

We typically refer to the parable that Jesus gave in this chapter as “The Parable of the Prodigal Son.” However, the context in which the parable was given indicates that the parable was actually about the father who eagerly longed to be reconciled with his son. The father portrayed in this parable parallels our Heavenly Father Who rejoices every time a sinner repents (v. 11).

**Verses 1-10:** The latest complaint that the Pharisees and scribes were having with Jesus was that He associated with publicans (tax collectors) and sinners and even ate meals with them. Jesus responded with a series of parables that illustrated the joy that comes when finding and being reconciled with valued things that have been lost. He then compares the rejoicing over finding material things that have been lost to the rejoicing that occurs in heaven when sinners repent of their sin and (vs. 7, 10). He then continues with a parable about a father who had a prodigal son and the joy that father experienced when his son repented and returned to him.

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11 And he said, A certain man had two sons: 12 And the younger of them said to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth *to me*. And he divided unto them *his* living.

**“And he said, A certain man had two sons”** – In this parable, Jesus describes a man who had two sons. He was apparently well-off, perhaps even wealthy, since we see that he had servants, fields, and livestock.

**“And the younger of them said to *his* father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth *to me*”** – Under Mosaic Law, the eldest son received a double-portion of the inheritance at his father’s death (twice as much as each of his siblings). Since this man had only two sons, the younger son was due to inherit a third of his father’s wealth. However, neither son was entitled to their inheritance while their father lived. This younger son wanted his inheritance immediately and was not willing to wait until his father’s death. Requesting the inheritance prematurely was tantamount to saying that he wished his father were dead.

**“And he divided unto them *his* living [wealth; resources]”** – The Pharisees and scribes who were listening were likely surprised that this father did as his son asked. They no doubt believed that this younger son’s disrespectful behavior did not deserve to be rewarded. Nevertheless, the father gave his younger son a third of all his wealth, and the fact that he divided it between “them” suggests that the older brother may have received his inheritance at that time as well. It may be that the father designated which portions of his property belonged to each son, along with the portions of livestock and money.

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13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

**“And not many days after the younger son gathered all together”** – It did not take long for the younger son to liquidate the assets that he had inherited. The “not many days after” was apparently the span of time that it took for him to sell the inherited land and livestock. He “cashed out” everything that he had inherited.

**“and took his journey into a far country”** – It seems that the younger son did not like living under his father’s authority, and so as soon as he was able, he “gathered all together” (the money from the sale of what he had inherited) and traveled well out of the reach of his father’s authority.

**“and there wasted his substance [possessions; money] with riotous [immoral; unrestrained] living”** – Did he invest his money wisely in order to provide for his future? No, he wasted it all in unrestrained spending on the things that pleased his flesh as if it would last forever.

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14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

**“And when he had spent all”** – He had spent his money without restraint and it eventually ran out. The flesh always wants more but no one has the resources to fulfill unlimited desires. We are not told how long it took before he was totally broke.

**“there arose a mighty famine in that land”** – His lack of control over his flesh and his lack of preparation for the future had now left him in dire straits. A “mighty” famine had taken the land, a situation that would strain the resources of even wealthy people. This younger son had no money and was especially unprepared to deal with the difficulties caused by the famine.

**“and he began to be in want”** – Without money, he could not buy food to eat and he likely had no place to live. He had went from being the “big spender” to being a beggar in a relatively short time.

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15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

**“And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine”** – The situation of this son in Jesus’ parable had reached a low state as far as the Jewish listeners were concerned. This Jewish boy had been reduced to working for a Gentile employer who was engaged in the business of raising pigs. The pig was considered to be an unclean animal and the worst job a Jew could have was to work for “unclean” people (Gentiles) doing unclean work.

**“And he would fain [to have a desire] have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat”** – The boy took another step down in the eyes of the Jewish listeners. Not only was he reduced to feeding swine, but he was envious of what they ate. The “husks” were virtually indigestible for humans, so the only reason he didn’t eat them himself was because held no nutritional value for him.

**“and no man gave unto him”** – He likely had many “friends” when he had money. However, those friends disappeared when the money ran out and now he was alone with no one willing to help him.

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

**“And when he came to himself”** – His desperate situation caused him to stop and take a realistic look at his life. He came to his senses as he reconsidered the rift that he had caused between himself and his father. He finally understood that it was his own foolish life choices that had brought him to his current situation.

**“he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!”** – He was starving even though he was a son of a wealthy man. He recognized that even his father’s servants were doing better than he was.

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

**“I will arise and go to my father”** – This son decided returning to his father was better than remaining where he was. He had no friends that cared about him where he was but he remembered that his father loved him and would not turn him away.

**“and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee”** – One evidence of genuine repentance is being willing to confess and take full responsibility for one’s sins and this son was ready to confess that he had sinned against God and against his father. He had shown his father disrespect by rejecting his father’s authority, demanding his inheritance early and then wasting it all. He had also sinned against God, not only by how he had treated his father but also by the immorality that he had engaged in during his time in the far country.

**“And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants”** – Another evidence of genuine repentance was the humility this son was showing. He did not expect to be restored to the position and privileges of being a son because he knew that he didn’t deserve it. He would only ask that his father would allow him to work alongside his father’s other servants.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

**“And he arose, and came to his father”** – The son did not wait around, but immediately journeyed back to his father’s house.

**“But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him”** – It appears that the father had been watching for him. Since he didn’t know when/if his son would come back, he may have been keeping watch daily ever since his son had left. Even though the son wasn’t there physically, he was in his father’s heart, who longed to see him.

**“and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him”** – As soon as the father recognized that it was his son that was approaching he immediately had compassion for him. Rather than wait for his son to reach the house, he ran to where the son was, indicating the joy that was in the father’s heart. This scene illustrates the rejoicing of our Heavenly Father that was mentioned in vs. 7 and 10. When the father reached his son, he expressed his love for him by embracing and kissing him. Such is the attitude of our Father in heaven when we repent and return to Him.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

The son begins the confession that he had planned to give to his father and got as far as admitting that he had forfeited any rights or benefits of being his father’s son. However, it seems that the father interrupted the confession before the son could ask to be hired as a servant.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet: 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*; and let us eat, and be merry: 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

**“But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put *it* on him”** – The father is so happy that his son has returned that the rest of the confession is irrelevant because he has already forgiven his son. Instead of letting the son finish, he instructs his servants to bring the best robe for his son, a custom reserved for honored guests.

**“and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on *his* feet”** – The ring was a signet ring and was a symbol of authority. Slaves typically did not wear shoes, so putting shoes on his son along with giving him a ring showed that he was being fully restored to the position of being a son.

**“And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*”** – The fatted calf was saved for only the most special of occasions, demonstrating how excited the father was to welcome his son home.

**“and let us eat, and be merry”** – The father was ready to celebrate his son’s homecoming.

**“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found”** – The son was “dead” and “lost” in the sense of separation and estrangement from his father. The father had suffered loss because he was separated from his son whom he might never see again, just as if he were dead.

**“And they began to be merry”** – The father, son, and servants are all celebrating the return and reconciliation of the son.

**Verses 25-32:** The parable continues, describing the elder son (representing the Pharisees) who returns from the field and discovers the celebration of his younger brother’s return. Rather than joining in the celebration of his brother’s repentance and reconciliation, he becomes angry at what he perceived as an injustice toward himself and was jealous of his brother. The elder brother apparently didn’t think that his “faithfulness” was being appreciated and that his brother’s sins were too great to forgive. The father, however, points out that the reconciliation of the younger brother was more important than the punishment of the sins he had committed.