

The Most Excellent Way

“ONCE We Were LOST ... NOW We Are FOUND”

The Prodigal is a type of the redeemed sinner — a new believer or backsliding Christian. Jesus describes the downward and the upward steps each of us took — and perhaps retraced — before we fully experienced the love and acceptance and forgiveness of our Heavenly Father. We may not fully comprehend a God who possesses so much love that He waits patiently for us, and joyfully forgives us all our sins, but we do understand the peace, love and joy we receive when we surrender our lives to Him by faith in Jesus.

The *sensual addictions* that took us down to the bottom are merely symptoms of the self-will and selfishness of our sinful nature. We owe Jesus everything! We are *brand new* creatures by His Spirit. Let's *celebrate* our *new, spiritual life* in Jesus — not just our recovery! We *must follow* His example *and obey* Him to avoid stumbling down the steps of destruction! *Again and again!*

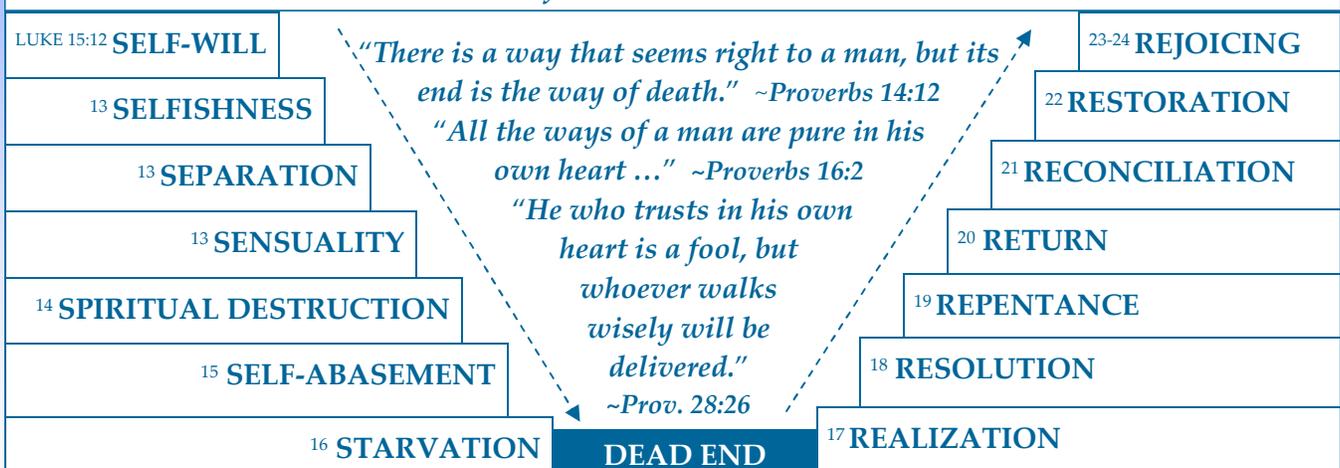
THE PRODIGAL ~ “Rebellion to Restoration”

Luke 15:11-22 NIV
Jesus continued:
 “There was a man who had two sons.
¹²The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.
¹³Not 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.
¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.
¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.
¹⁷When 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!
¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.
¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.’
²⁰So 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.
²¹The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’
²²But 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.
²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.
²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.”

“Path of the Redeemed Sinner”



The Most Excellent Way

Through the parable of the lost son, Jesus presents a vivid illustration of God and His mercy for repentant sinners.

The parable describes the passion of a caring father for his runaway son. Day after day, the father had been scanning the horizons for any sign of his lost son. Although in the first century a father would typically wait until a son showed some sign of respect before addressing him, here the father threw all social conventions aside. He couldn't wait to see his son. He started walking toward him. With open arms, he embraced his son, pulling him tightly to himself.

God is like this loving father. He wants to welcome sinners back home with open arms. This parable is a picture of God's grace.

Thank Him for showing that type of compassion to you.

SELF-WILL

Luke 15:11-12

A man had two sons, the younger of whom wanted his share of his father's estate (inheritance). This would have been one-third of the total estate, with the older son receiving two-thirds, a double portion of the other as prescribed by the law (Deuteronomy 21:17). In most cases the son would have received this at his father's death, although fathers sometimes chose to divide up their inheritance early and retire from managing their estates.

