

## **East Hill Church Sermon Discussion Guide: The Heart of the Father, Part 2: The Older Brother**

*Guest Speaker: Pastor Keith Jenkins*

*Date: March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024*

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### **Introduction:**

In the second part of his mini-series "The Father's Heart," Pastor Keith Jenkins shifted focus to the often-overlooked older brother in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15). He emphasized that neither the younger nor the older son truly understood the father's heart and encouraged the congregation to ponder, meditate on, and review this chapter to better understand and embody the father's heart, both for themselves and for those they encounter in the world.

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### **The Older Brother's Reaction**

Pastor Keith introduced the older brother, who, upon hearing of his younger brother's return, became angry and refused to join the celebration. This reaction revealed that the older brother was also estranged from the father, albeit for a different reason.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Why do you think the older brother reacted with anger and refused to join the celebration?
2. Have you ever experienced or witnessed a situation where someone's positive life change was met with resentment or jealousy? How did you respond, or how could the situation have been handled differently?
3. In what ways might we, as believers, sometimes resemble the older brother in our attitudes towards others?

### **Supporting Verse:**

**Luke 15:28** - "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him."

### **Context and Reflection:**

- **Historical/Cultural Context:** In the culture of Jesus' time, the older brother's reaction would have been seen as disrespectful and shameful to the father.
  - **Theological Significance:** The older brother's anger and refusal to celebrate reveal a heart that is far from the father's, despite his outward obedience and service.
  - **Application:** We must examine our own hearts and attitudes, recognizing that outward compliance does not necessarily reflect a true understanding of the Father's heart.
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### **Working for the Father vs. Being Intimate with the Father**

Pastor Keith pointed out that while the older brother had worked for the father, he wasn't intimate with him. He emphasized that it's possible to have all the outward markers of faith while having a heart far from God.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What is the difference between working for the Father and being intimate with Him? How can we cultivate genuine intimacy with God?
2. In what ways might we sometimes focus more on external acts of service or obedience rather than the condition of our hearts?
3. How can we guard against self-righteousness and maintain a posture of humility and grace in our relationship with God and others?

### **Supporting Verse:**

**Matthew 7:21-23** “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

### **Context and Reflection:**

- Historical/Cultural Context: Jesus often confronted religious leaders who focused on outward adherence to the law while neglecting the deeper matters of the heart.
- Theological Significance: True faith is not measured by external acts alone, but by a sincere heart that seeks to know and follow God.
- Application: We must prioritize our intimate relationship with the Father, allowing our service and obedience to flow from a heart transformed by His love and grace.

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### **Lessons from the Older Brother's Story**

Pastor Keith concluded the sermon by highlighting several key lessons from the older brother's story, including the dangers of self-righteousness, lack of compassion, jealousy, and resentment. He emphasized the importance of forgiveness, reconciliation, and emulating the father's love in our relationships.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Which of the lessons from the older brother's story resonates with you the most, and why?
2. How can we cultivate a heart of compassion and forgiveness, even when it feels challenging?
3. In what practical ways can we demonstrate the father's love to those around us, particularly those who may be difficult to love?

### **Supporting Verse:**

**John 1:14** - "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."

**Context and Reflection:**

- Historical/Cultural Context: Jesus, as the Word made flesh, perfectly embodied the balance of grace and truth in His interactions with others.
- Theological Significance: As followers of Christ, we are called to reflect His character, extending both grace and truth in our relationships.
- Application: In our dealings with others, particularly in difficult situations, we must prioritize grace, allowing it to inform the way we speak truth.

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**Conclusion/Reflection:**

Pastor Keith's message on the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son challenges us to examine our own hearts and attitudes. It reminds us that true faith is not measured by external acts alone, but by a sincere heart that seeks intimacy with the Father. As we reflect on the lessons from the older brother's story, may we cultivate hearts of compassion, forgiveness, and love, extending the same grace and mercy that our Heavenly Father lavishes upon us.

**Reflection Questions:**

1. In what areas of your life do you need to prioritize your intimate relationship with the Father over external acts of service or obedience?
2. How can you practice forgiveness and compassion this week, particularly towards someone who may be difficult to love?
3. What steps can you take to ensure that you are reflecting the Father's heart to those around you, balancing grace and truth in your interactions?

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**Prayer Requests:**

[Share any personal prayer requests, and pray over the week ahead]

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**References:**

**Primary Sources:**

- "The Father's Heart, Part 2: The Older Brother," East Hill Church, 04/07/2024. Delivered by Pastor Keith Jenkins.
- Sermon Discussion Guide, provided by East Hill Church.
- The Holy Bible, New International Version (NIV). Biblica, Inc.™, 2011.

**Secondary Sources:**

- Contextual and Theological Insights: Derived from general biblical scholarship and commentaries relevant to Luke 15, John 1, Matthew 7 and the parable of the prodigal son.

**General Sources on Biblical Studies:**

- Bailey, Kenneth E. "The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants." InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Keller, Timothy. "The Prodigal God: Recovering the Heart of the Christian Faith." Dutton, 2008.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. "The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming." Convergent Books, 1994.

**Collaborative Contributions:**

- LLM Contributions: Based on a mixture of licensed data, data created by AI models, and publicly available data, synthesized for the study of the provided sermon notes and biblical passages.

**LLM Training Data:**

- LLM Training Data. Includes a diverse range of texts (books, websites, and other publications) up to September 2023.