

The Lost Son: Who am I in the presence of God

A session with Sahaya G. Selvam, sdb – Part 1

Step 1: Read the following story

Luke 15:1 The tax collectors and sinners, however, were all crowding round to listen to him, 2 and the Pharisees and scribes complained saying, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.' 3 So he told them this parable:

4 'Which one of you with a hundred sheep, if he lost one....

8 'Or again, what woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one....

11 Then he said, 'There was a man who had two sons.

12 The younger one said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me." So the father divided the property between them. 13 A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery. 14 'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch; 15 so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. 16 And he would willingly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating but no one would let him have them. 17 Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger! 18 I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; 19 I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men." 20 So he left the place and went back to his father. 'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. 21 Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." 22 But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, 24 because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.

25 'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. 26 Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. 27 The servant told him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got him back safe and sound." 28 He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; 29 but he retorted to his father, "All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. 30 But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property -- he and his loose women -- you kill the calf we had been fattening." 31 'The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. 32 But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found." '

THE PRODIGAL SON
Luke 15



"A man had two sons. The youngest said, 'Give me my part of your riches.' The son left, and spent all of his money foolishly."

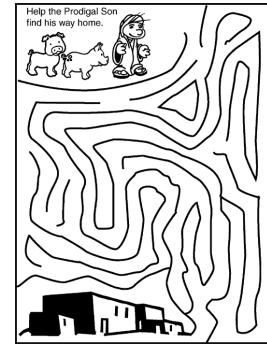
Step 2: Have you read the text?

After reading the passage above (Lk 15:1-3;11-32) go through the following statements and tick a box on the right expressing your opinion if you agree or disagree with each of the statements.

	Agree	Disagree
1. Requesting his share of property before the death of the father could imply that the younger son desired the death of his father.		
2. It was a premature decision on the part of the father to give the younger son his share of property (v.12).		
3. The younger son squandered his money with prostitutes.		
4. The younger son came to his senses just because of his hunger (v.17).		
5. Had the father known where his son was he would have gone in search of him!		
6. On his return home, the son said to the father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men."		
7. Slaughtering a calf to welcome his wayward son was not called for.		
8. The elder son was angry with his father because the father had ordered a feast without his permission.		
9. Between the two sons, the younger son loved the father more.		
10. The father loved his younger son more than the elder son.		
11. The younger son should have apologised and thus be reconciled also with his brother.		
12. The hero of the story is the younger son.		
13. From verses 1-3, we could compare the scribes to the elder son.		
14. The elder son is the real lost son.		
15. Jesus invites his listeners to imitate the father.		

Step 3: Focus on the younger son

- a. You might want to read the passage once again paying attention to the younger son in the story (Lk 15:12-24). And answer the following question: in what aspects do you resemble the younger son – in your attitude towards yourself, others and God?



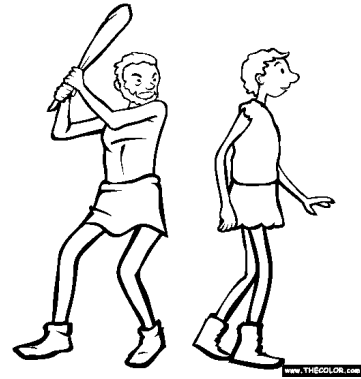
Feel free to use the following hints:

1. Wishing the father's death: In what areas do I still exhibit an adolescent rebellion – in my attitude towards the society, church, religious community, and my own personal discipline?
2. "Let me have my share": Do I have the right sense of balance between the exercise of my own freedom and the respect for authority and the place of others in the communities I belong to?
3. "The far-off place": What are the far-off places that I run to when I want to try my false sense of freedom: pub, cinema, bed, internet, phone?
4. "Squandering my gifts": Are there tendencies in me to squander my own time, talents and skills – in just seeking popularity and pleasure?
5. "Feeding the pigs": Are there areas in my life in which – may be sometimes - I deprive myself of my own dignity as a person?
6. "Coming to my true self": Do I know myself? Do I have a mature sense of the self?
7. "How many servants in my father's house...": Do I behave well (and even be a good Christian or religious) for the wrong motivation?
8. "He kissed him": Have you ever felt embraced by the Father-God?

Would you like to write something in answer to the above questions? In what aspects do you resemble the younger son:

Step 4: Focus on the elder son

- a. You might want to reread the passage, this time paying special attention to the elder son in the story (Lk 15:25-32). And answer the following question: in what aspects do you resemble the elder son – in your attitude towards yourself, others and God.



Feel free to use the following hints:

1. “Out in the fields”: Does my work sometimes become an escapism – from myself; from opportunities to engage with others, from union with God?
2. Work without love: Why do I do all that I do? What is the underlying motivation for my hard-work?
3. “Asking the servant”: Am I always relying on the experience and opinion of others even in my perception of God?
4. “Refused to go-in”: Am I afraid to be an affectionate child of the universe? Is it easy for me to believe: I have the right to be here? Am I shy of my own freedom? Am I refusing to enjoy life – to be happy?
5. “The father came-out”: Am I caught up in blind legalism unable to see the face of the father, unable to hear his call to the celebration of life?
6. “I have slogged for you”: Are you slogging for God? Should you? What excuses do you use to hide your fear of enjoying life; for not taking time to celebrate?
7. “This son of yours...”: Am I too judgmental and even hateful of others to the point of seeing others as outsiders? Am I in constant competition with others for resources, popularity and love? Do I think life (and love of God) is a zero-sum game?
8. “It is only right that we celebrate”: How do I judge the right? And the good?

Would you like to write something in answer to the above questions? In what aspects do you resemble the elder son: