Because Bible Context Matters

Those Prodigal Sons

Two Lost Sons and Their Father's Heart

Restoration Insights for Individuals and Groups

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Zechariah and Elizabeth: Persistent Faith in a Faithful God

The Rest of the Story: A Closer Look at Familiar Passages

Making Disciples Jesus' Way: Wisdom We have Missed

Encounters with Jesus: The Rest of Their Stories

Becoming a Judean Shepherd

That Good Sameritan

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A Digging Deeper Faith Study

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An Invitation

A Digging Deeper Faith Study

It is known as the story of "The Prodigal Son;" yet Jesus never used that term. Who came up with that title, and why? I suspect no one knows. But one thing does seem to be self-evident. It had to have been a Westerner who came up with that title. No one conversant with first-century Middle Eastern village culture would ever have characterized this parable in that way. This story is about a father and two sons; and as it contextually unfolds, we begin to see that the narrative is really a story about a father's heart towards his two lost sons. Hence the more expansive title of this digging deeper into Jesus' parable.

Depending on your Bible translation, the story Jesus unfolds in Luke 15:11-32 is only about 500 words long. It can be read in a matter of minutes, yet pondered for a lifetime. It tells a remarkable story that has made a lasting impression on our language. When someone comments that a person is "the family prodigal," they are most likely drawing upon this story as the basis for their use of that word. Another cultural idiom "hidden" in this story but readily recognized by a Middle Easterner could be coined the "elder-brother syndrome." But that gets ahead of our story.

Context matters in everything we do. Always has and always will. We know that to be true in our professions, in our families and in our relationships. Yet despite knowing this universal truth, we still seem to have this amazing ability to disconnect ourselves from that reality when we enter the Scriptures. The words in the Bible were chosen because of their precise meaning and that meaning is drawn from the passage's context. Thus, if we are to more fully connect with the original meaning of a passage today, we need to know what its verbs, phrases, idioms, events, names and places meant to those who first heard them.

While contextual restoring a biblical passage is exciting and comes with its *Aha* moments, that is not the reason why context is crucial in studying the Scriptures. The real reason is that it gets us closer to the Holy Spirit's original meaning. The closer we get to that intended meaning, the closer we get to the epicenter of the Holy Spirit's intended transformation. That's why context matters.

As we all know, new information and insights, no matter how intriguing, are insufficient for meaningful change to occur. Those insights need to be pondered and processed if they are ever going to penetrate us, let alone marinate our hearts and minds. It is in the midst of that meditative process that the Holy Spirit teaches us, touches us, and transforms us, both individually and corporately.

I invite you to revisit the greatest short story ever told as it is put back into its original context. It is my prayer that God's Spirit will touch you in a transforming way as you rediscover how much there is still to absorb from this "familiar" story.

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