



## WEEK 1 – THE PRODIGAL SON

### CHECK-IN

**How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... today's Scripture is a story about a young man who takes his rebellious phase a little too far. So, did you ever have a rebellious phase? Did you dress goth and listen to brooding music? Maybe you just wanted to dance in a town that had outlawed it? (If this one brings up bad memories, don't feel you have to answer.)**

### OPENING PRAYER

**Loving Father, remind us, no matter how far we stray, you are always there to welcome us home.**

### INTRODUCTION

When I get to thinking, you get a worship series. And coming out of a few deeper, more serious ones in a row, it was time for some levity. (Not that prayer and doubt aren't fun... just... heavy.) So recently, I

was asked what my favorite Bible story is. And like I said, I got to thinking... and here we are, a series on Mike's favorite stories in the Bible... ergo, Mike'd Up. (Don't judge, it's clever.) Now, I've got a lot of favorites, but I narrowed it to three. (This might be a series that repeats itself every so often... so... if you don't like these three, come back for the series sequel.) And to kick it off, we're going to start with a story that, as well as any other, sums up the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**Setup Question: We'll to get mine, so let's start with yours... what's your favorite Bible story and why? Did you identify with David fighting Goliath? Maybe you dig the message of the Good Samaritan? Perhaps you live outside the box and fancy yourself a talking donkey? (Disclaimer: It's okay not to have one... but your homework is to go read your Bible and find one!)**

## SCRIPTURE

Through an odd set of circumstances, I found myself in the plumbing aisle at Home Depot being asked this question, "What is your favorite Bible story?" Go back and watch this week's reflection for the whole thing. The young man in the orange Home Depot vest, tattoo sleeve, and piercings looked like he needed to hear something specific, so I started searching the mental spreadsheet. "Noah and the Ark"? Nah, that's ones too dark. "Jonah and the Whale"? Umm... a little too much doom and gloom there. "Joseph and His Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat"? Doubt this guy's an Andrew Lloyd Webber fan. Then it hit me. I think he needs to hear this one...

**Read Luke, chapter 15, verses 11 through 32.**

Now, I didn't read this word for word to the guy, but it felt like the right message... no matter how far we run, no matter how much we mess up, God will be right there, waiting to welcome us home. Who knows if it made a difference? Who knows if the Spirit spoke to this man's heart? But I have to believe we were both in the plumbing aisles at Home Depot for a deeper reason than him stocking bins and me buying pipe for some shelves.

**Question 1: We'll get into the Bible story in a minute. First, have you ever had an encounter like this, where you felt God put you and someone else in the right place at the right time for a reason? What happened and what was the outcome?**

## REFLECTION

Jesus is a smart guy. He knows how to preach to everyone in a crowd. And in this crowd, he's got all types. The first verse of the chapter tells us...

**Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. <sup>2</sup> This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain that he was associating with such sinful people—even eating with them! And so, Jesus told them this story...**

Jesus has "notorious sinners" listening to him speak. But he also has faithful religious Jews listening, as well. And so, Jesus speaks to both

groups. For the lost, he tells the story of the lost son. For the faithful, he tells the story of the faithful son. And each has something to learn. For the lost, he gives them the message: if you're in a place in your life where you feel like you need a reset, that there's some metaphoric pig slop of life that would be better than what you're dealing with right now, God is waiting for you to come home. God the Father is sitting on the porch, hoping you come strolling down the drive, and when you arrive there, He's gonna throw a party. To the faithful, he says, "I know you feel like because you've been good, you deserve good. And yet life is still hard, and you think that's not fair. But, it's okay to have not left. It's okay to have been the steady one. But that shouldn't make you jealous when someone who's lost comes home. It shouldn't upset your ideas of fairness when one of the lost sheep has been found. Lose the pride, lose the entitlement, and let's have a party!"

**Question 2: Time to ask the question, which character do you identify with? If you were in the crowd, which part would Christ have been speaking to you? Are you the lost son, haven't taken stock of where you were in life and thought, "wow... how did I get myself here?" Or are you one who has had a very steady life, expecting good things because you've been good? Discuss!**

But there's one more character in this story that Jesus uses to represent God the Father. And yet, there's something we can learn from this character, as well... the Father. In this story, Jesus says the Father waits for his Lost Son to come home. However, Jesus tells a

similar story just before this, where this character (this time a shepherd with a lost sheep) *goes looking* for the Lost. How would the Prodigal Son's story have been different if the Father went looking for his son, searching the country tirelessly until he found him? This is the love God has for the Lost... God not only has the love and forgiveness and mercy of the Father in the story, but the desperation of the Shepherd to go looking for us. We should do the same. Who in your life is lost and in need of seeking out? Is there a prodigal child who needs to know God is there waiting with arms wide open? Is there a faithful child who is feeling like life isn't fair right now, and needs to hear that it's okay? We are all called to this type of compassion.

**Question 3: Those weren't rhetorical. We're asking the question. Consider the story of the Prodigal Son. Put yourself in the position of the Father. Who in your life needs to hear the message of a God who will welcome them home? Who do you need to show the road back to God?**

## CLOSING

Very few other stories encapsulate the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ better than the story of the Prodigal Son. So, ask yourself, which character am I? Am I the lost one? Is there an area of my life where I've reached the end of a rope, where I need be strong enough to say, "I can't do this anymore," and come running back to God? Or are you the older son, having been faithful all along and maybe getting a little jaded at not getting the reward you feel you deserve? Be real and honest with the answer, then make a change. Come

home. Then, regardless of which child you identify with, take a note from the Father... and pray for the love and compassion to go out and seek that lost person in your life.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations  
and close in prayer.**