

## The Father of the Prodigal • Luke 15:11-32 • Parenting Series #1

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. *The Best Bible Translation*

1. Four pastors met each month for prayer and fellowship
2. Inevitably they would enter in to a friendly theological debate.
3. One month they were sharing about which translation of the Bible they preferred.
4. One pastor said he preferred the *King James* because of it's elegant use of the English language.
5. Another shared his preference for the *New American Standard* because of it's careful translation from the original languages.
6. The third stated his appreciation for the *Living Bible*; his congregation was made up mostly of young people with little to no Bible background and the Living Bible seemed like a good fit for them.
7. The forth pastor sat there silently listening to the others – they turned to him and asked, “What's yours?”
8. He said, “My favorite translations was my dad's. He put the Word of God into practice – and that's the most convincing translation of the scriptures I've seen.”

#### B. *Father's Unique Role*

1. Father's have a unique role to play in the life of the family.
2. Fathers have the special call to give *direction* to the family and provide the protection necessary for children to grow up safe and healthy.
3. Fathers are entrusted with showing the kind of balance we see in God Himself – a balance between justice and mercy,
  - a. between the law and grace
  - b. between firmness and gentleness
  - c. and between praise and correction.

#### C. *Preface to Parenting Series*

1. We're beginning a series of Sunday morning messages on Parenting today.

2. Just as a book often opens with a *preface*, today's message, coming as it does on Father's Day, is a sort of a *preface* to the real meat of the parenting series.
3. Today we'll be looking at the *father* in the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15

## II. TEXT

### A. Set The Scene • Vs. 1-2

1. Let's begin with v. 1 to set the scene of the story of the Prodigal Son

**<sup>1</sup>Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. <sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."**

2. Jesus' popularity is running pretty high at this point and large crowds were following Him
3. Among those who demonstrated a desire to attach themselves to Jesus were the kind of people the dignified considered *scum* –
  - a. people like the hated tax-collectors who were turn-coat Jews working for the despised Romans
  - b. women of ill-repute; people with light fingers, pickpockets and such
  - c. to put it in modern terms, they were drug-dealers, pimps, and street-walkers
4. The dignified and refined people went out of their way to avoid such people and they were scandalized when they observed how Jesus seemed comfortable around them and actually cultivated a relationship with them by going to their homes and eating with them.
5. Of course, what drew the misfits to Jesus was His message of love and forgiveness.
  - a. they KNEW they were wrong and needed to change
  - b. but they'd been led to believe that God had cast them off
  - c. if they were abandoned by God – why *not* throw themselves head long into sin?
6. Then Jesus came with a message of HOPE that God looks and

- longs for the *repentance* of sinners – and when they do, He rejoices and gladly forgives.
7. So they were drawn to Jesus like moths to a light.
  8. The Pharisees and religious do-gooders thought that *they* were God's chums and that because of their piety and careful observance of the letter of the law, they were the elite.
    - a. they looked down their noses on the tax-collectors and wicked women
    - b. and they couldn't understand why Jesus didn't share their strong dislike for them.
  9. They were like those immature young people today who get upset when you hang out with the wrong people
    - a. do you remember in high school how there were different groups, various cliques?
    - b. there were the athletes, the honor role, the smokers, the druggies, the nerds, the Goths, the punks, skinheads, La Raza, on and on the list goes
    - c. it seems nearly everyone had some clique they belonged to
    - d. but heaven help the fool who though he or she could reach out and be a member of more than one group.
    - e. there were the petty jealousies – “If you're going to hang out with them, you CAN'T hang out with us!”
  10. I think that's what we're seeing here.
    - a. the Pharisees and scribes were a clique of the self-approval and self-righteousness
    - b. and while they saw in Jesus *genuine righteousness* and a *real approved lifestyle*,
    - c. they couldn't fathom His acceptance of those who were so obviously *wrong*.
    - d. so they complain
  11. Jesus perceives their criticism and tells them three stories
    - a. the first is the story of a *lost sheep* and how the shepherd goes out to find it
    - b. the second is about a woman searching high and low to recover a *lost coin*.
    - c. the third story, tells the tale of a *lost son*

## **B. The Prodigal Son • Vs. 11-24**

**11** Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. **12** 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. **13** And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. **14** But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. **15** Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. **16** And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine 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 bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! **18** I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, **19** and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’”

**20** “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. **21** 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.’

