

# Parable of the Prodigal Son

*Two lost sons, two ways to be far from God, and the costly grace that brings us home*

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| SPEAKER  | Frank Costenbader                |
| DATE     | Sunday, June 21, 2026            |
| PASSAGES | Luke 15                          |
| MESSAGE  | Begins at 1:00:23 in the service |

## THE BIG IDEA

The parable of the prodigal son is not just about one way of being lost, but two. Jesus shows that both the rebellious younger son and the rule-keeping older son are alienated from the father—one through self-indulgence and the other through self-righteousness. What brings us home is not our performance but the costly and initiating love of God, fulfilled in Christ, our true older brother.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ The parable of the prodigal son in [Luke 15:11–32](#) is about two sons—both are lost in different ways.
- ◆ The younger son's rebellion is obvious, but the older son's distance comes through his self-righteousness and resentment.
- ◆ Both sons want the father's things, not the father himself; both try to control God—one by breaking the rules, the other by keeping them.
- ◆ The father's response is radical grace—he divides his life and status, absorbs the cost, and runs to meet both sons where they are.
- ◆ Jesus ends the parable unresolved, confronting the listeners (and us) with the question: Will you come in to the feast?

- ◆ True repentance is not just turning from sin, but also from self-righteousness—the attempt to earn God’s favor.
- ◆ Jesus is the true older brother who pays the cost to bring us home, not just with words but with his own life.

► 1:00:23

Frank opened by recalling his long friendship with Tim, and then set the scene in [Luke 15](#), where Jesus responds to the criticism that he welcomes “tax collectors and sinners.” Frank noted that while the story is usually called the parable of the prodigal son, it is actually about two sons, and we are meant to compare them. The story upends common assumptions about how to relate to God.

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## Setting the context: Two audiences, three parables

► 1:01:25

Jesus speaks to a divided crowd: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’” ([Luke 15:1–2](#)). In response, Jesus tells three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. Each story escalates the stakes, and each time someone goes out to seek what is lost.

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## Act 1: The younger son and the cost of rebellion

► 1:02:25

The younger son’s request—“Father, give me my share of the estate”—was shocking to Jesus’ original audience. It was equivalent to wishing the father dead, asking for the inheritance now. Frank explained that the father’s wealth was tied up in his land; dividing it meant selling part of his identity and status in the community. “What the younger son was asking the father to do is this: He’s asking him to tear his life apart.” The father does it, at great personal cost.

“And he divided his property between them... Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.”

LUKE 15:12–13 ↗

The son wastes everything and ends up feeding pigs, far from home and desperate. Frank connected this to the men he serves in addiction recovery, who resonate with hitting bottom and longing for restoration.

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## Coming home: Confession, repentance, and the father's embrace

► 1:04:01

The younger son's plan is to return home, confess, and ask to work off his debt as a hired servant. Frank explained, "He knew that to waltz back into his father's life with just an apology—he couldn't do that. He had to make restitution." But as the son approaches, the father sees him "while he was still a long way off," is filled with compassion, and runs to meet him. This was undignified for a patriarch in that culture, yet the father is "completely emotionally abandoned." He embraces and kisses his son, cutting off his speech and restoring him fully.

"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.'"

LUKE 15:22-24 ↗

Frank emphasized that the father confers sonship on the younger son by sheer grace, not by merit or repayment. "He gives us the full rights as sons. He confers sonship on us through Jesus. It's a standing. It's a status. It's secure."

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## Act 2: The older brother—resentment and self-righteousness

► 1:05:50

The story then shifts. The older son returns from the field and learns of the celebration. He is furious and refuses to join. Publicly, he humiliates his father by staying outside and by refusing to acknowledge his brother. Frank noted, "He was so mad that he refused to go in and join the feast. It was his turn now to assault the integrity of the family. He was saying by not going in, 'I'm not part of this. I will not be in the same family with him in it.'"

“But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’”

LUKE 15:28-30 ↗

Frank pointed out that, just like the younger son, the older brother cares more for the estate than for the father himself. “Both sons want the father’s things, not the father. One tries to get control by breaking the rules; the other by keeping them. Jesus is showing us that they’re both lost.”

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## Two ways to be lost—two ways to avoid God

► 1:08:10

Frank pressed the point: “Most of us think that God wants good people. But Jesus shows us that God wants new people. We like to think that the good are saved and the bad are lost. But Jesus shows us that they’re both lost. They may look different on the surface, but underneath they’re exactly the same.” He emphasized, “You may have to repent for the very reason you behaved yourself.”

He recapped the two audiences: “There are two groups of people around Jesus when he began to tell the story. Tax collectors and sinners are like the younger brothers. The Pharisees and the religious leaders are like the older brother. And these two sons then represent these two groups of people in the parable.”

Frank described the two basic strategies: “One way is self-discovery—‘I’m going to live the way I see fit. I’m going to determine what’s right and wrong for me.’ The other group says, ‘I’m going to be good. I’m going to comply with the rules, do what I’m supposed to do.’ Both ways say, ‘This is what will make me happy.’ But Jesus said, ‘You’re both wrong. You’re both lost. Both far from home.’”

“There are two ways for us to try to get control of God and the people around us. One is to live the way we want. The other is by trying to be very rule-based and moral. Both alienate us from the Father.” Frank reminded, “The gospel of Jesus isn’t morality or immorality, it’s not religion or irreligion, it’s not even halfway in between—it’s something else completely different.”

