



#3 Mirror, Mirror on the Wall  
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Last week we looked at the story of the prodigal son (sometimes titled The Lost Son). We continue with Christ's story this week, looking at the prodigal son's older brother. To get you thinking: Is it possible for there to be a tension in a church between new believers and long time believers? Between those who have been on the Christian journey for years, and new comers who have just found faith or are at least exploring faith? Why do you think such a tension *could* exist?

1. READ: Luke 15:25-32

Briefly describe in your own words what is happening in this story.

Vs 27 What did the father do for his younger son?

VS 28 What is the Older sons reaction?

Why do you think he is reacting like this?

What did his father do in response to his son's refusal?

What does this tell you about his father?

VS 29 What is the attitude of this son towards his father?

What do you think is the significance of the word 'slaving', and 'orders' to this story?

What does this tell you about the son's attitude or heart about being in this family?

What do you think is so important to understanding this son's attitude when he uses the phrase "give me a goat so I can go and celebrate with my friends"?

VS 30 What attitude is displayed here? Can you label it?

VS 31-32 What is the father's attitude in these verses?

How would you state this in your own words?

Thinking back to the opening discussion on the potential conflict in a church between long time believers and very new believers, what do you think these verses are telling us?

2. Discuss this statement:

*This story is what Jesus says to those who have been going to church for decades and have grown hard and merciless and excessively separated and who feel disgust more often than they feel compassion.*

3. The older brother is expressing anger, resentment, jealousy, self-righteousness, a sense of entitlement and feeling victimised by his father's expression of mercy. How could this be true of some people in the church? Why?

4. Discuss this statement:

*If we are human, we tend to keep score. The older son is calling in his chips. He wants to be recognized for his contributions. He wants to be covered in glory*

This story is a picture of a son who lived his life in service to his father, not because of love, but because of duty. How could this be true of a person in a church?

5. Discuss this statement:

*Though the prodigal travelled far from the father's house, the older brother travelled far from the father's heart.*

How is it possible to serve the Lord but never become part of the family, the community of God?

6. The story does not give us an ending. What do you think happened? Did the older brother see himself for what he was, repent and go into the celebration or did he not, and why? Who do you think is the real 'prodigal' in this story?

7. STEP 4 in the AA program states:

*'Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves'*

We have interpreted that step in the following way:

*'The Holy Spirit helping me I will take a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself.'*

Why do you think taking an inventory of who you really are, as guided by the Holy Spirit and scripture is so important to maintaining a heart warm relationship to our Heavenly Father?

8. Read: Lamentations 3:40; Psalm 139:23-24

COMMENT: Moving into new church there will be lots of returning prodigal sons and daughters. They will upset the nice balance of the household. You can rejoice, or be angry that church is not all about you. Or you can join the party and be part of the family or sit on the front porch and sulk. You get to write your own ending.

**“The Unexamined life is not worth living”—Socrates**

FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION THIS WEEK  
(use more paper if needed and try doing 2 items per day)

1. *List examples of compassion and mercy in your life.* (Matthew 9:13, Luke 6:36)
2. List times that you lacked this trait when you should have exercised it.
3. *List examples of kindness in your life* (Galatians 5:22 Colossians 3:12)
4. List times that you lacked this trait when you should have exercised it.
5. *List examples of humility in your life.* (2 Chron. 7:14; Luke 14:11)
6. List times that you lacked this trait when you should have exercised it.
7. *List examples of patience in your life* (2 Cor. 6:6 James 1:2-4)
8. List times that you lacked this trait when you should have exercised it.
9. *List examples of self control in your life.* (Prov. 25:28; Titus 1:8)
10. List times that you lacked this trait when you should have exercised it.
11. *List examples of forgiveness in your life.* (Matt. 6:14-15; Eph. 4:32)
12. List times that you lacked this trait when you should have exercised it.

13. *List examples of faith in your life. (Heb. 11:1)*

14. List times that you lacked this trait when you should have exercised it

*Dear Lord, as I examine my life, may you examine my life. May you provide wisdom and guidance through your Holy Spirit that I may have a heart that is true and longs for a relationship with you, my heavenly Father.*