

Understanding Our Heavenly Father's Love

The Bible says in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life." The main point of the referenced verse is to emphasize the sacrificial love of God for the World. This love is so powerful that He offered up His **one and only Son, the most precious and beloved Person to Him**, for the sake of the World. We cannot fully comprehend what God sees in the World that makes it so precious to Him, especially when we consider that the World does not feel the same way about God.

The prodigal son in relationship to our Heavenly Father love

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a great example about how God shows His love in ways we can relate to as human beings. You see God loves us in big ways, ways that are evident but hard to really relate to as humans. In the story, we see the intimate, human ways that God, our Father, loves us. That He is willing to receive us back upon repentance even after we have made wrong choices.

Let us look at Luke 15:11-32

¹¹ And He said, "A man had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. ¹³ And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. ¹⁴ Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. ¹⁷ But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' ²⁰ So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; ²³ and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. ²⁹ But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving

you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; ³⁰ but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’ ³¹ And he said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’ – Luke 15:11-32

The Three Important Points To Note About The Parable

When we review this parable we see three ways that this father showed his love for his son;

1. He Let Him Go

It was customary in those days for the eldest son to not only receive a double portion of his father’s inheritance but to be the first one to do so. It was also customary to wait until the father died or the father chose to parcel out his wealth to his children. This child didn’t wait his turn or wait until the father decided to give — he demanded his portion right away and we see that the dad, without a word, gave him his portion and let him go.

- Against wise counsel
- Without manipulation
- No strings attached

When the son was old enough to make his own decision (foolish as it was) the father let him make it — he loved him enough to let go. God, our Father, is like this. He lets us go too. We are free to disobey Him if we want. We can reject and abandon the Church. We can ignore all the wiles counsel of His word and promptings of His Holy Spirit and go our own way if we want to.

Some think that God should throw a thunderbolt to stop us — they think this would be love. But love means leaving the door open, not locking it into a prison. God loves man enough to allow him to be free; loves man enough to risk rejection in order to gain true faithfulness and love in return.

He doesn’t make the mistake that some fathers make in confusing “control” with compassion. God loves enough to deny self and allow His children to choose the way they live and live the way they choose. But like the father in the parable, God’s love doesn’t end with a “goodbye.”

2. He Waits For Him To Return

In the parable it says that the father saw his son returning while he was still a long way off. He wasn’t barricaded behind closed doors. He didn’t have the locks changed as soon as the son left.

He was expectant and made himself available at the first glimpse of the son's return. God loves us like that, He waits expectantly for our return, and He makes Himself visible all the while. Everywhere there are signs of God's presence and His love if we only but see:

- The beauty and love demonstrated by His creation that shelters and feeds us.
- The will and conscience that we possess continually attest to man's ability given by the Father – freedom to choose.

The Bible that speaks of God's love and provides assurance and guidance for a good life here and an eternal life with God in heaven. These are all signs of God's love, reminders of His concern for us, no matter where we go. The father in the parable had great faith.

At one point he said to his younger son that the older son had been dead, but now was alive. This was a fair assessment of the older son's condition – he was gone, he was unfaithful, he was destitute – he was dead to his God, dead to his family, dead to his people. But the father waited for this dead son's return, such is the foolishness of fathers who love their children – they hope even against hope to receive them back from the dead.

God's love is like this in that while we sin, while we ignore Him, while we harm ourselves, while we mock Him and all that He has done to show us His love. He plans for and works each day to win us back and wait anxiously to see us from far off returning to Him. When we do return, God displays His greatest show of love.

3. He Restores Him

It's one thing to take back an erring child, it's quite another to restore an erring child. What the son wanted was to be taken back. Given food and shelter. Earning his keep through proper and expected behavior.

What he was asking for was to live under new rules, under self-imposed law. What his father gave him was restoration and mercy. The father's gift showed how the son was restored:

- He greeted him with kisses, which showed him his love and affection.
- He felt compassion, which told the son that he understood his pain and the effort that it took to come back.
- He put the "best" robe, which signifies position – the long robes worn by nobles.

The ring is a mark of sonship, belonging. The father took him back as his son, not as a slave. The sandals signified that he was not to be treated as a slave (slaves went barefoot). The fattened calf and celebration were a precious gift as well. The father gave his son the right to laugh again, the right to experience joy because with forgiveness comes restoration and with restoration comes joy.

The father restored his son back to sonship again with all of its rights and privileges. He even defended him to his older brother who was jealous of his father's goodness and mercy – he would have preferred some "legal" arrangement.

When we return to Him He doesn't give us what we deserve or what we've earned – He restores us completely as sons and daughters and as sons and daughters we have:

- No More Sin (He forgave us) – [Act 2:38](#)
- No More Shame (He covers us with Christ) – [Galatians 3:26](#)
- No More Condemnation (Doesn't accuse us and doesn't allow anyone to accuse us) – [Romans 8:1](#)
- No Restitution to be Made (The Cross does this) – [Romans 4-5](#)
- No More Sadness (Hope of Heaven – “Rejoice Always”) – [1 Thessalonians 5:16](#)

In addition to this, God our Father defends us against the constant charges of Satan that we are unworthy, by keeping the blood of Christ and the prayers of the Holy Spirit constantly at the throne of mercy on our behalf – defending and justifying us.

When the Heavenly Father restores us, He restored us to our heavenly position as son and daughters of God occupying the right hand of His throne with Jesus.

Summary

This parable teaches us many practical lessons for Fathers specifically and parents in general:

- The purpose of our work with our children is to eventually let them be what they choose to be – even when that doesn't match (even remotely) what we want for them.
- We **can let go** but we **mustn't give up**. We still can have influence and a relationship through prayer, through love and a willingness to monitor and encourage their progress and sympathize with their failure.
- Fathers don't say, “I told you so”, they say, “I love you so”. When the prodigals come home – don't make slaves out of them – make sons and daughter out of them once again.

It also demonstrates the very real way that God deals with us, His children, especially His “wild” children with love and patience.

The prodigal son was a “wild child” who finally came home to the arms of a loving and forgiving father – this is the essence and the beauty of this parable and it is relevant in every place and every time where Fathers wait patiently for the return or the “turning around” of their prodigal sons or daughters.

Summary

You can always come home to the arms of your loving Heavenly Father, even if your earthly father won't have you. He has your robe of righteousness, your ring of sonship, your sandals of peace and freedom. And the feast is being prepared in heaven where the singing and the rejoicing have already begun. God is inviting you, will you come home to your Father this morning?