

As cruel as it may seem, pain is a necessary part of the change process. It will be amazing to see how much an addict must undergo before accepting the need for change. We cannot shortcut this part of the process.

**3) We must never give up.** Remember that it is God whom we are trusting at this point, not ourselves. We have the option to pray for our prodigal and doing so will help us to cast our burden on the Lord because He cares for us. The father in the story saw the son coming a long way off because he was looking for him. Expect God to accomplish what you could not.

**4) We need to be ready to rejoice when it is clear that our prodigal is ready to make a life change.**

Notice the contrast between the intended speech in verses 18 and 19 <sup>18</sup>*I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."* and the actual words spoken in verse <sup>21</sup>*"And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'" You will see that the father was so happy that the son never actually had a chance to complete his speech. It was because the father couldn't wait to celebrate. This is evidenced by what Jesus said in Luke 15:7, "I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."* While they are rejoicing in heaven, don't be afraid to join in here on earth.

**5) We need to realize that NOW is the time to offer the help we had to hold back earlier.** For the returning prodigal there are difficult times ahead. While there are consequences of sin that must be faced, we need to be ready to encourage and assist them as counsel directs. We must do this with caution, but we must do this with love. We can talk about the love of Christ "until we are blue in the face," but now is the time to demonstrate it.

And finally, like every parent, the last thing we consider is ourselves. Have we strayed from our Father in heaven and gone far away? Is He perhaps looking for us from a distance? Maybe we have never "come to our senses" and acknowledged our need for Him.

Jesus said, *"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."* (Matthew 11:28-29) Maybe you have tried that without much success. A well-educated man named Nicodemus tried to come to Jesus on the basis of his knowledge alone. Jesus informed him that head knowledge wasn't sufficient to get him into heaven when He replied, *Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3) If you would like to take this step in order to know God more intimately, talk to the person who gave you this, or call us here at the ministry. Remember the verse that we read earlier that said *"I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance."* (Luke 15:7) Why not take this step of faith today and give your heavenly Father cause for celebration?

*All scripture is from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.*

### DIGGING DEEPER

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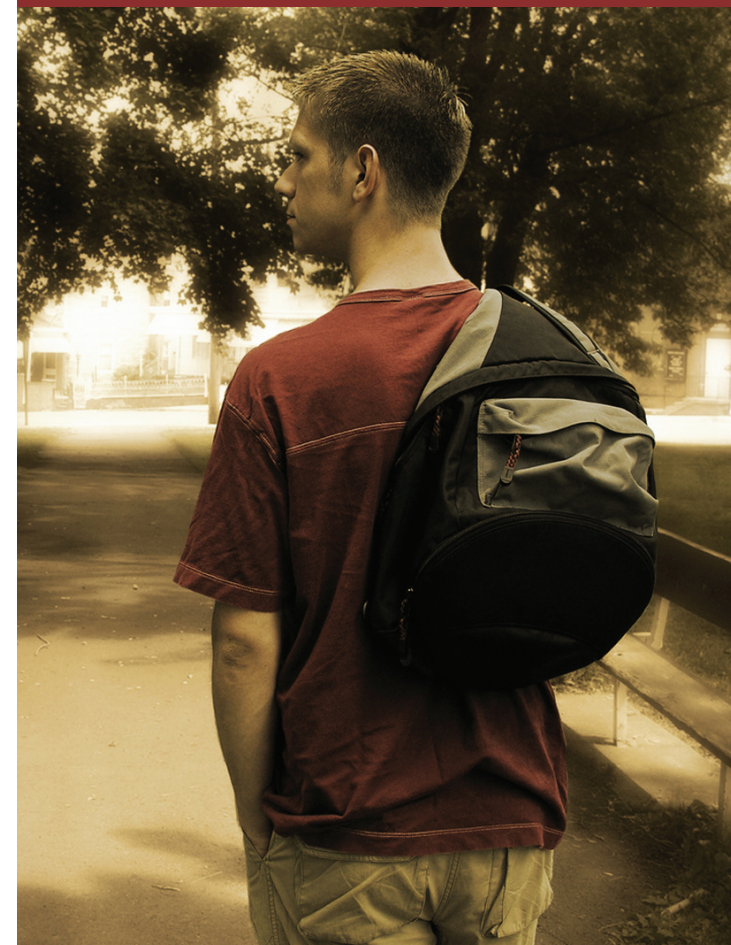


