

As we walked along with the Teacher from town to town, we experienced many of his parables and lessons over and over. Sometimes the different proximity of stories gave us a little something more to think about. This was the case after hearing the story of the Prodigal Son¹ and the one about the removal of an evil spirit². The latter situation was likened to a house swept clean only to have the spirit re-enter with seven others. I wondered how the story would go if the Prodigal “returned to his house” with seven of his gold-digging friends, and they tried to set up so that they could stay there. What would the father and older brother have thought and done?

Think of this merging of the two tales:

“There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. He had many friends who helped him use up his inheritance.

After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

His fair-weather friends had deserted him, and to get them back he came up with a plan, thinking that his father would be glad to have him return home. He gathered seven of these acquaintances, and they went home with him to his father.

While they were still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. But his father asked, “Who are these who accompany you?”

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I am ready to come back home and be called your son. I know that you will be glad to have me back and will be hospitable to these my friends.’”

The son and his friends then began to celebrate, of course, presuming on the father’s love for his son to finance the feast. They grabbed the best clothes and took the fatted calf and killed it.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and he and his friends have killed the fattened calf. Your father is overwhelmed and does not know what to do.’

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and discussed the situation with him.

“He told his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Now this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, and he is taking away what is left!’”

“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But this brother of yours was dead to us and has returned; he is alive again, but he is still lost! We are worse off than we were before!’”

I realized that there was no real resolution in either of the stories that the Teacher told. We were not told what older brother or the man with the seven spirits would ultimately do about their problem. Sometimes in our lives we are only shown the problem, and have to work out our

own solution using the principles of Good that God offers us. As with the man with the evil spirit, God can drive such out, but we must choose what to be refilled with. We always have the opportunity to be filled with God, and there are serious consequences if we do not.

1. Luke 15:11-32
2. Matthew 12:43-45, Luke 11:24-26

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