

Barren Family: The Story of Prodigal Son
Spilman Memorial Baptist Church, Kinston NC
March 26, 2023
Pastor H. Powell Dew, Jr.

Text: Luke 15:11-24

Purpose: The prodigal son followed seven steps downward that led to his complete ruin. But then the son came to himself, he took a seven-step journey back to reconciliation and restoration. This is a pattern of life many people have followed both to their destruction and their renewal. God stands waiting, like the prodigal son's father, for us to return back to Him.

An investment banker was at the pier of a small coastal village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellow fin tunas. The banker complimented the fisherman on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took to catch them.



The fisherman replied, "Only a little while."

The banker then asked why didn't he stay out longer and catch more fish?

The fisherman said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs.

The banker then asked, "But what do you do with the rest of your time?"



The fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a nap with my wife, stroll into the village each evening where I play guitar and sing with my friends. I have a full and busy life."

The banker scoffed, "I am a Harvard MBA and I could help you. You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds, buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat, you could buy several boats; eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman, you would sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to a big city where you will run your expanding enterprise."



The fisherman asked, "But, how long will this all take?" To which the banker replied, "15-20 years."

"But what then?"

The banker laughed and said that's the best part. "When the time is right, you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich. You would make millions."

"Millions...Then what?"

The banker said, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take a



nap with your wife, stroll to the village in the evenings where you could play your guitar and sing with your friends."

That story reminds me of the song, "Cats in the Cradle" by Harry Chapin. It is a song written years ago about a father that was so absorbed in making money and following the American Dream, that he missed playing with his son while he was growing up. Later in life, his son followed the same pattern and had no time for his father.



There is something unique and special between a father and his children. A father can shape and mold his children in ways a mother never can. In some family situations a father is present at every event the children are involved in. In other families, the father is never present.

Families – we all were born into one – and we are stuck with what we got!

Today's sermon is about a typical family. In just a few short verses, Jesus is able to bring about great sadness in a family situation – great barrenness – to full restoration. Most families that are experiencing barrenness are still waiting for restoration to occur. But we can take great comfort knowing that we can be restored.



Jesus told this story of the prodigal son along with two other parables about lost things. In Chapter 15, Jesus begins by talking about the one lost sheep out of a total of one hundred. The shepherd was so concerned about the one that was lost, that

he went looking for it, found it, and great was his joy upon returning home!

The second “lost” story was about a widow that lost a precious coin. She searched all over the house until she found it and when she did, great was her joy! Our passage of scripture is the third “lost” story. It is about the son that chose to move away from his family and live it up. His decision to move away is one that many people can identify with. There is nothing wrong with setting out on your own, but the way in which the son did it, and the attitude in which he left home, set him on a path of destruction.

The Journey Downward

The prodigal son headed down a staircase with seven gradual steps that put him at the bottom of society. You can look around our cities today and you will find many individuals that are sitting at the bottom rung of society and languishing there. Some are there because of choice and others are there because of circumstances. I am so glad our church is helping our community with canned goods and supplies in our blessing box. Everyone deserves a mouthful of food, even if they are there by choice.



STEP ONE DOWNWARD – Self Willed

The prodigal son’s demise began in his heart and the heart issue was his **“Self Will.”** In verse 12 we read, *“And the younger son said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So, he divided to them his livelihood.”*



The son was only concerned about what was his. He was not concerned about his mother and who would care for her if his father died. He was not concerned about helping his father in his old age. He surely didn’t care about his brother. The first step down the path towards destruction was “self will.”

STEP TWO DOWNWARD – Selfishness

The second step downward was his **“selfishness.”** You may not believe his asking for his share of the family wealth was selfish, but it was. This was money and property that was to be given to him only upon the death of the father. You see in Jewish culture; the oldest son got a double portion of the inheritance in order to take care of his mother. In this situation, the oldest son would get 2/3 while the younger son got 1/3 of the inheritance. How selfish of the younger son to demand his inheritance NOW.



Once he got his money, it wasn’t long before he said goodbye, and headed out to make a name for himself. In verse 13 it says, *“And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country,”*

STEP THREE DOWNWARD – Separation

The third step downward was a **“separation”** from his family ties. I have lived long enough to know and understand that you need your family if you are to make it in this world. You need the support and shelter they offer. You need the security they



provide. You need the contacts and wisdom they can offer. You need someone to lift you up when you are down, and support you when you are sick. You need them and they need you. But our prodigal son separated himself from all that was important.

