

Open Invitation

The Older Brother

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.'"

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"All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders."

This is a form of faithful service, but not from a place of willingness, desire, appreciation, and loving sacrifice. It is service that feels obligatory and dutiful.

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"Your brother came home, and your dad decided to throw a party to celebrate."



"It was the music and dancing that offended the older son. Of course, let the younger son return home. Judaism and Christianity have clear provisions for the restoration of the penitent returnee, but where does it say that such provisions include a banquet with music and dancing?

Yes, let the prodigal return—but to bread and water, not fatted calf. In sackcloth, not a new robe. Wearing ashes, not a new ring. In tears, not in merriment. Kneeling, not dancing. Has the party canceled the seriousness of sin and repentance?"

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in."



“Why is it that recklessness and shamelessness are rewarded with jubilation when responsibility and obedience have received no recognition?”

(Joel B. Green)

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"The beauty of grace is that it makes life not fair."



"Whenever a work of God goes powerfully forwards, there is always someone muttering in the background that things aren't that easy, that God's got no right to be generous, that people who've done nothing wrong are being overlooked. This story reveals the sheer self-centeredness of the grumbler."

(N.T. Wright)

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"If grace is an ocean, we're all
sinking."

JOHN
MARK
MCMILLAN/
HOW
HE
LOVES

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This is Jonah all over again!

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry.² He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.³ Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

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This is a warning to each successive generation of "religious" folks... like us!

Believe → Behave → Belong

VS.

Belong → Believe → Behave

This is a corrective parable for joyless servitude and hardened hearts.

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This is a corrective parable for “either/or” thinking.

"God's love is both/and, not either/or. The embrace of the younger son did not mean the rejection of the older; the love of tax collectors and sinners does not at all negate love of Pharisees and scribes. Such is God's love, but we find it difficult not to be offended by God's grace toward another, especially if we have serious questions about that person's conduct and character."

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"All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."



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"No one is worthy of God's grace, but some are more unworthy than others."



This is a corrective parable for joyless servitude and hardened hearts.

This is a corrective parable for “either/or” thinking.

This is a corrective parable for a scarcity mindset.

"The older brother shows that he has had no more real respect for his father than his brother had had. He lectures him in front of his guests, and refuses his plea to come in. Once more the father is generous, this time to his self-righteous older son. At this point we sense that Jesus is not content simply to tell the grumblers that they're out of line.

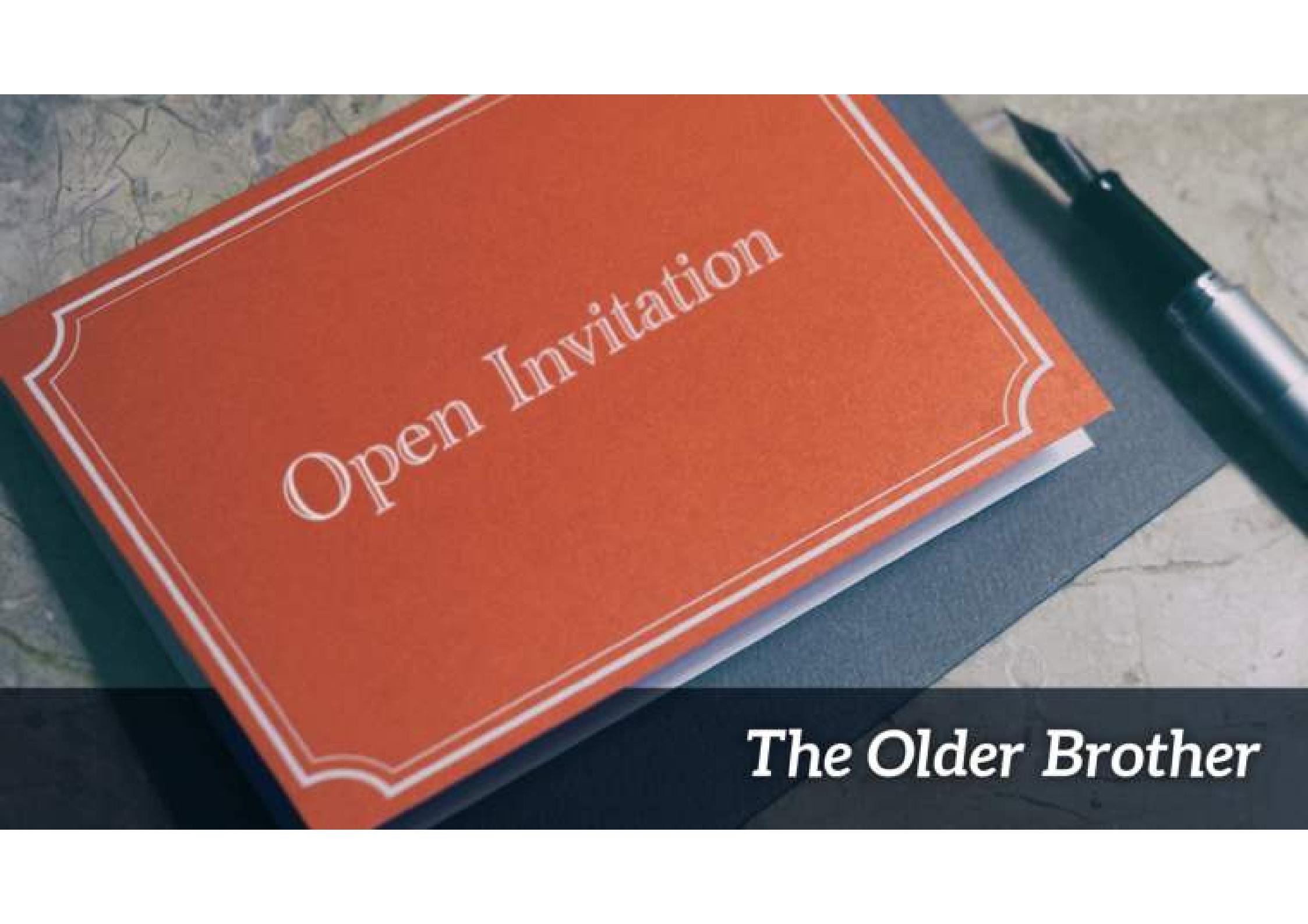
He, too, wants to reason with the Pharisees and the lawyers, to point out that, though God's generosity is indeed reaching out to people they didn't expect, this doesn't mean there isn't any left for them. If they insist on staying out of the party because it isn't the sort of thing they like, that's up to them; but it won't be because God doesn't love them as well."

(N.T. Wright)

What does your faithful service to Jesus look like? Dutiful obligation, or joyful sacrifice?

Do you view God's grace through a limited lens? Are there places that it doesn't, or shouldn't, reach? If so, where have you been placing the edges?

As one of the modern-day “religious folks,” does this parable offer you any needed conviction or challenge? Are you a victim of “either/or” and scarcity perspectives?



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