



THE NONCONFORMIST

THE **PUZZLING** STORIES
OF JESUS

14



YES, NO + MAYBE

1. I break less rules than the people sitting around me.
2. If I came into some money, I'd most likely spend it to travel to exotic locations.
3. You only sin when you are "not in your right mind."
4. God forgives you after you confess your sins.
5. We do not need to wait for God's blessings, because He's already given us everything we're going to get.

DIG DEEPER

● **READ Luke 15:11-32** (NLT)

11 To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. 12 The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

13 "A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. 14 About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. 15 He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. 16 The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

17 "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."'"

20 "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. 21 His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'

22 "But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. 23 And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, 24 for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.

25 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, 26 and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 27 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.'

28 "The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, 29 but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. 30 Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!'

31 "His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. 32 We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!'"

➕ **12 I want my share** - According to Jewish law, an elder son received twice as much as the other sons (Deut. 21:17), and a father could distribute his wealth during his lifetime if he wished. It was perfectly legal for the younger son to ask for his share of the estate and even to sell it, but it was certainly not a very loving thing on his part. It was as though he were saying to his father, "I wish you were dead!"

● What does it tell you about God that He blesses us like a prodigal spends their wealth (recklessly, and wastefully extravagant)?

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DIG DEEPER...CONTINUED

+ 15 Feed the pigs - In the rabbinic laws that governed employment, the occupation of swine-herder was considered so debased that anyone working with swine was seen as being cursed. His work brought the prodigal into daily contact with animals that the Old Testament had declared to be unclean, which meant that under Jewish law he would not be permitted to observe the Sabbath day, because he himself was unclean. He was forced for all practical purposes to renounce his Judaism. His life was at the lowest point of dereliction a Jew could reach.

● Jesus created a character in this story that the listening Jews would have no compassion for. He was cursed and got what he deserved. What does this say about God?

+ 20 He ran to his son - In the East, old men do not run, it brings shame upon them; yet the father ran to meet his son. Why? One obvious reason was his love for him and his desire to show that love. But there is something else involved. This wayward son had brought disgrace to his family and village and, according to Deuteronomy 21:18–21, he should have been stoned to death. If the neighbors had started to stone him, they would have hit the father who was embracing him! What a picture of what Jesus did for us on the cross!

● Why does Jesus not tell a story about justice here?

+ 20 Kissed him - Note perfective use of *κατα* [kata] kissed him much, kissed him again and again. In the Orient, to kiss someone in this way is not merely a sign of affection, or recognition, but is also a sign of forgiveness. The boy had planned his confession speech, but before he even had a chance to open his mouth, his father had already fallen upon his neck and kissed him. He was forgiven before he uttered a word. The father didn't need to hear the words; he could see the brokenness of his son, and his heart was moved to compassion, and he showed that compassion with a kiss.

● How is this example of God forgiving us before we ask different than the picture of God that you grew up with?

+ 22 The finest robe, a ring, and sandals - In the ancient Near East the ceremonial robe, the best robe, was a mark of honor. *Στολή* [Stolē] is an old word for a fine stately garment that comes down to the feet (from *στελλο* [stello], to prepare, equip), the kind worn by kings (Mark 16:5; Luke 22:46). Literally, "a robe the first." But not the first that you find, but the first in rank and value, the finest in the house.

Then there is the ring, obviously a signet ring. When it was given from father to son, or from king to prime minister, it signified the granting of authority. The young man says he isn't worthy to be called a son, all he asks is to be made a servant, a person of no authority. But the father, by calling for a ring to be placed on his finger, is restoring to him the authority of sonship in his father's house.

And then the third command to put sandals on his feet. Shoes or sandals were a luxury. They were worn by free men, never worn by slaves. The young son had appeared at his father's house in bare feet, looking like a slave, but the father ordered that shoes be put on his feet.

+ 23 The fattened calf - Now meat was rarely eaten, and so to take the fattened calf was a sign that this was an extremely special occasion, a time of feasting for the family and the servants, in honor of the return of the lost son to the family table.

● What does this display about God's character that He wants to shower sinners with honor?

+ 29 You never gave me - The father explained that he would have been willing to host a feast for the older boy and his friends, but the boy had never asked him. Furthermore, ever since the division of the estate, the elder brother owned everything, and he could use it as he pleased.

● How do we act as if God has not already given us everything? How does that malign the character of God and his sacrifice?



MY PRAYER...

1. How am I running off to a distant country away from the Father?
2. How excited am I to see messed up people coming back to God?
3. What new aspect of God's character does He want me to know?