**22** “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. **23** And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; **24** for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

1. This is the well known parable of the Prodigal Son
  - a. the son is called *prodigal* because of the way he lived when he left home

- b. v. 13 says he “wasted his possessions with prodigal living”
- c. meaning he lived so *prodigiously*, so large and wastefully, that he lost it all and was reduced to eating suet; pig’s food!
- 2. When hunger finally became *more painful* than his wounded pride, he decided to go home and cast himself on his father’s mercy.
- 3. But remember now the context in which Jesus tells this story
  - a. he is addressing the Pharisees and scribes who are shocked by his acceptance of sinners
  - b. it’s at them this story is aimed . . .

### C. Vs. 25-32

- 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**So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. **27**And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’
- 28**“But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. **29**So he answered and said to *his* father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. **30**But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’
- 31**“And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. **32**It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”

- 1. The first part of this story has oft been used as a powerful evangelistic message calling those who see themselves as rank sinners to repentance and forgiveness.
- 2. But if we’re true to the context, we have to see that Jesus *really*

- aimed this story at the hard-hearted attitude of the self-righteous Pharisees and scribes!
- a. they're the *older brother* in the parable of the prodigal son
  - b. vs. 11-24 are the set-up for vs. 25-32 and the real point of the story
  - c. and that is this: The Father's Heart!
3. If the prodigal son is a picture of the tax-collectors and sinners and the older son is a picture of the Pharisees and scribes, then who is the *father* in this story?
  4. It's God!
  5. The *whole reason* Jesus told this story was to *correct the Pharisees view of God*; to help them see that He is a tender-hearted Father who longs and looks for His erring children to return to Him.
    - a. no matter how far they've gone -
    - b. no matter how badly they've squandered the gift and potential of life He's given them
    - c. no matter how low they've sunk in to the pit of sin; even if they find themselves sleeping in a gutter and digging through a dumpster for a cast off doughnut -
    - d. if they will but *turn to Him* in sincere repentance and express their desire to be restored to Him, HE WILL FORGIVE!

#### **D. The Father**

1. Look with me again at the *father* in this story
2. You see, the reason why this story is a good place to begin our series on parenting is because of what it teaches us about the Father—heart of God.
3. As you've heard me say repeatedly – indeed as we saw so clearly last Sunday – what the Spirit is doing in us is conforming us to the image of Christ.
  - a. but Jesus said that He came to *reveal* the Father
  - b. remember His words to the disciples? – “If you've seen Me, you've seen the Father.”
4. So we are being conformed to the image of Christ *who is the express image of the Father*.
5. What this means is that God intends *the parenting of our children* to be modeled on our relationship with Him as our Heavenly Father.

6. So it's critical we grasp what Jesus says here about the Father of the Prodigal Son because it reveals God's own heart.

**11** Then [Jesus] said: "A certain man had two sons. **12** And the younger of them said to *his* father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to *me*.' So he [meaning the father] divided to them *his* livelihood.

7. Since we're unfamiliar with the customs of those times, what we read here is a bit lost on us.

8. But this presents an incredible tragedy.

9. As we read on in the story we discover that this family was quite wealthy

a. they live on an estate surrounded by fields

b. there were numerous servants and other evidences of wealth, such as livestock, special clothes and jewelry.

10. But one day the younger son approaches his father and says in effect, "I can't wait for you to die, Old Man. I want my share of the inheritance now. Give it to me!"

11. Parents, how would you like your teenager to come to you and ask how much you're insured for – and then tell you they can't wait for you to croak so they can get it?

12. What we read here is a whole degree worse in that an entire *third* of the wealth of the estate and family would be cashed out and given to the son.

13. This would have a dramatic impact on the rest of the family and household!

14. Now, how would most of *us* fathers deal with this if our teenage son came to us and demanded we cash out our life insurance, and sell of the house and a third of our possessions in order to give it to them?

a. we'd probably double over in laughter

b. we'd be totally shocked and think they had to be kidding

c. we'd try to reason with them and try to talk them out of such colossal idiocy

d. in fact, we'd probably do everything in our power to change their mind and force them to stay

