

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



The Forgiving Father

KEY PASSAGE: Luke 15:20-24 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Numbers 32:23 | Ezekiel 18:4 | Luke 15:1-19, 25-32
Romans 6:23 | Hebrews 9:27 | 1 John 1:9

► SUMMARY

Jesus was a skillful storyteller, and perhaps His most masterful parable was that of the prodigal son.

When He told this story, His audience was composed of tax collectors and sinners who were drawn to Jesus as well as self-righteous scribes and Pharisees who criticized Him for His association with sinners. Both these groups needed a lesson on the grace and mercy of God, and that's exactly what the parable of the prodigal son delivers.

► SERMON POINTS

This parable is about a son who asked his father for his share of the estate, left home, and wasted his inheritance. But perhaps the most amazing character in this story is the forgiving father. Jesus was teaching that no one has sinned to such a degree that it's impossible to turn back to God in repentance and receive forgiveness.

The Steps of the Prodigal Son Away From His Father

- **Dissatisfaction.** This young man had everything he needed at home, yet he yearned for more.
- **Desire.** He wanted to enjoy things he'd never experienced, thinking that satisfaction would come if he could indulge his cravings.
- **Deception.** He was deceived and believed he was missing something in life, and it could only be found outside his father's house.
- **Decision.** He chose to leave home and its restrictions in order to enjoy the life he imagined awaited him.

- **Departure.** He took his fortune and left his family to go to a far-off country.
- **Delight.** With plenty of money at his disposal, he enjoyed himself with new worldly pleasures. He tasted sin and believed these new experiences were the fulfillment of all his dreams.
- **Disillusionment.** Sin only satisfies for a season. What he had thought would give him pleasure began to leave him empty. Although sin may be enjoyable at first, the wages always result in death (Rom. 6:23). With a sinful lifestyle, there is the death of happiness, peace, and security.
- **Despair.** After the money was all spent and a famine came, the Prodigal Son ended up in a hog pen feeding pigs while he himself remained hungry. He'd begun life at home with everything he needed, and now he didn't even have enough to eat. His expectations of a great life had ended, and he'd lost everything. With God's grace, he came to his senses and in repentance and humility headed home to his father.

The Steps of the Father to His Son

- **Wounded heart.** The prodigal's father was hurt by his son's desire to have his inheritance early and leave the home he'd given him.
- **Wondered about him continually.** Like any parent whose child is far from home, this dad was concerned for his son—whether he was making good choices or was in need.
- **Waited patiently.** As parents today wait for renegade sons and daughters to return, this father longed to see his son.
- **Watched for him.** His son was never far from this father's thoughts as he watched the road to see if he was returning.

- **Wanted his son to return soon.** Whatever had happened in his son's life would never cause this dad to reject him. His desire was to see him as soon as possible.
- **Welcomed him home.** Eventually the day came when the father saw his son on the road while he was still a long way off. He felt compassion and ran to meet him. Instead of greeting him with reproofs, he repeatedly embraced and kissed his son despite his filthy condition. The young man barely managed to get out his confession of sin and of unworthiness to be called his son before his father called the servants to bring out the best robe, a ring, and sandals to clothe him. Then he told them to kill the fattened calf and prepare a feast to celebrate his son's return.

Through this story, Jesus was using an earthly father to depict the readiness of the heavenly Father to forgive those who come to Him in humble repentance, no matter how far they have strayed from Him in the past. He was showing the scribes and Pharisees God's attitude toward repentant sinners and conveying to the tax collectors and sinners that His Father was willing to forgive and welcome them if they'd confess and return to Him.

We can each see ourselves in one of the characters in this parable—the rebellious son who's far away from God, the forgiving father who welcomes him home, or the bitter brother who doesn't think the prodigal deserves to be welcomed.

Running away from the Lord and living in sin is never the way to find happiness. Like the prodigal, we'll eventually find ourselves disillusioned and despairing. Yet the heavenly Father forgives and welcomes us home when we forsake our sin and return to him. He'll give us a new beginning, and there will be a great celebration in heaven.

The only hope for all of us is the grace, love, and forgiveness of almighty God. Since mankind is appointed for death and then judgment, we must not put off the decision to repent and trust Christ as our

Savior (Heb. 9:27). He died on the cross to pay the penalty we all deserve for our sin. Through faith in Him and His sacrifice for us, we can be saved.

What God Offers Repentant Prodigals

- **Forgiveness.** On the basis of Christ's death and our faith in Him, we can receive forgiveness. If we'll confess our sins, God will be faithful to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).
- **Acceptance.** The Lord accepts us not on the basis of our good works but because of Christ's death on the cross, which paid our sin debt in full. Each one who believes in Him becomes a child of God who is welcomed into His household.
- **Restoration.** We are given eternal life, and God restores our dignity, attitudes, and thinking.
- **Rejoicing.** Not only do we rejoice but so do our family and friends who have been waiting for us to come home to the Father. But the greatest celebration of all is in heaven whenever a sinner repents (v. 10).

Returning to the Lord is the beginning of a relationship with Him that can never be severed. Although we may sin and experience His loving discipline, we can never lose our salvation.

► RESPONSE

- Has there ever been a time in your life when you've come in humble repentance to God, confessing that you've messed up your life and need His forgiveness? If so, how have you seen the Lord's restoration in your life? If not, why are you delaying?
- How has the representation of the earthly father in this story enriched your understanding of your heavenly Father?

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