

Series: We'll Leave The Light On For You  
Luke 15

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## **“Hope For When You Get Stuck”**

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Okay, we're going to get into this story Jesus told, and it's in Luke 15. So if you would, get a Bible. You can pull one off the pew rack in front of you or look at the Bible of the person next to you if they brought one. It is to be one of those messages where we're kind of walking through this chapter a fair bit so it will be helpful to just keep this open.

I'll start with the first verse. *"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This Man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"* Now knowing the audience is critical for this particular story because this is a powder-keg moment. So we'll keep in mind there are three groups of people. There is Jesus, and then there are these people who are kind of obvious sinners, spiritual losers. Then there are the Pharisees, the teachers of the law, religious leaders.

The verbs really tell the story. Jesus is *teaching*. The sinners are *gathering*. The Pharisees are *muttering*. "This Man." They can't even bring themselves to say His name. "This Man, Jesus. He has no standards. Water down the faith. He'll take anybody in." So this is a very tense, very explosive, in-your-face kind of moment, and everybody is watching to see how will Jesus respond to this criticism from these very powerful people? Maybe He'll be a little apologetic. Maybe He'll try to mend some fences, build some bridges. Maybe He'll back off the "friend of sinners" deal.

He starts telling stories. The first two are quite similar. *"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the 99...?"* This is in verse 3. "And when he finds the lost sheep, doesn't he rejoice and have a party and celebrate?" The people say, "Yeah, that's what happens." And then the second story begins. Essentially similar construction, language. *"Or suppose a woman has 10 silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully...?"* "And when she finds it, doesn't she throw a party and rejoice?" Again, everybody says, "Yeah, that's what happens."

They all know the meaning of these stories. Again, this is... Jesus is being somewhat provocative, somewhat confrontational here. The sinners hear these stories, and they say, "That's me. I was that lost sheep. I was that lost coin." Now Jesus is saying, "I've been found, and heaven rejoices." Jesus, for His part, is very clearly claiming to be the One who was searching. He is like that shepherd. He is like that woman. He is saying to these religious leaders, "Not only do I not apologize for accepting these people, I tell you flat out what you see with this group coming to Me, you're seeing the work of God." That's very bold, but that's nothing compared to what's coming next.

Verse 11 is story number three. *"Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons.'"* Now this is a different story. The first son, if you know this story or if you were here last week, is the rebel. Demands his inheritance from his father. Squanders the whole thing. Hits bottom. Gets desperate. Comes back

home. His father embraces him. They throw a party. This story is often called the parable of the prodigal son. It's often named after that first son. Messages usually focus on him. But see for Jesus' listeners, the real drama, the really explosive moment, doesn't begin until the second half of the story in the introduction of this other character, the older brother. If you thought things were tense before (and they were), you haven't seen anything yet.

So now remember the audience in the three categories. Jesus the teacher. These sinners, these spiritual losers. Then these muttering religious leaders. Verse 25. *"Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.*

*But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'*

*'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.'*"

One of the marks of the genius of Jesus' teachings is that we irresistibly find ourselves identifying with the characters in them. One of the ways you can learn a lot about yourself is to reflect on which characters you find yourself identifying with in any given story. Old story...Sunday school class. The teacher is walking through this parable with the kids in her class, and she asks them the question: "There was one for whom the return of the prodigal brought no rejoicing, no laughter, only resentment and bitterness. Who was it?" One of the kids says, "The fattened calf."

Learn a lot by, you know, finding who do you identify with in this story? I say that to let you know I understand the elder brother in this story. I get that guy. I'm the older brother in my own family growing up, and I would seek to please my parents and be a model son and try to have teachers think well of me. To do the right thing, say the right words, to have people think well of me as surely they spoke well of this elder brother who stayed home, who worked hard. I did mostly proper things. I dated the right girls when I dated at all. I chose the right schools. I entered the right profession.

I never ran away to the distant country. I grew up in Rockford, Illinois, and the distant country was Beloit, Wisconsin. Beloit was about 15 miles away, just over the border. The drinking age in Illinois was 21, but the drinking age in Wisconsin was 18. So when I was in high school, the fake IDs flowed like milk and honey. I never went to Beloit...partly because I wanted to do what's right, partly because I lacked the courage if I'm going to be honest about it. I would lament the immaturity and superficiality of those who went to the distant country. I would pray for them in our church's youth group.

