



**Prodigal Son**  
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**June 6, 2021**

**The Crossing Church**  
**Las Vegas, Nevada**

### **OPENING**

This week we are beginning a new series called “Prodigal.” It is the familiar parable about a rebellious son who demands his share of his Father’s estate, runs away and loses it all. This week we want to talk about this lost son and how we are a lot like him. Next week we will learn about the other son who stayed and was obedient to his father, but was still lost, and for Fathers’ Day we will look at the Father who loved both of them.

**QUESTION: How do you define the word “prodigal”? Has it ever defined you?**

### **SCRIPTURE**

**Luke 15:11-32** Jesus continued, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ “So, he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So, he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ So, he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So, they began to celebrate. Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So, he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I have been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has

squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ‘My son’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.’”

### **OBSERVATION**

In Jesus’ day there were two groups of people watching this story play out: One group was made up of people of questionable integrity. They were messy, irreligious, unbelieving, notorious sinners and dishonest tax collectors (redundant, eh?). The other group were religious people who couldn’t believe Jesus would spend time with the first group! In the culture of that time, a rich person would never eat with those he considered inferior to him – because that meant he accepted them. Not only did Jesus eat with those of the first group and welcome and accept them – Jesus welcomed, accepted and loved everyone.

#### **QUESTION: Who are other Biblical people whom Jesus accepted when others didn’t?**

Jesus tells of two sons who are equally lost. It is a parable about the love of their father, just as our stories are about our redemption by our loving Almighty Father. The prodigal wanted his father to give him his share of the family’s estate which would give him a one-half portion. This is different from an inheritance which would give him only one-third since the older brother would inherit a double share. Kenneth Bailey, professor of theology, wrote, “In all of Middle Eastern literature (aside from this parable) from ancient times to the present, there is no case of any son, older or younger, asking for his inheritance from a father who was in good health.” The prodigal son was actually saying, “I wish you were dead and I want what is coming to me now!” The two groups listening to Jesus were appalled at this and would have driven him out of the house for good.

**QUESTION: What do you think about the father’s reaction to his son’s demand for his inheritance? What would you have done?**

**QUESTION: When have you known a family whose child ran away? How did the parents react to that prodigal child’s return?**

### **APPLICATION**

The son returned home, but didn’t do it with a changed heart. He just wanted to improve his condition by solving a problem. Sometimes we are sorry for the consequences of our bad decisions and for the pain we have caused others, but that’s not repentance, Repentance includes sorrow, regret and, ultimately, surrender to God’s direction for our lives.

**QUESTION: When have you been in a place of shame and regret? What did you do?**

**QUESTION: What caused you to move from “improving your situation” to repentance? What kept you from making that move sooner than you did?**

For most of us it was shame and regret. “How can I go back and face all of those people?” and “Do I really want people to think that badly of me?” and “I don’t want the people to ostracize me completely like I was a leper?” While the crowd of onlookers would have done exactly that, the father did just the opposite: He rushed out to meet him; he kissed him; he hugged him; he loved him; he celebrated his son’s return. When the prodigal saw this, he realized he couldn’t work his

way back – he had to repent his way back and surrender. It is the **costly demonstration of unexpected love.**<sup>1</sup>

**QUESTION: What would have been your reaction to the returning son if you lived in those days?**

**QUESTION: When have you experienced this father’s kind of response from someone you’ve wronged?**

We all run to a distant country. It’s an affair or an addiction, or a huge expense, or that club, isn’t it? “I am the prodigal son every time I search for unconditional love where it cannot be found.”<sup>2</sup> If we have a dog, we’ve found it. Otherwise not so much, right? That’s because, through Jesus, we can experience unconditional love, but it requires our surrender, submission, obedience and humility. Not really a lot to ask from the One who saved us from the penalty sin requires.

**QUESTION: When have you searched for unconditional love? Where did you look? What did you find?**

**PRAYER:**

Lord Jesus, You require so little from us although You give so much for us. This is the grace You extend to us every day. We honor, worship and thank You for loving us so completely even though we don’t deserve it. In Jesus’ name. Amen

#### **QUESTIONS**

**QUESTION: How do you define the word “prodigal”? Has it ever defined you?**

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**QUESTION: What do you think about the father’s reaction to his son’s demand for his inheritance? What would you have done?**

**QUESTION: When have you known a family whose child ran away? How did the parents react to that prodigal child’s return?**

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**QUESTION: When have you experienced the father’s kind of response from someone you’ve wronged?**

**QUESTION: When have you searched for unconditional love? Where did you look? What did you find?**

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Bailey

<sup>2</sup> Henri Nouwen