

## THE PATH TO, PICTURE OF, AND PATTERN FROM OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

### **INTRO**

In 1867, D.L. Moody made his first trip to Great Britain. While there, he met a young man named Henry Moorehouse. Henry Moorehouse was known as “The Boy Preacher” in England and when he visited Chicago he wanted to preach for Mr. Moody. Mr. Moody was to be out of town and allowed him to speak on a Thursday night. The deacons, in Moody’s absence, would then decide if the man should be allowed to preach on Friday and again on Sunday.

Henry Moorehouse preached on John 3:16 on Thursday night and Friday night. On Sunday night he preached on John 3:16. On Monday night he preached on John 3:16, on Tuesday night he preached on John 3:16, and on Wednesday night he preached on John 3:16. For six nights he preached on one text.

The seventh night came and every eye was upon him when he opened his Bible. He said, “Beloved friends, I have been hunting all day for a new text, but I cannot find anything so good as the old one; so we will go back to John chapter 3, verse 16.

With that as a backdrop, please take your Bibles and **turn to** .....Luke 15! Luke 15—particularly the Parable of the Prodigal Son—is unquestionably a passage in which 7 sermons could easily be preached from. A website I refer to often is called BibleHub.com. Not only does it have a number of on-line commentaries—it also has numerous sermons. The quotes that I put in our bulletin are usually from one of the commentaries or one of the sermons. Finding a quote for this week’s bulletin was no small task because there were 172 sermons on this passage! Some focused on the sin of the prodigal; others on the sin of the eldest brother. Some were about the repentance and return of the son; others were about the response of the father. Some were about the repercussions of the son’s sinful choices; still others were about the rejoicing of the father. Please follow along as I read verses 20-24.

Title of my message: “The Path To, Picture Of, and Pattern From our Heavenly Father”

### **1. The Path to our Heavenly Father**

I don’t know of anyone who would look at this parable and suggest it is NOT a picture of someone coming to God. Rather than attempting to **prove** that that is one of the many lessons here, I’m just going to assume that you agree with that premise as well.

So how does someone come to God? We live in a day and age where the belief of religious pluralism is promoted and embraced by many. If you are unfamiliar with that term, it simply means this: “accepting the idea that all religions are equal, valid, and ultimately lead to God.” The **only** problem with it—and it is a **major** problem—is the fact that it is NOT true. Why is it not true? Because Jesus Himself declared it was not true!

**Matthew 7:21-23** “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, **shall enter into the kingdom of heaven**; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not **prophesied** in thy name? and in thy name have **cast out devils**? and in thy name **done many wonderful works**? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: **depart from me**, ye that work iniquity.”

--Jesus says “Not everyone who calls me Lord gets into heaven”

--Jesus says “Not everyone who does things in my name—even wonderful things—gets into heaven”

--How then call all religions lead to God? **They can’t!**

**John 5:39-40** “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye **will not come to me**, that ye might have life.”

--You look in the Bible for the answer on how to have eternal life and the Bible points to me. But you won't come to me to obtain eternal life.

**John 14:6** “Jesus saith unto him, I am **the way**, the truth, and the life: **no man cometh** unto the Father, **but by me.**” --Direct opposite of “all religions lead to God”

**Acts 4:12** “Neither is there salvation in **any other**: for there is **none other name under heaven** given among men, whereby we must be saved.” --Again, the direct opposite of saying “all roads lead to heaven.”

So how do we get there? This parable gives us the path to follow if we want to have forgiveness of sins and an eternal home in heaven.

#### A. Recognize the consequences of sin (13-17)

--v 13 “wasted his substance with riotous living”

Left home rich and free—threw off rules and restraint—and lived like the devil w/no one telling him what to do Hebrews 11:25 reminds us that there are “pleasures of sin”—but they are only for a season; they don't last

--v 14 “And when he spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land”

Isn't it wonderful how God works? Would this young man have repented if the famine came while his pockets were full of money? Probably not...Why do I say that? Because very few people turn to God when things are **going good**.....

--v 14b “he began to be in want”

--v 16 was so hungry that he wanted to eat the food he was feeding the pigs “and no man gave unto him” --v 17 “And when he came to himself”...what a wonderful phrase! “The light bulb clicked;” he had an “a-ha moment” when he realized that he was perishing from hunger **because he had sinned** against God and his father. How do I know that is what he is thinking? Because that is what it says in verse 18!

#### B. Repent of your sin (18)

“I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,” He repented—he changed his mind—about his sin.

