**The Prodigal Son Revisited**

*Many of us are familiar with the story of the Prodigal Son. Henri Nouwen’s classic work on this story includes an entire chapter on the older brother, the ways in which he is trapped, and in need of his own “homecoming” which seems impossible.*

*Here are a few paragraph’s from ‘Letting go of Rivalry’ in Henri Nouwen’s The Return of the Prodigal Son. If you want to review the parable from the Bible, it’s Luke 15:11-32.*

The elder son looks at his prodigal brother and father as aliens who have lost all sense of reality and engage in a relationship that is completely inappropriate, considering the true facts of the prodigal’s life. The elder son no longer has a brother. Nor, any longer, a father. Both have become strangers to him. His brother, a sinner, he looks down on with disdain; his father, a slave owner, he looks up at with fear.

Here I see how lost the elder son is. He has become a foreigner in his own house. True communion is gone. Every relationship is pervaded by the darkness. To be afraid or to show others disdain, to suffer submission or to enforce control, to be an oppressor or to be a victim: these have become the choices for one outside of the light. Sins cannot be confessed, forgiveness cannot be received, the mutuality of love cannot exist. True communion has become impossible

I know the pain of this predicament. In it everything loses its spontaneity. Everything becomes suspect, self-conscious, calculated, and full of second-guessing. There is no longer any trust. Each little move calls for a countermove; each little remark begs for analysis; the smallest gesture has to be evaluated. This is the pathology of darkness. …

I guess that all of us will someday have to deal with the elder son or the elder daughter in us. The question before us is simply: What can we do to make the return possible? Although God himself runs out to us to find us and bring us home, we must not only recognize that we are lost, but also be prepared to be found and brought home.

How? Obviously not just by waiting and being passive. Although we are incapable of liberating ourselves from our frozen anger, we can allow ourselves to be found by God and healed by his love through the concrete and daily practice of trust and gratitude. Trust and gratitude are the disciplines for the conversion of the elder son. And I have come to know them through my own experience.

*Here are some possible jumping off points for your discussion:*

* Can you describe any relationship from your own life in which family members or close friends have become “like foreigners” to you? Or in which “each little move calls for a countermove” and there is no longer any trust?
* Nouwen writes that the way to prepare ourselves to be liberated from these relationships that have become consumed by suspicion, anger, and darkness, is to intentionally create more trust and gratitude in our lives. What are some ways to do that?
* As this chapter continues, Nouwen reflects on our need to build trust with and gratitude for God, as the basis for being able to have trust and gratitude with others. How would you say your trust level with God is these days? How about your depth of gratitude?

A Prayer:

Accept, O God, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love.

We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care that surrounds us on many sides.

We thank you for setting us at tasks which demand our best efforts, and for leading us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone.

Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying through which he overcame death; and for his rising to new life, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom.

Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, and at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.