



So he set off and went to his father. 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. 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.

~Luke 15:17-24

Move to the Center – 10 Minutes

Note: Times are just suggestions to help structure your time. Feel free to adjust to suit your situation best.

Take time to center yourselves. Check in with each other to see how the past week has been and what you all are hoping for in the week to come. Write down any prayer requests that are lifted up. Then, pray your own prayer, inviting God to be present with you during this time of study and conversation (including any prayer requests that were surfaced) or use the following prayer:

Thank you, God, for bringing us together today. May our hearts be open to your movement in our lives and world. Thank you for sending Jesus to us, and for showing us that no matter how horribly we squander your grace, you are always ready to shower us with more. Amen.

Move into the Text – 20 Minutes

Read the Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32. If you have a favorite translation, feel free to read from that one instead of from the bulletin. Once the passage has been read out loud, take 2 or 3 minutes to re-read it silently, and/or take time to ponder, letting the Spirit guide your brief meditation.

- What do you find most surprising about this reading?
- Does anything in the reading bring you a particular hope?
- Does anything in the reading trouble you, or make you uncomfortable?

In this passage we hear a parable that is commonly called “The Prodigal Son.” Prodigal is an adjective describing lavish and reckless spending. The son, then, is seen as one who goes out and spends all he has without thinking twice. When the famine hits, you can imagine he may have second guessed himself, or he may have wished he had found a way to take more of his father’s wealth.

- Especially during the time of Jesus, asking for an inheritance before the person has even died was almost like saying, “You are dead to me.” In this parable – we see that the son seemed more interested in experiencing life beyond home, rather than with those who already loved and cared for him. Why do you think he did this?
- The father never got over his son’s leaving. We can safely assume this because the father sees his son while he is still very far off. How might you have expected the father to act upon the son’s return? Are you surprised at the father’s reaction? Why or why not?

The son has a secure future. He is rich by the standards of that day. All he has to do to hold onto his fortune is continue working in the family business. But he chooses to take his half and run, thus abandoning his family for what sounds like debauchery. He loses it all, and his losses are compounded by a famine. Again, the father is so heartbroken, yet very hopeful that someday his son will return. And return, he does!

- Notice that the son attempts to apologize, but he isn't able to get to the apology. His father is so excited, he cuts him off and starts planning a party. How do you think that made the son feel? Why?
- For the sake of conversation, pretend this was an historically accurate story. Do you think the son could have forgiven himself? Why or why not?

Move into Today – 20 Minutes

Take time to think about how the reading intersects with the world we live in today, as well as how it connects to your own life.

Most of the parable of the Prodigal Son is focused on the wayward son, his exploits, his troubles, his turning around and his repentance. The most astounding part of the story for many, however, is the lavish nature of the father. Before anything else happens, he is so generous he allows his son to have the inheritance before he is even dead. Surprisingly, when the son returns, the father's extravagant generosity continues. He would have been considered generous just letting his son work for room and board. But he throws a party and provides food and drink that is the best of the best.

- This is a parable meant to tell us something about us and our relationship with God. The popular name "Prodigal Son" might obscure the fuller picture of what Jesus is painting here. What if we called this parable "The Prodigal Father"? How does this change your perception of the story?
- If this parable is about our relationship with God, what does it tell us about God, in general?
- Describe a time when you have experienced prodigal grace, either from God or from another person. What was that experience like? Were you able to receive it without pushing back? What did it take for you to live into that grace?

Move into the Future – 5 Minutes

Think about how you might keep this passage in mind throughout the rest of the week. Can you develop a mantra reminding you that God is always waiting for you to return? Do you need to return now? Write down some of the ways God has been gracious to you. How has God used others to love you extravagantly?

Move to Adieu – 5 minutes

Spend some time reflecting on your conversation before leaving. You can ask yourselves these or similar questions:

- What went well? What could have gone better? What was your "Top Take Home Idea"?