

What to Do When You Feel Like Jesus Loves the Prodigal More Than You

If I force myself to be entirely honest, sometimes tears flow during times of corporate worship, not out of gratitude, though the sacrifice Jesus made on my behalf certainly moves me. If I dig deeper, look beyond the appropriate and expected emotional responses, there is something else, an emotion seemingly unsuitable and certainly disconcerting. It is a sense of abandonment.

We sing about it. We teach on it. We even paint lovely photos depicting it. It is the story of the Good Shepherd who leaves the 99 to go after the one.

“What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?” (Luke 15:4).

While this is certainly great news for that one lost sheep (and the essence of the gospel), I am often left feeling deserted, neglected.

You see, I am the 99.

We sing about it. We teach on it. We even paint lovely photos depicting it. It is the story of the prodigal son who was welcomed home with open arms.

So he arose and came to his father.

“But while he was yet far away, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran and embraced his neck and kissed him.

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven

and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him. And put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. Bring here the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry. For this son of mine was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' So they began to be merry.

"Now his older son was in the field. As he came and drew near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. He said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him safe and sound.'

"He was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and entreated him. But he answered his father, 'Look! These many years have I served you. Nor have I ever transgressed your commands, yet never have you given me a goat, so that I might be merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed the fattened calf for him.'

"He said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. But it was fitting to be merry and be glad, for this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found'" (Luke 15:20-32).

What an incredible parable depicting the love and forgiveness of the Father! He embraces, kisses, celebrates the one who returns home. Embarrassed by my own selfishness, I must admit I am jealous.

You see, I am the prodigal's brother.

I was raised in a Christian home, said the sinner's prayer at age 4, and by the time I reached my teens, I had responded to more altar calls than I could ever count. From my earliest

memories, I had been within the Shepherd's fold, lived within the Father's house. "Must I stray in order to get His attention?" I have wondered. "Must I leave and return to be as valued as the prodigal?"

To answer these questions, let's take a closer look at these stories. To whom was Jesus speaking?

"But the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them'" (Luke 15:2).

Jesus was responding to the Pharisees, who through their strict observance of the law, hoped to achieve salvation. In their self-righteousness, they saw no need for a Savior. However, Romans tells us that all have sinned and that redemption comes only through Christ.

"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:23-24).

Once again, peering into my own heart, I recognize my need for a Savior. Even the selfishness, the pride and the jealousy have separated me from the Father. I repent. I come running back. He sees me, embraces me, celebrates me. I am undone. The tears come. This time, they are tears of gratitude.

You see, I am the prodigal. I am the one.