

What Do You Want?

Jesus told this parable:

“There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.



“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.’” And he arose and came to his father.’ (Luke 15:11-20a)

Why did the younger son make the choices he did? Do you suppose he didn’t know any better? I think he probably did know that partying away his inheritance was not wise. But he did it anyway.

It seems to me that it is virtually impossible for anyone to behave as he or she “ought to,” without actually wanting to.

How many of us, as children, did everything we should do and avoided doing the things we shouldn’t do? I’m not talking about ignorance. I’m talking about knowing the right path to take, and yet taking the wrong path anyway.

Why do we do that? There are many reasons, but they all boil down to one: we usually do what we really want to do, for as long as we can get away with it.

Let me share a story with you. I know a young lady who became very over-weight. Tammy¹ tried many times to control her weight, but without any success.

She was in her thirties, and her health was deteriorating rapidly. Her blood sugar and blood pressure were both out of bounds, and medication was not helping much. Her doctor told her that if she did not turn her life around, she would soon have to go on kidney dialysis.

After that conversation, Tammy “came to herself.” She decided that she no longer wanted to continue along that path. She was too young to be worrying about the horrors of diabetes; she wanted to get healthy and enjoy the rest of her life. So she began a strict regimen of diet and exercise, and because it was what she now wanted to do, she stayed with it.

Her blood sugar and blood pressure improved dramatically right away. A year after she started, Tammy had lost over 150 pounds. She exercised faithfully at a gym five days a week, and she found the energy to start a new business with a friend.

Now, a few years later, she is staying with it, she’s healthy and she looks great. You might say she found the “will power” to succeed. I call it “want power.”

Be careful to get the right message from my young friend’s story. Self-indulgent behavior got Tammy into big trouble. It was not selfishness that made her want a better life; it was the desire finally to do what she already knew she ought to do. She had tried many times and failed. But when the right way became the desire of her heart, she was able to do it.

In another context, Jesus said something that is very important to remember. He said, *“If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.”* (John 13:17) He was talking about serving others, but what He said applies equally well, I think, to any right behavior. You don’t get the blessing of your knowledge of what’s right until you put it into action.

Take prayer, for example. Jesus told the disciples the Parable of the Persistent Widow (Luke 18:1-8) to show them that they “ought always to pray and not lose heart.” St. Paul exhorted Christians to “pray without



¹ Not her real name.

ceasing.” And many other times we see the Bible encouraging us to pray. Even though we don’t know how to pray as we should, the Holy Spirit comes alongside to help, to pray with us and for us.

There is blessing attached to the act of praying to God. When we praise Him, when we simply enter into His presence quietly, and when we ask for His help for others or ourselves, we are blessed. It is a tremendous blessing just to be accepted into the presence of our Holy God. But knowing we ought to pray, even knowing about the blessing it entails, is not enough. We are blessed if we do it.

So why do we not spend the time in prayer that we should? It’s because the devil, the world, and our own selfishness would rather have us doing something else. I say again that it’s virtually impossible to do the things we ought to do consistently, until we come to the point of wanting to do them.

One more example, a trivial but obvious one. I used to smoke cigarettes. For years I “tried to quit,” because I knew I should. Finally I got fed up with the whole business of “Am I allowed to smoke? Where are the ash trays? Am I going to run out of cigarettes?” Also, it was about that time that I first heard about Grace, and I said “Yes, I want that” to Jesus. So I came to the point where I wanted to quit smoking. So I did.

Did Jesus help me to quit? Absolutely. I believe it was by His help that I came to want to quit. But I’m sure I would not have done it if I hadn’t wanted to. Because, you see, I still had the freedom to do the wrong thing. Nothing made me quit except my own desire.

So now we come to a practical question: How does one stop desiring the wrong things — all the indulgences of the world, the flesh, and the devil — and start desiring the right things — those that are pleasing to God and beneficial to us? I can offer you a formula which I believe will help you get started in the right direction. But I don’t promise an easy transition. The difficulty of moving from a wrong path to a right path is proportional to the “wrongness” of the wrong path. If you have an addiction, for example, don’t think you will conquer it without a struggle.

Anyway, here it is:

1. Repent. This means, first of all, recognize that what you have been doing is wrong. Admit it. Confess it. Take responsibility for your own actions. DO NOT try to lay the blame on someone else. Whatever guilt and shame is attached to it is your guilt and shame. You need to feel sorry for it, because if you don’t, you haven’t really begun to admit that it was wrong. Ask God to show you what He thinks of that behavior.



And **Repent** means, secondly, you must turn away from that behavior. Remove yourself from the vicinity of temptation. If it’s pornography, destroy it. If it’s alcohol or tobacco or drugs, throw those things away. (No, don’t give them to a friend. They are bad for your friend, too.) Stay away from the places that tempt you to fail.

