

WHAT DO I DO WITH A PRODIGAL?

INTRO: This is hardest lesson I've prepared since May 2008 (three months after oldest son took his life). He was a prodigal. I spoke then on "Dealing with Loss". Today, speak on the difficult subject of what to do with a prodigal? Who has one? Why do people who grow up in godly homes go astray? Where did I go wrong? I don't have an answer. No one factor explains it all. Currently, we have a prodigal. Addressing this causes me to unpleasant emotions: anxiety, shame, embarrassment, anger, fear, frustration, etc. Many of you are dealing with this as I speak. I am no authority, but God is and so is His Word. I am not going to address WHY they go astray, but WHAT to do when they go prodigal. Hope this helps!

I. BIBLE PRODIGALS

- A. Examples: Adam and Eve, Noah's sons, Samuel's two sons (Joel & Abijah) David & Absalom, But best known is son found in Luke 15:11-24 (familiar story). This story provides some insights in what to do when it happens.
- B. "Didn't God promise this wouldn't happen in Pro. 22:6?" A difference in an absolute promise and a generally true principle (Ex. Prov. 15:1). Pro. 22:6 is generally a true principle but not an iron clad promise. Writer of Proverbs knew godly parents could have prodigals (10:1; 15:20; 17:21, 25; 30:11). Where did God go wrong as a parent to cause Israel to sin? Hosea 11:1-4, 7-8

II. PRODIGAL STAGES (Lk. 15:11-24) – This Jewish father would have done all he could to raise son to love God. Prodigal definition: recklessly and wastefully extravagant (son); giving on a lavish scale (father).

- A. Stage 1: REBELLION (vv.11-13a) basically a struggle for control. In early years rarely an issue. Around middle school more of an issue. Fact: Kids want control sooner than we want to give it. Sin nature rears its head (in all of us). A classic confrontation. . . What can we do when they are legally independent and you can't control them anymore?
 - 1. *Let them go.* Father didn't chase. No doubt feeling many emotions: embarrassed, angry, confused, self-condemned, . . . God is perfect parent and He has children who rebel. The tighter we hold the more they resist. It's so hard to let them go.
 - 2. *Let them reap what they sow* (Gal. 6:7). Let them make mistakes and feel the consequences of their choices (vv. 13b-16). Because the father didn't intervene, he came to stage two.
- B. Stage 2: REMORSE (vv. 13b-19) Many of us pray this daily (come to their senses). Whole new attitude: re-evaluation, to regret, to repentance. We rarely change until we get desperate (God gets our attention).

What do I do while we wait?"

- 1. Pray — Satan has them in his sights. He wants to ruin them. He gets at us through them. Commit them to God (again) — If not in our control then not our responsibility. But not out of God's control.
- 2. Wait (vv. 18-20) — Because the father waited, the prodigal came to stage three.
- C. Stage 3: RETURN (vv. 20-24) "How did the father handle his son's return?"
 - How we handle this stage is so critical (v. 20). He did three things:
 - 1. He LOVED FAITHFULLY — He never stopped loving his son. Focus on the relationship not the behavior.
 - 2. He ACCEPTED UNCONDITIONALLY — He ran and embraced him and kept kissing him. No conditions stated for acceptance. Don't confuse approval with acceptance. Big difference. You can accept a person without approval of their lifestyle. Language of acceptance was physical. How did son respond? (v. 21). Confession is easier when you know you have been accepted. Make it easy for them to admit wrong.
 - 3. He FORGAVE COMPLETELY (v. 22). In several ways: robe (sign of sonship), ring (unlimited credit card—sign of trust), sandals for sons not slaves.

III. FINAL SUGGESTIONS

- A. *Don't play the blame game.* No winners. We are not the only influence in their lives. All imperfect parents.
- B. *Deal with the guilt.* Seek Professional help.
- C. *Realize the prodigal made their choices.*
- D. *Guard your tongue.* Words wound. Words are remembered, context forgotten. Father didn't rub it in (blew one third of his wealth!).
- E. *Keep praying.* Remember, they are never beyond God's reach. There's always hope. (v.20). Final chapters not written. Pray he'll be "in need" and "come to his senses."

CONC: This story has a happy ending. For some the jury is still out. What if they never return?

- 1. Stay committed to Jesus — Love Him above all else, even family (Matt. 10:37-38)
- 2. Let God and others comfort you.
- 3. Never ever give up hope!

Empty chairs to come and pray for them.

Prayer for Prodigals . . .