion does not stink any worse than the sin of smug self-satisfaction. The father went out twice that day, to get both sons. Both sons underestimated their father's love, just as we underestimate God's. And here's the amazing part. Jesus did not finish this story for us. We don't know how it ends. It is left open-ended. I think Jesus wants us to complete it. To come home. To come see what love can do. To repent and open up to God's amazing love.