

DOWN TO EARTH TO PARENTING • INSIGHTS ON DISCIPLINE •

LUKE 15:11-24 • 01/28/2018

MAIN POINT

The father in Luke 15 models many things great parents do well.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

This weekend's message began with a personal illustration about the blessings and struggles associated with parenting. Do you have any memorable moments from your childhood about how you were raised ? If you're a parent, could you identify with the illustration shared over the weekend? Explain.

If we were fortunate enough to have loving parents, we probably learned a lot about how to parent ourselves from them. But even the best parents have many flaws, and therefore we've learned alot about what NOT to do when it comes to parenting. And if we're

fortunate enough to have children, they will say the same thing about us when they are adults (maybe even when they are teenagers!).

But there is one Father who actually fathers perfectly and models for us exactly how we can parent our children. While there are no guarantees when it comes to raising children, the principles gleaned about parenting from the father in the parable of the Prodigal Sons in Luke 15 are helpful guides. Let's take a look.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:11-16.

This parable begins with a son who is from a good family, a good home—it seems like he's had every opportunity in life, hasn't he? But there's something very wrong.

What is this son really saying to his father?

Imagine you were the father in this story: how would you feel if your son tells you, "I want my share of the inheritance?"

Here, this son is saying to his dad, "Give me the share of the property that belongs to me." But, there's a catch—in order to inherit something, someone has to die. What this son does is horrible. He is telling his dad, "I wish you were dead... I'd rather have your riches than a relationship with you." This son's actions are a terrible insult. He not only dishonors his father, but he disgraces and disowns him, too. A father in that culture would have slapped his son across the face, kicked him out of the house and called the entire community together to tell them, "This man is no longer my son; he is no longer welcome in my home or in this community."

What does the father in the parable do instead?

What does this teach us about God the Father?

What does this teach us about parenting?

Although the son is dishonoring, we see a father who responds with love. The father says, in essence, “Even though you love my stuff more than me, I love you more than my stuff.” He is a father full of grace, even though he knows things aren’t going to go well for his son. The dad didn’t force his son to stay home. Once his son decided that’s what he was going to do, the dad let him go, even though the dad feared the son was going to learn the hard way. And that’s exactly what happened. His son lost everything and then a famine hit the land and his situation became totally desperate.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:16-24.

The boy went from the penthouse to the pigpen—he squandered his inheritance, every penny. He learned the hard way that the world will take everything you have and give you nothing that you need. This boy had lost everything except one thing: the love of his father. And so he realizes, “I have to go home.” He knew the door will be open.

What is different about the younger son now? Is he coming back only because he’s broke?

What does the father do when he sees his son coming? Why does this matter? What does it teach us about parenting?

When the son was desperate enough to finally come home, the Bible says that the dad saw him while he was a long way off. You don’t see someone from a long way off unless you are looking constantly for them, hoping, praying. And that’s exactly what we need to do. Keep looking. Keep hoping. Keep praying. And one day, hopefully one day, we’ll see them coming back from a long way off.

In ancient Hebrew culture, it was considered completely undignified for men to run anywhere. They wore long-flowing robes, and to run anywhere they’d have to hike up their robes, showing their undergarments. But the father doesn’t care about being dignified—his love for his son is stronger than any concern about propriety.

Look at verse 20. What are we seeing here in the father's response to his son?

Have you ever had a moment when you felt like this younger son? Overwhelmed by the grace, love, and forgiveness that someone else showed to you?

Have you ever had a moment you felt like this father? Embracing a lost son or daughter and reaping the benefits of the grace you've shown and the prayers you've prayed?

The father made it easy for the son to come back. When the son comes back and starts to try to explain to his dad, his dad interrupts him, because the dad doesn't care what happened. He's just glad to have his son home! So he puts a ring on his finger, a robe on his back, sandals on his feet, and kills the fatted calf and has a party. He doesn't make the son promise he won't do anything like that again, he doesn't make the son jump through any hoops, sign a family contract, or anything else. He makes it easy for him to come back.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

In this passage, we see the beauty of a father's love and the power of a father's grace and the joy of a son's return. This is how God the Father treats everyone who decides to come home. When the lost are found, God rejoices and celebrates. But that doesn't mean everyone shares in His joy.

How will you practically change your parenting as a result of reflecting the Father's love for you as demonstrated in this parable?

One of the things discussed on Sunday was the importance of having many positive voices speak into the lives our kids? Who are your kids listening to other than you? Who should they be listening to more? What role do you play in making positive changes for your kids in this regard?

PRAY

Thank God for His grace that He gives to older and younger sons alike. Pray that His grace would transform your life and would lead you to share His grace with others.