2. Keep telling yourself what your new desire is. When you speak something aloud with your own mouth and hear it with your own ears, soon you will begin to own it. Ask God to give you the words to convince yourself that this changed behavior is truly the desire of your heart. If you want to change, you will do this. If you do this, the desire for the right path will grow and become real and true. When you have a doubt, say this prayer: “Jesus, I want what you want for me.”

3. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. (James 4:8) Study the Word. Pray. Focus on God’s goodness and the beauty of His holiness. It will strengthen your desire to please Him.

What will you gain? Let me close with more of the story of the Prodigal Son:

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And 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 servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.



This is how God feels about a sinner who repents and turns to Him. This is how He feels about you and me.

God bless you abundantly!

Brother Roland

Ask Me ...

Send your Bible questions to me and I’ll try to answer them in the “Good News Guide.” Your question may be one that will really help someone else.

**Brother Roland
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The Prodigal Comes Home

The parable of the Prodigal Son is a favorite because it is so easy to relate to the younger son's situation. We all "blow it" by being stupid sometimes. And we relate to the older son's wounded self-righteousness because we all have been in situations where we thought we deserved better than we got. How wonderful it is to have a God who loves us unconditionally, in spite of our sinful ways!

Puzzle:

I B M B X N F A X I S Z W T E Z O O B D N A S L R I G N O S Y
E O O S E V H S G R G T O M Y L P D E P A C R H T T X F P T Z
D N A M Y H T L A E W A O D O W C S E B N A D L T F M L R I B
X O T R E E W S W B F I O Z R U L N S R C A V A J U N A I L O
N S O C S T H E F A T H E R W A S W A I T I N G E O P C R L W
C Y T E F E C K R K G C Q V P J U X G N Q U G D K A E D G W N
A M F I N J A C L H F X H V W B F N E W H C L H E W Z E Y E O
L E D W Y Y O T H E E L D E R S O N H E A R D V K H U T V N G
L R C W E U O H S G R G E A W R N E O D A F A I G E T T T T N
E A K M N H K U V C N E L B E B N B C V F H J R P N T A U H I
D U U T S W A C R C G L H D Q H U N S O S C F Y F I I F B U O
T O R G I A F V V B M I H T E E M O T T U O N A R T E E S N G
H Y U G L I N R E I R I T F A R Z N E D L X P L E W K H G G Y
E E O Q K J N D N T S O O V A F E L S Y N E T S L A A T I R T
S Q C W E F C E A C O U T S L W S E N N E P D F S S R L P Y R
E O D A G G I T O L N C K H E L G I V O O N K R R G S L G A A
R F F P M S S N H D S E E H E S A W H I S S O N C O M I N G P
V X C Y Y E F D O E D A N L I R Y T E D L R O M V N Z K I I E
A M A O A E T U B W F E N A E D W R I B E A E W E E P E D S H
N C U X S V T O H K H A A D Y B A A G T O K S G T H C J E Q T
T R F S J G J A H T V T T U A X R F S N N R S I N D T L E J C
S I I G W A T C H I N G T H E R O A D D A E A A E U A R F V N
J O K E T I F C B A M N E T E F I J T M E S P G F H O H O Y M
N B H O T A S N C X K S S V E R W N I E A A A S N X W Y U F N
Y P G W R D S K A N N E E U F E S X G D D D D W D I N O E H M
H E A D E D F O R H O M E L W W G A U N Z P Z F E N R S N H V
H S S D K D G F P E O D P B F A D I I D U D A M J H A B W E T
T I R E H N I D L U O W E H M G B C D D U P A C H W I G G P Q

Words:

A WEALTHY MAN
HAD TWO SONS
THE YOUNGER SON
ASKED HIS FATHER
FOR THE MONEY
HE WOULD INHERIT
THEN HE WENT OFF
TO A FAR COUNTRY
AND SPENT IT ALL
ON GIRLS AND BOOZE
WHEN IT WAS GONE
HE GOT A JOB

FEEDING PIGS BUT
STILL WENT HUNGRY
HE CAME TO HIMSELF
HEADED FOR HOME
THE FATHER WAS WAITING
WATCHING THE ROAD
HE SAW HIS SON COMING
RAN OUT TO MEET HIM
IGNORED HIS CONFESSION
CALLED THE SERVANTS
BRING A ROBE
SANDALS AND A RING
KILL THE FATTED CALF

LET'S HAVE A PARTY
THE ELDER SON HEARD
THE PARTY GOING ON
ASKED WHAT IT WAS
WHEN HE FOUND OUT
HE WAS ANGRY
THE FATHER SAID
YOU ARE MY SON
ALL MINE IS YOURS
YOUR BROTHER WAS DEAD
NOW HE IS ALIVE
WE HAVE TO CELEBRATE

Bonus Puzzle: The National Football League

I know you like these puzzles, so I'm giving you two this month. The NFL pre-season is about to begin. Here are all of the team names, along with the home of each team. Have fun with the puzzle.

