

The Parable of The Prodigal Son: There Is No Understanding the Father's Love Without It!

I. Introduction

- Family Vacation – Time with whole family...time with my son. A couple jogs on the beach, time at the gym, coffee, a few walks...it's like the difficult times, the low moments have a way of evaporating. Why is that? It's simple: I love my son.
- Paige – Just a few days...but listening to a daughter turn into a young woman. Accident (she's ok), costs, walking her through it all. I love my daughter.
- Elle – In the gym. Watching her brother show her the ropes. I love my son's love for his sister. Talking about goals, ideas for the future. I love my daughter.
- Anna – "One turtle!" She called from the store. "They are \$7.99." So, I let her buy three out of the family of six sea turtles. But the receipt was for more. I said, "You said they were \$7.99. She replied, "That was the starting price." A future business woman of America!
- No perfect dads...but we want to love our children. How, with all our sin and imperfections, with all of our times of missing the mark...how do we love our children, on their best days and their worst valleys?
- A parable in Luke 15 brings us into at least part of the answer. Why is it here? Why has God preserved this parable in Holy Scripture?

"...because God is self-existent, His love had no beginning; because He is eternal, His love can have no end; because He is infinite, it has no limit; because He is holy, it is the quintessence of all spotless purity; because He is immense, His love is an incomprehensibly vast, bottomless, shoreless sea."¹

- Amazing words. Beautiful and elevating, but I confess, not incredibly comprehensible for an average guy like me!
- I'm grateful for brilliant minds like A. W. Tozer, but I need a more personal, intimate description expressed in terms that closely mirror my life. Are you like me? There is your answer to why the Parable of the Prodigal Son is in Scripture! God desires to communicate something of eternal importance in the most intimate, personable of ways.
- I want everyone to hear something this Father's Day...you are loved by a Father! For all the ways your earthly father has and does miss the mark, your Heavenly Father never fails to love you!
- We often focus on the prodigal son, as we should, in this parable. But it is only half the story. The story of the Prodigal Son is not about the failures and sins of a son; it's about the lavish love of a Father!

The Parable of the Prodigal Son is a Declaration of God's Unfailing Love for Us!

¹ A.W. Tozer, Knowledge of the Holy

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, ²⁹ but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" – Luke 15:11-32

II. The Prodigal Son

1. The Prodigal Life

- Hasty – the money was burning a hole in his pocket; he couldn't wait to go.
- Squandered his money in reckless living – prodigal-one who spends recklessly
 - Parties, people, late nights, until the money was gone

2. The Prodigal Misery

- Broke, Famine, Alone – no one gave him anything
- Conviction – Many people experience this; the question is, “how will they respond?”

3. The Prodigal Poverty of Spirit

- I’ll return, but as a servant.
- Maybe my dad will hire me. I know I can’t expect much, but I think my dad will give me something to eat.
- I don’t deserve to be called his son, but maybe a servant.
- From his perspective, there is nothing more to hope for.
- In his poverty of spirit, he was ready to come home meek and broken, but also transactional. We are more comfortable with that....servant, subject, slave.

III. The “Prodigal” Father

1. The Father’s Eagerness

- The Father saw his son coming from a distance. He’d been watching and waiting, probably every day. That’s what this kind of Father does; waits.

2. The Father’s Compassion

- In compassion, ran, embraced, kissed him. In the Greek tense it literally means he kissed him again and again and again!
- He is holding his son close. His son has just come a distance and smelling like pigs. Have you ever been in a pig sty? I have! You don’t embrace and repeatedly kiss someone who has come out of a pig sty...unless! Unless! Unless you are a Father who loves your son or daughter so unconditionally that you are oblivious to the sights and smells of your prodigal returned home.
- Interrupts his son’s confession – how different from us! We can look for the right wording, right countenance, exacting a certain contrition...not the Father! Divine interruption. Look at verses 18-19...he doesn’t let the son complete his prepared, transactional confession.

3. The Prodigal Father

- Best robe, ring, shoes...and all before a bath! Fatted calf! Celebrate!

“There is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.” – Luke 15:7

- Prodigal – one who spends lavishly.

IV. The Older Brother

- If the lilies of the field blossomed as the Father embraced the son, they withered and died when the older brother came walking by!

1. The Older Brother's Anger

- He was angry and he refused to go in!
- The Father's appeal in mercy falls on a hardened heart – it is possible to leave the Father without leaving the farm.

“It is not by our feet, nor by change of place, that we either turn from Thee or to Thee...in darkened affections lies the distance from Thy face.”²

2. The Older Brother was even farther away from his Father.

- A good man in many ways. He never left; was externally upright, which gave his father a good reputation.

“The young son had been far from his father (in a distant country) because of his sins of *passion*. But the elder son was separated from his father through sins of *attitude*. He was even farther away than his younger brother and he had not even left the farm!”³

3. Elder Brothers are Lethal!

- Self-righteousness and bitterness warps our grasp of reality.

“Look, these many years I have *served* you, and I never disobeyed your command, *yet you never* gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.” – Luke 15:29

○ “served” – slaved for you. “I never disobeyed.” “Yet you never!”

- This son of yours (v.30)
 - I don't identify with you. I'm ashamed of you.
 - I am not like you. In fact, I am better than you.

² St. Augustine, Confessions

³ R. Kent Hughes

- Aren't you glad it is the Father who meets us in our shame, and not the elder brother?

V. Implications

1. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God!

- It is easy to forget what we were like before we came to the Father.
- Over time we imagine we are "good" people compared to other people.
- We classify sin different from God, what Jerry Bridges called "Respectable Sins"
 - The older brother – I have not committed the physical sins of passion that my younger brother has. I don't sin like you sin. We think if we have avoided sins of passion we are better – all the while we are full of the sins of jealousy, pride, gossip and judgmentalism. We call these little sins or faults, but in reality Jesus had to go to the Cross for those sins too!
- How do you "look" at and "think" of other people? Are you glad that, "I am not like him or her." Be careful! Do you want to take your stand before God on your self-righteousness?

2. No one is beyond the love of the Father!

- You cannot do anything that will keep the Father from hugging you, kissing you, and bestowing a robe on you, along with a ring and new shoes! Complete and total, lavish, "prodigal" like forgiveness is the only kind the Father gives. No half-measures with the Father!
- Are we in a "distant" country like the younger brother because of sins of passion, or because of attitudes like the older brother?
- Both need to recognize who they are so they can see the love of the Father.

3. Your Father doesn't want to negotiate with you; He wants to love you!

- Could I just have a job out in the field? I know I don't deserve more.
- Forgiveness is not transactional! Yes, turning back to God, but it cannot be earned; it is a gift and it is lavish, or it is nothing. You must come on the Father's terms. He might interrupt you! 😊

4. Don't settle for less than sonship and daughtership!

- The Father isn't looking for hired servants. He doesn't need field help like that! He's looking for sons and daughters to whom he says, "My son (daughter), you are always with me, and everything I have is yours."