

God Wants to Be Your Father

the story of the prodigal son

by **Mike Harding**



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(the story of the prodigal son)

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Pastor Mike Harding
Love Gospel Church
P.O. Box 4482
Apache Junction, AZ 85178
480.510.7089
mikecrisharding@aol.com

www.lovegospelchurch.com

For videos and audios of Pastor Mike's teachings,
go to www.xpmedia.com/channel/pmike

Then He (*Jesus*) said: "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to *his* father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls *to me*.' So he divided to them *his* livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him *anything*. But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry."

Luke 15:11-24

Have you ever heard the story of the prodigal son? This well-known story is one of the parables that Jesus told as He taught people about God. What is a parable? It's a made-up story that has a real meaning for us. The characters are symbols, the events are symbolic. Jesus spoke often in parables. If you have an inner hunger for God, you will see the meaning of the parable – God will speak to you through the parable.

So, the characters are symbolic. Who do they represent? In this story, the father of course represents God. The sons represent us – you and me! What is the purpose of this parable? It's to reveal the Father-heart of God to you. What is the meaning of this parable?

God wants to be your Father! He wants to receive you as His long-lost child – to love you and embrace you and make you His own for ever and ever. Keep reading!

Do you want to know God personally as your loving Father? He's not just the Creator, and He's not just a Heavenly Judge that we will face some day in the future. He wants to be your Father. He wants to love you and heal your heart and teach you and make you His own child in every way! Keep reading!

It doesn't matter what "religion" you might be or what church you go to – or don't go to. If you don't really know God as your "Abba" – that's an old Hebrew word for "Daddy" or "Papa" – then keep reading! God can be your "Abba" - your Daddy - starting today!

* * *

The younger son in the parable came to his father one day and said, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me." So the father divided to them his livelihood, the Bible says.

What do we see here? You can often know a person by their words and by their actions. If you listen to someone, and if you watch them, you can come to understand what is in their heart. We see here a father who values relationships. He did not hesitate to give to his sons the portion of their inheritance, although it was a little premature! He did not care about the money – he cared about his sons and about his relationship with them. He was not stingy – he was generous. The younger son, however, did not value the relationship he had with his father. He wanted the *stuff* – he wanted the money! (Question for you: what do you value? People or money? Relationships or power? Loved ones or personal ambitions? God? Friendships? Luxury? Control? Comfort? Pleasure? Security? This list could go on, you know. But it's important to look honestly at what you truly value, don't you think?) So the younger son just wanted the stuff. He didn't want to stick around or hang out with Dad. A few days later, he took off with his checkbook and his newfound "freedom" to go live it up!

This is where the symbolic part comes in: haven't we done something like that – or at least *wanted* to? This part of the parable represents our rebellion against God. What? You might say, "I

haven't rebelled against God!" (Or maybe you would say, "Oh, yeah! I have rebelled against God *big-time!*") Either way, Jesus is trying to get you to see something. If you don't have a close, loving relationship with God as your Father, then YOU might be the prodigal son! You might be the one out there trying to do it all by yourself, when God really wants you close to His heart.

The young man "journeyed to a far country". Have you ever tried to get as far away from God as possible? If you don't want Him "interfering" with your decisions, if you don't want His morality messing with your conscience, you run away. Of course, there's nowhere to go. But we try!

So what did the kid do? He "wasted his possessions with prodigal living". What does "prodigal" mean? It means I want what I want, and I want it now! I want pleasure, entertainment, and crazy parties, and I don't want anyone stopping me!

Now he's broke, and he realizes he was an idiot, but he's not ready to give in yet – not even close! So it gets worse. Now there's a famine in the land – high unemployment, lots of foreclosures! He can't find work, and he's hungry. Finally he lands a great job – feeding pigs. Low wages. *Really* low wages. The pig food was looking pretty good!

Finally, finally, he says, "OK! I need to go home! I'm dying here." He decides to go home and confess his sin. He will say, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you." So far, so good. It's always correct to confess our sins to God. When you have blown it, when you have run away, don't try to cover it up. Don't look in the other direction, whistling, hoping that God won't notice. *He notices!* Confess your sins, be honest.

But then this young man does a curious thing. He plans to say to his father, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." Hmmm.

