

# Luke 15:26

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

## Analysis

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### **And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.**

Rather than rushing in to join the celebration, the elder brother pauses outside to interrogate a servant (παῖδα, paida, literally "boy" or "young servant"). His question "what these things meant" (τί ἀν εἴη ταῦτα, ti an eiē tauta) reveals his detachment from the household's emotional life. He doesn't recognize that such celebration could only mean something profoundly joyful has occurred.

The elder brother's caution and questioning expose his suspicious, calculating mindset. Rather than assuming good news worthy of investigation, he stands outside analyzing, judging, maintaining distance. This contrasts sharply with the father's immediate, undignified running toward the prodigal (v. 20). The elder brother's reserve and propriety keep him on the margins while grace celebrates inside.

This behavior reveals the fundamental problem with merit-based religion: it cannot comprehend or celebrate grace. Those who believe they've earned God's favor through obedience struggle to rejoice when the undeserving receive free mercy. The elder brother's questioning reflects the Pharisees' attitude toward Jesus welcoming tax collectors and sinners—suspicious interrogation rather than joyful participation in God's redemptive work.

## Historical Context

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First-century social protocol would normally require the eldest son to host such a celebration, greeting guests and managing the feast. His absence and need to ask what's happening indicates his complete exclusion from planning and his father's joy. This public slight would have been noticed by all attendees, adding to his humiliation and fueling his resentment.

## Related Passages

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**Ephesians 2:8** — Salvation by grace through faith

**John 3:16** — God's love and salvation

## Study Questions

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1. What does the elder brother's interrogation of the servant rather than joining the celebration reveal about his heart condition?
2. How does suspicion toward celebrations of grace indicate a merit-based rather than grace-based understanding of salvation?
3. In what ways might believers today stand outside 'asking what these things mean' rather than celebrating God's work in others' lives?

## Interlinear Text

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καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος ἕνα τῶν παίδων αὐτοῦ

And

he called

one

G3588

of the servants

G846

G2532

G4341

G1520

G3816

ἐπυνθάνετο τί εἶη ταῦτα

and asked

what

meant

these things

G4441

G5101

G1498

G5023