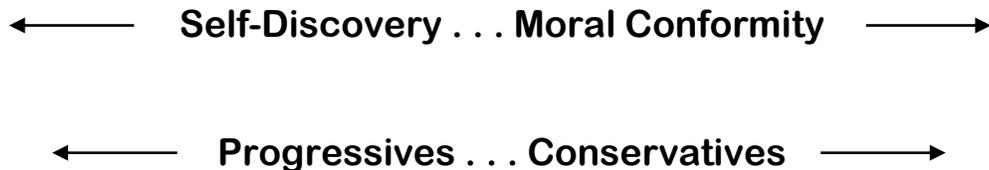


Introduction: Two well-worn paths of life



“Our Western society is so deeply divided between these two approaches that hardly anyone can conceive of any other way to live. If you criticize or distance yourself from one, everyone assumes you have chosen to follow the other, because each of these approaches tends to divide the whole world into two basic groups. The moral conformists say: ‘The immoral people – the people who ‘do their own thing’ – are the problem with the world, and moral people are the solution.’ The advocates of **self-discovery** say: ‘The bigoted people – the people who say, ‘We have the Truth’ – are the problem with the world, and progressive people are the solution.’ Each side says: ‘Our way is the way the world will be put to rights, and if you are not with us, you are against us.’”

Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God*

Jesus' parable (Luke 15) teaches both approaches are _____.

Where is God when being good
isn't "good enough"?

- The Occasion and Conflict Luke 15:1-2
- The one parable with _____ mini stories Luke 15:3-32

Jesus Offers Hope . . . When Our Goodness Fails Luke 15:25-31

- The elder son's response: Anger - "I won't go _____."
- The elder son's reason: Pride - "I've never _____ you."
- The elder son's message: "You _____ me, I've been slaving for you."
- The elder son's attitude: Bitter and resentful, his motives exposed.
He wants what the father has, not the father himself.

What do we learn from the elder brother?

- Very good, moral, religious people who believe the Bible can be as lost as the most immoral sinner.
- Jesus extends forgiveness to elder brothers (Pharisees then, many of us now) – "come in to My house."
- Elder brothers' lives are as miserable as prodigals.

Traits of elder brothers and their relationship with God is characterized by . . .

- Duty and _____ = _____ prayer life.
- Thinking God owes them a _____ life.
- Guilt because they feel they never quite _____.
- Feeling pressured - _____, _____, and _____.
- Performance - feeling loved only when you are _____ what you ought to do.
- Right living is the _____ to getting what you really want from God.

Traits of elder brothers and their relationship with other people is characterized by . . .

- Feeling _____, critical, prejudice, judgmental.
- The legalistic letter of law; not the _____.
- Championing God's _____; not mercy.
- _____ irreligious people.
- Espousing correct doctrine, but acting in _____.
- Struggling with _____ and often having secret sins.

How do elder brothers experience God's love & forgiveness?

- Repent of their _____ as the basis of their relationship with God.
- Repent of their _____ - _____ motives.
- Repent of their desire for _____ approval above God's.
- Repent of their _____ and humble themselves (admit their need).
- Refuse to _____ themselves with others.
- Refuse to _____ others.
- Draw near to the Father, just to _____ the Father.
- _____ to God's authority in their lives.

Discussion Questions:

1. How does Jesus shatter our preconceived “2-path” perception of doing life and finding happiness?
2. Read the quote by Timothy Keller out loud; what is it both sons have in common that make them equally lost?
3. What elder son tendencies do you have? How does a “performance-orientation” impact your relationship with God and others?
4. What does repenting look like for you? Who can you share your journey with and who can you help?

Resources: *Tired of Trying to Measure Up* by Jeffrey VanVonderan
The Ragamuffin Gospel by Brennan Manning
The Return of the Prodigal Son by Henry Nouwen