

Sermon Notes

Practical Lessons for Understanding the Word of God



The Downward Path to a Broken Life

KEY PASSAGE: Luke 15:11-24 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Genesis 3:4 | Luke 15:30 | John 3:16

SUMMARY

So many people today are profoundly unhappy.

They come from all walks of life and socioeconomic levels but have one thing in common—they feel stuck in their misery and don't know how to get out of it. Oftentimes, they're angry or feel broken, empty, or worthless. It seems like nobody cares for them, and just getting through life is a difficult day-to-day struggle. Some of them don't understand why they feel this way, while others know that their choices have contributed to their condition. Whatever the cause and no matter how deep the despair, the Scripture offers hope and a way out for anyone trapped in misery.

SERMON POINTS

Jesus used the story of the prodigal son to show us the downward path into a broken life as well as the road to recovery (Luke 15:11-24). Although we may not find ourselves in the son's exact situation, we can all identify with his choices and responses.

The Path to a Broken Life

Each of the following words describes the progressive steps that lead to misery. They will help us recognize how we've ended up in our present condition and what we need to do to change course.

■ **Dissatisfaction.** Although he came from a wealthy family and had everything he needed, the Prodigal Son became discontented with his life. Perhaps he heard stories about other places or saw people enjoying pleasures that he didn't

have. Whatever the cause, he felt like he was missing something in life.

- **Desire.** The son's dissatisfaction led to a desire for something else, and the more he thought about what he wanted, the more his desires multiplied. Like the Prodigal Son, we may long to be free of restraints and have the financial freedom, for example, to live as we please. But this kind of self-indulgent lifestyle will get us into trouble and eventually lead to misery. When our desires are sanctified and placed under the will and authority of God, they can inspire us to achieve whatever He wants us to accomplish. But if they are not controlled and contained, they will lead us into dangerous territory.
- **Deception.** The inevitable result of uncontrolled desires is deception. In the story, the son thought he'd find what he wanted in a distant country. There he'd have complete freedom from parental authority and have his share of the inheritance to live as he pleased. For us, a distant country represents any place we desire to live outside of God's will and purpose for our lives. Satan's goal is to lure us into believing that living in accordance with our own desires is the way to happiness and satisfaction, but it is actually the path to misery.
- **Decision.** After being deceived by the devil and his own desires, the son then made a decision to leave home in search of a better life. All he saw ahead of him were freedom and unrestricted pleasures. Satan never wants us to think about the future outcomes of our choices. When he tempted Eve in the Garden, he told her that, contrary to God's Word, she wouldn't die if she disobeyed (Gen. 3:4). Anytime we decide that we have a

better plan than God's, we're headed for trouble. By walking away from Him, we lose our anchor in life. Instead of being connected to our heavenly Father, we are left adrift, searching for something or someone to satisfy our longings.

- **Delight.** After leaving home, the Prodigal Son lived for his own pleasure, and for a time he enjoyed himself. He had an abundance of freedom, fun, financial resources, and friends. Verse 13 (of Luke 15) says, "He squandered his estate with loose living." His older brother claimed that he devoured his father's wealth with prostitutes (v. 30). Although the younger son thought he was finally free to live as he pleased, in reality, he was enslaved to sin and would soon suffer the consequences.
- **Disillusionment.** His enjoyment of unrestrained liberty and abundance quickly turned to disappointment. "When he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished" (v. 14). He had foolishly tried to gratify himself with pleasures that can never truly satisfy or last. And oftentimes, this is what we attempt to do as well. We spend our time, money, and effort pursuing what we think will make us happy, only to be disillusioned when they all fail us.
- **Despair.** The next step downward is hopeless misery and desolation. The prodigal son ended up hungry and alone in a field feeding pigs (vv. 15-16). For a Jewish man this was the bottom of the barrel. He'd lost everything, and no one was willing to help him.
- **Determination.** However, when he came to his senses, he remembered his home and his father (vv. 17-19). Here he was in a faraway land dying of hunger while his father's hired servants had more than enough to eat. At this point, he made a decision to go home, confess his sin, and ask his father to let him be one of his servants.

The Return Home

The Prodigal Son left home with riches, fine clothes, and dignity, but he returned empty-handed, clothed in rags, and humbled by dishonor. Despite his foolish

choices and impoverished condition, his father ran to him, clothed him like royalty, and celebrated his return with a lavish party (vv. 20-24).

God is like this loving father. He's willing to forgive us, cleanse us, and give us a second chance. But we must first choose to come back to Him. Although we came to be in our miserable condition through a series of steps—dissatisfaction, desire, deception, decision, delight, disillusionment, and despair—we can determine today to turn around.

The only way out of a broken life is to humbly recognize where we are at present, confess our sin to God, and return home to our heavenly Father with repentance, surrender, and obedience. Whatever we have done or wherever we've been, He will take us back right away. He loved us enough to send His own Son to pay the penalty on the cross for our sins. Now whoever believes in Jesus and accepts Him as Savior will be forgiven and receive eternal life (John 3:16).

RESPONSE

- Can you identify with any part of the story of the prodigal son? In what ways have you felt like he did or responded in a similar manner?
- Review the progressive steps that lead to misery. Have you ever found yourself at any or all of these steps? What was the situation? How far down the path did you go?
- Now consider how you could turn around at several of the earlier steps so you don't end up following the entire pathway to misery. For instance, what can you do to cut off dissatisfaction before it takes root in your life?

To purchase this message on CD or DVD, please visit store.intouch.org or call 1-800-789-1473. To download these Sermon Notes, visit intouch.org/sermonnotes

