

## Research: Prodigal Son

### Luke 15:11-13, 17-24

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.

“The father is God . . . The younger son is all penitent sinners, here, in particular, the publicans and sinners. The portion of goods (v. 12) is the whole of a man’s faculties and powers, which he ought to exercise and enjoy in his father’s house, i.e. in dependence upon God and in His service, but which the prodigal son demands to have under his own control, to use according to his own will and pleasure” (Dummelow 758-759).

“According to Jewish customs in Palestine, a father could dispose of his property either by a will to be executed after his death or by a gift to his children during his lifetime” (*AYB Luke i-ix.1087*).

“*Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. The part of property that is my share*” (Barnes 229).

“*He divided unto them his living. The division of property, among the Jews, gave the elder son twice as much as the younger*” (Barnes 229).

*Portion* is *meros* in Greek and means “part, one of the constituent parts of a whole” (Thayer 400).

Did the son believe that good could be portioned out? That there are really only parts of good and man doesn’t deserve it all?

The younger son wants to do as he pleases. With a character comprised mostly of human will, he believes that he can separate himself from the Father and find freedom. While expressing the immaturity of youth, he simply wants to be irresponsible for a time. As so many do, he wants instant gratification, doing what he wants to do when he wants to do it. He is not willing to work hard for anything, to wait and be patient and think ahead. He is frivolous and weak and consequently suffers for his sin.

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.

“gathered together all he had. The verb *synagein*, ‘bring together,’ probably carries the connotation of ‘converting everything’ into cash. It is so used to mean ‘converting the inheritance into money.’ The young son was apparently within his rights to do this” (AYB Luke i-ix.1088).

“*Into a far country.* A country far off from his father’s house. He went probably to trade, or seek his fortune; and in his wanderings came at last to this dissipated place, where his property was soon expended” (Barnes 229).

“... not many days after, he gathers all together, i.e. deliberately resolves to devote his whole fortune and all his powers to the pursuit of pleasure, and journeys into a far country, i.e. into the world of sin where God is not, or rather where He is forgotten, and wastes his substance in riotous living” (Dummelow 759).

Literally he converts everything into cash and then squanders all his wealth with wild living. He travels to “a far country,” looking for pleasure, substance and life in matter. The far-off country represents a place where God has been forgotten and where the younger son is far from the Father’s rules and laws. He decides to devote his whole fortune to the pursuit of pleasure.

The word *prodigal* means reckless, extravagant, wasteful, ungrateful. This is the version of man according to the second chapter of Genesis, expressing qualities of thought like self-centeredness, willfulness, and selfishness. As his thought wanders and he is attracted to the sensual and worldly – the false pleasures of the flesh – he is subjected to severe consequences.

**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!**

“This realization and the remorse are the beginning of his repentance. His remorse must include a realization of what he has done to his father and a regret for his misconduct” (AYB Luke i-ix.1088).

“*He came to himself.* This is a very expressive phrase. It is commonly applied to one who has been *deranged*; and when he recovers, we say he has *come to himself*. In this place, it denotes that the folly of the young man was a kind of derangement—that he was insane. So it is true of every sinner” (Barnes 229).

All his dreams are shattered and his cup of misery is now full. He has fallen so low and become so insignificant that no one gives him anything. Totally neglected, he tries to feed his hunger with the husks, but they cannot appease his gnawing pain. This is what happens when we turn our backs on God: from our perspective, it appears He has turned His back on us.

Then “he [comes] to himself;” he wakes up and is filled with great remorse and regret. He longs to return to the Father’s household where he was loved, cared for, and fed.

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

## REPENTANCE

*Sin* is *hamartano* in Greek and means “to miss the mark; to err, be mistaken; to miss or wander from the path of uprightness and honour; to do wrong; to wander from the law of God; to violate God’s law; to sin” (Thayer 30).

“*To my Father.* He has nowhere else to go but to God” (Barnes 229).

“*I have sinned.* I have been wicked, have been dissipated, ungrateful, and rebellious” (Barnes 229).

With true repentance, humility, and a willingness to confess his sins and take responsibility for them, he longs to return to his Father.

The word *convert* (or “turn”) is *epistrepho* in Greek and means “to turn to, to the worship of the true God, to bring back, to turn one’s self about, turn back, return” (Thayer 243).

*Repent* is *metanoeo* in Greek and means “to change one’s mind, i.e. to repent, to change one’s mind for the better, to heartily amend with abhorrence of one’s past sin” (Thayer 405).

In a way, the prodigal son repents and turns away FROM the far country and turns back TO his Father.

“The lack of seeing one's deformed mentality, and of *repentance* therefor, deep, never to be repented of, is retarding, and in certain morbid instances stopping, the growth of Christian Scientists. Without a knowledge of his sins, and repentance so severe that it destroys them, no person is or can be a Christian Scientist” (*Mis.* 107:25).

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

## REFORMATION

“*No more worthy, etc.* “Such has been my conduct that I have been a disgrace to my father. I am not fit to be honored by being called the son of a father so kind and virtuous. Treat me as a

servant. Let me come again into your family, but I do not ask to be treated as a son.’ This evinced 1) deep humility—such as a sinner should have; 2) love for his father’s house—such as all penitents should have towards God’s dwelling-place in heaven; and 3) confidence in his father, that he would treat him kindly, even if he treated him as a servant” (Barnes 229).

“place me lowest in thy kingdom” (Dummelow 759).

### Luke 15:20-24

20And 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.

**Arose:** *anistemi* in Greek

Cause to rise up

Raise from laying down

Cause to bring forward and appear

**Came to his father:**

- *Erchomai* in Greek

- Make one’s appearance; come into being; come forth; show itself; find his place;

- To come

**Great way off:**

Father sees him clad in rags, poor, and emaciated

He recognizes His son

Moved with compassion and love

**And Ran:** the son came slowly, the

Father ran

**Kissed him:** manifestation of forgiveness

Father daily waiting for his return

Expecting him moment by moment

Total forgiveness and unconditional love

No reproach or condemnation

21And 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.

**Worthy:** *axios* in Greek;

- Weighing; having weight; value; worth as much
- Befitting; congruous; one who has merit

The only real gravitational pull is Godward

Able to let go of past mistakes and was restored

22But 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:

### Redeemed by the Father

*“spiritual teaching must always be by symbols.” 575:13*

symbolic of true sonship:

“I know who you are, you are my image, my beloved son.”

**Ring:** symbol of rank and honor; mark of wealth and dignity; mark of favor and affection

**Shoes on his feet:** symbolizing spiritual freedom, for slaves went barefoot; expressed his wish that he be treated as his son and not as a servant

**Best robe:** son was in rags, poverty

Father clothes him in best raiment

Outer garment; put on the best one they had; one reserved for festival occasions

23And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill *it*; and let us eat, and be merry:

24For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

### **RESTORATION**

Was dead in sin

- Morally dead

And is alive again by repentance

There isn't anything that we could ever do that God could not forgive.

Pleasure in matter brings pain. Sin has its consequences, and we attach ourselves to those consequences until we cease sinning. Upon our return home (to the consciousness of God and the obedience of his laws) we find ourselves restored, cared for, and beloved.

SH 497:9

3. We acknowledge God's forgiveness of sin in the destruction of sin and the spiritual understanding that casts out evil as unreal. But the belief in sin is punished so long as the belief lasts.