But the truth I would not acknowledge even to myself was that secretly a deep part of me sometimes envied the prodigals around me. I had all the sexual feelings an adolescent male has, and I struggled with them but in ways I could keep secret and hidden so that I was simultaneously judgmental and ashamed. The irony is the first command is the command to love. But my very smugness made me spiritually sicker than the people I thought I was superior to. So I get this character. We're talking this weekend about me.

Maybe some of you.

Because when you cease to be the younger brother, when you decide you will take faith and obedience seriously, when you commit your life to God, one of two things will happen. Either you will start becoming more like the Father or you will start becoming more like the elder brother. I want to tell you God loves us too much for that to happen. Not here. I have seen too many churches where under misguided ideas of spiritual maturity, too many Christians get produced who are cold, smug, arrogant, know-it-all, self-righteous. Not here...not here.

So this weekend we're going to get really clear on what's wrong in the heart of the elder brother. What's the difference between "older brotherism" and Christianity as following Jesus is meant to be. I'm going to ask that we all look really seriously at our own hearts because I sure need to and ask God to identify and begin to remove any remnants of this elder brotherism from our hearts because it makes the Church noxious to the world around us and sucks life out of us.

Here is the story. Again, this is the drama. This is the climax. This is everything Jesus has been building to in this chapter. Here is Jesus. Here are these sinners, these spiritual losers. Here are these really prideful and arrogant people who perceive themselves to be the righteous. He tells about a lost sheep and a lost coin and then this lost son who comes home, and the father has a big party. But now here is this one other character. There is an older brother, and he has been out working in the fields. He is heading home, and he hears music and dancing.

Now this is an event that would involve the whole village. It's a very communal society. This would have been a family with a lot of resources. If they were able to, you know, kill a fattened calf just for one party, then they were a really prominent family. Everybody in the village knows what's going on. They all knew when the kid left; they all know he has come home. This is a party that's a public event. Everybody is there. We'll come back to that. That's significant for this story.

Now if everything was as it should be in the heart of this older brother, when he hears the party, he would immediately go inside. But he doesn't. He is suspicious. He asks what's going on. He is told, "Your brother comes home." "Then he became angry and refused to come in," Jesus says. Now this is the first mark of the elder brother heart is this *chronic tendency to resentment*. He resented his brother for leaving. Then he resented his brother for repenting and coming back. Then he resented his father for embracing him.

All this manifests itself in just a refusal to enter into joy. "I won't dance. I won't sing." You know, one of the main themes of Luke 15, it's all about joy. In the first story in verse 3, Jesus says the shepherd when he finds the sheep, "**he joyfully puts it on his shoulders.**" He goes home. He calls his friends and his neighbors, and he says, "**Rejoice with me.**" They do. Jesus says, "I tell you that in the same way there will be rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents."

Then the parable of the lost coin. Woman finds the coin. When she does, she calls her friends and her neighbors, and she says, "**Rejoice with me.**" They do. "**In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God.**" Then the lost son. He comes home, and the father and that lost son and the whole village, everybody. This is a story where everybody is rejoicing except one guy. The person the father would most expect to be joyful is the most joyless. He will not go into the house.

Now this is much more serious to Jesus' listeners than we would tend to understand. We'll have to do a

little work to go back to their culture. As the oldest son, the elder brother would have the formal responsibility at a gathering like this (a guy name Ken Bailey writes a lot about this) to mingle with the guests, make sure everybody had enough food. Often the father would be seated with the guests, and the older brother would be kind of the semi-official headwaiter. It was a family's way of saying to guests in that very honor-oriented culture, "You are so honored. You are so important to us that our own son is serving you." But the oldest brother will not do this.

Now when the younger son hurt his dad, he did it privately. "I want my money. I want to leave." Here the older son deliberately chooses to expose his father to public humiliation. The whole village sees this. See it's different to us, but to Jesus' listeners, the older son is insulting his father more openly, more defiantly, more cruelly than the younger son would ever have dreamt of doing. The father comes out and pleads with his son. Now this too is really unusual activity. We'll come back to this. In two weeks, we're going to talk about the father and coming home. So, man, be praying for God to be really active in a couple of weeks.

