

THE PROBLEM WITH PRODIGALS

Luke 15:11-14 (MSG) Then he said, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, 'Father, I want right now what's coming to me.' So the father divided the property between them. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt."

FOUR STEPS DOWNWARD

v.12 - SELFISHNESS ("I want right now")

- According to Jewish law, an elder son received twice as much as the other sons (Deuteronomy 21:17), and a father could distribute his wealth during his lifetime if he wished.
- It was perfectly LEGAL for the younger son to ask for his share of the estate and even to sell it, but it was certainly not LOVING. It was as though he were saying to his father, "I wish you were already dead."
- Jesus once warned two disputing brothers, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." (Luke 12:15)
- Why? Because the covetous person can never be satisfied, no matter how much he acquires, and a dissatisfied heart leads to a disappointed life.
- You cannot enjoy the things money can buy if you ignore the things money cannot buy!

v.13 - SEPARATION ("distant country")

- The far country is not necessarily a place to which we TRAVEL; it exists first and foremost as a place within our HEART.
- Before sin is ever a DEED against God, it is always first a DISTANCE from God.
- **Isaiah 59:1-2 (NLT)** Listen! The Lord is not too weak to save you, and he is not becoming deaf. He can hear you when you call. But there is a problem—your sins have cut you off from God. Because of your sin, he has turned away and will not listen anymore.

v.13 - SENSUALITY ("wasted everything")

- The word "prodigal" actually means "wasteful." Once the son got out from under the restraint of his father, he became reckless with his life. He didn't see the consequences of "something for nothing."
- **Proverbs 20:21** An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.

v.14 - STARVATION ("he began to hurt")

- Life in the far country was not what the son expected. While he had money, he had friends. But when his resources were gone, so were they! He joined (literally "glued") himself to a citizen who sent him to feed pigs – the lowest humiliation to a Jewish boy!
- He was finally forced to do for a stranger what he would not do for his own father – work! This is what sin does: it promises freedom, but only brings slavery; it promises success, but only brings failure; it promises life, but "the wages of sin is death!" (Romans 6:23)
- **John 8:34-36 (MSG)** Jesus said, "I tell you most solemnly that anyone who chooses a life of sin is trapped in a dead-end life and is, in fact, a slave. A slave is a transient, who can't come and go at will. The Son, though, has an established position, the run of the house. So if the Son sets you free, you are free through and through. "

FOUR STEPS UPWARD

v.17 - REALIZATION ("when he came to himself")

- The prodigal never would have come to the Father if he had not first come to himself! The servants of his Father (the lowest class in the entire house) were better off than he was.
- He thought he would "find himself" but instead he "lost himself." For many months he had not "been himself" – there is an INSANITY in sin that paralyzes the image of God within us and liberates the animal inside.
- He REALIZED that he had seen his father in a wrong light!
- **James 1:17 (NLT)** Whatever is good and perfect comes to us from God above, who created all heaven's lights. Unlike them, he never changes or casts shifting shadows.

v.18 - REPENTANCE ("I have sinned against heaven")

- If the son had only thought about himself and his situation, he would have experienced regret or remorse, but not REPENTANCE. Repentance involves the WILL, not just the EMOTIONS ("I will arise ... I will go ... I will say"). METANOIA means "a change of mind."
- He left home with the words "give me" (my inheritance – v.12) but returned with the words "make me" (a servant – v.19). He had experienced a complete change of attitude.
- **2 Corinthians 7:10 (NLT)** For God can use sorrow in our lives to help us turn away from sin and seek salvation. We will never regret that kind of sorrow. But sorrow without repentance is the kind that results in death.
- It is God's goodness, not just our badness, which leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4).

v.20 - RETURN (“he arose, and came to his father”)

- When the son really changed his mind, he was willing to change his direction. Real repentance is the FIRST STEP in a journey back to the father’s house!
- **Ephesians 2:8-10** For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

v.24 - RESTORATION (“he was lost, and is found”)

- It was a breach of an elderly Jewish man’s dignity to run, but the father had been waiting a long time for this reunion!
- He saw him when he was still “a great way off” and met him there. It was very possible that the elders of the city would have wanted to stone this rebellious son (Deuteronomy 21:18-21), but they couldn’t do so when he was wrapped in the arms of his father!
- Servants did not wear rings, shoes, or expensive garments – but the prodigal son received them all! If he had been dealt with according to the law there would have been a FUNERAL, but because he was dealt with according to love there was a FEAST.
- **Psalms 103:8-13** The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.

WHAT A HAPPY ENDING! SO WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH PRODIGALS? THERE ARE TWO KINDS!

- Remember why Jesus told this parable in the first place!
- **Luke 15:2** And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.
- The elder brother needed to repent of his attitude and return to the father’s house just as much as his younger brother. He had nothing to lose by his brother’s return, but he had grown too protective of the father’s house! He did his father’s will, but not from the heart.
- **Mark 2:17 (NLT)** When Jesus heard this, he told them, “Healthy people don’t need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough.”

- **ONE PRODIGAL LEFT THE HOUSE AND WASTED HIS INHERITANCE; THE OTHER PRODIGAL STAYED IN THE HOUSE AND WASTED HIS INHERITANCE! IN ALL THESE YEARS, HE HAD WORKED HARD, BUT NEVER ONCE ENJOYED A PARTY!**
- 'I'm not setting foot in that house as long as that kid's in there! I'm the one who stayed here; look at these calluses on my hands - see those? They're from working this farm. I was here the night he left; I was here when he told dad he'd had it with farming, that my father was out of date. I was here when he walked down the road with his inheritance in a big bag. He didn't even look over his shoulder at us. I was here! I was here when the people came in from the town and they taunted dad that he must have been a great father because his little boy was doing him proud in the big city. I was here and heard dad sometimes sob in his bed at night - and I knew what he was crying about. I was here! And now the kid comes home because he's hungry. He ran out of money and ran out of friends and ran out of food - he's home to sponge off dad again."
- There was one thing the elder prodigal didn't understand: DO YOU HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT GOES ON IN THE HEART OF A FATHER WHEN HE THINKS HIS CHILD IS DEAD AND HE COMES HOME ALIVE?
- **Romans 8:15 (NLT)** So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into his family—calling him “Father, dear Father.”
- ONE PRODIGAL WAS REBELLIOUS, THE OTHER WAS RELIGIOUS; WHAT THE FATHER WANTED WAS RELATIONSHIP!
- **DON'T STAND OUTSIDE! Come in and enjoy the feast!**