



[Luke 15:29-32](#)

(29) 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. (30) But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' (31) " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. (32) 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.' "

New International Version

What can we learn from the father in this story? After all, if anyone was wronged in this parable, it was the two young men's loving father. Instead of reacting with the bitter hatred, envy, and self-centeredness of his elder son, he handled the situation with love, [longsuffering](#), [kindness](#), [goodness](#), faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. His wise words to his elder son in verses 31-32 help to put everything in its proper perspective.

In essence, the father tells his offended son, “Don't be so short-sighted, lest you become as greedy and foolish as your little brother. All that we have here is yours, so keep your eyes on the bigger picture and the greater reward.”

We all long to feel appreciated—to receive our “fattened calf”—particularly if we strive to sacrifice and work hard in service to others. But we should never lose sight of the fact that the purpose of our faithful service is *not* for a pat on the back or the approval of others. Otherwise, we are no different from the Pharisees who did their works before men and thus, as Christ declared, “Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward” ([Matthew 6:2](#)).

In summation, the Parable of the Prodigal Son contains two important stories and a handful of invaluable lessons for practicing Christians:

- » [God](#) is our only Judge, and He looks on the heart.
- » Our sins have consequences.
- » We should always be ready and willing to forgive any grievance as God does—unconditionally—and to seek reconciliation.
- » Our walk should be defined by the spirit, not just the letter, of the law.

While both sons' sinful attitudes and actions brought dishonor upon the father, his willingness to forgive them both provided [hope](#) for all, just as our [merciful](#) Father in heaven provides for each of us. While the narrative ends without revealing what happened to the two brothers, it is worthwhile to imagine that they reconciled—that they healed their relationship and restored honor to the family name.

Because there is hope for reconciliation, we should pray for it—even expect it! Never give up on God. Those who are loyal and faithful and endure to the end will, one day, receive the greatest thanks and exaltation that measure far beyond our ability to envision. For [Jesus Christ](#) Himself will welcome those into His Kingdom with a resounding, “Well done, good and faithful servant . . . Enter into the [joy](#) of your lord” ([Matthew 25:21](#)).

— Ted E. Bowling

To learn more, see:
[The Elder Brother](#)

Related Topics:
[Bitter Envy](#)

[Bitterness](#)

[Consequences](#)

[Dishonoring Parents](#)

[Faithfulness](#)

[Forgiveness](#)

[Fruits of God's Holy Spirit](#)

[Longsuffering](#)

[Older Brother of the Prodigal Son](#)

[Parable of Prodigal Son](#)

[Parable of the Prodigal Son](#)

[Reconciliation](#)

[Self-Centeredness](#)

[Spirit of the Law](#)