

Come and Meet the World's Finest Father

Luke 15:11-32

Three expectant fathers were awaiting news of their wives, who were all in labor for several hours in the local hospital. As the hours passed, more and more coffee was consumed and nerves were on edge. Small talk had long ago stalled. The three paced back and forth. Each minute seemed like an hour. The strain could be seen on each man's face as he waited.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, a nurse came out and told one father the good news. His wife had just given birth to twin sons. The nerves that had been so taunt were now relaxed, and he quipped humorously, that this was great, because he worked in the front office for the Minnesota Twins, and he could go and tell the staff they had twins.

After the excitement died down, the other two men went back to pacing anxiously, awaiting the next word from the nurse. After what seemed like hours, which had been, in reality, only 20 or so minutes, the nurse came back out and told the second father the tremendous news. His wife had delivered triplets. He had two daughters and a son, all were healthy, and the mother was fine. Shocked at his fortune, his only comment was, "Boy, will they laugh in the office tomorrow; I work for 3M."

All alone now, nerves stretched to the max, the remaining father waited. He thought, "One had twins, the other triplets...2 and 3 kids, what if...?" About that time the nurse came out with a big smile that looked to him to be bigger than before. As she began to tell him the good news, suddenly he snapped. His eyes enlarged, his pupils dilated, his hands trembled and there was perspiration on his brow. He gave a bewildered look and then bolted, as fast as he could run, out of the hospital, into his car, and down the street.

The shocked nurse looked over to a passing volunteer and asked what in the world caused that? The volunteer commented that while he was pacing back and forth, he kept repeating over and over, "Oh no, what am I going to do? I work for 7-up...I work for 7-up."

As a father myself, speaking to fathers present here today, I want to tell you that both the joys and the jokes of fatherhood are great. I love them, and I hope you do, too. I hope that your fathering is smooth and effective and. I wish I could say, "trouble free." It seems, however, that being a father does have its struggles.

We're going to take a look this morning at the parenting style of the finest Father who ever lived. Actually, I'm happy to report to you that we are honored this morning to have this Father present with us and we will be talking to Him at the conclusion of this message. Before we do that however, I want to tell you some things about Him.

His story is over in Luke 15 and, whether you are a Christian or not, you probably have heard it. Actually, the story is usually named after one of this Dad's sons. We usually call it "The Prodigal Son."

(Read Luke 15:11-32)

The first time I ever preached from this passage I, like so many others, highlighted the younger son of the story, probably because it was closest to my own experience - I was young and didn't grow up in the church. Then, as the years went by, I gradually realized that there was an older boy whose story was told here. My emphasis shifted to the bitter older brother in the story, who was really the focus of Jesus' hearers. But just recently, however, I've been looking at the father in this story and relating very much to him. It is

this father that I want to focus on in this message. I see some things in his parenting style that every father should understand and imitate.

I see first that this father was

I. Approachable.

By "approachable," I mean his sons did not fear speaking to him or dread coming into his presence. I base my observation on some of the first words his wayward son said after he came to his senses in the pigpen. He said, as recorded in verse 18, "*I will get up and go to my father...*" His first thought was, "I'll go to dad."

Dads, are you the first one your children think of when they are in trouble... or the last? A lot depends on how approachable you have been for them. No, we cannot control what a person's response will be in crises, but we may strongly influence what it will not be. If, each time they have come to you in the past, they've found a grumpy, vindictive, tyrant who shows little interest and no understanding or compassion, you'll be the last one they'll go to, if they go to you at all. Had the father in this story been that way, this boy would probably have said something like, "O, would I love to go home, but I know that is impossible. My dad will never understand and he'll never forgive me." He might have never been restored to the family.

Dads, if your kids messed up like the boy in this story, squandered what you gave them, dragged your reputation in the dirt, then came to their senses and wanted to come home, would they have to swim a sea filled with sharks or would there be a bridge there for them with you waiting on the other side to welcome them?

"I will get up and go to my father..." the young boy said. Did he expect to be restored to his position in the family? No. He knew that was not fair. He hoped only that his dad would have enough pity on him to give him a place at the table where the servants ate. He did know that his dad could be approached.

Words are not adequate to describe the hurt that comes when one of the children you raised turns his or her back on all they've been taught. There are few things that reach the depth of pain that such an act brings.

But for the sake of those children, if you find yourself in such a spot, you need to remain approachable in the hope that they will come to their senses and return.

Oh, and by the way, this approachability should be in us whether they stray or not. It takes kids awhile to get things sorted out and they are going to make some mistakes. May it always be that, no matter what has happened, they find a father who is open to reconciliation!

I see secondly that the father in this story was

II. Spiritual.

"Wait a minute," I can imagine someone thinking. "How can you say a man is spiritual if he loses one of his kids? Surely that is evidence that he has done something wrong, isn't it?" Perhaps. But may I remind you of the meaning of this parable at the time Jesus spoke it? It was spoken to a group of grumbling Pharisees and scribes who were upset that Jesus would receive sinners and eat with them (v. 2). Each character in the parable represented someone. The younger son represented the sinners who were coming to God as a result of Jesus' ministry. The older son represented the Pharisees and scribes who thought that Jesus should have nothing to do with such people because they had squandered their lives. Who, then, did the father represent? The father in the parable is God and what this parable is showing us is that God will receive a sinner back if he repents.