COMMENTARY

LUKE 15:11-32

15:11-12. Jesus turned to the family setting for his concluding parable to illustrate why He associated with sinners. The story was told succinctly with only the points Jesus wanted to make elaborated. A younger son demanded his share of the estate and got it. There is no indication of why he wanted it or why the father so quickly gave it to him. Later we will see the older brother's attitude and surmise sibling rivalry here, as in the Old Testament stories of Jacob and Esau and of Joseph and his brothers. The younger brother's portion was only a third of the estate if the entire estate were divided. By law, the older brother got a double portion (Deut. 21:17). Although this well-known parable (vv. 11-32) is usually called the parable of the prodigal son, the other son and the father are also important characters. It was unusual, but not unheard of, for a father to settle his estate before his death. Since the older son got a double portion of his father's estate, the younger son's share would have been one-third of the estate.

15:13-16. The younger son had no intention of returning to his family. It is impossible to know whether his foolish living included "prostitutes" (v. 30), or if that was just an angry accusation made by the older brother. The irony of the penniless younger son's new job was that pigs were unclean animals to Jews (Lev. 11:7). He was at rock bottom in his new life.

15:17-19. It took extreme poverty and hunger to prompt the younger son to come to his senses and realize that, in spite of all he had done, the correct course of action was to

return and become one of his father's hired hands. To do so, however, it would be necessary to confess that he had sinned greatly and was not worthy to be called his son. This is a vivid picture of a person "hitting bottom" and finally realizing the magnitude of his sin. The younger brother came to his senses: The day laborers on his dad's farm had enough to eat. Note how this ties the story back to the beginning of the chapter and the theme of sinners. No longer are we using animals or objects to talk about the lost. Now we have gotten down to basic facts. People are lost. People need to realize their lost condition and admit it. The younger son's first step is saying, "I am a sinner."

What is a sinner? An unworthy person. One who deserves nothing. Yet a sinner wants something. So the sinner searches for someone who loves the unworthy, who is willing to help the undeserving. The sinful younger brother had forfeited his position as son. He had no more claims on his father, so he applied for a new job—day laborer. Humans have the capacity to change. We do not have to remain in the pigpen. We do not have to continue to live as sinners. We can become responsible for our lives. We can quit our riotous living. We can come home.

15:20-23. Focus shifts from son to father. That the father saw his son coming from a long way off indicates that he habitually looked for his return. Perhaps the normal parental reaction to the younger son's return would be anger or at least deep disappointment, but this father's response displayed: (1) compassion, (2) love (threw his arms around his neck and kissed him), (3) celebration (a feast), and (4) joyful restoration of status for his son (a robe of distinction, signet ring of family authority, sandals worn by a son, in contrast to barefoot slaves). Even the joyful welcome did not deter the son from his determined course. He repeated the plea he had rehearsed. Somehow the last line never came out; the job application as a day laborer was never made.

15:24. This is the point at which the parable ties in to the two previous stories about God's joy in saving the lost. The father's celebratory attitude depicts the way in which God the Father receives repentant sinners. This contrasts with the contempt the Pharisees and scribes displayed for sinners who came to Jesus (v. 2). How could the father act like this? Did he not know what the son had done? Of course, but the son had been given up for dead. This was resurrection time. He was lost. We found the precious treasure for which we have hunted. The lost sheep is back. Certainly a lost and found son is worth much more than a coin or a sheep. What a picture of the Father in heaven. How He does celebrate when the lost are found, when sinners repent. What compassion and love He shows. Why

does Jesus associate with sinners? Because heaven loves them and waits patiently for them to return and repent so the celebration can begin. Heaven's citizens are repentant sinners.

15:25-30. Instead of the story ending on a note of joy and celebration, as might be expected, the spotlight shifts to the older brother. Unlike the father's positive attitude, the older brother (1) was surprised at the return of his sinning brother, (2) was offended and jealous at the father's celebration, (3) became angry at the father's forgiving love, (4) declared his own self-righteousness, and (5) focused on his brother's sinfulness rather than his newfound repentance. Jesus' representation of the religious leaders in the character of the older brother was a scathing rebuke of their self-righteousness.

15:31-32. The rebuke of the religious leaders continues. They did not understand (1) the opportunity for a close relationship with God, (2) the generosity of His grace, (3) His joy at the salvation of sinners, or (4) the profound transformation of conversion. Perhaps most crucial of all, however, is the reminder of kinship to the sinners intended in the phrase this brother of yours. The religious leaders refused to accept their Jewish brethren, the "sinners," as the older brother in this story.