Brockley Homegroup Study April 2024
LEADERS NOTES

Thank you homegroup leaders. I appreciate all that you do. Now that the clocks have changed we will be trying to arrange a short evening where all the homegroup leaders can get together and have a chat about how things are going. I need your feedback to make these studies and our homegroups as helpful as possible. The plan is to find a date and invite you all for a curry or a barbecue. The business side won’t take too long. It will be very much a social too.

**The Parable of the Lost Son**

***11****Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.****12****The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.*

***13****“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.****14****After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.****15****So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.****16****He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.*

***17****“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!****18****I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.****19****I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’****20****So he got up and went to his father.*

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

***21****“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

***22****“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.****23****Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.****24****For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.*

***25****“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.****26****So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.****27****‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’*

***28****“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.****29****But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.****30****But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’*

***31****“‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.****32****But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’” Luke 15*

Q1
Have you got a story where you got ‘let off’ when you should have been punished? How did it make you feel?

A1
I got pulled over onto the hard shoulder of the M6 by a Police car. He was just starting to write me a ticket when his centre consul screen bleeped urgently and flashed red. The screen showed that a wanted car was coming up the motorway. I said, “If you want to go and catch that bad criminal, it’s not a problem.” He swore at me in a good-natured way, told me to get out of the Police car – then he roared off spinning the wheels and spraying loose gravel. I felt lucky, and relieved and grateful. I drove within the law for several weeks.

Q2
Why do you think Luke starts verse 11 with the words ‘Jesus continued”

A2
Luke doesn’t want us to miss that these stories are of a piece and they are all a response to the Pharisees accusation, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” The Pharisees thank that God’s attitude towards sinners is not to condemn and keep his distance – for fear on contamination. Jesus is trying to teach them that the opposite is true. God loves us. He values us. He searches for us, he finds us, he comes close to us, he climbs down into the pit to rescue us, finds us, he receives us and forgives us and welcomes us home.

Q3
What do you think motivated the younger son? Have you ever felt like that? What did you do?

A3
I think the younger son, is a bit bored, sees his life mapped out in front of him and doesn’t particularly like it, he wants independence, he wants freedom, he wants to see the world. Like most teenagers he doesn’t appreciate what he has; he is self- centred; he is insensitive / unaware / careless of the effect his actions and attitudes have on others.

Q4
If you have children and grandchildren (we don’t) are you less worried about the behaviour of the grandchildren than you were of your children? And why

A4
I think yes for several reasons (1) grandchildren aren’t our responsibility in the same way – (you can give them back!) (2) grandchildren don’t reflect back on us in the same way (maybe a bit of pride there) (3) but also, haven’t we grown a bit more tolerant of human behaviour? Don’t we take a more global view and realise that this is ‘just a phase’ and they will turn out alright in the end?

Q5
The NIV titles this story “The Parable of the Lost Son” and it is often called The Prodigal Son. (a) What does prodigal mean? (b) Do you think that is a good title? (c) is the younger son the most lovable character in the story?

A5
(a) prodigal means wasteful. (b) not really. There are two sons not one - and really I think the main point of the story is the heart of the father. (c) I think we can all find it in our hearts to love somebody who messes up, recognises what thy have done, and says sorry.

Q6
What role does repentance play in the younger son's return?

A6
Yes, the sons return is prompted by a crisis and desperation but that doesn’t make it any less genuine. He sees his behaviour as (a) sin “I have sinned against heaven”(v21) (b) and as personal “I have sinned against you”(v21) (c) He has abandoned any ‘rights’ based on entitlement “I am no longer worthy to be called you son”(v21)

The son's decision to return home and confess his wrongdoing demonstrates genuine repentance. This reminds us that true repentance involves acknowledging our sins, and turning back to God.

Q7
What does the older brother do, think and feel? Who does the older brother represent? Do you ever feel like that? What did you do?

A7
It is the brilliance of this story that we are told so little about the older brother – but we can infer a whole lot. He seems the dutiful obedient son. I suspect he in envious of the younger brother – and secretly wishes he had the courage to go and see the world. I suspect that the older brother quietly seethes when he sees how much the Father misses the younger son – and goes out to look for his return everyday. The older brother is quick to judge and imagine the worse – he talks about the younger brother and prostitutes (v30) but the story does not mention prostitutes. This accusation has come from the darkness of his own imagination. The older brother objects to the welcome that the father gives the returning younger son. He refuses to join in the party.

The older brother shows many of the characteristics of the Pharisees – and they know that.

We all show characteristics of the older brother when we think that God’s love for us depends on our good behaviour. We all show characteristics of the older brother when we imagine that we are earning or deserving of God’s favour.

We show characteristics of the other brother when we imagine the worse about other people, when we want to see them get their come-uppance, and are sceptical about their ‘repentance’ and won’t join in the party.

Q8
Who does the father represent? Make a list of the good things about the father’s attitude, speech and behaviour? If this is what a father should be like – how does this match up with your experience of your human father?

David Beckham said in an interview this week that his father pushed him very hard and never gave him a word of praise until he had played for England 100 times.

A8
The father represents God. (1) He doesn’t explode when the younger son asks for his share of the inheritance. (2) He doesn’t disown the son when he leaves and tell him never to come back. (3) The father sees him when he was still a long way off – it implies he was eagerly looking for him each day. (4) The father runs to the returning son (5) he throws his arms around him and kisses him – there is absolutely no doubt that he is pleased to see the son coming back. (6) The forgiveness seems to be absolute and unconditional (I think I would have accepted the ‘servant’ offer – OK come back, knuckle down, prove that this ‘repentance’ isn’t just because you are hungry and have no other option, work for a year – then we will see how things go.)
(7) And see how the father goes out to the older brother. The older brother is so much harder to love – but the father loves him too and wants him to soften, change his attitude, rejoice, forgive and join the party.

My father wouldn’t see it this way – but there wasn’t a lot of grace in his fathering. I grew up with the clear understanding that you earned favour by good behaviour. My mum probably showed more of the love, grace and forgiveness. I hated school and I remember the occasional summer days when she would unexpectedly say – “It’s too nice for school today. Don’t go. We’ll make a picnic and go down by the river and catch minnows in a jam jar. Those were the best days.

I tried to be a better dad – but I doubt that my children would agree that I did any better.

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For further thought?

Was the father wrong to give his younger son his share of the inheritance when he asked for it?

Main point
The father exhibits qualities of patience, compassion, and unconditional love. His willingness to forgive and welcome back his wayward son demonstrates God's boundless grace towards repentant sinners.

Challenge
Are there places in myself, or my past where I need to accept grace and forgiveness? Are there people / places where I need to show / extend more grace and forgiveness than I do?

Prayer and reflection
As we conclude, let's take a moment to thank God for his unconditional love and boundless grace, as demonstrated in this story. May we receive that love and forgiveness and remember that Go is for us in everything. Let’s resolve to reflect God’s love in our relationships and extend forgiveness and grace to others, just as we have received it from him. Amen.