What do we see here? *This young man does not really know his father.* It is possible to know someone for quite a while and not really know them. Not *really* know them. The young man thought he knew his father. He thought he knew how his father was going to feel and react if he went home. But he didn't. We often make that same mistake with God. We think we know how God feels about us, but maybe we really don't.

The prodigal son thought, “My father might receive me as a servant, but he will never again receive me as a son. I have blown it. I have let Him down so bad that it is irreversible. The best I can hope for is to become a servant in the household. I can sleep in the barn and have something to eat if I work hard for him, but He will never really love me or accept me again. I have broken his heart.”

The son was misjudging his father. He thought that Dad was going to blow a gasket because he took off and spent half of the family money. He thought that Dad valued money over relationships. He thought his dad would only want him as a servant rather than as a son.

We do the same with God. We think that, because we have blown it so bad, because we have rebelled and sinned and tried to live without Him, that He will be mad at us, that he will condemn us. We think that maybe, just maybe, He will receive us as servants, but never as sons – not real, true sons.

We misjudge God. We think that God values service and obedience over relationships. Religion does that to us. Religious thinking says that God is far off, and probably mad at you for your sins and mistakes. Religion says that, maybe, if you work really hard, God might accept you as a servant, but never as a son. Religion says that God only values your obedience, but He doesn't care about your heart. Religion says that you must try to keep God's rules, from a distance, and hope that he might accept you.

All of that is a lie.

God is like the father in the parable of the prodigal son. He values relationships above everything else, and He is willing to forgive our worst mistakes to restore a lost relationship. He wants to receive us as sons and daughters. He wants us to come into relationship with Him and stay close to His heart forever. He doesn't want you to come home as a servant, but as a son. Of course we're going to obey him. Of course we're going to serve Him. But our true calling from God is to be sons, not servants!

So the prodigal son goes home ready to be chewed out, ready to sleep in the barn, too ashamed to ever look his father in the eye again.

But what does Jesus say? “When he was still a great way off, his father saw him...” How could his father see him when he was

still a great way off? Because his father had been looking for him, waiting for him, for months, maybe for years. Every day the father would look down the road, covering his eyes against the sun, squinting, and thinking, “*Maybe today my son will come home to me.*” He wasn’t thinking about lost money, and he wasn’t thinking about his son’s rebellion or foolish decisions. All he was thinking was, “*Maybe today my son will come home to me.*”

One day, like hundreds of other days, the father looks down the road, straining to see if he might make out the shape of his son in the distance. On this day, finally, his heart skips a beat. There’s movement – someone coming this way. It looks like... It looks like... It is! His son is coming home! He runs! He runs! He runs all the way toward the walking figure and falls on his neck, hugging and kissing him! His son has come home to him!

The son is ready for the chewing out of his life. He deserves it! He confesses his sin – he tells it like it is. No cover up. He blew it! But then he starts talking about how unworthy he is, how he’ll sleep in the barn and be a servant – just please forgive me.

The father has already forgiven him! While the son is talking about how unworthy he is, the father is making plans for a party!

The father says to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’

How does God feel about you? He just wants you to come home to Him, to stay close to His heart and let Him love you forever. He’s ready to restore you to His original plan for you! He wants you alive, not dead! He wants you found, not lost!

The son had been feeding pigs just a little while ago. He was filthy. He stunk. The father in the parable (God) says to his servants (God’s angels) “Bring out the best robe and put it on him.” The what? The BEST. Not just a robe, not just a clean robe, but the BEST robe! In this world, the devil is trying to convince most of you that you are worthless junk. Maybe you don’t feel like you could ever be worthy of the best, but God wants the best for you - not because you have done everything right, but because you’re his kid!

This clean, beautiful robe represents God's righteousness. When God forgives you, He covers you in clean robes of righteousness. (Isaiah 61:10) You're not dirty anymore. You're clean before God.

Then the father gives his son the family ring and sandals on his feet. In those days, sandals were for the sons and daughters in the household; the servants went barefoot. The family ring was a restoration of authority. It meant, "You're your father's son again. If you need something, go into town and charge it to daddy's account. It's taken care of. If you need something done, the ring says to the servants, 'Take care of this man's commands.'" The sandals and the ring carried the message, "You're my son again. All is forgiven; all is restored!"

