# Parable of the Prodigal Son

A parable is a short, simple story with a moral, spiritual, or religious lesson. It places a familiar, everyday scenario next to a complex or abstract truth. Unlike fables, which often use animals or nature, parables typically feature realistic human characters. They use experiences to make deep wisdom easy to understand and remember. Jesus often spoke in parables after being asked questions by His listeners. Two familiar examples are: the Good Samaritan, a parable about helping anyone in need; and the Prodigal Son, a tale about forgiveness, second chances, and unconditional love, in which Jesus addresses the Scribes and Pharisees who criticized Him for welcoming sinners.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is one of Jesus' most beautiful parables, which teaches us once more that God is a kind and understanding Father (Matt. 6:8; Rom. 8:15; 2 Cor. 1:3). Not only does the parable have universal appeal but it also applies to men and women alike.

The son who asks for his part of the inheritance is a symbol of the person who cuts himself off from God through sin. "Although the word 'mercy' does not appear, this parable nevertheless expresses the essence of the divine mercy in a particularly clear way." (Pope St. John Paul II, r. 1978-2005, Dives in misericordia, 5).

The son who leaves home in "loose living," in a certain sense is the man of every time, beginning with the man who was the first to leave the inheritance of grace and original justice – Adam. "The parable touches upon every breach of the covenant of love, every loss of grace, every sin" (Ibid.).

After his departure from home the young man experiences regret of his decision and the unhappiness it has brought. His predicament describes the enslavement which sin involves (Rom. 1:25; 6:6; Gal. 5:1): by sinning one loses the freedom of the children of God (Rom. 8:21; Gal. 4:31; 5:13) and hands oneself over to the power of Satan.

God always hopes for the return of the sinner: He wants us to repent. When the young man returns home his father does not reproach him for his transgressions ("I told you so! I hope you're happy for the pain you caused!" etc.) but greets him with compassion.

This parable of Jesus, although known as the Prodigal Son, might be called the "Prodigal Father" because it portrays the unlimited heavenly Father's mercy.

The parable is divided into 2 parts, verses 11-24 and 25-32, each concluding in joyous expressions.

The Prodigal Son was defiled in a way most humiliating for an observant Jew – tending pigs – pork, a forbidden food. No one gave him anything; he was forced to steal. The young man returned to his father's house, not so much out of sheer necessity (he could have gone somewhere else), but because of the compelling remembrance of his father's goodness.

Verses 25-30 are the action and words of the older son. The elder brother acted the part of the Scribes and Pharisees, who "never transgressed one of thy commands" (V. 29). He immediately expressed his dislike of his brother by not even acknowledging his brother: "this thy son" (V. 30).

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Further, without any evidence, he accuses his brother of a wasted life and indulgence with wicked women, harlots.

The older self-righteous brother represents the average Jew at that time who was convinced that the Gentiles were unworthy of God's truth and love and beyond redemption. God the Father, however, calls all men and women to repentance and forgiveness (Matt. 18;14; 1 Tim. 2:4).

Finally, he attacks the forgiving generosity of his father towards the repentant brother. But the father did not return rejection of his goodness with rejection of the elder son. True to his nature, the father forgives his older son by reassuring him: "Son, you are always with me and all that is mine is yours." (V. 31).

God still offers salvation to all His children: "All that is mine is yours." In Heaven we will enjoy forever the love of God in its fullest sense.

God is waiting for us with open arms, even though we don't deserve it. It does not matter how great our debt is. Just like the prodigal son, all we have to do is open our hearts to His love and forgiveness. God's mercy is so great that man cannot grasp it; as we can see in the case of the elder son, who thinks his father loves the younger son excessively, his jealousy prevents him from understanding how his father can love this "great sinner."

Sts. Augustine, Paul, and Mary Magdalene were at one time great sinners, and by the grace of God turned their lives around.

It was true, the younger brother was a sinner, but that does not justify the elder brother passing judgment on him.

This love can reach down to every prodigal son and daughter no matter how far the sinner is from "true love." Because no matter how far a person has fallen the Father 's love reaches down to even the deepest depths.

"There will be more joy in Heaven over a sinner who repents than of those who have no need of repentance" (Luke 15:7).

## God is Love ( 1 John 4: 8, 16 )

God is not abstract love, but a lover. He offers His love to the human race corporately and singularly to each human heart. God offers His love through the channels of family, friends, Church, and culture. When family life is fractured, or when the culture is corrupted, He still continues to extend His love. When His love is returned, He forgives past neglect and sins. He leads the sincerely repentant to become saints.

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It was not only to teach us by example how to live that Jesus became man. He came as the Messiah, the long-promised Savior, to suffer and die in order that the scales of ontological order (order of existence) could perfectly balance mercy and justice in judging men. No merely human person could reconcile God's justice with His mercy, only Christ the Son, because He both embraces and surpasses all mankind.

Some people are troubled to learn that God's perfection demands justice. They want to enjoy His mercy while denying His justice because they think justice is cruel. "Justice is a supreme example of His love. Justice is the defense of the defenseless. It protects the weak, and restores to little ones those things of which they have been robbed by force." (Caryll Houselander, Wood of the Cradle, Wood of the Cross, Sophia Institute Press, 1966, p. 123).

While the older son mirrors the attitudes of the Pharisees, who regard God's grace as a zero-sum game (where someone's gain is equal to another's loss) rather than rejoicing over the spiritual recovery and mercy shown to a sinner. The parable highlights the boundless nature of God's love, reminding believers that divine grace for a returning sinner does not diminish the gifts already given to those who have remained faithful.

God the Father is always ready to forgive, as the father of the prodigal son says: "...My son you are with me always and everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found." (Luke 15: 31)