Now, back to my original question. If a man loses one of his kids, does that mean he is unspiritual? The father in this story lost one of his for a time, didn't he? . And who does the father in this account represent? God! Is God unspiritual?

Surely this father had made every effort to teach this boy the truth. He hadn't shirked his responsibility. I base my conclusion on verse 18. In the second half of that verse it says, *"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight."* Then he said it again in verse 21: *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight."* This boy knew the truth. He knew about sin. He knew that heaven was the dwelling place of God whom he had offended. He also knew about responsibility because he recognized he had let his father down.

Yet, the boy had free will. He was capable of taking the precious things his father had taught him and casting them aside.

Bro. Duerr, why do I say these things? Glad you ask. Because I know that some of you have watched helplessly as your children, brought up in homes to love and serve the Lord, have pushed it all aside, deserted your teaching, and gone their own way.

Does it mean you have failed? It certainly feels that way! And, it is possible that you have failed if you have neglected your responsibilities to them. A father who cares nothing for the raising and training of his children is most certainly a failure, whether they depart or not. But some of you have taken your responsibility seriously.

You've done your job and yet, seen your kids depart. I say, it isn't necessarily a forgone conclusion that you have failed. Some of God's children have departed too.

Oh, but doesn't it say in Proverbs 22:6, *"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it."* Yes it does, but is that statement an absolute guarantee that with the right training, your child will never go astray and that if he does, you have failed? Be careful in your answer. If that verse was intended to be an absolute, statement, then the rest of the Proverbs should be taken that way, too - as absolute, never-fail statements. Can they be taken that way? How about this one: Proverbs 22:11: *"He who loves purity of heart and whose speech is gracious, the king is his friend."* Is that always true in every case, or is it a general guiding principle that is true most of the time? Need I remind you of David, a man who loved purity of heart, and King Saul, a king who hated him for it? How about this one: Prov 12:11: *"He who tills his land will have plenty of bread..."* Is that a guarantee that hard working farmers will never be forced to file bankruptcy? I know a lot of former farmers who would argue with you on that one. What about this one: Prov 16:13: *"Righteous lips are the delight of kings, and he who speaks right is loved."* Is that an absolute statement? Are those who speak with righteous lips always loved? Do I need to remind you of Jesus, whose lips were more righteous than any man, yet he was hated by those in authority in Jerusalem to the extent that they crucified Him?

Proverbs are statements of general truth. They guide. They point direction. We get in trouble, though, when we try to make them absolutes that are true in every case. Is the rest of the Bible to be interpreted that way? No. The rest of the Bible isn't made up of proverbs.

This father was spiritual. Fathers today must be, too. Men, don't depend on your wife to do it. Don't think you can "let her take care of the religion in the family." It's your responsibility. If you shirk it, you deserve to be called a failure.

Thirdly, I see that this father was

III. Compassionate.

Look quickly at verse 20: *"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion for him, and **ran** and embraced him, and kissed him."*

How can a father feel compassion for a returning child who has squandered what he has worked for all his life? How can a father feel compassion for a child who has dragged his reputation in the dirt and spat upon everything he stands for? Drop down to verse 32 to find the answer. The older son has just asked his dad those very questions.

He's beside himself because of the way his father received his younger brother back. In verse 30, he says, *"when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with harlots, you killed the fattened calf for him!"* It is probably safe to say that he thought the boy should be disowned! Yet, look at verse 32: *"We had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found."* To him, the boy's return was like life from the dead. His possessions, his reputation, compared to that, didn't matter.

Dads, are we compassionate men toward our children? When they mess up and repent, do we accept them back joyfully, or do we disown them or distance ourselves from them? Look at the example of this father and you'll have your answer. Beyond that, consider that you will not always have the opportunity to be compassionate.

Conclusion

I began this message by inviting you to learn from the finest Father in the World. I also told you that we would be talking with this Father at the end of the sermon. Let's do that right now. Shall we pray?

I would now read again v. 20 for our closing. *"And he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him and ran and embraced him and kissed him."*

The son was accepted even before he confessed. This is a significant point. Repentance is the sign that we are sincere when we confess, and the Father knows we are sincere when He sees actually turn from our wicked ways. He forgives when we repent, when we truly want Him to forgive. This is the reason the Father runs to meet His son. The son had turned away from the far country and had come to the Father.

- the Father's eyes were merciful: no matter what He had seen, He wanted to have mercy.
- The Father's heart was merciful: He wanted to reach out in compassion to the sinning son.
- The Father's feet were merciful: He wanted to run and meet and escort the sinner home.
- The Father's arms were merciful: He wanted to embrace the prodigal son and weep with him.
- The father's lips were merciful: e wanted to welcome the prodigal son home with all the tenderness of a true Father.