



The Hospitality of God (Luke 15:11-32) Welcome to the Table pt. 3 Pastor Tim Peck

THE BIG IDEA

The parable of the prodigal son shows us that God's hospitality does not manipulate us, God welcomes the lost home, and God calls us to celebrate when the lost come home.

OPENING

- What's the most rebellious thing you did as a child?
- Have you ever been invited to a celebration you were reluctant to attend? Why?

DIGGING DEEPER

- Read Luke 15:1-2. How do these verses help explain the context for the parable of the prodigal son?
- Throughout this week's message, Pastor Tim refers to Henri Nouwen's book *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. In that book, Nouwen says, "More than any other story in the Gospel, the parable of the prodigal son expresses the boundlessness of God's compassionate love. And when I place myself in that story under the light of that divine love, it becomes painfully clear that leaving home is much closer to my spiritual experience than I might have thought."¹ Discuss this quote. How does it ring true to your experience as well?
- All three characters in the story act in ways that would be very surprising to people who lived in the first century. The younger son surprisingly asks for his share of the inheritance early. According to Bible scholar Kenneth Bailey, this was the equivalent of telling his his father that he wished his father was dead.² The father surprises us

¹Henri Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (Image Books, 1994), p. 38

²Kenneth Bailey, *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Eerdmans, 1983), pp. 162-63.

by granting the son's request and then by welcoming the son home when he returns. The older son acts surprisingly when he refuses to come into the house for his younger brother's celebration, thereby shaming his father publicly. What impact do you think these surprising actions would have had on the people Jesus told this story to?

- According to Pastor Tim, the aim of this story is to help us understand God's hospitality and to invite us to become more like the father in the story. What characteristics of generosity can you identify in the father? Make a list of these characteristics.

PUTTING IT TO WORK

- Spend time this week reflecting on this story. Which of the two sons do you most identify with right now in your life? Why?
- Identify one characteristic of the father in this story that you most need to grow in. Spend time in prayer this week inviting God to develop this characteristic in your life.

PRAYER REQUESTS