--It wasn't just hunger he wanted to get rid of; nor was it sorrow over his wastefulness

What did he want to rid himself of? **The guilt and shame** that came as a consequence of his sin. I heard something on VCY the other morning that I'm not sure I ever considered before and it was this:

“People will suffer **from guilt**—the lack of forgiveness for their sin—forever—in hell.” I've thought of people suffering with the memories of times that they heard the gospel—and rejected it—but I never really focused on the guilt-aspect of suffering.

More than anything else, I believe this young man wanted to be rid of **guilt**—he wanted to have forgiveness from both God and his father—and that is why he wanted to express to his father, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee.” “I have sinned” is hard thing to admit—and an even harder thing to **say**—but the blessing and peace that comes from being forgiven makes it oh so worth it!

#### C. Realize you are owed nothing (19)

What was this son's attitude? It was one of shame and humility; there is no hint of entitlement here—unless you consider volunteering for manual labor as entitlement! Notice verse 19: “[I] am no more worthy to be called thy **son**: make me as one of thy hired servants.” It was almost if the son was saying: “I deserve servitude—not sonship; bondage—not freedom; labor—not leisure. A blessing to me will be being a hired hand in your home.”

#### D. Return to the Father and acknowledge your sin (20-21)

--v 20 “And he arose, and came to his father.”

--v 21 “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.”

In verses 18 and 19 he **thought** about what he was going to say; in verse 21 he said **most** of it. I say “most of it,” because he didn’t get out the part “make me as one of thy hired servants.”

Is it enough just to admit our sin in our **minds**? I don’t think so; I think an important part of forgiveness and healing is acknowledging and expressing our sin to those we have sinned against. That is what the son does here.

What is the path to God? What steps need to be taken?

1. Recognize that sin has consequences—eternal separation from God.
2. Repent of our sin—admit our guilt before God
3. Recognize our unworthiness and that God owes us nothing. We cannot **make** Him receive us—we count on His mercy and goodness to do that. “For by grace ye are saved through faith” (Eph 2:8)
4. Come to God in humble faith, acknowledging our sin and need for forgiveness
5. Not seen in this passage—but pointed out in verses we looked at earlier—is the fact that we need to trust that Jesus’ shed blood is what allows the Father to forgive us because our sins are paid for—not just **felt sorry** for!

What path are you trying to take to get to God? If you think “all” paths get you there or the “good works” path or the “baptism” path or “belonging to such-and-such a church path” gets you there, you are going against the very words of Jesus! Get on **His path**; the one the Prodigal son took.

## **2. The Picture of our Heavenly Father**

What a splendid picture we have of our heavenly Father in this parable!

First, He is....

### A. Anxiously Awaiting (20b)

“But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him...”

How long was the son gone? We don’t know, do we? We don’t know how **large** the inheritance was... or how much the son **spent** each day...or how long it took for the famine to personally affect him or how long he fed swine before he “came to himself.” What we do know is this—the father was **anxiously awaiting** the return of the son. I believe this waiting demonstrates that the “father” is our Heavenly Father more so than an earthly father. Please take this the right way, but could an earthly father “quit his day job” to watch and wait for a wandering son **all** day, **every** day? Probably not—and yet that seems to be what happened here.

Another evidence that this parable pictures the father as our Heavenly Father more than an earthly father is...

### B. The Bountiful Blessing (22-23)

“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: And bring hither **the** fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:”

--The father met the repentant son’s needs—he needed clothes, shoes, and food

--He went over and above, however, because the father gave him the **best** robe and **the** fatted calf.

Not any fatted calf, but the one set aside for a special occasion.

Yet a third indicator this parable pictures the father as our Heavenly Father more than an earthly father is the fact that the son was given

### C. Full Forgiveness

Question: Did the father honor the son’s wish to make him as a hired servant?

No—he didn’t even let him get the words out! Notice the last part of verse 20: “and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

There is no anger...there are no questions...there is no announcement of consequences or a probationary period before “sonship” status is reinstated. Instead, there is the best robe and the fatted calf. Would a hired servant get either of those? Not hardly!

Notice the last part of verse 22: “and put a ring on his hand...” Did hired servants wear rings? Probably not because the ring was a symbol of dignity and wealth. Think of it—the father **bestowing dignity** upon a son who wasted what he had been given, had dragged the family name through the mud, and had broken his father’s heart. Who but God can forgive so fully and freely? Verse 24: “For this my son was dead, and is alive again” also shows that the father freely forgave his son.

Is not this a wonderful picture of salvation? When we are saved from the penalty of our sins and are forgiven by God, we are **not** treated like pardoned criminals or duty-bound slaves—we are treated as a child of the King!

