

The Forgiving Father

(Luke 15:20-24)

Today's scripture reading is about a lost son – the Prodigal Son. This parable is the third of three parables Jesus told when he explained why he has meals with sinners. The loss of a sheep or a coin is incomparable to the loss of a son. Therefore the father's joy is extravagant (vv. 22-24). However, this third parable has a surprise ending. With the introduction of the older brother, Jesus directly addresses the Pharisees who, like this brother, show their anger at the grace of the father.

When Jesus told this story, his audience was composed of tax collectors and sinners who were drawn to Jesus, as well as self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who criticize him for his association with sinners. All these groups needed a lesson on the grace and mercy of God, and that is exactly what the Parable of the Prodigal Son delivers.

This parable is about a son who asked his father for his share of the estate, left home, and wasted his inheritance. But perhaps the most amazing character in

this story is the forgiving father. Jesus was teaching that one can always turn back to God in repentance and receive forgiveness, regardless of their degree of sinfulness.

I am going to divide this sermon into **two** parts. The **first** part will discuss the steps the Prodigal Son took away from his father. In the **second** part, I will talk about the steps the father took toward his Prodigal Son.

When talking about the steps the Prodigal Son took away from his father, I will use the letter “D” as a memory peg. Dissatisfaction is my first “D” word. This young man had everything he needed at home, yet he yearned for more. Desire is my next “D” word. This young man wanted to enjoy things he had never experienced, thinking that satisfaction would come if he could indulge his cravings. Deception is my next “D” word which means he was deceived, and believed he was missing something in life that could only be found outside his father’s house. Decision is my next word as he chose to leave home and its restrictions in order to enjoy the life, he imagined awaited him. Departure means he took his fortune and

left his family to go to a far-off country. Delight was what he felt with plenty of money at his disposal. He filled himself with new worldly pleasures. He tasted sin and believed these new experiences were the fulfillment of all his dreams.

Disillusionment was this young man's next "D" word. Sin only satisfies for a season. What he had thought would give him pleasure began to leave him empty. Although sin may seem enjoyable at first, **Romans 6:23** tells us that "the wages of sin is death." With a sinful lifestyle, there is the death of happiness, peace, and security.

Despair is the young man's last "D" word. After the money was all spent and a famine struck, the prodigal son ended up in a hog pen feeding pigs while he himself remained hungry. He began life at home with everything he needed, and now he did not even have enough to eat. His expectations of a great life had ended, and he had lost everything. With God's grace, he came to his senses and in repentance and humility headed home to his father.

In the **second** half of this Scripture reading, we will look

at the steps the father took toward his Prodigal Son. This time I will use the letter “W” as my memory peg.

Wounded heart is the first “W” word. The prodigal’s father was hurt by his son’s desire to get his inheritance early and leave the home he had provided for him. Like any parent whose child is far from him, he Wondered about him continually. This dad was concerned for his son—whether he was making good choices or was in need. Waited patiently is the next “W” word, just as parents today wait for renegade sons and daughters to return. This father longed to see his son. So, the father Watched for his son. His son was never far from this father’s thoughts as he Watched the road to see if his son was returning. This father Wanted his son to return soon. Whatever had happened in his son’s life world would never cause this father to reject him. His desire was to see him as soon as possible. My final “W” is the father Welcomed him home. Eventually, the day came when the father saw his son on the road while he was still a long way off. He felt compassion and ran to meet him. Instead of greeting him with disapproval and

shame, he repeatedly embraced and kissed his son despite his filthy condition. The young man barely managed to get out his confession of sin and of unworthiness to be called his son, before his father called the servants to bring out the best robe, a ring, and sandals to clothe him. Then he told them to kill the fattened calf and prepare a feast to celebrate his son's return.

Throughout this story, Jesus was using an earthly father to depict the readiness of the heavenly Father to forgive those who come to him in humble repentance, no matter how far they have strayed from him in the past. He was showing the scribes and Pharisees God's attitude toward repentant sinners, and conveying to the tax collectors and sinners that his Father was willing to forgive and welcome them if they would confess and return to him.

We can each see ourselves in one of the characters in this parable—the rebellious child who is far away from God, the forgiving parent who welcomes him home, or the bitter sibling who does not think the prodigal deserves to be welcomed.

Running away from the Lord and living in sin is never the way to find happiness. Like the prodigal, we will eventually find ourselves disillusioned and despairing.

Yet the heavenly Father forgives and welcomes us home when we forsake our sin and return to him. He will give us a new beginning, and there will be a great celebration in heaven.

The only hope for all of us is the grace, love, and forgiveness of almighty God. Since mankind is appointed for death and then judgment, we must not put off the decision to repent and trust Christ as our Savior. Which is what it tells us in **Hebrews 9:27**, “Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment.” He died on the cross to pay the penalty we all deserve for our sin. Through faith in him and his sacrifice for us, we can be saved.

Now, let me close with **four** things that God offers us as repentant prodigal children. **1st**, is **forgiveness**. On the basis of Christ’s death and our faith in him, we can receive forgiveness. If we will confess our sins, God will be faithful to forgive us and cleanse us from all

unrighteousness. **2nd** is **acceptance**. The Lord accepts us not on the basis of our good works, but because of Christ's death on the cross, which paid our sin debt in full. Each one of us who believes in him becomes a child of God who is welcomed into his household. The **third** thing God offers us repentant prodigal children is **restoration**. We are given eternal life, and God restores our dignity, attitudes, and thinking. And the **fourth** thing God offers us is **rejoicing**. Not only do we rejoice, but so do our family and friends who have been waiting for us to come home to the Father. But the greatest celebration of all is in heaven whenever a sinner repents. Returning to the Lord is the beginning of a relationship with him that can never be severed. Although we may sin and experience his loving discipline, we can never lose our salvation.

What are the **lessons** we can learn from this Scripture reading in Luke?

Luke 15:20-24 is a pivotal part of the Parable of the Prodigal Son that offers profound lessons about God's boundless love, forgiveness, and the transformative power of repentance. The father in this parable represents God. His immediate and joyful response to his Son's return, despite the son's wrongdoing, exemplifies God's unconditional love and willingness to forgive. The prodigal son's journey back to his father demonstrates the significance of repentance. He recognizes his mistakes, acknowledges his sin, and humbly returns to his father seeking forgiveness. His actions show that genuine repentance involves acknowledging wrongdoing, turning away from sin, and seeking restoration. In essence, this Scripture reading reminds us that God's love is limitless, his forgiveness is boundless, and that repentance and returning to him brings immense joy and restoration.

Please bow your heads as I pray.

Heavenly Father, in the Spirit of today's Scripture reading, we come before you with hearts full of gratitude

for your boundless love and compassion. Just as the father in the parable saw his son from afar and ran to embrace him, we acknowledge that you are always watching for us, longing for our return. We confess, Lord, that we have strayed from you, like the prodigal son, choosing our own paths and neglecting your loving guidance. We have sinned against you and against ourselves, and we are truly sorry for the pain and hurt we have caused. We ask for your strength to turn back to you, to confess our sins, and to embrace your grace. Help us to recognize the depth of your love and the joy you have in welcoming us home. We are eternally grateful for the gift of your grace and the promise of eternal life with you. We ask for in the name of your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**