Father comes out and pleads, and the son will not go in. The truth is, in a strange way, he enjoys his resentment. This is a strange thing. Did you know this about resentment? It's kind of fun, kind of recreational because you get this sense when you give into it of pleasure at rehearsing, "What a victim of mistreatment I am." It feeds something really dark. This older brother likes torturing himself. He likes sitting out there on the front porch, listening to the music, not going inside. "Let them all sing. Let them all dance. None of them know how I'm the one who is being victimized here." It feeds his sense of self-righteous superiority.

I'll tell you how resentment works. I read this some time ago. There is a method of killing wolves in the far north where the hunter will take a clump of meat and impale it on a knife, leave the knife there. A wolf will come along and start devouring the meat, begins to eat it greedily. When it gets close to the knife, the wolf will begin to prick its own tongue. But because of the cold, because the wolf is in such a frenzy over its greed for food and the taste of blood, it doesn't realize when it begins to consume its own blood. It will go on until it cuts itself so badly it bleeds to death. It was destroyed by its own appetite for its own blood.

Resentment works that way. You're at the knife, and you start feeding on, you know, my own sense of self-righteous superiority. Then you start as your own soul is bleeding to death. There is a party going on, and all those who are living at home in the grace of Jesus, the grace of the Cross, are learning to let go of resentments and live in the community of grace. I don't know. Maybe you're sitting outside on the front step right now maybe. There is resentment festering inside. Somebody cheated you on a deal. Somebody did you wrong. Some parent did not live up to your expectation. Some child has hurt you. Some friend has not done what you want.

There is some group of people out there somewhere, and you don't like them. You don't like what they say or how they live or what they think. You're actually kind of savoring the resentment. You're at the knife right now. Little by little, the joy and the mercy and the patience and grace are being bled out of you. You're killing your heart. The question for today is... *Will you let it go?* Will you just forgive? If you need God's help, will you ask, "God, help me to forgive"? Will you go to the Father's house?

A *spirit of chronic resentment* is a mark of elder brotherism. I'll tell you another one is a *spirit of chronic complaining*. Take a look for a moment at verse 29. A spirit of chronic complaining. Father goes out to plead with his son who won't come into the party. **"But he answered his father, 'Look!'"** Now the first striking thing here to Jesus' listeners again is different in our day. First striking thing is this older brother

does not address his dad as *father*. We are apt to miss this because our culture does not demand kids express enormous respect for their parents, does it? Not so much. One of my kids when they're e-mailing me regularly addresses me as *fatty* or *the fat one*. I just let it slide. They're out of the will, but other than that, I just let it slide.

Now in Jesus' day, this stuff didn't slide. To omit a title of respect was unthinkable. If it happened, it was a real, deliberate slap in the face. I'll tell you how dramatic this is. If you look back at verse 12, when the younger son (the rebel) is going to come to his dad and say, "I'm tired of waiting around for you to die. I want my inheritance right now to be able to go spend it." Even in that moment he begins his statement to his dad with the title *father*. Even there he pays that much respect to his dad. Not the older brother.

Remember, the whole village is present for this party. This is a public conversation between an older son and a father, who this son is already publically humiliating by refusing to come into his party and play his role. He begins his remarks to his dad. Essentially in our culture, it would be like, "Look, you! Look, you!" Incredibly demeaning. "All these years I've been working like a slave for you."

Then this irony. "I've never disobeyed a single command" literally is what he says. Really? He says this even though he is in this moment publically humiliating his father by refusing to join the party. He says this even though in this moment he is defying his father's deepest will that he should love his brother. "I have never disobeyed a single command" when the truth is he has never obeyed one...not from his heart, which is what matters.

The truth is he doesn't know a thing about obedience. He understands conformity. He follows rules. But he is eaten up by pride, superiority, jealousy, bitterness, self-righteousness, envy, sarcasm, mockery, deceit, condemnation, judgmentalism, lovelessness. He is lost as a goose. He is farther from his father at home than his brother was a thousand miles away. But his self-assessment is, "I'm the righteous one. I'm the good one. I'm the obedient one. I have never disobeyed a single command."

