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The Prodigal Parent

Luke 15:11-24

Today the subject is parenting. I thought, what text do I take as the basis to talk about parenting?

And I was surprised when God lead me to this passage. Luke 15:11-24 – we usually call it the parable of the prodigal son. Although, it's just as much, if not moreso, the story of the prodigal parent.

Prodigal is defined as “rashly or wastefully extravagant” or “Giving or given in abundance; lavish or profuse”. This is the picture of the parent – the father – in this story. (Based upon Timothy Keller's book, *The Prodigal God*.)

I'd like to read this story, leading us in an imaginative meditation about it, then show how it relates to parenting.

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¹¹ To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. ¹² The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now before you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

What “*point further*”? About God's outrageous, relentless love. He's already told 2 other stories. One about a shepherd leaving his 99 sheep in order to find the one. Another, about a woman obsessed with finding a coin. She stops everything else, and turns the house upside down to find it.

Notice it's about a man with two sons. It's as much about the parent as about the 2 sons. To ask for the inheritance before his father's death was a slap in the face, an insult. “I can't even wait for you to die – I want my money now.”

This is a wealthy man – he has

an estate.

The father didn't even have to divide the wealth according to the law. In Deut 21, the first son is to get at least 2/3 of the inheritance. He could get all of it. Amazingly, even insulted and not obligated to give anything, the father agrees to divide the estate.

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¹³ "A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. ¹⁴ About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve.

Probably had a caravan of stuff. He carrying off the wealthy of half his father's estate. He can't wait to get on the road – just a few days later. He can't wait to get out on his own. He wastes it all on wild living. He's the life of the party. He can have anything he wants, anyone he wants, any woman. They love him for his money. But when the money runs out, so do his friends. As the money disappears, so do his friends. A famine hits the land, and times are hard. He begins to starve.

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¹⁵ He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

1. The only work he can find is the worst kind of work – especially to a Jew. Pigs are unclean. You're not to be near them, certainly not touch them. Yet this is all he can find. He works for a small wage, but food's not part of the deal. He's so hungry that pods of the kerab tree fit only for pigs begin to look good. Sort of like poor mothers in Haiti. Sometimes in order to feed their children they'll take a little flour and mix it with mud to feed their children. No nutritional

value – it just stops the hunger for a while.

2. He's utterly on his own. No one gives him anything.

3. So he feeds the pigs. It's hot and filthy work in the middle of a drought. No water to take a bath. The manure and the mud just cake up on his skin.

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¹⁷ "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger!

He finally wakes up – he comes to his senses. He realizes finally sees the truth.

He's not talking about the regular servants – one's that are always there – almost part of the family. He's talking about standing on the corner of the market, hoping to get picked up as a day laborer. A job for the homeless, or for the transient, maybe the illegal immigrant of today. This was the lowest sort of laborer. He hopes he can be hired as one of them. Even they have food enough to spare. The father is generous, perhaps providing not just a day's wage but food enough to spare as they break for lunch.

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18 I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."

So he starts rehearsing his speech. Maybe if I beg – maybe, just maybe, he'll take me on as a day laborer – and maybe I'll get a meal. Day to day – but he'll take that.

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20 "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.

His father is looking for him. He sees him a long way off. He doesn't wait for him to come to him. He runs to him – something a rich dignitary of the 1st century would never do. He lifts up his robes like a skirt so that he can run. His son can't believe it. He's dumbfounded. The father falls on his neck. He doesn't just kiss him. Phileo is the word for a simple kiss. Rather, he covers him with kisses – kata-phileo. The stench of the pig filth and manure in his nostrils. This doesn't stop the father.

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²¹ His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.' ²² "But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet.

He's trying to give his prepared speech. But it's as if the father doesn't even hear it. He says to his servants, "Quick, get my best robe." Why – in order to cover his shame and fith. "Put a ring on his finger." No mention of paying back the half of the father's estate the son's wasted. In fact, he gives him his ring – the symbol of the father's authority – sort of like the credit card of the first century. He restores him to full standing. "Sandals on his feet" Only slaves and children go without shoes. He wears the shoes fit for a son.