15. But that's not what this father did – he gave the son what he wanted and let him go

16. Friends – God loves us – His love for us is so complete that He takes care of us in untold ways.
  - a. but God never forces Himself on us
  - b. love by its very nature cannot be forced or coerced – it has to be free
  - c. when love is forced or demanded – it becomes something other than love!
17. Just as the father in this story gave life to the son, God gave us life
  - a. and just as this son had all he needed as he abided in the home, we have all we need as we yield to God
  - b. but for reasons that have nothing to do with some lack in the father, the son decided to depart – and in the same, we all like sheep have gone astray, we have turned, everyone of us to our own way; we've forsaken God!
  - c. we've taken the gift of life He's so richly given us, the gift of health, and reason, and the potential to experience such incredible pleasure, and we've set off on our own course.
18. How this *shatters* the heart of God with ache to watch His foolish children turn from Him, the Fountain of living water, to attempt to drink from the cesspools of this world.
19. Think of it – God lets us go! Why? Because of love – He will not force us, but rather, He honors our choice.

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20. What this teaches us about parenting is that there comes a point in the raising of our children, usually in the mid to late teen years, when we need to move away from the tight structure of controlled direction that marked their childhood, to more of a peer to peer relationship.
  - a. of course teens still need direction from their parents and obedience is still required
  - b. but the direction parents give their *teenage sons* and daughters has to come more from the intimacy of their relationship as opposed to orders from on high.
  - c. as the young person matures, they'll face more and more specific choices that mom or dad haven't talked to them specifically about.
  - d. they must know what to choose based on a clear understanding of what mom or dad would choose – and that kind of knowledge

- comes from a mutual sharing of values and priorities.
- e. what I mean is this – while young children are guided by INSTRUCTION *from* their parents, teens are guided by RELATIONSHIP *with* their parents.
  - f. the tighter the bond of love – the closer the relationship.
  - g. and as I said – love by it's very nature is thwarted by force of any kind.
21. Parenting these days has been turned all around
- a. many parents have the idea that when a child is young, you provide lots and lots of freedom so that their sense of self isn't hindered or squelched
    - 1) they never say, "No!"
    - 2) for goodness sakes, never use corporeal discipline
    - 3) baby-proof your house so that the child can have free reign to go anywhere and do anything his little heart desires
    - 4) it's a kind of "hands-off" approach to parenting
  - b. then what happens as parents take this kind of laizze-faire attitude toward parenting, as the child grows and moves into the adolescent years, they begin to demonstrate a self-absorption and self-centeredness that's embarrassing!
  - c. they becomes rebellious, so the parents start to apply some controls, they tighten up on the rules.
  - d. as the child moves into their teens, they start exhibiting outright dangerous behavior and in fear of some major catastrophe, the mom and dad really clamp down and start using things like restrictions and look for camps for trouble kids.
22. This model of parenting is all backwards!
- a. parenting means applying a lot of structure and guidance in the early years,
  - b. and as the child matures, that structure and guidance is slowly peeled away
  - c. it should be that in the teen years, the child has enough self-discipline that he or she doesn't need outside constraints.
23. On the grounds here are several trees.
- a. they were planted 3 years ago
  - b. when they were first planted, the landscaper placed tall poles next to them and used guy-wires to steady them.
  - c. the reason why was because the trees were newly planted and

had no strength to withstand the winds that blow almost every afternoon.

- d. now, after 3 years, several of the trees have taken sufficient root that the poles and wires have been taken down – they’re able to weather the winds
  - e. other still need help, but with each month that passes, the supports become less and less necessary. One day they too will be taken away
  - f. that’s a good picture of how to raise our children.
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- 24. In this story, the day came when the younger of the two sons came with a determination to implement a really poor plan.
  - 25. You can be sure the father was heart-broken over his choice – but he let him go, just as all of us come to the place in life where we eventually have to let our children go.
  - 26. Our parenting is aimed at that day – when we can set them loose with the confidence they won’t do what this son did – and that was squander the inheritance his father had set aside for him.
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27. Now, notice the father’s response when the prodigal returns . . .

