

The Prodigal Son

“Thank you,” Keenan said with a smile that was neither faked or forced. It had taken almost a year to get to this place.

Keenan’s sin had been well hidden, or so he thought. Only the Lord had known the depths of the anger and jealousy he had toward his younger brother, Jacoury.

In Keenan’s mind, Jacoury had been the favored child. So, when Jacoury got “caught up” in a life of drugs and crime, Keenan had secretly felt vindicated. Keenan knew Jacoury would one day break his parents’ hearts.

Still, their parents prayed and held out hope that one day their son would repent of his sins and return to the Lord. Two years ago, Jacoury had done just that, to much fanfare of his parents. Then some 11 months later, Jacoury said he was called to the ministry.

Keenan had expressed his skepticisms to his parents, along with his views of their inequities toward their two sons. His anger and hurt were met with patience, which Keen found patronizing.

It was during his private times with Christ that Keenan came to see his sin of jealousy was just as bad, if not worse, than the sins he had tallied against Jacoury. It had softened and strengthened him—the rebuke and the love of Christ.

“Your brother preached today,” said another church member to Keenan.

“Yes, he did!” Keenan beamed again.

1. *How would you characterize your faith life—are you a younger son or an older brother?*

2. *In what ways does your faith life affect how worthy, or unworthy, you feel before God?*

3. *Why is the word lavish a good adjective to describe God?*

LESSON FOCUS: God’s love is always greater than our unworthiness.

A Rebellious Son

Luke 15:11-16, KJV

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.

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.

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

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.

Luke 15:11-16, NIV

¹¹Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them.

¹³"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything."

When Jesus had a group of "tax collectors and sinners" listening to Him, as well as religious leaders, He told three parables showing He came to seek and save the lost—"the one sinner who repents" (Luke 15:7, 10). In the third parable, He told about two sons. The younger son demanded his share of the father's estate before the usual time to settle the inheritance, which was when the father died. This not only "divided" (vs. 12) the estate, but it divided the younger son from the family.

The younger son then went off to “a far country” (vs. 13, KJV), a Gentile area where he did what he wanted with no Jewish moral restrictions until he had “squandered his wealth in wild living” (NIV). He was financially—and morally—bankrupt. When a famine came, the son found a job with a pig farmer, as demeaning a job as a Jew could have. He longed to eat the pigs’ food because he was starving—but “no one” would give him “anything” (vs. 15). Many people still reject the heavenly Father because He has too many “rules” to follow. But like the prodigal son, they may suddenly find themselves “in need” (vs. 14) of everything, hungry and homesick, ready to return to the Father.

4. *Why did the younger son want his inheritance?*

5. *What did the younger son do when he received his inheritance?*

A Wake-Up Moment

Luke 15:17-20, KJV

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!

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.

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.

Luke 15:17-20, NIV

¹⁷“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰So 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.

A moment came when the younger son realized who and where he was—the son of a man wealthy enough to have servants now longing to eat pig’s food to keep from starving. He wondered if he could go back to his father and ask to at least be one of his father’s servants. The son’s actions showed he was no longer “worthy” to be his father’s son, but he could be “like one of [his] hired servants” (vs. 19)—if his father would even have him back. The son practiced a speech he would make to his father confessing his unworthiness. He had not only broken the traditions of family relationships, but the moral rules set forth in God’s Word.

But when the son “was still a long way off” (vs. 20), his father ran to meet him. For older men to run meant pulling up their long tunics and exposing their bare legs, something shameful to do. The listening religious leaders and sinners would have expected the father to shame the son, but the father “was filled with compassion” for his lost son (as Jesus was—see Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 20:34; Mark 6:34). The father kissed his son to show how accepted he was and back with the family he had disowned.

6. *Why was the son ready to try to go home again?*

7. *What would he tell his father when he returned?*

8. *What was the father’s initial reaction to seeing his son?*

A Welcoming Father

Luke 15:21-24, KJV

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.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best

Luke 15:21-24, NIV

²¹“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²²“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring

robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fattened 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.

the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So, they began to celebrate."