See, it's not just his lostness that's killing him. It's his blindness. He is as lost if not more lost than his brother, as unable if not more unable to love (which is the core command) than his brother. But the killer is...he doesn't know; he thinks he is doing great.

Now you think it's getting a little hot for Jesus' listeners at this point? Here is his complaint. "All these years. Slaving away for you. Never disobeyed a single command, and you never gave me even a goat to have a party with my friends with." By the way, remember the father has given to the younger son all the inheritance the younger son can ever get. That money is all gone now. Therefore, to whom will all the remaining estate go? The older brother.

See this story is also about money as a lot of Jesus' stories are. The older brother is doing the math. The older brother is saying to his father, "You're going to take *my* money, *my* inheritance, *my* fattened calf, and you're going to throw it away on *him*, and you expect *me* to be happy about it?" The father's answer of course is, "Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. Now you're getting it. Now you understand. Come on, son. Come on in to the party. Be happy."

But he will not be happy. So subtle even in the hearts of people who are thinking, *God, I've never disobeyed a single command*. Is there a spirit of chronic complaint at work in your heart? It just leaks out in the strangest times when we think we're being spiritual.

Some of you were here last week for the sermon on the prodigal son part of this story. Just only part of the story got told. I was listening to the podcast of it this week. Have you ever heard someone preaching a sermon complain because they don't get to finish the story? Do you ever hear that? Well, that's elder brotherism right there, see? People who live in grace tend toward gratitude. People who don't tend to live in complaint.

There is a guy in a hospital. Amazing technology that saved his life. Do you ever think about, *What a lucky being I am to live in a day when there is modern medicine and science that can enable us to live when in previous centuries...?* If we had any spiritual sanity at all, we'd be so grateful. This guy is in the hospital just complaining. Complaining about his bed. Complaining about the medication. Complaining about his roommates. Complaining about the doctors. Eventually (this is a true story) he called the nurse in when his meal had been served and said, "This is a bad potato." Can you imagine sending hospital food back? "This is a bad potato." I love this. The nurse picked it up and started to spank it. "Bad potato. Bad, bad, bad."

I think about that. Living in a hospital of grace where my soul is being saved. Walt Gerber so often over the years at our church would say, "You know, we're not a museum for saints, for elder brother types. We're a hospital for sinners." Hospital for sinners being saved by grace, complaining about the potatoes.

The older brother is secretly kind of comparing himself to the younger son. See, here is part of what's going on. He secretly believes life was better in the distant country than having to be at home with the father. So he is thinking, *If I'm going to give up having all that fun, I better be compensated for it.* Will you ask Jesus for the gift of gratitude?

We're going to all try something. We've been talking about this all weekend. As kind of a spiritual discipline, tomorrow (on Monday), we're all going to go on a one-day fast from complaining. Okay? Just for one day. See how long we can make it. When you wake up in the morning until you go to sleep at night...one entire day, no grumbling. No whining. No complaining. Not a single negative word. Not about your body or your money or your food or your relatives or your boss, about the spouse you don't have, about the spouse you do have. No complaining all day long. Ask God to help you make it through one day with no complaining tomorrow (Monday).

How many of you are game for taking that one on? Okay. How many of you think it's a stupid idea, and you don't like it? All right. Just we're going to give it a shot, and then we'll just find out how hard is that for me? How much do I need God to be able to do that? By the way, I don't want to complain right now, but is it just me, or is it a little warm in here? Okay. Well we're doing that just to make sure nobody will complain. Mark, can you check with anybody and see can somebody turn the air conditioning on? All right.

Aren't you grateful for air conditioning too? If you just think back in the old days, people would preach for hours, and there was no air conditioning at all. I'm sidelining now. I was at a church one time. It was mostly African American Catholic charismatic church on the south side of Chicago. No air conditioning, and the service was three hours long. Isn't that amazing? Doesn't that sound like a cool idea? Okay, back to the text...