**20“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.**

- 28. Tell me, how could the father have seen the son while he was still a great way off unless he was on the lookout for him?
- 29. And how does the father respond to the son’s return?
  - a. does he cross his arms across his chest and take on the stern look of one who says, “I told you so, son!”
  - b. “Didn’t I tell you what you were doing was wrong? Didn’t I try to warn you? But NO!!! you wouldn’t listen to me; I’m just your fuddy-duddy old man.”
  - c. “You’ve squandered your inheritance after hurting me more surely than anyone has *ever* hurt me.”
  - d. “You’re not welcome here!”
- 30. Is that the father’s response?
- 31. Hardly! He’s on the front porch with his hand set to shade his eyes so he can see a 100 yards farther.
  - a. and as soon as he sees the form of someone coming up the

- road, he squints to see who it is.
- b. when he recognizes his sons characteristic stride, he tears off the porch, across the yard, and down the path till he gets to him
  - c. then he throws his arms around the boy, unmindful of the caked mud and sweat and the hideous swine-stink that comes from his ruined rags
  - d. he takes him in a bear hug and covers his neck with kisses
32. My friends – please don't miss that Jesus is painting a picture here of our Heavenly Father!
33. This flatly rebukes the ideas the Pharisees had about God.
- a. their god was austere and stingy
  - b. their god only passed out forgiveness to those who were already doing good
  - c. he sat on a regal throne, extending his pinky to a long line of the righteous who want to kiss his ring
  - d. but no prodigals are found in that line
34. But here the father rises from his chair and *runs* to the repentance prodigal.
35. There was a song some years ago that drew attention to this –
- a. in the Bible, we usually find God seated on a throne, and a few times, standing,
  - b. but the only time we see Him run is when He's tearing down the road to embrace an errant yet repentant child!
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36. Parents, how merciful and forgiving are you toward your children?
- a. how tender is your heart for their return?
  - b. have you locked and barred the door?
  - c. have you effectively sealed off restoration and forgiveness.
  - d. have you gone to the gate in the wall that surrounds your life and hung a big, "Moved! No forwarding address" sign.
  - e. do you condition your forgiveness on exacting a pound of flesh from them for the times they hurt you?
37. Godly parenting means taking the hits and still forgiving when your child show genuine repentance.
38. Godly parenting means being on the lookout for the return of errant children and the very moment they turn, you run out to embrace them with joy.
39. There's no place for harshness, retribution, and revenge in

parenting.

**21** 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.’

**22** “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. <sup>23</sup>And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; <sup>24</sup>for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. CELEBRATION!

1. Most parents long for the day when their children have grown and become successful adults
2. We want to see them excel in school, get a degree, land a well-paying job in a respectable field, marry above themselves and live happily ever after.
3. Basically, we want to be able to brag about how well our kids have done – because deep in our hearts, we believe it means WE DID A GOOD JOB OF PARENTING!
4. We want to be able to celebrate their success!
5. But notice how the father of this story calls for a celebration at the return of his son!
  - a. he’s ecstatic that boy has come home!
  - b. he pulls out all the stops
    - 1) a special robe is put on his shoulders
    - 2) a ring is placed on his finger
    - 3) a calf they’ve been saving for a special celebration is put on the barbie
  - c. they throw a party!
    - 1) not a graduation party
    - 2) not a birthday party
    - 3) not a party to celebrate some *accomplishment*
    - 4) this is a *resurrection* party
  - d. forgiveness has turned abject failure into victory!

## **B. God Delights To Forgive**

1. The devil is quite clever in his methods of ensnaring us
  - a. he seduces us with temptation to sin by telling us the pleasure will far exceed the penalty
  - b. he suggests that we'll someone escape any *real* punishment
  - c. then gets us to fixate on nothing other than the sin – making it look so good!
  - d. but once we partake, what does he do? – he hits us over the head with a consuming sense of *guilt*
  - e. he tells us we're good for nothings and that there's nothing left for us but to climb down into the gutter and join the pigs in their suet
  - f. he paints a picture of God as distant and disinterested; as mean-spirited and hard
2. But far from God being stingy and reluctant in His forgiveness, He is eager and ready
3. All He waits for is that we but turn to Him, then He tears down the road to cover us with kisses and a garment that covers our terrible wretchedness
4. Being a godly parent means asking the Lord to fashion a similar heart in us
  - a. that a love relationship with our children would always be more important to us than rules and regulations
  - b. that our *treatment* of them wouldn't be based on whether or not we are proud of or embarrassed by them.
5. Parents, when your child repents and demonstrates a desire to be restored to fellowship with you – do you welcome them with demonstrated joy?
6. That's how God treats us!
7. Jesus said that when one sinner repents – all of heaven breaks out in ecstatic celebration!
8. Of course our hearts break when our children err – but when they repent, do we celebrate?
9. God does!
10. And God calls us to emulate Him in the raising of our children.