



**Grace Under Pressure: The Prodigal God and Two Lost Sons  
A Heart Wide Open  
The Sermon Study Guide  
Mark 4:33-34 and Luke 15:11-32  
2 Corinthians 6:3-13  
October 18, 2009**

**Opening Prayer**

We thank God for his word: *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* 2 Timothy 3:16

**Leader The Lord be with you.**

**People *And also with you.***

**Leader Let us pray.....**

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**Remembering the Message (Read Mark 4:34-35)**

**Introduction:** The Gospel presentation from Luke was introduced by this reading from Mark on Jesus' use of parables. Fr. David spoke of parables as "direct from the infinite heart of the Father....coming down and touching us deeply at some point in our lives." Parables are memorable stories with a message. Jesus conveyed truth through the use of the metaphorical story or parable.

**Going Deeper:**

Read Luke 18:1, 18:9, 19:11

- 1) What were some of the things Jesus was responding to when he told parables?
- 2) How can hearing the truth told through a parable help us receive that truth? Are there parables which you have found difficult to understand? If so, which one and what made/makes it difficult to understand?
- 3) Look back on the parables recorded in Luke. When has God used one of the parables of Jesus to reveal his infinite heart of love for you and to touch you deeply? What was your response?

**The Lost Son: Read Luke 15:11-24** Carol Anderson began with a dramatic telling of the story of a mom and dad with 7 children. One child was lost and the mom searched and searched for her son, Danny. Listening with every part of her being she heard an intake of breath and then quiet sobs from the closet under the stairs. She opened the door, found her son and cried out, “I love you! Why did you hide? We were so worried about you!” Danny asked for forgiveness for breaking something of great value to their family but she replied, “I’m not angry – it’s you I care about.” Mom and Dad, brothers and sisters, as well as friends and neighbors who knew that Danny had been lost were invited to a party where they celebrated the son who was lost but was now found.

### **Going Deeper:**

- 1) The word, “prodigal”, means recklessly extravagant or having spent everything. How is that a description of the younger son? Of the father?
- 2) When have you lost something valuable? When did you find something that was important to you? What was your response in each instance?
- 3) Have you ever wandered away from God? Was it intentional or did it seem to “just happen”? How did God rescue you?
- 4) Was there a time when you went to the “distant country”? How can you relate to the experiences of the younger son?

**The Elder Brother: Read Luke 15:25-32** Jim Shores and Carol Anderson-Shores then acted out a version of the response of the elder son to his younger brother’s return and the father’s response to the elder son. The elder ‘sister’ in their story is angry with her younger brother and even with the father. For one who is obedient to the father, who has been focused on doing everything right, it just doesn’t seem right or fair for the father to love the younger son as much as he loves the obedient child. It can be all too easy to become the elder brother. One of the signs that our heart attitude is that of the elder brother is when our prayer life becomes heavy on petition and light on gratitude. When we are the elder brother our actions are focused on duty and “supposed-to’s” rather than being about relationship with God, walking with him, and desiring to live a life of grateful response to his love.

### **Going Deeper:**

- 1) Read Luke 15:1-2. Who is Jesus’ audience when he tells this parable? What do you think prompted Jesus to tell this series of 3 parables?
- 2) What does “running around with the wrong crowd” look like in our society? Who do we tend to see as the “right” people to hang out with? The “wrong” people?
- 3) Tim Keller, in his book “The Prodigal God”, states that Jesus uses the younger and elder brothers to portray the two basic ways that people try to find happiness and fulfillment: the way of moral conformity and the way of self-discovery. How is the younger son lost? What is the barrier between the father and the younger son? How is the elder son lost? What is the barrier between the father and the elder son?
- 4) Why is the elder brother so angry with the younger brother? With his father?
- 5) Of the two brothers, which reminds you the most of your own story in the life of your family? In your relationship with God?
- 6) When a newspaper posed the question, “What’s Wrong With the World?” the Catholic thinker G. K. Chesterton reputedly wrote a brief letter in response: “Dear

Sirs: I am. Sincerely Yours, G. K. Chesterton.” As you reflect on his response and Jesus’ words in Luke 18:14, what would you say is the prerequisite for receiving the grace of God?

- 7) What are the qualities of the Father that you most need to respond to the lost? How will you join in the celebration for the lost who have been found?
- 8) What is the lesson in this parable for you today?

### **Staying the Course in 2 Corinthians:**

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 6:3-13.**

- 1) How does Paul defend his ministry to the Corinthians? How is our ministry commended to others?
- 2) What is Paul asking the Corinthians to do in verses 11-13? What are ways in which we can respond “with hearts wide open”?
- 3) How do you measure “success” in ministry? How do your guidelines align with Paul’s list? When has God used someone’s response of “grace under pressure” to reach you? When has God used your response to reach someone else?

### **Connect the Dots!**

- 1) In one or two sentences how would you “connect the dots” between Luke 15:11-32 and 2 Corinthians 6:3-13?

### **Closing Prayer**

Thank you, Father, for loving us freely and unconditionally, despite our flaws and failures. Thank you for seeking us in those times and places in our lives when we are the younger brother – lost because we want to go our own way, to be independent, when we go to distant lands of self-indulgence and try to gratify our wants and desires with earthly things. Thank you for seeking us out when we are the elder brother - self-righteous and proud, angry, resentful, bitter, and looking down on others. Forgive us, Father. Let the scales fall away from our eyes and help us to see clearly the depth of our need for you and the depth of your love for us. Help us to receive your love, to rest and rejoice in your presence so that our hearts would be full of love and thanksgiving for you. And then, Father, may we reach out to those who are lost and in need of your grace and forgiveness. All this we pray in the name of Jesus - our Shepherd, our Savior, and our Lord. *Amen.*