

A Prodigal Love of the Father **Luke 15:11-24**

A woman wrote a funny dad story. When she was in the 3rd grade, one evening she was solving a Math homework problem with her mom. Like any other kid, she wanted to go down and play with her friends instead of dividing complex fractions. But her mother refused to let her go down and play and insisted that she should finish her homework first. Have you ever done that with your children? As a kid, she didn't have a choice. So with teary eyes, she continued doing her homework. Later, when her mom went to the kitchen to start prepping for dinner, her dad saw her crying as she sat solving her math problems. They made a deal. He would finish the rest of her homework so that she could go down and play with her friends. What a nice dad!

After her play time was over she came back up and got a scolding from her mom. Do you know why? Not because her mother found out that she made a secret deal with her dad, but because all the math problems were solved incorrectly. She then knew where she got her bad math skills from. A good father may not necessarily have good math skills.

Happy Father's Day! Today is Father's Day and on this day, we remember our fathers and their love for us. Compared to mothers, fathers are typically clumsy in expressing their emotions and love. Of course, not all fathers are the same, but just like mothers, fathers also love their children. Through their love, we can glimpse the love of our heavenly Father.

A Prodigal Son

Today's scripture is known as the parable of the prodigal Son. A man had two sons and the younger one said to his father, "Father, I want right now what's coming to me." He requested his inheritance. In other words, he was saying "Father, I want you to be dead and so I can get mine." In traditional Middle Eastern Culture, this son's act would have brought tremendous shame on himself and his family, but this selfish son wanted what he wanted.

Why did he do this? Perhaps, he was tired of doing the same field work every day and he wanted to change his life. Maybe he wanted to travel and see the larger world. Perhaps, he wanted to be rich and he believed his inheritance would be good seed money. Perhaps, he had his own dreams and to pursue his dream, he requested his inheritance.

No middle eastern father would have agreed to this shameless son's request. Any human father would have refused. However, the father in the parable granted the son's request. "The father divided the property between them" and the Bible tells us, "It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country."

What does this mean? Ancient Israel didn't have the financial system we have today. Most property would be land and livestock. So this son would also have inherited his share in the form of the land, livestock and grain. These were not just economic properties. They were signs of God's blessing and a family bond. To leave for a distant country, the son had to sell the land and livestock he had inherited. It meant selling what his family and father had built up for centuries and abandoning their family legacy. Imagine you have run a restaurant all your life and retired, leaving the restaurant to your son and he sold it right away. How would you feel? I bet it would not be very pleasant. It would hurt you. Every act of this prodigal son hurt his father as he cut ties with his family.

According to Jewish law, a stubborn and rebellious son should be brought to the elders at the gate of his town. And all the men of his town are to stone him to death. (Deuteronomy 21:18-21) But this father in the parable was slow to anger and gave his abundant love to his son.

Perhaps, this father wanted his son to give his dream a shot, so he bore all shame and hurt himself and let his son go away. In this father's love, we glimpse the prodigal love of God toward us. We pursue our dreams and even rebel against God, but God still loves us and waits for us to come home.

A Sacrificial love of Father

Children often don't know how their fathers love them, especially when they are young. A Korean polling firm interviewed high school seniors about their future dreams. As a part of their interview, students were asked one question. "You only have a year to live and you have two options to choose. First, you can accomplish your life dream within a year. The second option is that you will get 1 million dollars. Which option would you choose?" If I asked you the same question, which answer would you choose? Between your dream and money, which one would you want? Save your answer for later.

One student answered, "I would rather die for my dream than money. I think pursuing my dream is meaningful so I would choose my dream!" Another student answered, "I will choose my dream because if I can accomplish my dream, I will get more than 1 million dollars." Of course, some teenager half-jokingly answered that "I will eat everything I want to eat, do everything I want to do before I die." But most of them chose their dream over money.

After hearing their answers, interviewers showed students a video. In that video, those students' fathers had been interviewed and asked to the exact same question. All of the students were surprised because they didn't expect their fathers to show up in the video, but soon quietly listened to their father's answers.

One father answered, "so I can choose either my dream or 1 million. Right? If so, I would choose 1 million because I believe 1 million dollars would help my family after I am gone." Another student's father said. "I thought about it realistically. I don't think that I can make 1 million dollars in a year. But 1 million will be very helpful for my family and for the future of my son. So I would choose the million dollars. Another father also chose the million. "I have been seriously ill with cancer, so I know what's really important. I would choose 1 million dollars for my family so they would not have to struggle with financial challenges after I died."

All of the teenagers chose their own dreams, but their fathers, all of them, chose 1 million dollars for their families and the dreams of their children over their own. As these high school seniors watched the video, their eyes filled with tears.

Perhaps, the prodigal father in the parable would have a similar mind to these fathers for their children. His son's words and actions broke his heart but he still wanted to give him a chance and support him with his sacrificial love. This is the prodigal love of our heavenly Father for us.

God waits for us and that is love!

Unfortunately, in a distant country, this undisciplined and dissipated son wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a severe famine throughout that country and he began to feel it. He had to work in pig slop and he was so hungry he would have eaten the corn-cobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any. When there was nothing he could do, he remembered his father. "I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand." He got right up and went home to his father.

The father was waiting for his son. He waited for his son's return. "When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him." This is a father's love that embraces his children without question. The father didn't care if the son repented of his sins and said "father, I am really sorry." He had waited for his son every day at the gate of his town. This is the prodigal love of our heavenly Father for us and all of humanity. God loves you and we are saved by this amazing love of the Father.

We see and experience this prodigal love of God through the prodigal love of our fathers. If your father is still alive, call him or visit him and say "Thank you. Or I Love you." If your father is in heaven, remember their love in your heart and cherish the good memory of him. If you didn't have a good relationship with your father, remember that your heavenly father still loves you! Let us celebrate Father's Day with a grateful heart and give thanks to all fathers in the earth and our heavenly Father for His prodigal love for us. Amen.