STEP FOUR DOWNWARD – Sensuality

I am here to tell you, when you are away from the ones you love and the ones that will hold you accountable, you can easily slide into the fourth step downward – that is **“sensuality.”**



Verses 13 and 14 illustrate that for us. *“And there (the prodigal son) wasted his possessions with prodigal living. But when he had spent all, there arose a famine in that land and he began to be in want.”*

STEP FIVE DOWNWARD – Spiritually Destitute

So many individuals that head off to college, away from home for the first time, become involved in a lifestyle that would make them blush if their family back home knew the reality of what was happening. You could say, the prodigal son had taken the fifth step downward and was **“spiritually destitute.”** Every night on television, you can see examples of individuals that dabble in things they should not be doing. Drinking, sleeping with numerous people, taking drugs – all for pleasure and self satisfaction. But there is an illusion in that – it never satisfies and it only leaves you craving more.



Now that the prodigal son’s resources had run out and there arose a famine in the land, he was now willing to do almost anything to keep himself alive.

STEP SIX DOWNWARD – Self Abasement

Verse 15 says, *“Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed the swine.”*



Our young prodigal son saw himself in a dire situation. He voluntarily entered into a slave situation in order to get out of the situation he was in. He willingly put himself into a worse position and the result was even worse than before. Again, he had taken another step downward towards **“self abasement.”** Now he was working for this man and he was not even being paid enough to eat.

Satan works just like that. He entices you to trade the best for the worst and because you are so desperate and headed in the wrong direction, you convince yourself that what you are doing is in some way, acceptable.

STEP SEVEN DOWNWARD – Starvation



Verse sixteen gives us a glimpse of the last step downward - **“starvation.”** *“And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.”*

Here was a Jewish young man, standing as a slave before a hog pen, feeding them food he wished he could eat. To a Jew, having anything to do with a hog would make you unclean. But to want to eat the food that the pigs were going to eat was the bottom of the barrel as far as this young man was concerned.

I can just see him standing there. He is hungry. He is broke, and all of his friends have left him. I will tell you, as long as you have money and are having a good time buying alcohol, you will have friends. But when the money is gone, your friends will evaporate. This prodigal son found that out. He was alone.

The Journey Upward

Verse 17 says, “*He came to himself.*” I like that phrase. He came to himself. Apparently, he had been separated from himself before this time. He was disillusioned and was seeking something “out there” that did not satisfy. But now he woke up. He found himself.



STEP ONE UPWARD – Realization

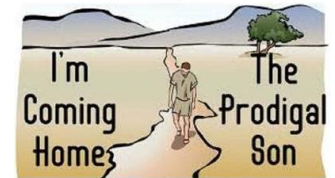
The first step out of that hole he was in was “**Realization.**” He realized the condition he was in. He was filthy, dirty, hungry, broke, and broken. He said, “*How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger.*” His hunger spoke loudly. But he realized something else so vital that we do not need to miss it – he realized he was a son.



He was a child of his father and nothing would be able to change that relationship. It didn’t matter about distance, money, health, or clothes. The only thing that mattered was the relationship.

STEP TWO UPWARD – Resolve

Verse 18 says, “*I will arise and go to my father.*” This son took the second step upward and “**resolved**” to do the work of restoration. He resolved to go back and make it right. He didn’t care about the family wealth. He didn’t care about how his brother would feel. He only wanted to be back with those that mattered most.



STEP THREE UPWARD – Repentance

The next step out of the mess he was in was “**Repentance.**” This was a critical and necessary step. He knew he had done wrong. He knew it would take a humble heart to seek to restore fellowship. He could not boldly come bounding back home and expect all to be forgiven without repentance. He said, “*I will say to my father, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,’*”



That is exactly what David said to Nathan about his sin with Bathsheba, “*I have sinned against heaven.*” (Psalm 51) The prodigal son said, “*I will say to my father, ‘I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’*”

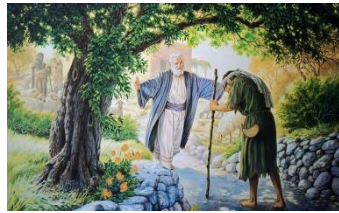
STEP FOUR UPWARD – Return

He determined in his heart to **“return”** home. His heart was ready to approach his father with a spirit of repentance and to seek a reunification with his family – even in the place of a servant. He began the long walk home.



Verse 20 says, *“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.”*

Of all the pictures of a father in the bible – I love this one the most. This father was always looking for his wayward child to come home. He was always looking down the path waiting for his son to come home again. Our story does not say how long the son was in the far country. He could have been gone a month, a year, or even a few years – we don’t know. But we do know that how ever long he was gone, the father was at home waiting.

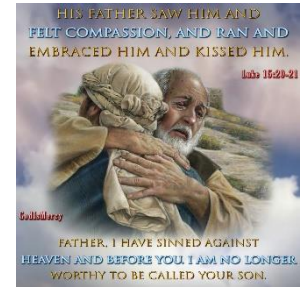


The father saw him and ran to him. He didn’t simply walk – or stand there disinterested. He did the culturally inappropriate thing – he lifted up the edge of his robe and took off running! We all get goose bumps when we see the scene in the movie when the hero returns home and embraces his loved ones, or when two lovers run to embrace each other.