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²³ And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.

They prepare the finest meal. They immediately on the spot begin celebrating. The place erupts in celebration!

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To understand parenting look at how God relates to us as a parent.

To best understand parenting, look at how God relates to us. It's throughout the Bible but perhaps best expressed in this story - the story of the prodigal parent.

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So how does God relate to us as our Father?

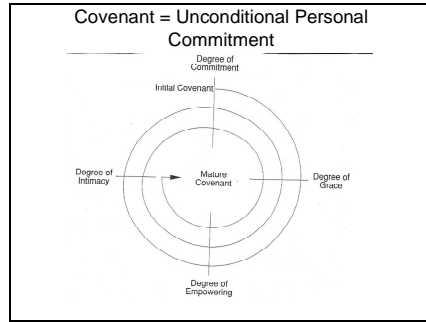
- Loving
- Caring
- Disciplining
- Giving
- Respecting
- Knowing
- Forgiving.

(Myron Chartier, 1978)

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All Within Covenant

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Begins with unconditional personal commitment on the part of the parent. You love your child, unconditionally – no matter what – in hopes that one day that love will be returned. Mature covenant is bilateral – unconditional personal commitment on the part of the parent and the child. It spirals toward greater love and commitment, as the degree of grace, the degree of empowering, the degree of intimacy does as well. The father was willing to let the child go – grant him freedom – in hopes that somehow, someday, that love would be returned. Even after the insult, injury, and rebellion of the child.

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- ### The Family Covenant
- From Conditional Love to Unconditional Love
 - From Shame to Grace
 - From Control to Empowering
 - From Lack of Feeling to Intimacy

The son thought in contract terms. I've ripped off my father. Maybe, he'll hire me for just a day, so that maybe I can just get one meal. The father thought in covenant terms. "You're my son! It doesn't matter what you've done. You're still my son, and will be fully restored to live as my son. Let's all celebrate! The father covered the son's shame and bathed him in grace. The father showed he didn't want to control his son. He even gave him his freedom – freedom he misused to destroy himself. The father showed that he didn't want to control his son – rather he wanted to bless and empower him. The son was cold, hard-hearted, empty of feeling for his father. He just wanted to take as much

as he could get and hit the road. The father responded with love that finally won his son over and led to real closeness and intimacy.

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The Covenant Journey

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1. The beginning point of any family relationship is covenant commitment, with unconditional love at its core.

The parent was unconditionally committed to the child.

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2. Out of the security of covenant love, develops grace.

Unconditional personal commitment provides the basis for a life of grace. "I'll love you forever, I'll like you for always. As long as I'm living, my baby you'll be." by Robert Munsch.

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3. In this atmosphere of grace, we have the freedom to empower each other.

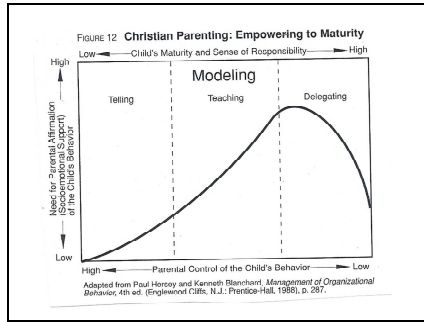
Not control each other.

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4. Empowering leads to the possibility of intimacy between family members.

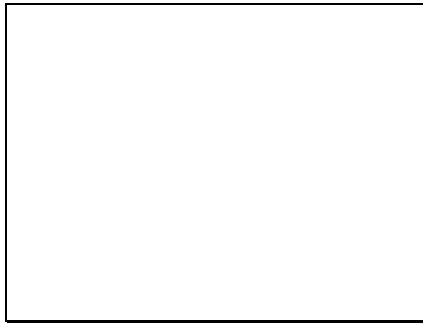
When we know we are for each other no matter what – reach closeness develops.

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The way that God relates to all of us as our prodigal – extravagant, lavish, giving in abundance – forms the picture of how we can relate to our children in order to show them our heavenly father.

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