

# REPENTANCE AND FAITH

Justin checked his phone for the fourth time in about ten minutes. He was looking for a text from his son, Kenan. Justin had offered to take him out to lunch.

Justin hadn't been in his son's life since he was a newborn. But Justin contacted Kenan several months back. Justin had been an absentee father. He had traveled, partied, and did what he wanted to do. But after years of harmful repercussions, Justin had grown weary of his lifestyle. What did he have to show for it, really?

So, five months ago, when Justin moved back into town, he sought out the son who had never known him. Justin was not greeted with opened arms. He wanted the love of his son and hoped that it would not forever be out of reach. Justin knew he didn't deserve, but wanted, *needed* unconditional love. He thought maybe it could eventually come from Kenan.

Then, Justin remembered the words and prayers of his late mother. He grew up in a Christian home. Why had he left?

This morning, Justin was sitting in his childhood church. At first, he felt a little ashamed at the thought of attending. But he had been met by smiling ushers. There were numerous new people at the large church, and Justin didn't think many people recognized him. But what did that matter? He needed help. He needed the Lord.

**1 Have you ever felt like there was someone outside of your ability to reach? How might God reach them?**

**2 What kind of emotions do we feel when we gain back something which was lost?**

**3 What false narratives might keep a person from turning to God and requesting forgiveness?**

<sup>11</sup> And he said, A certain man had two sons: <sup>12</sup> And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

<sup>13</sup> And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. <sup>14</sup> And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. <sup>15</sup> And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. <sup>16</sup> And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

<sup>17</sup> And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, <sup>19</sup> And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup> "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. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.'

## The Shameless Son

*Mom, Dad, I wish you were already dead.* Most of us wouldn't dream of saying that to a parent. But that's the kind of son in Jesus' parable.

This is a son who is so anxious to be rid of his father that, instead of waiting to inherit a portion of the father's property, he asks for an immediate inheritance, what he calls "my share"—even if it means dividing the estate (Luke 15:12). Probably more shocking is that the

father grants this shameless request, at great harm to the family.

As a final slap in the face, the son leaves home (v. 13). In short order, the inheritance that took a large part of his father's life to save is spent and gone, and Jesus leaves us to guess at what He means by the son's "wild living." There is no excuse, no thoughtful defense, no framing of the situation that paints the son in a positive light. Since he finds himself in desperate need, he takes a job feeding pigs, whose food only makes him salivate (vv. 15–16).

It's beside the pigs—creatures not even raised and eaten by faithful Jews—that the man decides to try one more shameless gamble. Instead of persisting with no food and no money, he decides to return to the father (vv. 17–19). His plan is to implore his father for mercy, hoping to be given a well-paying job. It's not remorse that sends him home; it is hunger.

**1 What are the different shameless actions of the son in this text?**

**2 How would you expect a reasonable father to respond to his son's request?**



The carob tree is a flowering evergreen that is native to the Middle East. The "husks" (KJV) or "pods" (NIV) considered appetizing to the son are likely to be the seedpods that grow on it (Luke 15:16).

Photo: Chixoy

<sup>20</sup> And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup> And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

<sup>22</sup> But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: <sup>23</sup> And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: <sup>24</sup> For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

...

<sup>38</sup> Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. <sup>39</sup> For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

<sup>20</sup> “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.

<sup>21</sup> “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

<sup>22</sup> “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. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

...

<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. <sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

## The Unreasonable Father

The father of Jesus’ parable is many things, but *reasonable* is not one of them. Instead of denying the son’s request, he gives what is asked. He allows the son to squander the inheritance, but Jesus is not using this parable to give parenting advice. Rather, Jesus is building up our expectations for the moment the son comes home. Jesus sets us up to expect an awkward scene where the son is forced to beg.

But the father in the parable is the one who restores the

relationship. We are used to seeing people run for exercise, but a respectable Jewish man wearing robes would never be seen picking up the bottom of his garment to run at breakneck speed. The scene is almost comical, if it were not otherwise an overwhelming act of generous love.

