

FORGIVENESS

Deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay

The Father and Older Brother

Luke 15:21-32

MEMORY VERSE | Colossians 3:13

When Jesus was on earth, He lived like one of us. He slept and ate and worked and made friends and traveled. But His main purpose was to show us what God is like in everything He said and did—and in the stories that He told.

Jesus spent His entire life on earth showing people who God is. On one occasion, He likened God to a wealthy farmer with two sons we'll call Peyton and Eli. The older son always did just as his father asked. But the younger son, Eli, was a different story. He demanded his share of his father's property and money and took off for a foreign country. There he wasted all the money on parties and wild living.

Soon, though, food ran low and Eli ran out of money. He found himself working the worst of jobs: feeding pigs. And even the pigs ate better than he did!

So Eli finally went home, planning to ask his father if he could work as a servant. But instead, his father raced out to meet him with a big hug, and then threw a huge party to celebrate Eli's return! It was a day of joy and laughter for everyone—except Eli's older brother, Peyton.

If Jesus continued the story today, it might sound something like this:

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PEYTON STRAIGHTENED HIS BACK and surveyed the field. The barley harvest wasn't quite finished, but he wasn't giving up.

"We'll finish before dark!" he announced to the hired workers.

They exchanged glances. "It's already nearly dark," pointed out one man.

"Nearly is not completely!" barked Peyton. "Get back to it."

"But there's something going on at the house," the worker noted.

Peyton glanced toward the family's large, rambling home and was surprised to discover every window blazed with lamplight.

"It's preposterous!" he exclaimed. "No one told me anything."

Frowning, Peyton stalked toward the house. As the door opened and a servant came out, Peyton could hear music and laughter and the stomping feet of dancers. He called to the servant, who was carrying kitchen scraps to the garbage heap.

***"What?"
Peyton shouted.
"No! I'm not going in."***

"You! Tell me what's going on."

The young servant couldn't keep himself from dancing to the bursts of music. "You haven't heard?" the servant asked. "It's your brother! Your father killed the fattest calf 'cause your brother's home safe and sound."

Peyton stared in disbelief. "Hold on a sec. My father is throwing a party for the kid who took his money and broke his heart?!"

The servant shrugged. "Your dad seems pretty happy right now. You want to come tell your dad you're done for the day?"

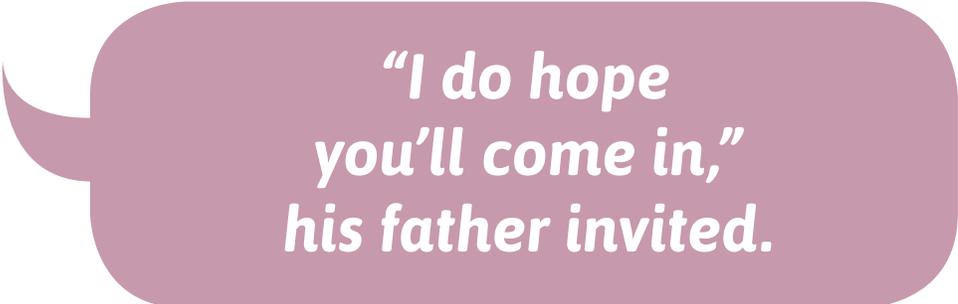
"What?" Peyton shouted. "No! I'm not going in."

The servant returned to the house. Peyton plopped down on a tree stump and glared at the brightly-lit windows. “No fair!” he grumbled to himself.

After a few moments, he hopped back up and began to pace, fuming. “I should just run away, too. Then maybe Dad would notice that I’m the one making everything happen around here!”

Peyton was so consumed with anger, he didn’t even notice his father approaching. “Peyton, please. Come in,” his father encouraged.

Peyton whipped around, practically shooting flames from his eyes. “Are you kidding me?” he growled. *“All these years I’ve worked like a slave for you! I’ve always done what you asked me to do. And you never even let me roast a young goat to have a party with my friends.”*



***“I do hope
you’ll come in,”
his father invited.***

“Is that what you wanted?” his father asked.

“Like you care!” Peyton spat. “Just look at Eli. He insults you and wastes your money—and then just shows up again. And you kill the fattest calf for the biggest party ever!”

Peyton’s father watched him with sad eyes. *“My son . . . you are always with me. Everything that I have is yours. But we [have] to celebrate and be glad. This brother of yours was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.”*

Peyton crossed his arms. He couldn’t find anything to say.

“I do hope you’ll come in,” his father invited.

Peyton allowed himself one last glance at the lights and dancing through the windows of the house. Then, determined, he turned his gaze back to the dark fields.

"I like it out here," he mumbled.

At last, Peyton's father returned to the house. Peyton remained outside, torn between clutching his anger—or letting it go and joining in the party.



Let's Talk!

Think about the last time you were really mad at someone. Share how that anger made you feel. Did you hold onto that anger for a long time? Or did you choose to let it go?

Sometimes it actually feels good to stay angry—like by staying mad, you're punishing the person who hurt you. But the truth is, the person you're really hurting by staying angry is you. Holding on to your anger may feel good for a little while. But it starts to take over. It can control what you think and say and do. You stop enjoying life. Jesus doesn't tell us what the older brother chooses, but it sounds like he's about to miss out on an awesome party and on a great friendship with his brother and father . . . all because he's too busy staying mad.

When you're caught in the anger trap, there's only one way out: forgiveness. Choosing not to make the other person pay. Is there anyone that you've stayed mad at for a long time—or maybe that you're still mad at right now? Pray together and ask God to help you let it go and trust that He will make things right.

(Parents, make sure your child understands that forgiving someone does not mean they are required to automatically be friends again with someone who has hurt them deeply—or that they need to put themselves back into an unsafe situation.)