### **3. The Pattern from our Heavenly Father**

What, then, is the pattern that God our Heavenly Father wants us earthly fathers to follow?

#### A. We are to warn

Admittedly, we don’t see the father in this parable **warning** his son of the consequences of sin. Many commentators point out that when the son asks for his part of the inheritance, there seems to be no **resistance**. Does not the father care? Does not he warn his son of the consequences of squandering what has been given him?

Sadly, some fathers don’t. Although God calls David “a man after his own heart,” David failed at times as a father. Notice **I Kings 1:5-6** “Then Adonijah the son of Haggith [and the son of David] exalted himself, saying, I will be king: and he prepared him chariots and horsemen, and fifty men to run before him.<sup>6</sup> And **his father had not displeased him** at any time in saying, Why hast thou done so? and he also was a very goodly man; and his mother bare him after Absalom.” David had not displeased Adonijah at any time—meaning Adonijah got his way all the time. Letting a child get his way all the time is a recipe for disaster...

Was this father like that? We don’t know so we can’t say for sure. We do know this, however—if this father is a picture **of God**, He most certainly warned this self-centered son of the consequences of sin.

**Proverbs 1:10** “My son, if sinners entice thee, **consent thou not.**”

**Proverbs 1:15-16** “My son, **walk not thou in the way with them**; refrain thy foot from their path:  
<sup>16</sup>For their feet run to evil, and make haste to shed blood.”

**Proverbs 4:14** “**Enter not** into the path of the wicked, and **go not** in the way of evil men.”

**Proverbs 13:15** “Good understanding giveth favour: but the **way of transgressors is hard.**”

Could it be that this father had warned...and warned....and warned, then came to the point of realizing that the only thing that would bring his son to the end of himself was for him to suffer brokenness...and guilt...and hunger...and loneliness...before the son was finally convinced that you really do **reap** what you sow and when you sow to the flesh—your sinful, selfish nature—you reap corruption—disaster! **Dads—warn your children like God warns us!**

#### B. We are to watch and wait

--v 20 b “But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him...” Have any of us “divided the inheritance” ahead of time like the father did in this parable? Probably not; but I daresay many of us have had a son or daughter who have gathered up their belongings and taken a “journey into a far country” and are in the process of “wasting their substance with riotous living.” Maybe the “far country” is not far **physically**—and maybe the “riotous living” isn’t all that **wild and rebellious**—but the reality is that that son or daughter is far from God. You know—and they know as well—that they have taken what God has given them, have left Him, and are living for themselves....

Are you waiting? Are you watching? Are you asking God to bring just the right amount **of famine** into their lives so that they “come to themselves”—and come back to God? God can bring them famine, can’t He? God can give them a sense of **lack**—even when they have abundance; God can give them a sense of **guilt**—even when they seem to be care-free; and God can give them **memories** of what it was like when they lived for Him—even if it has been a long time. Keep watching, waiting, praying, and trusting...

God’s pattern for us as earthly fathers is that we should warn, and watch and wait, and thirdly

### C. We are to welcome

Did this wandering son know what kind of reception he would receive when he got home? No; he knew what kind he **deserved** though. Imagine the emotions that raced through his mind as his father ran toward him, and embraced him, and kissed him. First, there was probably **amazement**—‘my father was not just watching and waiting—he’s **welcoming** me with open arms.’ Second, there was probably **disbelief**—‘my father isn’t lecturing or scolding or talking consequences—he wants to celebrate!’ Third, I can’t help but think that he felt **overwhelming gratitude** at the fact that he was **fully** forgiven—and treated like a favored son instead of a hired hand!

What kind of reception will your wayward son or daughter have when they come home? Do they **know** they will be welcome—or do they know they **will not be**? May their thinking **never** be—“I know that God will forgive me—but I’m not so sure about my Mom or Dad!”

**PRAY**

### **CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS:**

1. Are you **saved**? We looked at perhaps the most detailed and wonderful picture in all the Bible of how a sinner comes to God. Jesus Himself said not all paths lead to God. Have you come to God the way the prodigal did: recognizing the consequences of sin, realizing you can’t remove those consequences, repenting of your sin, and coming in humble faith to God for forgiveness and salvation?
2. Maybe you are a child of God but have taken what God has given you and spent it up on yourself with no thought of how God wants to use you or what He has given you. Come back to Him, seek forgiveness from Him, be restored in fellowship with Him, and resolve to live a life that is pleasing to Him because of His great love for you.
3. Fathers—are you a warner...and a waiter and watcher? Are you ready to welcome when your wayward one comes home?