

The parable we study is named after the younger son. This prodigal acted shamefully before his father and disowned his family. The story shows us the downward spiral of self-centered living.

1. Beware of the Big "I"

The younger boy in the story thought, "life is about me." He saw himself as the hero of all his dreams. He felt his father stood between him and success. If only his father would give him his inheritance, he could make something of himself. The young man said, *Father, give me my share of the estate.* (v. 12) What is the shameful young man really saying? "Dad, I want you dead...so I can have your stuff." *Deuteronomy 21:17* allowed him to have one-third of his father's property. He might own it before his father died but he should not dispose of it until after his father's death. Yet the boy did not care who was hurt as long as he got what he wanted.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all that he had... (v. 13) The wealth of this family was not in stocks or banks but in land, a home and animals. Suddenly losing one-third was a disaster. Yet the boy liquidated generations of accumulation so he could leave the village with a bag of gold. He did not care about the family expectations or his father's name.

One custom of his day seemed to be forgotten. The *Kezazah* occurred when a boy left home and lost the family's wealth among the Gentiles. When he tried to return, the village broke a large pot in front of him and cut him off from his people.

Have you built your life based on what you have wanted?

2. Bear Your Consequences

The younger boy thought, "I can acquire happiness." His story did not take long to pick up the theme of loss. The boy *squandered his wealth in wild living.* (v.13) All that he had was soon scattered in a wasteland of broken dreams. Extravagance marked his lifestyle. Soon he found himself in a *distant country* (13) cut off from those who gave him life, with no home, no family and no God. When loss settled in on him, he had no one to blame but himself.

He went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country... (v. 15) or shall we say, he pestered a *citizen* until the man offered him a job—a job that even he did not think the Jewish boy would take—working with pigs. The boy was so hungry he *longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating* (v. 16) The high cost of low living brought him *to his senses.* (v. 17) His emptiness did not expel his selfishness. His loss of money still did not make him sensitive to his father's broken heart. He did not recognize all the trouble he had caused, but he knew he could not keep heading in the direction he was going. He knew he had made a mess of his life.

Have pride and selfishness led you to shame?

3. Break Out of Your Mess

The prodigal decided to return to his father and seek a position as a hired man. He spoke words of apology. *Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.* (v. 18) How do we interpret his desire to be a hired servant (who receives pay) rather than a slave (who is unpaid)? Did he want reconciliation? Or did he want to eat and make enough money to do his thing again? Regardless of our assumption, his father interrupted the prodigal's rehearsed words with overwhelming love. Shame suddenly found a home in the prodigal's heart. He determined to change his ways as he forgot about regaining control. He settled into the amazement of "being found." The only way the prodigal was restored was through the self-emptying love of the father.

Many of us have heard the lure of the siren's songs in the vulnerable regions of our hearts. We have forgotten the Father's love that reaches out to us as his beloved on whom his favor rests. We have searched for love and meaning where it cannot be found.

Do we dare respond to Jesus' story by turning away from our impulsive forays, our obsessions and our compulsions? Do we dare allow the Father to embrace us and welcome us home to his family with his unconditional love?

What needs to happen for God to get your attention?

