

How to Easily Spot the Poverty Spirit

A poverty spirit is easy to spot. It shows up in both the prodigal son and the older brother (Luke 15:11–32). The prodigal son dominates the story; he is young, selfish and wants his inheritance before his father dies so he can leave home and see the world, all at the father's expense. The father, surprisingly, grants his request. Why would any father do this? The key is that this story is not about just any father; it is about the heavenly Father. This act of kindness points to the character of God. It is not a lesson about a wayward son who comes home; it is a story about a benevolent Father. The goodness of the Father can be seen throughout the parable. The son does not understand the depth of his father's love until much later, when he runs out of money and finds himself in a far country, alone and barely surviving. He has developed such a spirit of poverty that he cannot see the goodness of his father. By that time, he perceives himself as a slave and not a son.

When he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have an abundance of bread, and here I am perishing with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants" (Luke 15:17-19).

The sad truth of the passage is that the prodigal never saw himself as a son. He did not understand the goodness of his father when he asked for his inheritance, nor does he understand in his despair away from home. He feels guilt and shame, not primarily because of his failure but due to a lack of knowledge about the essential character of the father.

When he returns, he is surprised to discover that the father has been eagerly awaiting him. The father sees him in the distance and runs to love and embrace him. So overwhelming is the father's love that the son cannot find a platform for his confession.

The character of the father dominates the story.

What kind of father is this? No guilt? No life lessons? This would not be the reaction of many earthly fathers, and the contrast shows the abundant love and goodness of our heavenly Father.

The story continues with the older son, who also needs to understand the goodness of the father. When little brother returns from his journey, the older son is indignant and angry with both the brother and the father. He refuses to join the celebration for the returning prodigal, even after the father pleads with him. He held the view that many hold today, that the prodigal did not deserve the kindness of the father. It was not fair! How could the father love, forgive and bless such a clueless and selfish son?

The older son was living with the same poverty of spirit as the prodigal. In his estimation, he was good, and now the father was bad. Only a bad father would show favor to a wayward son. Again we see how a distorted view of the goodness of God can affect our perspective on life.

Yet the father in our story was relentless in his pursuit of the older son. His goodness could be seen on every side. The father patiently waited as the older son expressed his frustration and anger. Once he finished, it was the father's turn to close the discussion with words that ministered love and grace.

The father provided three important truths. The first was *sonship*.

The older brother had lived under his father's roof for years but never understood that his father was good. He needed to acknowledge that a good father does not show favoritism. He was like many people today who live a life apart from the goodness of God and do not understand sonship. Much of the turmoil in our homes and the world can be directly traced to a lack of understanding that God is good.

The second truth was *relationship*. You might think that after the younger son left home, the older son would be closer to his father, yet he never really knew him. Maybe he made no attempt to know the father because he assumed that he was not worth knowing. We can get so busy working for God that we fail to take the time to get to know the heart of the Father. When we set aside time to abide in His presence, we discover that our Father is much more interested in our relationship with Him than our labor for Him.

The third truth was that of *inheritance*. All that the father had, he provided for his sons. In his living and his dying, he gave it all that he might further his kingdom. The father knew that future generations would depend on his sons getting a better understanding of his heart. The importance of knowing the goodness of God the Father is essential in every generation, especially those living in the last days who will face unparalleled lawlessness and disregard for Him.

What hope did the younger son have in that far-off country, destitute and detached from his father? What hope did the older son have with his hardened heart that kept him apart from his father just as surely (if not more so) as physical distance? In both cases, their only hope was in a renewed relationship with the father. The younger son realized it, and we can see what a vast difference it made in his life. Jesus ends the story before we see whether or not the older son finally came around. But the parable gives us all hope for the prodigals we know, as well as those we know who are so driven to work for God that they miss the joys of relationship with

Him.

Jesus made it clear to His disciples that it was “your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). What a powerful statement! In Christ, we have been adopted into God’s family and are partakers of His divine favor.

As Christ-followers, we have been given the authority to carry out the agenda of the Father on earth. With every prayer, we increase in power and advance the kingdom of God. When we press into the kingdom, we understand that all the power and provisions of Christ are entrusted to our care. Jesus expects us to carry out the mission of proclaiming the Gospel, healing the sick and advancing the kingdom. {eoa}

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