

Tough Love from Tender Heart – Lessons Learned from a Good Father

Happy Father's Day to all who have the amazing privilege of being a dad. Children are a gift from God, as we are told in Psalm 127: 3. Solomon wrote these words and we can only assume he did so before his became tweeners, teenagers and young adults – those early years when they listened to dad before they thought he came from another planet.

Today we are going look at perhaps the best-known of all the parables Jesus told. The focus is typically on the son in this story as it should be because it bears the name by which he has been known for more than two thousand years. It is particularly dear to me right now because my next book is going to come from this passage and focus primarily on the son. That will consume my summer, so pray for me as I write it.

The Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11 – 24)

And (Jesus) said, "A man had two sons. "The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. "And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. "Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. "So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. "And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. "But when he came to his senses, he

said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! 'I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men."' "So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. "And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate."

We are going to consider three observations about the father and lessons we learn from each.

♦ ***The younger son rebelled, and the father let him have his way.***

This act was ***insulting*** to his father and ***defiant*** of his authority because in that culture, as is mostly true today, an inheritance was received AFTER the benefactor died. A father could decide to divide his estate before he died, but it was his decision, not his sons', and certainly not the younger son. The firstborn son had special rights, including a double portion of the inheritance.

He wanted his money now so he could use it as he pleased. To demand his part of the inheritance now was like saying, "you are dead to me, give me what is due me now." Despite such an affront, the father gave him what he demanded.

The lesson here is not that fathers give in to our children's every demand. The opposite is true, in most cases, because in

doing so we send the wrong signal. Sadly today, too many dads (parents) do give in and end up with spoiled children who go thru life with an entitlement mentality. We become **enablers**. They think the golden rule is *“demand and you will receive.”* We know life does not work that way.

So what is the lesson? This young man was just that—a man. His father knew it was time to let him have his way—despite the fact that it brought embarrassment to him (the dad) and may not end well for his son. As dads, we must be spiritually discerning to know when we are to give in to the requests or demands of our children. Spiritual discernment is learned through discipleship that comes from studying the Word of God. Dads, let that be the first lesson – get in the Word of God and learn! **AND PRAY**

♦ ***The father did not go after his son.***

We surmise later in the text, his rebellious younger son's leaving must have grieved the father. *Granting Freedom and giving up control is hard.* But he did not chase after him—then or later. As parents, sometimes we allow our children to make decisions, whether or not we agree with them, hoping it helps them learn to stand on their own two feet. But then we get “buyer's remorse” or “decider's remorse” and go chasing after them to “help”, when all we are really doing is more enabling. As a senior dad, who had some prodigal son in myself as well, I learned firsthand,

Failure, more than success, is one of life's greatest teachers.

♦ ***The father's response to his son's return.***

Older parents, who survived the teen and young adult wars that can accompany parenting during those years, know how this father could have felt during his son's absence. We observe there is no specific reference in this story to this dad's emotions while his son was away. He did not know if his son

was dead or alive or would ever return.

But, for those who have walked thru hard, even dark, times like these, we know feelings can run the gamut—hope, anger, resentment, fear, concern. But one day, this dad looked up and off in the distance, he saw his son approaching. Here is how he responded. (v20)

“But while he (son) was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”

It is important to note at this point, the father did not know the son had become broken and contrite over his sins against him and was willing to crawl back to him to even become one of his servants. But before he could get a word out of his mouth, the loving, compassionate father was all over him with hugs and kisses. He only got as far as the first part of his confession he had worked up, when his father did another amazing thing—he ordered up a party to celebrate the return of his son.

Here are great lessons for dads. Notice what the father did/did not do. The father looked out and saw his weary, defeated, dirty, desperate son trying to come back home.

- He did not turn away or ignore him.
- He did not wait for him to get all the way there and then say I told you so.
- He saw with eyes of love and compassion.
- He ran to meet him—something beneath fathers in that day.
- He hugged and kissed him repeatedly – that is what the Greek interpretation means.
- And as his son began confessing his sins, the father did not wait to hear more. He ordered a feast to welcome him back into the family as a son—not a slave or worker.

My dear friends, the Lord sent me to tell you that He is the

father waiting and watching for your return. There is nothing you have done, nowhere you have wandered, or any sin you have committed that can separate you from the love of God in Christ if you will but do what this son did. Come to your senses, realize your sinful, hopeless place, and return to the One Who created you in His own image. Your Father will run to meet you with outstretched arms and smother you with hugs and kisses. You will feel His presence.

Finally there are those of you who have become prodigals in your mind and heart. You quit on God because you think He quit on you. Please come back. He has and will never leave or forsake you.

My prayer is that you respond to this message in whatever way the Holy Spirit bids you to. Do not wait another day. I may be the last messenger God sends to invite you to come Home. He is waiting now for you.

For Christ's sake,

Walter