The son only gets halfway through his prepared speech before the father cuts him off to start the preparations for a great feast. By clothing the son, placing a ring on his finger, and placing sandals on his feet, the father is showing the world that his son is redeemed into his family position. The ring might be a signet ring, granting authority to a son who has just shown an appalling lack of judgment, and a fattened calf would provide enough meat for a small community. The father's words proclaim the joy of a metaphorical resurrection: the son was "dead" and is now "alive again"; although he was "lost," he has been "found" (Luke 15:24). The father makes no mention of the son's shameless actions. They are as good as forgotten.

The second reading is from Acts. In response to Peter's preaching, a great crowd are baptized in the name of Jesus (Acts 2:38). Instead of robes and a signet ring, the Father in heaven stands ready to pour out the Holy Spirit, a "deposit guaranteeing our inheritance" (Eph. 1:14). God's reception of the lost is as unreasonable as the father's actions in the parable. The prophets say this about the Lord's mercy: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways" (Isa. 55:9).

**1 In what ways does the Father in the parable reflect God and His love?**

**2 Do you think that the father in the parable was worried about making reasonable decisions? Why or why not?**

**3 What kind of inheritance do people turning to God receive in Acts 2:38–39?**



## Outcasts Are Invited

I still cringe when remembering my high school lunch hour. The athletes, band geeks, and theater kids were all in one room; but they were divided into different tables. At my particular school, if you didn't have a group, you were labeled a "loner" or "outcast." If one of the popular kids talked with an outcast, people would ask, *Why?*

Among the controversial things that Jesus did, He was known for eating with sinners and outcasts (Matt. 9:10; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30). The religious leaders of the day saw the world as divided between those who were walking with God and those who had already chosen a life of sin.

But the reality is, humans find it easier to spot the faults and weaknesses of others over their own. All have sinned, and we would be left sitting "alone" as an outcast from God, were it not for the relentless love of the Father. Jesus did not wait for our status to be good enough to join us at the lunch table: He expressed the radical welcome of God, assuring us that we do not have to live as unredeemable sinners.

Jesus calls the former sinners and people of the land to come and follow Him. He welcomes them to repent and believe, to transform their lives. When that happens, like the son of the parable returning home, we are counted as children of the kingdom, Christ's friends (see John 15:14–15; 1 John 3:1). The message of Christ is good news, especially for the outcast.

Dr. Martin Luther King said, "Every time I look at the cross, I am reminded of the greatness of God and the redemptive power of Jesus Christ." In Jesus' kingdom, He reaches out to every table. He welcomes all to dine with Him. Revelation 19:9 speaks of a great feast that is coming, "the wedding supper of the Lamb." As the time draws near, God doesn't turn away any who come to Him.

**1 Why do you think *welcome* is expressed so often with food?**

**2 Why is it important for us to remember that we were once outcast, but welcomed by Jesus?**

**3 How can we continue to reach those who are outside of Christ with the good news of Jesus?**

## The Power of Sharing a Table

The focus of today's lesson has been on God's forgiveness and welcome for those who turn to Him. At the conclusion of the parable, the father decides to invite everyone to share a meal to celebrate the son who has been found.

**Is there someone in your life who deserves to be celebrated? Is God inviting you to share a meal, perhaps with someone who hasn't been welcomed to dinner? What kind of doors might that open?**

### Key Text

For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. —Luke 15:24 KJV

“For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.” So they began to celebrate. —Luke 15:24 NIV

### Quiet Hour® and Cross Daily Bible Readings

**Week of January 12 through January 17**

**Mon.** James 1:2–8—Praying for Wisdom.

**Tue.** Jeremiah 29:10–14—Praying and Seeking God.

**Wed.** Philippians 4:4–9—Praying with Thanksgiving.

**Thu.** Psalm 61—Praying for Protection.

**Fri.** Matthew 6:5–15—Praying as Jesus Taught.

**Sat.** Genesis 18:23–33—Praying for Others.

**Next Week:** Genesis 18:25–27; Luke 18:9–14; 1 John 5:14–15

*We'll talk about opportunities to be shaped by the requests we bring to God. What is a prayer you find yourself repeating again and again?*