The son began to give his speech about wanting to be treated like a servant. The father, however, interrupted the speech and called for his servants to bring a robe, a ring, and sandals. The "best robe" (vs. 22) would likely have been the father's robe, showing the son's acceptance into the family. The signet ring was a symbol of authority in the family. The son wearing sandals would have distinguished him from the slaves in the household because slaves went barefoot.

Beyond giving his son new clothing, the father ordered the "fattened calf" (vs. 23) be killed—a "lost" son as good as "dead" (vs. 24) had returned. Like the tax collectors and sinners who originally listened to this story, lost children who feel they have no place in the Father's house because of the lives they have led are celebrated when they return.

Jesus continued the story with the older brother, who resented everything his father did for his wayward brother while the older brother stayed home and worked (vss. 25-32). The parable ends without the older brother deciding if he will join the celebration. The religious leaders also scorned sinners like the younger brother, while refusing to see they too were "lost" in self-righteousness.

9. *How did the father celebrate that his son had returned?*

10. *What does the parable show us about God and His forgiveness?*

Prodigal Father?

Barcelona, Spain, is home to a Michelin-star restaurant. The goal of the three owners is to provide a gastronomic experience where one is amazed and stimulated with creative Mediterranean food. They create multi-course tasting menus. Each menu tells a story. Not only must it be good, each course contributes to the whole, and gives the diner a sense that the dish is something unique and beautiful. It could take diners four hours to experience a 30-course tasting menu! One could certainly call it a lavish meal!

The younger son is often labeled “prodigal” because of his wasteful spending along with returning after an absence. But the first definition of prodigal adds profuse or extravagant spending to the definition. *Lavish* is a synonym of prodigal.

Could *lavish*, or prodigal, also describe the father in the story? Even though the son had morally rejected his family, the father still loved him. When the son returned, the father acted in a way that was shocking and unexpected. The father was full of forgiveness. His gifts showed acceptance back into the family, and the father hosted a huge feast to celebrate the return of his “dead” son.

We see another picture of *lavish* (the Greek word means to abound or overflow) in Ephesians 1:3-8. Paul talks about the prodigality of our heavenly Father. Just like the younger son was cut off from his family, all people (through sin) are cut off from being sons and daughters of God. But God sent Jesus to redeem us through His death and resurrection. Through God’s lavish grace we are each adopted into His family and can call Him “Father.”

11. *In what ways are you an unworthy “younger son” who deserted his father at some point?*

12. *How much has the heavenly Father lavished on you in blessings?*

13. *How has the knowledge of His grace affected your relationship with the Father?*

Picture This

It can be easy to wallow in unworthiness. When we spend all our time looking down, we may miss seeing signs of God's love. A recent traveler to another country shares pictures of dramatic sunrises that she took on her trip. She tells how seeing the vibrant colors in the morning made her want to shout, "Alleluia! Alleluia!" She was reminded of God's great love as she watched the sun rise.

► *Think of a picture, either real or in your imagination, that helps you know and see God's love. How can you remember to focus on this picture to help you realize how great God's love is—especially when you are feeling unworthy?*

My picture:

KEY VERSE

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.

—Luke 15:21, KJV

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "

—Luke 15:21, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSONS

Week of March 6 through March 12

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross devotionals* on these passages.)

Mon. Matthew 15:21-28—Jesus Heals a Gentile Girl.

Tues. Matthew 19:13-22—Let the Little Children Come.

Wed. Proverbs 1:7-16—Learn Wisdom, My Child.

Thurs. Deuteronomy 4:7-14—Teach Your Children God's Laws.

Fri. Jeremiah 1:1-10—Consecrated from the Womb.

Sat. Matthew 21:12-17—The Praises of Children.

Sun. Matthew 18:1-9; Mark 10:15—The Greatest in the Kingdom.