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## LOVING YOUR PRODIGAL



# Loving Your Prodigal

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Transformation Resource Series





## Loving Your Prodigal - God's Way

**W**hen I was a child and my parents said that they loved me, I thought I understood. But when I became a parent I realized that a parent's love for his child far exceeds the ability of that child to fully comprehend. I have come to believe the same is true of our Father's love. Perhaps when we get to heaven we will understand the depth of God's love, but until then, all we can do is speculate. I hear repeatedly about sons, daughters and spouses who have strayed from the path of healthy living and gone instead down the road to addiction or other sinful lifestyles. Being exposed to these situations causes me to ask the question, "How can I love my prodigal God's way?" The world is full of philosophies, but what does the inspired Word of God say?

In the Bible, we learn that God is the Father to whom every family on earth owes its name. Paul said it this way:

*"For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."* – EPHESIANS 3:14-15

Being the Father gives God ultimate responsibility for each one of our lives. This, of course, includes the lives of our children and spouses. God the Father sees far better the need for discipline than we do. Again, if we look to the wisdom of the Bible, we read:

*"Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we, may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."* – HEBREWS 12:9-11

**God the Father sees far better the need for discipline than we do.**

I think that it is important to note that the purpose of all loving discipline is to benefit the person being disciplined with "a harvest of righteousness and peace."

Remembering this desired result, we will be able to endure the discomfort necessary in the process. We can compare it to the pain that we would allow our child to undergo in having his appendix removed. Granted the child will suffer, but the end result will be healing. We could never expect a young child to grasp this concept fully, but that would not prevent us from doing what is in his best interest, because we love him.

Likewise, God knows what will work best in our lives and allows us to feel the consequences of our actions as part of the sanctification process. Sometimes we inadvertently see God as a cosmic ogre looking over our shoulder waiting to thump us if we sin. This concept is not accurate. While God does promise to execute judgment over His creation for wrongdoing, sometimes consequences suffice. If I tell my young children not to touch a hot stove and they do, I don't need to punish them because they will experience pain as a result of their actions. Often we shield prodigals from the consequences of their sin and interfere with the discipline of God. The problem is that we will continue to rescue them until the consequences are so big that there is no way they can deal successfully with them alone. The time will surely come when we will be unable to rescue them. At that point we must ask ourselves if we have really helped them at all. Jesus was a Master at the use of illustrations to help us grasp spiritual concepts. There is a story in the book of Luke, chapter 15, beginning at verse 11 about a father who had two sons. It goes like this:

### THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON

Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. <sup>12</sup>And the younger of them said to his father. 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his liveli-

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hood. <sup>13</sup>And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. <sup>14</sup>But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. <sup>15</sup>Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. <sup>16</sup>And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. <sup>19</sup>and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."<sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; <sup>24</sup>for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry. (Luke 15:11-24)

### WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THIS PARABLE ABOUT LOVING THE PRODIGAL — GOD'S WAY?

**1) We have to let go.** Sounds easy, but it's not. In fact, it can be excruciating. The father in this story didn't have to give his son his inheritance before he died, but he did. Why? Because we get to the place where we realize that nothing we say or do is helping. At this point we must trust in the fact that there is a God in heaven who loves our prodigal and He has a plan that, right now, doesn't include us. Until you take this step the road to recovery cannot and will not begin.

**2) We shouldn't interfere with the discipline of God.** We may get a call for help. We must be careful that we are not prolonging the downward spiral that eventually is going to allow the prodigal "to come to his senses."