A *spirit of judgmentalism* is another characteristic of elder brotherism. In verse 30 of chapter 15 notice what language does the older brother use to refer to the prodigal? He says, "You know, all these years I've been slaving away. Never disobeyed. Nor you wouldn't even give me a young goat so I could celebrate

with my friends." ***"But when this son of yours..."*** What does he not say? He doesn't say, "My brother." *Son of yours* is something that would be said by even an outsider by somebody not in the family. Your son. See, the elder brother is speaking as if he were not part of the family. He is renouncing by his language his brotherhood. He is renouncing his sonship. But his self-assessment is, "I've never disobeyed a single command."

How blind can you get? See, judgment is not just pointing out what somebody has done wrong. We all need that in our lives from people who love us and are for us. Judging another is when you speak from a distance with no compassion, no obligation to help, and you kind of enjoy the failure of the other person. Then it leaks out in things like gossip.

***"But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes..."*** Again, that's very striking. When Jesus earlier tells about what the prodigal son did, He says, "he went off to a distant country, squandered his wealth in wild living. Then after he had spent everything..." He never says anything about prostitutes, but the older brother just throws that in there.

How come? Well, his imagination has been working. He wants to smear his younger brother. Maybe he is thinking what he would do if he went to the distant country. Because this is a weird thing about the human condition. Sometimes the truth is that under the surface, deep in the heart, there is not nearly as big a difference between the rebel and the rule keeper as the rule keeper would like to believe. Every once in a while you hear about a rule keeper who ends up in a ditch somewhere because all those desires have been in that heart all this time. Sometimes you never hear this story. It keeps hidden. But it's all in the heart.

The prodigal son was feeding on slop meant for pigs. The older brother is feeding on these little choice morsels of gossip. The writer of Proverbs says, ***"The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to the inward parts."*** Anybody ever hear of gossip ever happening inside a church? What feeds that stuff? Well it's just the heart. But I can be doing that and still saying, "I've never disobeyed a single command." See, that's elder brotherism. A life that can be filled with chronic resentment and chronic complaint and all kinds of judgmentalism. But what makes it so insidious is the blindness, "I never disobeyed anything."

Tim Keller has a line that's just haunted me since I read it. He says, "It is natural for younger brothers to think older brotherhood and Christianity are the same thing." I want to read that one more time. "It is natural for younger brothers to think older brotherhood and Christianity are the same thing." A huge barrier to people in our society and Jesus is so many people outside the Church think so many churches are filled with older brothers. You know why they think that? Because a lot of times churches are filled with older brothers. I have a lot of older brother in me.

That's why it's so important that we get really clear older brotherhood and following Jesus are so far apart. It's like 180 degrees away from each other. But they can look so similar to each other because externally there seems to be, you know, so much avoidance of certain kinds of misbehavior and piety and religious knowledge and all this kind of stuff. But here is the deal. Elder brotherism has no grace. There is no grace. So it's filled with judgmentalism and all these other kind of problems. Following Jesus is full of grace.

The truth about me is I need grace not just when I first become a Christian. I need it every moment. I need it so badly because without it, things that are even in themselves good things, every time I resist temptation or I get a little bit generous with a little bit of my money or I do something right or I read the Bible some or I try to pray to God, the very next thing that can happen inside of me is, *Oh what a good*

*boy I am! Won't somebody do this (clap)? How come those other people out there can't be more like me? How come they can't be right? How come they can't speak the right words? How come they can't think the right thoughts? I'm more lost when I think I'm at home.*

Maybe you're sitting on this front step, and you kind of enjoy being judge and jury. Maybe gossip flows out of your mouth more often than you'd like to acknowledge. Maybe you don't even know it. You know, one of the hard things is the elder brother has no idea what spiritual condition he is in. Other people could have told him, but he wasn't asking, you know. The younger brother, the prodigal son, at least he knew when he was eating out of the trough...he *knows* he needs grace. The problem with the elder brother is not just that he is sinful. We're all sinful. The problem is he doesn't know it. He doesn't know he is the one who needs grace. So here is all this pride and all this joylessness.

Now the father comes out to his son and pleads. Again, in Jesus' day this is really striking, really surprising. You know, in our day we talk about co-dependency and all this kind of stuff. In that day, when there was a son who did what this older brother did, all of Jesus' listeners would expect... They would know the father is going to be furious. He is going to disown, disinherit, and disgrace this boy. This father goes out and pleads like a servant, like a beggar, like one without power. No father would do this. When his son rejects his pleadings, blows him off, insults him, refuses to address him as *father*, defies him further, he does not give up.

