

## A study of Jesus' Parables

### SYMPTOMS OF FATHERLESSNESS

While we might not think of fatherlessness as a disease, it has been clearly demonstrated that it has a tremendous link to poverty, substance abuse, physical & emotional health, educational struggles, crime, and sexual misappropriation, including abuse and teen pregnancy. With over 20 million children in the U.S. living in a fatherless home, I'm sure many of you can relate to these struggles.

For those of us who grew up in a house without our father, we might have a distorted view of God when he reveals himself as "Father." How can we understand what it means for God to be a "good Father," when we've never seen an example of what a good father is?

Today's parable is so amazing that we're going to study it this Week and next. In this parable, we're going to see the heart of a father who loves his sons. Through this story, we are introduced to the heart of our Heavenly Father. Next Week we're going to explore Jesus' invitation to share in the heart of the Father. This Week, however, Jesus invites those who are far away to experience the Father's love.

### LUKE 15:11-20

<sup>11</sup> Then Jesus said, "A man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that will belong to me.' So he divided his assets between them. <sup>13</sup> After a few days, the younger son gathered together all he had and left on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth with a wild lifestyle. <sup>14</sup> Then after he had spent everything, a severe famine took place in that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and worked for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He was longing to eat the carob pods the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> But when he came to his senses he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have food enough to spare, but here I am dying from hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go to my father and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired workers.'" <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way from home his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; he ran and hugged his son and kissed him.

### SCOUTING REPORT

**SETTING** Crowd of tax collectors & sinners w/ Pharisees & Law experts

**NEED** Expose heart of Pharisees and God's love for them.

**STORY** The father let son go his own way, but offered joyous reconciliation with repentance.

**TRUTH** God rejoices when the lost turn back to him.

### DISCUSSION

Describe a time when you knew you messed up and what you planned to say to ease the punishment.

1. Identify the three people in this story. (11-12)

2. What did the younger son ask of his father? (12)

3. What hardships came upon him? (14)

4. How did the father respond when the younger son arose and went to his father? (20b)

5. In what way did the younger son come to his senses? (17) Why is that important for what happened next?

6. Describe how you practice repentance in your Christian walk? If not, what would it look like to make that a regular practice?



"Wherever you are, whatever you did, it's a page in your book, but it isn't the end. Your Father will meet you with arms open wide... Let your life be made new, as you come into view, your Father's not waiting, no he's running too."

ICEBREAKER

OBSERVATION

INTERPRETATION

APPLICATION

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### STUDY NOTES PRODIGAL

In a line of dialogue, an author once wrote, "There are many challenges to long distance running, but one of the greatest is the question of where to put one's house keys." Although it may not actually be the *greatest* challenge, it's certainly an observation that many of us have encountered. This funny statement brings up a profound truth. If you're going to run, you better be able to get back home.

The parable we're studying this Week and next is often referred to as the "Prodigal Son." That title has become so well-known that the term "prodigal" is used in common culture of someone running away from home or choosing to live contrary to their parents. However, titling this story "Prodigal Son" misses the point. Yes, he experienced an amazing story of redemption, but the story isn't about the son.

As Jesus begins the parable, he said, "**A man had two sons.**" This story is about the father. Both sons have a perspective on the father, but the point of our parable is the father's love—a love we receive and a love we are to share with others.

### A LOST SON ILLUSTRATES LOVING LOST PEOPLE

The first part of the story follows *the younger* son. He went *to his father* and said, '**Father, give me the share of the estate that will belong to me.**' This is an incredibly rude and arrogant statement. He was asking for an inheritance. Basically, the younger son looked at the father and said, "I'd rather have your stuff than you. I wish you were dead."

The father could have responded in many ways, but instead of acting angrily, *he divided his assets between* his sons. Likely receiving land and farm goods, the younger son would have needed time to sell off his inheritance in order to have the cash he needed to run away. But, *after a few days, the younger son gathered together all he had and left on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth with a wild lifestyle.*

The younger son left the land of his ancestors, the land of God's people. Not only that, he blew through his money and was left with nothing. *Then after he had spent everything, a severe famine took place in that country.* At rock bottom, the younger son hired himself out to work. He was Jew, hiring himself out to a non-Jew to *feed pigs*—detestable. According to the Old Testament Law pigs were unclean. So, the fact that *he was longing to eat what the pigs were eating* illustrates just how

desperate his situation had become.

When he hit rock bottom, three things happened in quick succession. Remember, Jesus is telling a story. It doesn't matter how long these events *would have* taken, what matters is how *the story is told*.

First, *he came to his senses*—a.k.a. he remembered his father. Throughout the Bible "remembering" is synonymous with repentance. This is evidenced in his words as he planned what he was going to say.

Second, *he got up and went to his father.* Notice, this statement doesn't describe a long journey from a far away land. It's described in two steps—standing and stepping.

Third, *while he was still a long way from home his father saw him, and his heart went out to him; he ran and hugged his son and kissed him.* The way the story is written describes the son repenting, taking a single step towards the father, and the father closing the distance as he ran toward his son.

### LOVING LOST PEOPLE WELCOMES THEIR RETURN

We can imagine the father going to the same spot every day. Peering into the distance, hoping to see his son on the horizon. Day after day, nothing. Then finally, his son appears, starving, stinking, and covered in muck. His father ran to him—which, by the way, was *not* something wealthy landowning men did in those days. It was shameful for him to run.

Our translation says that the father *hugged his son and kissed him.* Literally, in the original language, it says "he fell on his neck." This is not a one-arm bro hug. This is a deep grasp. His head was buried in his son's neck as his tears began the process of cleaning the filth from his son's back.

Perhaps you've never been hugged like this. This is the kind of hug that melts you. A hug where you know with all your heart that everything will be OK.

There is an old saying, "Sin takes you further than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, and costs you more than you want to pay." Many of you reading this might feel like the younger son at rock bottom. You might think, "If anybody knew the real me, they would run away." You're wrong. If you relate to this story, come to your senses—wake up. Remember that the Lord is good, and if your coach and friends are walking with the Lord, they will love you too. That's not to say there won't be difficulty and a long road back home, but stand, repent, and experience the Father who runs after the lost.