Then they killed the fatted calf and had a great big party. Do you know that when you turn away from your rebellion, when you come home to God as your Father, there is a great big party in Heaven? God and all his angels celebrate because you have come home! (Luke 15:10)

* * *

Some of you had good fathers here on earth. Some of you had terrible fathers. If you had a good father, you may have sweet memories of your father's love and protection. You may understand that God gave us fathers to represent Him when we are little, to love us and teach us and protect us. You may have that inner confidence and security that comes from a father's strength and love. You may know what it means that God wants to be our Heavenly Father forever.

But if you had a messed up father, the very idea of a father might bring up powerful feelings of fear or anger or bitterness in you. Your father may have been abusive, alcoholic, controlling, critical, impossible to please, angry, emotionally cold, or completely absent. He may have betrayed your trust or your innocence in horrible ways. The idea of God as your "Father" might be your worst nightmare.

God gave us fathers to love us and protect us. He intended them to be good and loving and fair. But he also gave us free will. When people get messed up, they can behave in horrible, hurtful

ways. And God continues to honor our freewill, even when we hurt the ones we are supposed to love. If God stepped in every time we made a wrong decision, free will would be a lie.

If you have painful memories of your father, if your image of a father has been twisted in some way, God wants to heal your image of what a father is supposed to be. He wants to be a good Father to you.

Fathers are supposed to provide us with unconditional love, safety and protection, belonging and acceptance, a healthy identity, inner strength, motivation, affection, an image of success, and true forgiveness when we make mistakes. If you missed out on any of those things from your earthly father, God wants to heal your heart and supply you with what you missed out on. I pray that that healing will begin in your life RIGHT NOW, as you read this book. You'll be *His* kid now, if you accept Him as your Father.

* * *

There's something you need to know. Jesus said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me.*" (John 14:6) What does that mean? If you want to go home to the Father, the only way is through Jesus - through faith in Jesus - through accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. Why is that? Jesus said, "*I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved...*" (John 10:9) How can he be a door? A door is a passageway between two places. Jesus is the only passageway between Heaven and Earth. A door always has two sides. Jesus is God on one side, and man on the other side. He is Immanuel, "*God with us*". (Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23) God became a man called Jesus to bridge the gap of sin and separation between Heaven and Earth. Jesus died on the cross, giving His life as the payment for our sins, and He rose from the dead on the third day. The Bible says that "*if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*" (Romans 10:9) The Bible says that "*whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.*" (Romans 10:13) The Bible says "*believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved*". (Acts 16:31) Do you see it? All the people of Earth have

run away from God. It's a planet full of prodigals. If you keep running away from God, the end of the road is eternal separation from Him. It's a place called Hell. Don't go there! Jesus came *to seek and to save what was lost* – that's us! (Luke 19:10) If you believe in Jesus - if you come through Jesus, who is the open door into Heaven (Revelation 4:1) - you will be saved. You will become a child of God. You will be forgiven and you will receive eternal life in the presence of God.

* * *

I want you to receive the Father's love right now. Will you? I want you to picture yourself as the prodigal son (or daughter). You realize that you want to come home to God, where your heart belongs. So you're walking down the road towards home. If you've been a rebel, a runaway, if you've made some really bad mistakes, come prepared to confess your sins to God. Ask Him for forgiveness - ask Him now!

Pray this prayer, out loud: *“God, I come home to You right now. I want You to be my Father. I confess to You my sins and my rebellion. I ask You to forgive me and make me clean. I know that You come running right now to embrace me and kiss me and receive me as your son/daughter. You put the robe of righteousness on me right now. You put the sandals on my feet and the family ring on my hand. The angels of God celebrate because I come home to you right now. I believe in Jesus Christ. He is my Savior and my Lord. Jesus died for me on the cross, paying for my sins with His life, with His blood. I come to You, God, through Jesus Christ, the only door into Heaven. God, I want to know you as my Father. Please heal my heart, and fill me with Your love, in Jesus' name. Amen.”*

If you sincerely prayed that prayer, you are now a child of God. You are forgiven and you are saved. God is now your “Abba”, your Daddy. (Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6) Welcome to the family. There is a party in Heaven right now because of you!