

The Prodigals Are Coming Home!

Luke 15 is the 'Lost Chapter;' a trilogy of three things lost, sought, and found: sheep, coin, and son.

I've written several lessons based on these three stories, but take a different slant today, and would like to focus on one verse, or use it as a launching pad.

Usually in 'missions' we focus on another aspect of evangelism: those in the regions beyond that have never heard this life-transforming gospel. We focus on the 'new.' Today, *I feel compelled to focus on those that have heard this gospel before and have, at one time or another, walked in truth.* But, for some reason, have walked or strayed away from it. *They are commonly referred to as 'prodigals' or 'backsliders.'* Neither word seems to be explicitly found in the King James Version of the Bible. However, both are unmistakably revered there.

John 3:16-18 allows us to know that the world consists of three types of people that will be lost and condemned because they have not believed:

1. Willful rejecter.
2. Indifferent neglecter.
3. Those that have never heard.

I usually focus on the third group, but in this lesson would like to draw attention to the other two.

Luke 15:20 NKJV

²⁰ "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.

Luke 15:20 NIV

²⁰ So 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.

Luke 15:20 AMP

²⁰So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was **moved with compassion** (*for him*), and ran and **embraced him** and kissed him. (fervently).

I want to make a declarative statement. One that is backed by God's Word: ***'The Prodigals are Coming Home!'***

Rod Parsons in *Bringing Home the Prodigals* said, "There is **nothing as frustrating** as **seeing people come to Christ through the front door** of the church and **losing** others in almost the same proportion **out the back door.**"

The truth is **our sphere of sinners** we could ***invite to church*** sometimes decreases.

But, if we are moving away from reaching the world, that's not good! Anyway, **all of us know lots of prodigals.**

Most commentaries will highlight that **the father watched and waited**. That is the typical story. **It sounds so passive.**

I envision, knowing my heavenly Father, that it was more active than that. Before the boy saw him, he saw the boy.

The father was:

1. Praying – Preparing – Persevering - Plundering heaven - Plowing through hell **interceding for his son's return**.
2. Picture him as weeping, an **unquenchable obsession** with the **return** of his son.

I imagine:

1. Anticipation – Expectation – Hope – Urgency - Eagerness
2. And the Bible simply calls all of that **'faith.'**

Hebrews 11:1 NKJV - By Faith We Understand

11 Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1 AMP - The Triumphs of Faith

11 Now **faith** is the assurance (**title deed, confirmation**) of things (**WE**) hoped for (**divinely guaranteed**), and the evidence of things (**WE**) not seen [the conviction of their reality—*faith comprehends as fact what cannot be experienced by the physical senses*].

2 Corinthians 5:7 NKJV - ⁷ For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Luke 1:37 NKJV - ³⁷ For with God nothing will be impossible.”

Jeremiah 31:16-17 AMP

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD, “Restrain your voice from weeping And your eyes from tears, For your work will be rewarded,” says the LORD; “And **your children** will return from the enemy’s land.

¹⁷ “There is [**confident**] hope for your future,” says the LORD; “Your children will come back to their own country.

The old anthem of the church rings out, **“I once was lost, but now am found.”**

The prodigals sing, “I once was found, but **now am lost.**”

Definitions of the Prodigal

1. Recklessly spendthrift.
2. Characterized by profuse or wasteful, lavish expenditure.
3. A person who spends or has spent his or her money or substance with wasteful extravagance.
4. Someone that squanders away.

A Prodigal May Include:

1. Son or daughter- Brother or sister - Husband or wife - Father or mother - Friend

Characteristics and Advantages of the 'Potentiagals'

1. They already know the Father and what is in store at the Father's House. He won't be able to escape it.

A line from a song, a memory of a sermon, an instruction from a parent, a prayer heard, etc. will one day come back to remind him.

2. They know where they should go to church.

The lost sheep was lost, knew that it was lost, but didn't know its way home.