Verse 31. Again, this story is shocking to Jesus' listeners. This father says, "**My son.**" It's even more tender than that. The Greek word for *son* is *huios*. Jesus uses the word *teknon*. "My child. My little one." "You are always at home with me, and everything I have is yours." Remember the younger son took his share. Now everything that's left is the older boy's. Before the eyes of this village, the eyes of a watching world, there is a father who takes upon himself the pain, the shame, the humiliation of a defiant rebel. This is a little foreshadowing of the Cross of grace. He pays an enormous price to extend grace to his lost, blind, self-righteous, angry, selfish son.

"My son, do you not realize to live at home with me, to exchange love with me, to share all things with me, to walk together through life...these are the greatest gifts I have to give. What I have been offering you all these years is not the land, not the house, not the money, not the clothes, not the ring, not the calf. It's me. It's me. If living at home with me is not enough, then all the parties and all the property in the world will not satisfy you because every time your brother is in the limelight, every time somebody else gets celebrated, every time somebody else gets some stuff, it will stick in your craw."

This father is infinitely gracious and yet infinitely firm. He will not apologize. He will not stop the party. The elder son is not allowed that power. Not that one. He will plead. He will do anything. But not that. "This brother of yours was lost and is found. This brother of yours." Not "this son of mine." "This brother of yours. You're still family. It's not too late. You can still live as my beloved son. You can still come to the party as his rejoicing brother. For a long time I lived in sorrow over a lost son. Now that I have him back, must I lose another?" Then there is silence. The father looks into the eyes of this older brother. What does he see? Anger or confusion or sorrow?

Now back to the audience. We don't know. All Jesus' listeners stand in rapt silence of this extraordinary story of one son who was lost and came home and another son who stayed home and was even more lost and this incredible confrontation with this unbelievably gracious and yet firm father. They're all waiting to see what will happen next. All the listeners are filled with something. Some of them are filled with joy. "Listen to Jesus! He has been criticized, and I thought maybe He would back away from me. But He is

telling them these stories, and He is standing up for me because I was that lost sheep. I was that lost coin. I was that lost boy, and I'm home, and Jesus loves me."

Then some of those listeners are so furious they're ready to kill Him. They're all waiting to see what happens next. What does the elder brother do? How does the story end? Then Jesus stops. The father says, ***"But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."*** Everybody is just dying. *What does that elder brother do?* Jesus walks away. In the next chapter, Luke 16, He is speaking to a different audience, just the disciples. He never finishes the story.

Why didn't He finish the story? Well, it's not because Jesus couldn't think up a good ending, okay? It's because the ending would have to be written by somebody else. Okay, it's everybody listening to Jesus would have to decide how it ends because it's not really about Him. It's really about me. Really about you.

It will end in one of two ways. Either the elder brother turns away from his father, returns to the field, works in coldness and bitterness of heart, and never goes into the house again. Does his work, follows the rules, tows the line, but never goes into the house and grows to hate his brother. That spirit of pride and superiority and anger and complaint gets a little stronger and a little darker in him every year. Grows to hate his brother and secretly grows to hate his father. When he dies, he dies all alone.

Or maybe it ends like this. Then the elder brother fell to his knees. His hard heart was broken, and he began to weep before his father. He begged his dad to forgive him, take him back again. Then he went into the house, and he saw there the skinny, wasted figure of his brother. He remembered how they grew up together and played and fought and worked and loved each other and how he thought his brother had been forever lost to him. But now they would never again be apart.

His heart exploded with love, and he was so glad to think that some of the resources he had could be part of what would be given to his brother that he threw his arms around his brother, and he would not let go. He joined in the celebration, and he laughed louder, and he sang longer, and he danced faster, and he cried harder than anybody else. The celebration goes on to this day.

How does the story end?

Heavenly Father, You know about our hearts. You know what a subtle force sin is, lostness is, blindness is. God, would You help us? Whoever You're calling to repent today, whatever it is in our hearts that needs to get cleaned up, would You forgive us? Would You help all of us elder brothers to come home to You too? Would You allow grace to triumph just day by day by day by day? We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.