This was a situation where the son who took the family money and left was now coming back home. He didn’t know what he would find when he returned home. His father embraced and kissed him passionately.

STEP FIVE UPWARD – Reconciliation

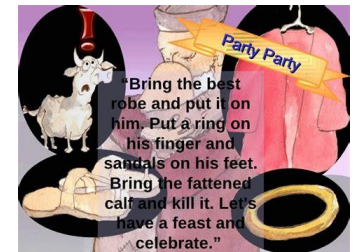
The son had prepared his speech and was ready to speak the words of **“reconciliation”** and restoration. Verse 21 says, *“Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.”* The father heard his words, but willingly restored him back to son-ship.



Verse 22 says, *“But the father said to the servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and sandals on his feet.’* The father didn’t scold him, or rebuke him. He only spoke words of reconciliation.

STEP SIX UPWARD – Reclothed

This wayward son was restored to son-ship. He took one more step upward and was **“re-clothed”** once again. He was given the family ring, which probably extended him the ability to charge items to the family name. He was given sandals on his feet. He was re-clothed and outfitted as a son would be.



STEP SEVEN UPWARD – Rejoicing

The last step in the journey of restoration was **“rejoicing.”** The father said to his servants, *“And bring out the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is not alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.”*

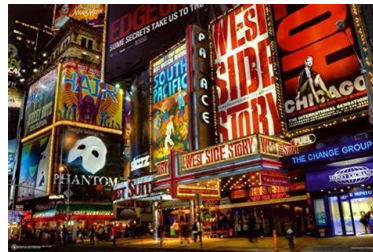


There was joy in the heart of the father when the son returned. In the eyes of the father and the family, the son was as good as dead. They had taken back the family ring. He was no longer in the family. But now that the steps of restoration had been taken, he was freely welcomed and restored.

I am sure you can see the application of this story Jesus shared.

The Application of this Story

Many individuals have decided they no longer want to live according to the things of God. They simply ignore what they know is right and head off to the far country. The lights are brighter there, the glitter is more appealing, and the enticements don't seem so bad. Yielding to this temptation to run with the fast crowd, drink a few drinks, try a few drugs, get involved sexually with different people. All of these steps downward lead to spiritual bankruptcy and eventually physical consequences do rear their ugly head – like STD's, unplanned pregnancy, addiction, arrest, or even death.



The good news for us today is that God is still standing at the house waiting for His wayward children to return home. He is looking down the long paths of life searching for individuals that have decided to repent and turn from the life of selfish living and self gratification.



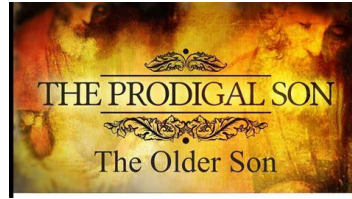
You can never go too far for God to reach you if you turn and repent from what you are doing. God has been described as the Hound of Heaven, the one relentlessly seeking His creation. There is no sin too great for God to forgive.

I John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*

God's grace, forgiveness, and acceptance is so amazing when it comes to sinners. Romans 5:8 says, *“But God demonstrated His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”* While we were still in a state of separated sin, God sent His one and only Son to die for you and me.

If you are far from God today headed down a path of destruction, look deep into your heart and examine the path you are on. There is restoration and reunion when we turn unto Him. He is waiting for you!

For most of us, we are not in a foreign country running from God or our family. We are like the other son that has stayed home tending to the family business.



Maybe some of you have a family member – a son or daughter, an aunt or uncle, a cousin or in-law that is running from God. All we can do is pray for them and offer words of encouragement to them as we are able. In every person's family, there seems to be someone that is far from God and estranged from the family.

If we have repented of our sins and been restored back into the family of God, then we are called to the ministry of reconciliation. Psalm 51 says we are to teach



transgressors God's ways and convert sinners to God. We are called to pray for, and reach out to our family, friends and neighbors. We are actually in the business of reconciling others back to God.

You will find a bookmark in your bulletin that I made for you to write the names of individuals you know that are not where they should be in their walk with the Lord. I



I want to encourage you to write their names on this bookmark and use it as a guide for you to pray for others that need to come back to the Lord. If you regularly pray for them, God will create ways in which you can influence them and guide them back to God.

I know some of you are praying for your family members. Others are praying for their children. Some may even be praying for their spouses. If we would commit to pray then God can and will answer our prayers. It may take years, but He will faithfully wait with you as the wayward person comes back home.

LET US PRAY