The lost coin was lost, didn't know it was lost, and didn't know how to get home.

The prodigal was lost, knew he was lost, and knew his way back home.

3. **They have tasted** of the Holy Spirit, known the power of the name of Jesus, and experienced God's inescapable and indescribable presence.
4. They have a heightened measure of faith.
Everyone is given a measure of faith (Romans 12). But, when you hear and read God's Word, faith is increased. It grows!

Romans 10:17-18 AMP

¹⁷ So faith *comes* from hearing **[what is told]**, and what is heard *comes* by the **[preaching of the]** message concerning Christ.

¹⁸ But I say, did they not hear? Indeed they have;

"Their voice [*that of creation bearing God's message*] has gone out to all the earth, And their words to the **[farthest]** ends of the world."

The church's dying words are: **'We've never done it this way before!'**

Next to that, to me, some of the saddest, runner-up words are **"He'll never stay!"**

They said that about me, when I walked into Church, toting long hair and a hard heart. That was twenty-five years ago!

Stumbling Blocks on the Road to Bringing Them Home

1. We reach the place where we ACCEPT their lostness.
2. We OVERLOOK their lostness.
3. We ASSUME they are not our primary responsibility.

The ancient question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" should meet a resounding, "Yes."

4. We COMPROMISE our convictions; override them and rationalize they are saved.
5. We play the BLAME GAME.

They were driven away by the pastor, or the church, or we didn't teach them well enough. **This creates a sense of GUILT.**

I doubt anyone will be able to stand before God and say, ***"Because of THEM... I am not in church."***

Yet, at the same time we shouldn't **PUSH them out but PULL them in.**

I once experienced a family that constantly criticized the church and the pastor.

Yet, somehow they thought that their son would magically want to be a part of it.

"You're supposed to be honoring the Message, not writing graffiti all over it" (James 4:11, *The Message*).

Helping Hands in the Prodigals, the Potentiagals, Coming Home

1. Pray they will come to themselves.
2. Keep the home light burning! Always make the pathway clear for them to return one day. (Don't change the doctrine!)

Get the house ready for their return. Be a prodigal-friendly church. This message is a call to the church to be ready when the prodigals come home.

There is a phrase that made 'Motel 6' a viable option for anyone that needed a bed for the night. The ad nailed the low price market. Tom Bodett said, **"We'll keep the lights on!"**

3. Ask God to create circumstances that will cause them to look to the only One who can help.

It was at the lowest point possible, in a pig-pen that the son came to his senses that caused him to find hope, and a way back home.

4. Be sensitive to times of vulnerability when one's heart will be open to the Lord.

This includes sickness, sorrow, birth of a child, difficulties in the family, divorce, death, loss of a job.

5. Forgive, even when there isn't evidence of change.

Many use rejection, isolation, and bitterness. Be like the heavenly Father: love unconditionally.

6. Wisely and sensitively seek ways to highlight what God is doing.

Create a hunger in their heart for the things of God.

7. Speak the truth in love.

Otherwise, it is like giving someone a kiss with bad breath. The bad breath remains, long after the kiss is gone.

8. Don't condemn.

Look beyond what the 'prodigal is' to what the 'potential' can become.

9. Anticipate. Expect. Believe!

Maintain a sense of hope and encouragement. Some of our prodigals are not as far away as we think.

10. Understand that God is ready to bring the prodigals home.

"When our prodigals do come home, pray that they meet the father first, and not the elder brother."

CLOSE:

There is always a place at home.

We'll keep the lights on!

Our Prayer:

Bring _____ Home!

I had someone pass out little note cards to the congregation. During the process of the sermon, they could write the name of their prodigals on the card. In the altar service, they brought their cards to the altar, left them there, and interceded for the prodigals.

I also purchased a lamp that sat on the side of the pulpit reminding all that we should keep the lights on.

The prodigals are coming home!