

**Daily Reflection on Scripture**  
**Week of February 5**  
**Parables Part 4 –**  
**The Prodigal Son**



Insights for this week's reflections were gleaned from Kenneth Bailey's chapter, "Middle Eastern New Testament Scholars and a Cultural Understanding of the Parable of The Prodigal Son" published in *The Forgotten Faithful: A Window Into the Life and Witness of Christians in the Holy Land.*"

**Sunday, February 5, 2017**

Luke 15: 11 – 12 (NRSV) The Parable of the Prodigal Son (*Prodigal* meaning wasteful or reckless) *Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them."*

**Reflection:** In the story, the younger son asks for his inheritance while his father is still alive. This request is an unthinkable breach of traditional culture. Simply stated, it means he cannot wait to receive his inheritance and his request makes clear he is eager for the death of his father. The audience at the time would be waiting to see the father fly into a rage, strike the boy across the face and drive him out of the house with nothing. Instead, the father violates the code of a Middle Eastern patriarch by granting the son's request; no matter the grief and shame it may cause him. Sometimes we make requests without considering the toll they may take on the people around us. Prayerfully consider any current or future requests you might be considering. Whose feelings or input might you need to consider as you make those requests?

**Sacred Pause:** It's easy to think about what we want without considering the impact our requests might have. Whose feelings do you need to consider?

**Monday, February 6, 2017**

Luke 15:13 *A few days later the younger son sold all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property through extravagant living.*

**Reflection:** The text informs us that "after not many days" the younger son "sold all he had." Jewish law forbade a son to acquire possession of his inheritance while his father was still alive and thus denied the possibility of the son selling that inheritance. As the younger son moves around the village to sell his inheritance, he advertises his break with his father and in so doing triggers the anger of the community. He realizes he must leave town quickly and does. When the son breaks off relations with his father he in turn isolates himself from the community. In what ways have you experienced isolation— be it from family, friends, coworkers, a faith community, or your own soul? Spend some time considering this question, and if need be, ask God to help you find trusted community.

**Sacred Pause:** Life is too big to face alone. We all need others walking with us. In community we give and receive. Who is your trusted community?

**Tuesday, February 7, 2017**

Luke 15: 14-16 *When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything.*

**Reflection:** The prodigal son must find a paying job so he can purchase his father's land. The reader does not know where the prodigal is living but knows it is a "far away country" where the leading citizens have herds of pigs. He is in a gentile (non-Jewish) city and it is among gentiles that he loses his money. He knows he has broken the code of honor that holds the threat of being shunned when he returns home. Naturally, he tries to find employment to buy back the property he sold and regain the money he squandered. But alas — the only job he can find is feeding pigs. He feeds carob pods to the pigs and longs to eat them himself... His shame is so total that he longs to become a pig in order to eat their food. When we experience shame it wounds our ability to see ourselves as God sees us. In turn, we settle for a life unworthy of our calling. Today, ask God to reveal where you have settled for less than what God has in mind for you. Consider what you would need to gain greater trust in your God-given identity.

**Sacred Pause:** When we experience shame it wounds our ability to see ourselves as God sees us. You are more than your shame. You are wonderfully made.

### **Wednesday, February 8, 2017**

Luke 15: 17-19 *But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father.*

**Reflection:** After realizing his folly, the younger son decides he will return to his father's house. On the road home he begins crafting the speech he will deliver to get back into the father's good graces. Interestingly, he doesn't plan to ask forgiveness; rather he wants to work off his debt by serving as a hire hand.

The speech the younger son prepares assumes that *if* he takes on the role of servant only *then* will he be back in his father's good graces. As he will come to find out, the father's love cannot be bought or sold. It's easy to fall into a pattern of treating relationships like transactions. But withholding our love for someone until they can appease our desires is not real love. Spend some time considering what you expect of others in return for your affection, and then ask God to give you a heart that is willing to risk extending unconditional love.

**Sacred Pause:** Love is patient and kind, it does not insist on its own way, it is not irritable or resentful, love forgives all things and hopes all things.

### **Thursday, February 9, 2017**

Luke 15:20 *But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.*

**Reflection:** The son steels his nerves to enter the hostile village and "while he was yet far off," his patient and watchful father ran to meet him and did so in front of the village that would judge his actions. Middle Eastern culture expects a father to wait in the house, isolated and withdrawn, to discern what the son has to say for himself. The mother can run down the road and shower the dear boy with kisses. The picture painted in the parable is therefore, of a father who acts with the tender compassion of a mother. Have you ever stopped to consider what your primary image of God is? Or where that image came from? In this parable, God is cast as a father who exhibits motherly qualities. This should not surprise us; feminine images are used to describe God's character throughout the Bible. Incorporating these images into our conception of God creates new avenues through which we can encounter Divine love. Try using a feminine image in your prayers today. For example, "Oh Divine Mother, give me your compassion so that I see my friends and foes as you see them."

**Sacred Pause:** God is like a father who acts with the tender compassion of a mother. Such love tells us we always have a place to call home. You are loved.

### **Friday, February 10, 2017**

Luke 15: 21-24 *Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat*

*and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.*

**Reflection:** The costly love was offered before the son’s speech was given. This is the critical point. The Apostle Paul stated the same theology with the phrase “God showed God’s love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Without that costly demonstration of love the son would have become one more self-serving, law-abiding servant, but the father would not have a reconciled son. Redemption is always the movement from God to us, not the other way around. What God requires is an open heart to receive His coming. As you pray today, open your hands, turning your palms towards the sky, as a way of inviting God’s spirit to be with you as you move through the week.

**Sacred Pause:** Open your heart, open your mind and open your hands. This openness is what opens our eyes to see and experience God’s love in and around us.

### **Saturday, February 11, 2017**

*Luke 15: 25-32 “Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.’ Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him... [saying] ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”*

**Reflection:** Grace is not only amazing — for certain types it is also infuriating. You get what you pay for, don’t you? The older son’s attitude is: “Throw the bum out until he pays!” When he discovers that the father has “received him (the younger son) with peace,” the older son is furious. Once more, on the same day, the father must offer costly love to a wayward son. Instead of demanding obedience the father goes down and out to offer love, to plead for joy and to defend grace. The older son’s view of the father’s love is so stingy that he cannot stand watching his younger brother welcomed back into the family without first paying a price for the offense. Unfortunately, the parable ends before we find out what the older brother decides to do. Does he join the party or does resentment keep him from being reconciled to his brother? Jesus leaves the story unresolved because he is inviting us to make the same decision — can we accept God’s grace even when it is extended to the people who offend us most?

**Sacred Pause:** I do not at all understand the mystery of grace - only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us. – Anne Lamott