

# Red Chairables

## *The Prodigal Son*

Part 3 – August 1, 2010

[VIDEO: DIGNAM'S PIG FARM]

Animals need to be fenced in. If they're not, they'll wander away and get lost. They have no idea of the hazards and dangers that lie outside: freeways, poisons, coyotes, starvation. In their ignorance, they just see ... freedom. When we wander away from God's boundaries and shelter, what we're really "escaping" is peace, purpose, and protection. In the parable of The Prodigal Son, Jesus reveals a Father who wants us to leave the pig pen and come into His home.

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. 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. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.' So 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. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." - *Luke 15:11-24 NIV*



This has got to be the most memorable of all Jesus' parables! It's known as: The Gospel *within* the Gospel because of Jesus' depiction of a gracious, loving, merciful father, responding to true repentance.

Do you know what the word "prodigal" means? It means wasteful; and he's *wasteful* because ...

... [He] squandered his wealth in wild living. - *Luke 15:13 NIV*

He wasted his wealth on drunken parties. Interestingly, we still use terms like *wasted*, *smashed*, and *hammered* for drunkenness. Well, this guy got “prodigaled”!

There are two moments in this story would’ve surprised Jesus’ audience:

1. The most obvious shocker is when the father forgives and restores so *readily* after being so wronged by his son. There’s no resistance whatsoever! No well deserved gloating. No rubbing the son’s nose in his profoundly selfish mistake.
2. The less obvious surprise to the crowd is at the beginning, when the father *grants* the son’s insulting request! There’s no outrage, no indignation ... just resignation and compliance with the defiant son’s dim-witted demand.

Under Jewish law the younger of two sons was entitled to 1/3 of his father’s estate *upon death* (2/3 going to the eldest son). It was just as offensive then as now to tell your parents that they’re not dying fast enough - and you’d like their estate *now*!

The father was providing for his son, but the son didn’t trust him to fulfill his *deepest* desire; so, he looked for a shortcut before even knowing what that deepest desire really was. Ironically, it turned out to be his father’s love and acceptance.



But, for now he’s taking his father’s humiliation public.

... the younger son got together all he had, [and] set off for a distant country ... - Luke 15:13b NIV

He liquidates his third of his father’s assets, packs it all up, and gets away as soon as possible, to as far away as possible.

He is *eager* for what this world has to offer; and he’s bought into the deception that “whatever happens in the distant country *stays* in the distant country”!



This loving father would’ve tried to talk his son out of going; but, it’s noteworthy that he *does* allow him the freedom to squander his inheritance. God doesn’t restrain us, but releases us. He won’t stop us if we’re determined to leave Him. He knows that doing so would only incite *more* rebellion. He won’t force anyone into fellowship with Him, because He’s only pleased when His will is done *willingly*



Convictions come from experience. So the father gives his son what the son *thinks* he wants, in the hope that the consequences of his poor choices will drive him to want what’s *best*. Sometimes we only learn through pain. And after we learn and heal and grow, we live with the scars as a reminder of our lessons.



But for now, this kid's got his freedom and his inheritance and it's party time! He's cruisin' the Egyptian strip on his pimped out Camelac! And Jesus sums it up quite succinctly:

[He] squandered his wealth in wild living. - *Luke 15:13 NIV*



Sin is fun for a season, but it's shortsighted and superficial fun. It's an attempted shortcut to happiness that always ends in misery.

There was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. - *Luke 15:14 NIV*

Party's over! He's broke; alone; wallet's empty; life's empty. Nature has a way of disciplining children in ways their parents can't. So, be careful not to short-circuit the job of natural consequences by rescuing your kids from their responsibilities.



But, he's resilient; he's a farm boy. Except, the only farm work available is very un-kosher.

So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. - *Luke 15:15 NIV*



This is the lowest humiliation a Jew could suffer. And it's not a job that pays well.

He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. - *Luke 15:16 NIV*

What he wanted was freedom; what he got was bondage; and that's the lie the lure and the end result of sin. He gets all the misery, *none* of the fun.



The word: "pods" is referring to carob pods; and they're still used as animal feed. It's the same carob that's used in the chocolate alternative. Carob pods are like sin: sweet at first but ultimately unsatisfying.

The crowd would be enjoying the story at this point. Tending pigs was one thing, eating their food was utterly horrifying!



What a wonderfully awful end to this immoral young Jew! He ends up with all the misery and none of the fun. However, this isn't how Jesus ends the story.

When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!" - *Luke 15:17 NIV*

The bad news is: you don't have to be in a distant country to be disconnected from God. The good news is: you don't have to wait until you're in the "pigpen" to come to your senses! So, after the carob pods it's fairly easy to swallow his pride.

I will set out and go back to my father and say to him ... - *Luke 15:18*

Let's stop right there for a moment and analyze: he'll "set out" (he's made a decision to leave his pigpen); he'll "go back" (turn from sin and *return* to his father); and he'll "say to him" (he's going to unconditionally confess his sinfulness).

He's decided to confess two things and then offer a deal:

1. "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you" (*Luke 15b:18*)

That's right and proper and good.

2. "I am no longer worthy to be called your son" (*Luke 15:19a*)

That's meek and humble and true. He's not blaming or excusing.

And then comes the deal:

3. "Make me like one of your hired men" (*Luke 15:19b*)

Wow. He's gone from "Give me my share" to "Make me your servant".



So 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 ... - *Luke 15:20a NIV*

Why do you think Jesus includes the part about the father seeing him: "while he was still a long way off"?

He's saying that the father was waiting and watching! This father had worn a path to the highest hill where he scanned the horizon daily, eagerly awaiting his rebellious son's return.

The compassion Jesus attributes to this father would have really challenged His listener's perception of God's nature. He goes on:

... he ran to his son ... - *Luke 15:20b NIV*

In order to run, men had to hike up their long robes and bare their legs; it was highly undignified.

... threw his arms around him and kissed him. - *Luke 15:20c NIV*

The Greek verb indicates that he *smothered* him in kisses. And the father does this *before* the son confesses his sin!

The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick!" - *Luke 15:21-22a NIV*

Do you notice how the father cuts off the son's speech? The prodigal acknowledges his guilt: "I have sinned", and he acknowledges his shame: "I am no longer worthy", but he never gets a chance to make his deal, to: "Make me a like a hired man".

- There's no place in this story for *earning* forgiveness.
- He's restored by the same grace that allowed him to go.

The father says:

Bring the best robe and put it on him. - *Luke 15:22b NIV*

Who owns the best robe? The father! And who smells like piggy poo-poo? The Son! This father doesn't think twice about staining his finest robe in order to cover the filth that clings to his child.

Put a ring on his finger ... - *Luke 15:22c NIV*

The son probably pawned his family ring. The new ring symbolizes his reinstatement into the family of his father.

... and sandals on his feet. - *Luke 15:22d NIV*

Slaves didn't wear shoes – but sons do. One by one the father is restoring what this sinful child had despised and "prodigaled".

Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. - *Luke 15:23 NIV*

He left rebellious and returned repentant.

Our Heavenly Father eagerly awaits, embraces us despite our sin, covers our filth, and rejoices when we're reborn!

As we read this passage again, which stage do you relate to? Squandering the inheritance? Suffering the consequences? Or resting safely in the Father's arms?