

THE **crossing** **small groups**

Jesus is More Than Religion | Luke 15:11-32 | Patrick Miller Sermon Discussion Participant Guide

Purpose of Discussion: To recognize our “older brother” tendencies, uncover the person we’re trying to be, and experience the Father’s love for who we truly are.

Sermon Refresher: Jesus tells the story of two lost sons: the younger who is lost through rebellion, and the older, who is lost through self-righteousness and moral superiority. Jesus wants the Pharisees listening to see themselves in the story, having chosen to remain “outside the party” and distant from the father’s love. He wants them to be transformed by the love of the Father who pursues and welcomes older brothers, too.

Icebreaker: Describe some of the roles you and your siblings had in your family growing up. Was there an “older brother”—the responsible one, rule-follower, or golden child? Was there a “younger brother”—the rebel, risk-taker, or one who tended to get into trouble? How has your family role shaped who you are today?

Transition: For some of us, when we’ve heard the story of the Prodigal Son, the emphasis was solely on the younger brother—the wayward one—coming home. His rebellion is obvious, and his need for grace is easy to see. But Jesus doesn’t stop there; there’s another prodigal son—the older brother. And Jesus wants us to identify with his need for grace, too.

Discussion:

1. Why did Patrick suggest that if the devil “took over” our city tomorrow, it would be filled with morally upright, self-righteous people? What makes this idea so surprising—and unsettling?
2. **Read Luke 15:11-32.** Why do you think we would naturally choose the older brother to work with, live next door to, lead our Bible Study, or even assume is a true follower of Jesus? What does this reveal about the qualities we tend to value in ourselves and others?

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3. [Read Luke 15:29–30](#). What do you think the older brother wanted the most?
4. As we read the words of the older brother, we see that his religious system is transactional. In essence, he says, “I put all the right coins in the vending machine and you aren’t giving me what I deserve. I’ve given you everything; you’ve given me nothing.” Can you think of a time when you felt that God owed you something because of your faithfulness or obedience?
5. What do we learn about the father’s love in this passage? What do you notice about the way he pursues, responds to, and welcomes his sons? How is this different from—or similar to—the way you have thought about God as your Father?
6. Patrick contrasted our ideal selves with our real selves and said, “God doesn’t love the ideal you because that is a figment of your imagination; he loves you, the real you.” What needs to shift in your mind or heart in order to believe that he is pursuing and welcoming you, exactly as you are?
7. In his book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, Henri Nouwen said, “It is clear that the hardest conversion to go through is the conversion of the one who stayed home.” What makes it more difficult for the one who stayed home to see his need for grace? How have you seen this play out?

[Sharing and Prayer:](#)

Reflecting on your summer, ask God to reveal any “older brother” tendencies in you. Where have you found yourself comparing, keeping score, feeling entitled, striving to prove yourself, or struggling to simply receive God’s grace? Examples might include: workplace, church, family, friendships, marriage, parenting, social media, etc. Ask the Father to help you recognize your need for grace and receive his love for you as you actually are.

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