

Back In The Father's Arms

Luke 15

He was a rebel, college drop-out, a party boy, a carouser. He smoked, drank hard liquor, was a brawler, was well known by all of the local police authorities, and had more than one visit down to the jail.

By his own admission, he was the classic example of the prodigal son. Today he succeeds the most respected, admired, and perhaps famous American of the Twentieth Century - Billy Graham. The prodigal son's name is Franklin Graham. Today, Franklin Graham not only has a tremendous benevolent ministry called "The Samaritan Purse," but he is now preaching the Gospel just like his father to thousands and thousands of people all over the world. He will tell you he is where he is today because he had a father who left the lights on.

Charles Dickens calls the parable of the prodigal the greatest short-story ever written. It is the classic Biblical story of second chances. It is a story that never grows old and probably has the sweetest storybook ending of any story in the Bible. It is a story whose three main characters provide a glimpse into all our souls. The story is about the most famous father of all time. His son is one of the most infamous figures of all time. Their story is one of the most touching stories ever told.

How does God feel about people who mess up?

How does God feel about me?

When Rembrandt was young, he painted himself as the wandering son. When he was older, he repainted himself as the loving father who welcomes and embraces his son. Later in life, Rembrandt saw that the focus of the story was not on the son who sins but on the father who forgives.

"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. 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 and put it on 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've 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.' " Luke 15:11-32

1. When You Are Away From God, It Is Your Fault.

"The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property

between them.” Luke 15:12

The story begins with a son who had a very good home; godly parents, everything you could ever want in life. But the root of ingratitude has bloomed into the fruit of rebellion.

2. While You Are Away From God, You Have Failure.

“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.” Luke 15:13

The request would require that the father be dead. Normally the inheritance of an estate would not be given until the death of the father, but this son wanted his share of the inheritance immediately. What he was really saying to his father was, “I wish you were dead. I want what you have, but I don't want you.” A father could have slapped his son in the face for such an insulting request, but he did not. The public sale of 1/3 of the estate would soon spread the news of the family trouble. There would have been a special ceremony called a “Kazazah,” which means a “cutting off.”

A pot would be broken, and his cutting off would be announced, and the community would turn their backs on him as he left town. The loving father allows the son to quietly leave with his inheritance. There is no limit to the mileage God will allow us to wander, and there is no limit to the patience He has for us until we return.

The son had received all the blessings of the father, and yet he never shows any appreciation or gratitude for what has been done. He believes that if he could get away from his father, then everything would be all right.

Everything goes wrong when he lives his life independent from his father. The son said, “I want to have it my way, and I want to do it my way.” He leaves behind a lonely, broken-hearted father and sets out for the far country. In the far country he would eat, drink, and be merry. He leaves behind the restraints of home. He had not counted on an unexpected famine. He thought things would always be the way they were.

- There was the tragedy of waste.

“He wasted his substance with riotous living.” Luke 15:13

He was going to try everything there was to try. The word “wasted” means “to toss grain in the air and allow the wind to blow it away.” A lot of people are wasting their life. A lot of people are wasting the talents and the abilities that God has given to them.

- There was the tragedy of want.

“After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.” Luke 15:14

Sin is expensive. It cost him personally. It is possible to be filled in our belly but be empty in our soul. When you wander away from the Father and leave Him out of your life, there is a hunger and an emptiness. Everything he thought he would find in the far country, he did not find. He was reaching for more and more and finding less and less. No Jewish boy would accept a request to feed swine.

“He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.” Luke 15:16

There are some lessons that are only learned in the hog pen. The road to the hog pen is a bright road. He began to think about the Father's house. It was not the badness of sin that woke him up, it was the goodness of the

father. He took a look at himself and where he was and said, “I don't belong here.” The son was just beginning to think about home, but the father had been thinking about the son for a long time. You might have lived years with indifference toward the Heavenly Father, but there has never been a day, a minute, or a second when the Father was not thinking about you.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’” Luke 15:17

The father was not indoors when the storm-beaten scarecrow appeared on the horizon.

“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.” Luke 15:20

The word SAW speaks of the eyes of forgiveness. The word COMPASSION speaks of the heart of forgiveness. The word RAN speaks of the feet of forgiveness. The word THREW speaks of the arms of forgiveness. The word KISSED speaks of mercy.

It was considered undignified for a man to run. He is consumed by compassion.

“He had compassion on him.” Luke 15:20

He was able to look beyond what his son had done to his own condition.

When he left home, his word was, “Give me.” He is different now, saying “Make me.” You would be surprised what God can “make” in a life. The first level of servants in the Bible is the bondservant. The bondservants (doulos) were treated like one of the family. A middle-class servant (sedar) worked for the bondservant. The (mishtash) were the servants who were employed by the hour and could be dismissed for any reason at any time. He said, “I want to be the lowest servant of all.”

The son confessed. *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am no longer worthy to be a son. Make me as a hired servant.”* Luke 15:18-19

He was willing to work as a hired servant, but he can't even get those words out because the father is so busy with compassion. The father never brought up the past. The sins of the son had been buried in the grave of forgiveness and cast into the sea of forgetfulness because when you come back to God, all you find is forgiveness.

3. When You Come Back To God, You Find Forgiveness.

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes 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.” Luke 15:22-24

In the far country, the son had learned the meaning of misery, but back home he now learned the meaning of mercy.

The son who had wasted his inheritance in parties is now the guest of honor at his father's party. The father never even lets him finish his speech. He smothers him with kisses and puts his arms around him. He made the great discovery that he was still WANTED. When he went back home, he discovered that the father wanted him! Everything that boy was looking for in the far country, he found back home.

When the father got to him, he *“fell on his neck and kissed him.”* The word kiss literally means “to smother with

kisses.” Can you imagine how dirty, how filthy, how smelly that boy was? But his father couldn't taste the filth and he couldn't smell the stench. All he cared about was that boy. He's kissing him so much the boy can't even talk. That is a picture of abundant love. A person may go to hell unsaved, but they will never go to hell unloved.

- The Robe

The best robe is the one the father wore to the festival. The robe would cover the scars of his wandering. Sin did its damage to us when we were in the far country. The robe would signify his complete restoration into the family. At night, a person would cover themselves with the robe when they slept. He was wrapped in his father's love.

- The Ring

The signet ring gave the son his father's authority. The ring represents sonship. He was saying, "Come back home, I'm giving you back ALL the position you once enjoyed. You're right back where you were."

- The Shoes

The shoes removed all possibility of his returning as a servant.

- The Fatted Calf

The fatted calf was a deep expression of joy. This was the happiest of moments in the father's life. The head of the house would take the blood of that animal and apply it to the threshold of the door. When the honored guest stepped through the door, they would step over blood, a symbol of a new covenant. He was home, and there was a new relationship with the father. He was home because an innocent victim had shed blood. You have a right to come back to the father's house because an innocent person, Jesus Christ, shed His blood for you. He leads the boy back into the village as if to say, "Don't stone him. Stone me."

When we're in right relationship with the Father, He fills and satisfies all those needs, the deepest needs in your life. You have a Father in heaven who loves you. For every step you take toward God, He'll take two steps toward you.

No matter how far away you have gone, you can come back. No matter how far out you have gone, you can come in. No matter how far down you have gone, you can come up.

When you do, just remember that God will be waiting with open arms because He always leaves the lights on.