“So, whether you’re a younger brother or an older brother, you need to come home. Jesus ends the story without resolution.”

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## How do we come home? Initiating grace, repentance, and costly love

► 1:11:08

Frank laid out three steps Jesus gives for coming home. First, “we need the initiating love of God. Jesus said, ‘No one can come to me unless the Father draws him.’ The Father goes out to both sons in order to bring them into the feast. He goes out to the first son and kisses him to bring him in. He goes out to the second one and pleads with him to bring him in. But, he goes out to both. You will never seek God unless he first seeks you.”

Second, “we need to learn to repent for something besides just our sins. The younger brother comes home and he's got very clear sins to repent of... But, remember the older brother. He never disobeyed, and yet he was lost. So, the point's this: Christians not only repent of their sins, but also repent of trying to make God owe us by being good. You need to learn not only to repent of your sins, but also your self-righteousness. God loves righteousness. He just doesn't like self-righteousness.”

Third, “we need to be melted and moved by what it cost to bring us home.” Frank underlined: “Only when you learn that you've transferred your trust from yourself to Jesus do you walk into that salvation that he's offering.”

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## Jesus, the true older brother (and the cost of coming home)

► 1:14:35

Frank highlighted that, in the parable, the older brother refuses to pay the price to bring the younger home. “Jesus is doing it deliberately to ask the question: Who should have gone after the brother?” In the culture, “it was the older brother's job to make the family a family.” A good elder brother would have said, “Father, my younger brother has run off and his life is now in ruins, but I'll search for him. I'll find him. I'll bring him home. Even at the cost to myself.” But the older brother in the story is unwilling. “For the younger brother, the restoration seemed free. It was all grace. But for the older brother, it was immensely expensive. Cost him dearly.”

“We need a true older brother. God cannot just bring us back into the family, adopt us, accept us, except at the expense of a true older brother. The younger brother in the story, unfortunately, gets a Pharisee for an older brother. But we don't. There is a true older brother. There's one who loved and obeyed the Father completely. One who came to earth and loved God with all his heart and soul and strength and mind, as neighbor like himself. One who earned everything. He earned the robe, the ring, everything. But at the end, what do we see? He doesn't get a royal robe. He gets stripped. He doesn't get the fatted calf. He gets vinegar. He doesn't get a ring of honor. He gets a crown of thorns.”

“And this older brother looks and says, ‘I did it for you. You couldn’t be clothed unless I was stripped. You couldn’t get the robe and the ring unless I lost them. I earned them. They’re mine. But I freely give them to you. Don’t you see? Salvation is absolutely free for us. It’s unbelievably costly for him.’”

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

ROMANS 5:8 ↗

Frank shared a vivid illustration: “I love in The Passion of the Christ when Mel Gibson insisted that he be the hand that’s holding the hammer that drove the nail into Jesus. Because he said, ‘My sins put him there.’ On the cross, he died for our wrongdoings and our self-righteousness so we could be brought home. He brought us home at infinite expense to himself.”

“That’s designed to melt us because it is in the melting that we come. God doesn’t want our performance. He wants our heart.”

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## Invitation and prayer: A new heart

► 1:15:42

Frank concluded with a heartfelt invitation: “When we come, we know the state of our heart. He says, ‘I will transform your heart. You come to me. You don’t have to stand judged and ashamed of your bad heart. We all have one. He will take that heart of stone and transform it into a heart of flesh. He will make us willing to follow after him. And he will be our God, and we will be his people.’”

He prayed, “Lord, I’m so grateful that we don’t need to be good people. We need to be yours, and you make us into good people. And Lord, yes, we do want to obey you, but only because you changed our hearts to make it that way. Pour out your grace on us. Give us the grace to, whether we’re an older brother or a younger brother, come home, come into your presence. We desire to be part of your family. We pray that in your name, Jesus. Amen.”

Frank invited anyone present—whether they saw themselves as a younger or older brother—to come home, trust Christ, and receive the grace that brings us into the family of God. He also welcomed anyone needing prayer to come forward: “If you’ve never made that response, if you’ve never come, I say God is willing to go to great lengths to restore us into his family. We’d love to pray with you.”

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**FOR FURTHER STUDY****SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- [Luke 15:1–2](#)
- [Luke 15:11–32](#)
- [Luke 15:12–13](#)
- [Luke 15:22–24](#)
- [Luke 15:28–30](#)
- [Luke 15:32](#)
- [Romans 5:8](#)

**FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP**

1. Which son do you identify with more—the younger or the older? What does that reveal about your approach to God?
2. Frank said both sons wanted the father's things, not the father. Where do you see this dynamic in your own life?
3. How does the father's costly love challenge your ideas about grace, repentance, and belonging?
4. What would it look like to repent of self-righteousness, not just obvious sins? How can a community help with that?
5. What step can you take this week to “come home”—to move toward God himself, not just his gifts?

**ABOUT THE SPEAKER**

Frank Costenbader serves at Hope Chapel and works with men in drug and alcohol rehabilitation. He was invited to speak on the parable of the prodigal son from [Luke 15](#), drawing on his experience and relationships to illuminate the story's relevance for people who feel far from God—whether through open rebellion or through self-righteousness.

**Watch the full message:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6iTtw34Op68&t=3623s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.