What is unusual is that the younger son initiated the division of the estate. This showed arrogant disregard for his father's authority as head of the family.

SELFISHNESS

Luke 15:13

Within just a few days, the younger son was on his way — indicating that this had been his plan when he had asked for his inheritance in the first place. He packed all his belongings and got as far away from his family as possible, traveling to a distant land.

SEPARATION

Luke 15:13

The young man apparently had wanted to live his own way, be his own master, get out from under the rules of his home and his father. Money was his ticket out, so he took it and ran.

SENSUALITY

Luke 15:13

In this distant land, he wasted all his money on wild living. Apparently this "wild" life and the freedom he thought went with it had also been part of his plan. So he lived on the wild side for a while, spending freely on whatever he chose.

SPIRITUAL DESTRUCTION

Luke 15:14

But then his money ran out. The inheritance, whatever amount it was, sustained him for a time, but it was not an endless supply. It dried up, and then, to make matters worse, a great famine swept over the land and the boy did not even have money for food.

SELF-ABASEMENT

Luke 15:15

Jesus' listeners would have understood that the young man had traveled outside Jewish territory, since he later ended up with pigs (15:15-16) — animals Jews did not own because they were considered unclean.

The young man became so desperate that he went and hired himself out to work for a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. According to Moses' law, pigs were unclean animals (Leviticus 11:2-8; Deuteronomy 14:8). This meant that pigs could not be eaten or used for sacrifices. To protect themselves from defilement, Jews would not even touch pigs.

For a Jew to stoop to feeding pigs would have been a great humiliation, and for this young man to desire to eat food that the pigs had touched was to be degraded beyond belief.

The Most Excellent Way

STARVATION

Luke 15:16

That no one gave him anything shows that he was neglected and insignificant — he had truly sunk to the depths.

DEAD END

REALIZATION

Luke 15:17

When reality finally hit him, the son finally came to his senses. Sitting among pigs that were better fed than he was, he reflected on life back home. He realized that at home even the hired men have food enough to spare.

God's love is constant and patient and welcoming. He will search and give people opportunities to respond, but He will not force them to come to Him. Like the father in this story, God waits patiently for people to come to their senses.

RESOLUTION

Luke 15:18

With no money, no dignity, and, so he thought, no claim to sonship in his father's household, he decided to go home to [his] father, confess his sin, and ask to be taken on as a hired man. At least there he would not go hungry.

While his motivation at first seems to have been his hunger, he could have saved his pride by never going back. He could have searched for a job as a hired hand anywhere (although his present experience showed him that not all hired hands were treated as well as those on his father's estate). He could have avoided his older brother's inevitable scorn over what he had done by staying away. Instead, this young man chose to go home.

REPENTANCE

Luke 15:18

The key lies in the words that he planned to say to his father: *"I have sinned against both heaven and you."* He wanted to tell his father he was sorry. He

wanted to repent of his selfishness that had sent him away and spent all the money that his father had set aside for his future. Even if it meant living as a hired man in his own home, he would return there in order to say these things to his father.

RETURN

Luke 15:18

The son returned home to his father, not knowing what to expect — the best he could anticipate was a cold shoulder, a halfhearted welcome, but in hopes of being hired to work for his father.

The younger son, like many who are rebellious and immature, wanted to be free to live as he pleased, and he had to hit bottom before he came to his senses. It often takes great sorrow and tragedy to cause people to look to the only one who can help them. For this young man, coming to his senses meant reconnecting his life to those who loved him. He had had his fill of individualistic adventure, and he realized his best prospect was to reconnect with family and friends.

Youth loves freedom and needs a growing portion of it. But youth needs family, friends, and community too — the solid base that provides identity and support. Are you trying to live your own way, selfishly pushing aside any responsibility or commitment that gets in your way? Stop and look before you hit bottom. You will save yourself and your family much grief. In your young adult years, reach high but keep connections strong.

The father watched and waited. He was dealing with a human being with a will, but he was ready to greet his son if he returned. The father seemed to have cast his eyes on the horizon many times since his son had left, hoping one day to see him returning.

RECONCILIATION

Luke 15:21

Clearly God's love reaches out to sinners who, repenting of their sin, run to Him for forgiveness. They can be assured of a warm welcome from the one who has been watching for them to come.

Finally, his father saw him coming even while

The Most Excellent Way

he was far away. The father ran, embraced, and kissed his son. He was filled with love and compassion at the sight of his son who had come home.

