

The Parable of the Two Sons

Matthew 21:28-32 (NRSV)

²⁸ “What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ ²⁹ He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰ The father[a] went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. ³¹ Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

What characters are in this story?

What relationship with the father did the son have who said yes and then didn't go?

What relationship to the father did the son have who said no and then went?

What two options are not included here? Why, are they not included?

In a patriarchal society, how would Jesus hearers have reacted to hearing that the son said no to his father?

Did you ever say no to yours? Why might it be important to say no to God? What kind of relationship with God would be required to say no?

What groups in Jesus' day are represented by the two sons?

Who are those today? Who have said no, yet do the will of the father?

How does it make you feel that tax collectors and harlots are the first to enter the kingdom? Given a choice between chief priests and elders, on the one hand, and tax collectors and harlots on the other, with which group would you most likely identify with?

Why does God want our capacity to say no, as a precondition for our saying yes?

What happens when we bring only the yes and deny that the no exists in us altogether?

Why does Jesus not make the yes response the model for discipleship as the church has?

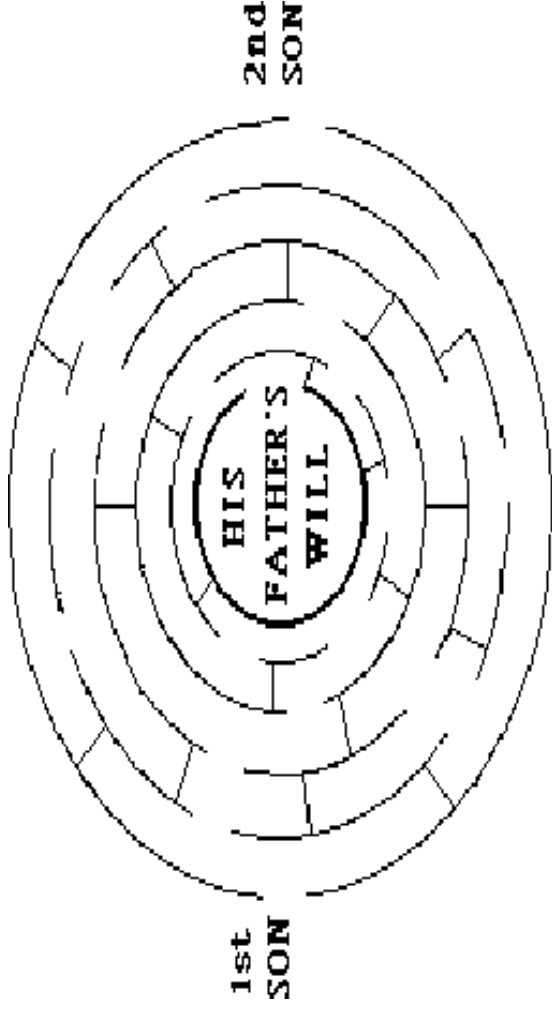
What does all our ambivalence to God do for choice?

Can you think of a time when saying no to God enabled a deeper yes?

The Parable of the Two Sons

What do you think is more important: what you say or what you do, your words or your actions? In our parable this week, Jesus tells a story to show how different people obey what God has called them to do. In Jesus' parable of the two sons, the father asked both sons to go and work in his vineyard. One son answered, "No," but went and worked. The other son answered "yes" did not go.

In telling the story, Jesus wanted us to realize that what we do is more important than what we say we will do. Jesus wants us to answer, "Yes," when he tells us to "Love one another," but what he really wants is for us to love one another! Jesus wants us to answer, "Yes," when he says, "Follow me," but what he really wants is for us to follow him!



Questions to Consider

What happened in the story?

Which son did the right thing?

Is it better to say you'll do something or to actually do it?

How do you think the father felt?

Do you ever say you will do things and not do it?

What do you do to help your family?

How do you feel when you're helping others?