

Perhaps there is no fuller picture given in all of Scripture of the constancy of the love of a father than that which is found in the parable we have come to know as *the Prodigal Son*. Three characters clash in the context of this Jewish family setting to bring to light rebellion, repentance, reconciliation and rejoicing. Having previously described the shepherd's grace and the seeking love of God in the parables of *the Lost Sheep* and *the Lost Coin*, Christ continued to contrast the perfect love of God for sinners with the futility of self-righteousness in a piercing analogy found in the personal setting of a Jewish home. Together, let's take a look at this parable and learn what the heart of the Heavenly Father is like.

Luke 15: *The Parable of the Lost Son NKJV*

<sup>11</sup> Then He said: "A certain man had two sons.  
<sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to *his* father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to *me*.' So he divided to them *his* livelihood.  
<sup>13</sup> And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.  
<sup>14</sup> But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.  
<sup>15</sup> Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.  
<sup>16</sup> And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him *anything*.  
<sup>17</sup> "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!  
<sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,  
<sup>19</sup> and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." '  
<sup>20</sup> "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.  
<sup>21</sup> And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'  
<sup>22</sup> "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet.  
<sup>23</sup> And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry;  
<sup>24</sup> for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

<sup>25</sup> "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.  
<sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.  
<sup>27</sup> And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.'  
<sup>28</sup> "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.  
<sup>29</sup> So he answered and said to *his* father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.  
<sup>30</sup> But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.'  
<sup>31</sup> "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.  
<sup>32</sup> It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.' "

**The Father's Love is Spilled out generously.** Both sons had a claim for an inheritance. One son requested it sooner and received it. One son failed to believe that the goodness of the father was freely given and not distributed according to earned favor. **The father held nothing back that was his in his love for his sons.** In seeing our wicked ways of rebellion, God the Father spared nothing, even giving His own Son to die for the rebellion of man!

*Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*

God's love was spilled out generously on the cross so that we could be reconciled to the Father.

**The Father's Love is Spurned.** Given multiplied blessings from God, man does not naturally desire to enjoy God's goodness in His presence and refuses to enjoy them under His authority. We have looked upon His claims on us with disdain, and, like the prodigal son, have gone our own way to find pleasures elsewhere. We have looked God in the eye and spurned His intense love, refusing to respond to His love with anything but contempt.

*Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

**The Father's Love is Constant.** Both sons had a problem with their relationship with their father. One son turned his heart away from his father by refusing to enjoy his father's goodness. The other son stayed home and turned the love of his father into something to be earned. He had come to believe that the father's love was conditional and that only by his faithfulness could he receive the father's love. His view of his relationship with his father was not based upon unmerited favor--*grace*, but upon *tireless performance*. This view of the love of his father was distorted and grotesque. It questioned the inherent goodness of the character of the father. Both sons' hearts were unbelieving in the satisfaction that could be enjoyed in being near their father. **Notice how the father receives both sons with kindness and love.** (v. 20, 28) Both sons are invited to the feast in the rejoicing of the father. Sadly, the story ends *without* the self-righteous son at the table.

**The Father's Love is in His Personal Presence.** Even though one son did stay home, it became evident that his motive for staying home was self-absorbed. He, like the prodigal son, searched for joy and pleasure in the wrong place. He looked for it in his self-righteousness, grossly underestimating the delights that he could enjoy in the presence of his father. Both sons, as it were, left home. **God's love, found in His personal presence in our lives, can only be known and enjoyed when one's relationship with Him is in right standing.**

What do we mean by a right relationship with the Father?

1. **A belief that there is nothing in this world as good as knowing a right relationship with God the Father.** The prodigal son bought every pleasure he could find and still found himself broken-hearted. The cheap pleasures of this world cannot compare with the wealth of experiencing the incomparable love of the Father.

2. **A belief that, based upon His grace, my relationship with God is not lost or gained by my performance.** The love of the Heavenly Father is freely given in His generous grace. It cannot be earned by exhausting ourselves in futile attempts to prove to Him that we are worthy of such love. To seek to *earn* such love is to cheapen it and to dishonor the character and heart of the origin of the love—the heart of the Father. God's love is so great that it cannot be earned just like one cannot ever empty the ocean with a bathroom cup. It is infinite in its breadth and freely given.

We can only know the love of God if we recognize that nothing on earth compares to the delight of having a right relationship with the Father, and also recognize that nothing on earth can buy the love of the Father that is offered freely.

**God, Jesus said, is like the Prodigal's father.**

**Life Application Questions:**

1. Describe the character of the two sons.
2. What makes self-righteousness as detestable as outright rebellion?
3. How does self-righteousness rob one of rejoicing in the Father's goodness?
4. What other similarities do you see in this parable between the father and God the Father?
5. Which son are you? Have you laid down both your rebellion and righteousness at the feet of the Father so that He could rescue you in your repentance and reconcile you to Himself?