For the patriarch of the family to run was to lose all caution and dignity. The father went beyond normal forgiveness and showed incredible love. The son began to give his father the speech he had prepared (15:19), but he didn't even get to the part about asking to be hired, for the father wanted to welcome his son back into his home with a grand celebration.

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RESTORATION

Luke 15:22

The father immediately restored this destitute and humbled young man as his son, directing the servant to bring the finest robe (generally given to a guest of honor), a ring (signifying authority, as a son, not a servant), and sandals (only slaves and the very poor went barefoot).

REJOICING

Luke 15:23-24

The calf that was being fattened up for the time when a special feast should be prepared was to be killed — the father could think of no more fitting celebration. His son had been as good as dead to him but now had returned to life. He had been lost but now was found. This father's love and compassion picture the love God has always shown to His wayward people.

**"As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion
on those who fear Him."**

Psalm 103:13

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Jeremiah the prophet wrote:

*"There is hope in your future," says the LORD,
"That your children shall come
back to their own border."*

¹⁸*"I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself:*

*'You have chastised me, and I was chastised,
Like an untrained bull;*

*Restore me, and I will return,
For You are the LORD my God.*

¹⁹*Surely, after my turning, I repented;*

*And after I was instructed,
I struck myself on the thigh;*

*I was ashamed, yes, even humiliated,
Because I bore the reproach of my youth.'*

²⁰*Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a pleasant child?*

*For though I spoke against him,
I earnestly remember him still;*

Therefore My heart yearns for him;

I will surely have mercy on him," says the LORD.

Jeremiah 31:17-20

FORGIVE AND FORGET

This father restored his wayward son and celebrated his return. **In this reconciliation, the father absorbed the hurt and financial loss and was willing to adjust his hopes and dreams for his child.**

People are not perfect — your life will not unfold according to blueprints.

Your children will not develop according to your specifications.

You can harbor resentment if you choose, but when it comes to relationships, that choice is always self-defeating.

Joy embraces others — stubbornness shuns them.

Peace forgives others — pride prolongs the separation.

Love cleans the slate of hurts recorded — self-pity smudges the record until nobody remembers who is at fault or why.

When the lost relationship is found, when apology is genuine, when reconciliation is sought, forgive and forget, absorb the loss and the cost, and rejoice and let the party begin!

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The Most Excellent Way

“The Prodigal Son”

Luke 15:11-22

Questions for Personal Reflection and Group Discussion

- ***Studying God’s Word***

1. What did the younger son ask his father to do? (15:12-13)
2. What did the younger son do after arriving in the distant country? (15:13)
3. How did the younger son live once he was out on his own? (15:13-20)
4. Why did the younger son have to hire himself out for work? (15:14-15)
5. What made the younger son decide to return home? (15:17-19)
6. How did the father respond to the younger son’s return home? (15:20)
7. Why did the father call for a celebration? (15:22)

- ***Understanding God’s Word***

8. What does the forgiving love of the father in this story represent?
9. How have you been like the prodigal son in this story?
10. How have you personally experienced the forgiving love of the Father?
11. What should we do when a vile person wants to be forgiven?
12. How should we react when a person comes to know Christ?
13. **How can you show compassion for those who have not believed in Christ?**
14. **What could you do to thank God for His amazing love for you?**
15. What responsibility do you have to your unbelieving friends?
16. What does this parable reveal to you about the Lord’s love?

The Most Excellent Way

- *Applying God's Word*

17. How can you honor your Heavenly Father for His love and mercy toward you?
18. How will you honor your earthly parents and your Heaven Father?
19. How will you avoid backsliding?
20. Say or write a brief prayer of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord in response to once being lost and now being found ... how has your life been changed.

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Titus 3:3-8 NKJV

"For we ourselves were also once foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving various lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another.

⁴But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared,

*⁵not by works of righteousness which we have done,
but according to His mercy He saved us,*

through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

⁶whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,

*⁷that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs
according to the hope of eternal life.*

*⁸This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly,
that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works.*

These things are good and profitable to men."

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Matthew 18:11-13 NKJV

Jesus said: "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost .

*¹²What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray,
does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains
to seek the one that is straying?*

*¹³And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you,
he rejoices more over that sheep than
over the ninety-nine that did not go astray."*

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