

THE PRODIGAL SON'S BROTHER

By Keith Greer

In the book of Luke we read the story of the prodigal son. This son wanted his "**inheritance**" now, so he could enjoy it. Yet, I believe another lesson is often overlooked in this story; that of the eldest brother. What can we learn from him?

"Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf. 'But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.' {Luke 15:25-28} What strikes you first about this eldest brother? Does he show any affection or love for his brother? After not seeing your brother for many years, would you not be anxious to see him?

Personally speaking, I have two brothers who live in Indiana. Since some distance separates us, I cherish the time we have together. Did this brother have a concern for his younger brother? From reading the story, I believe the eldest brother might not have cared if his younger brother ever came home! Certainly we can see, this is not the way the relationship between brothers should be. How sad to be that close, yet, so far away from one another!

When the son doesn't come in, the father goes out and pleads for him to come in. Look at what he says to his father; "So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. 'But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' {Luke 15:29,30} He was jealous! What does this attitude tell us about this brother? He cared about self, more than he cared about anyone else!

Did you notice he did not refer to him as "his brother", but "your son." This man is full of envy and jealousy! This eldest son does not have a forgiving heart! "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." {Matthew 6:14,15}

"It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." {Luke 16:32} The eldest son was "dead" and he was right there with his father! The heart was cold and hardened. What a sad state to find ourselves in. The father had the right attitude and love towards both of his sons!

Sadly, I've seen this same attitude in the Lord's church when it comes to receiving one back after they have been away for some period of time. What about when one is struggling with a serious addiction problem? Will they get better overnight? Will they defeat it the first time they try? What about the person who has personally and directly hurt me in some manner – do I have the right heart of forgiveness toward that brother or sister? What about the wayward that went off and prospered greatly while we have remained true to God and suffered – do we allow jealousy to swell up in our hearts and fail to do the proper thing and receive and accept them back? Look very closely at this story – there is not

just one person lost – but two. Even though the older son was true to his father, he had a greater problem being fond of self!

Let us learn better. Jealousy has no place in our heart. If we are seeking to go to heaven and please our Heavenly Father – then we too must always have a forgiving spirit. By the way, how many times has God forgiven us when we make the same mistakes in our own lives? ***