Puzzle:

B R O W N S J C X S B S H W N E K V H I N P K V O T I S K V I W O
 N U T F Z L I E L V Z Y H O C K F G V A O K O G F O W G I A H G S
 Z E F L X J L X T X Z B T K P P R D X G R H A E Y J A X A M D Z J
 E K W F D S A U W S J G W M B U Y D A O I W T T S S A I N T S K R
 R Q C Y A S F F A O N J I H B G A C Y N T E K R N S Y I V L E A T
 B H T Z O L F N F I E Z Y S H X I W K A M K A A T A M M H V V M M
 Y R S S A R O X H S T P T P D H E U M X T U S L D I L C A E V E M
 Q H O G R Z K S N R G T Z N C N U P O J G I O B X R G T N T Z E J
 X T C N I E A S A O I N A S P T A S X A Y C E D U W P S A Z W I X
 Q J O R C W H L R P T L I B R B E X J B S M X D Q G C J T Q N O U
 P R A S Q O S T G E G S V K A E H D C I K A I H P L E D A L I H P
 V D W F F R S R N N K V U Y I M D F T S S J N E H O V P C T T E P
 G S H G E E O N E A Q C A O I V E I N C F E A F J L I P I Z A H C
 L A W O L W I W Z 9 P C A N H J A I A B I L L S R N M O D Q N H A
 O O T Q L S E H S W 4 M N P E C H X J R K V O E B A R E B Z N T E
 Y Q B U I N M M C U V E Q B C P Z U X E R D B O G T N A U T I U K
 K D P Z V U C A F S S M H F L T D F V U F U E N E N I C E E C J A
 X Y I Y N R A J R O S I L O P A N A I D N I N D M O A N I Y N S N
 X J H I O X R S T X U M D T S U I H O I J L G E P B N S A S I O S
 A J D F S D O A Y C L L Z W N R W V T J T E A U Z E N B O W C K A
 F I O S K N L Z R U P C D L A B E R W K S T L F S Y E P X L T O S
 H R Y T C N I D S E O R O W X X P E K L S G S S P O W J Y S O A C
 S N A L A B N R P A D S X F E Y V S N Y A T E M K Y O G I P E X I
 R S B K J K A S K G A S E A T T L E C A F E D O L J R R S F Z W T
 E K N G S B Q L M N L R K W Y A H A S A C E T O B O L J B I T V Y
 G A E N E T A I G P L A L I Y W G H G I R C A L K S E D I E J B R
 R B E A A N E E L C A G L K N R L A C I L D U G D N A L E V E L C
 A V R A D T L E N Y S J D V T S H W E O A I I B L N N M A N P Y N
 H S G W G E B A L T I M O R E I K K F Q W N O N O E S A I Q V H T
 C C W D S J G N I E X B B X Z W T S Z J P B T N A Y S Z Z A Y E N
 S T O I R T A P K M R B Q S O O N A A P P G O S S L V V B A M O R
 K O G S T T C B O D M S C U J Z N J N I J Q H Y W U S K X P Z I B
 F A L C O N S F K L Z Y C G Z M P T E S U W L J S L H Y G U S C F

Words:

49ERS	CHARGERS	GIANTS	NEW ENGLAND	REDSKINS
ARIZONA	CHICAGO	GREEN BAY	NEW ORLEANS	SAINTS
ATLANTA	CHIEFS	HOUSTON	NEW YORK	SAN FRANCISCO
BALTIMORE	CINCINNATI	INDIANAPOLIS	NEW YORK	SEAHAWKS
BEARS	CLEVELAND	JACKSONVILLE	OAKLAND	SEATTLE
BENGALS	COLTS	JAGUARS	PACKERS	STEELERS
BILLS	COWBOYS	JETS	PANTHERS	TAMPA BAY
BRONCOS	DALLAS	KANSAS CITY	PATRIOTS	TENNESSEE
BROWNS	DENVER	LIONS	PHILADELPHIA	TEXANS
BUCCANEERS	DETROIT	LOS ANGELES	PITTSBURGH	TITANS
BUFFALO	DOLPHINS	LOS ANGELES	RAIDERS	VIKINGS
CARDINALS	EAGLES	MIAMI	RAMS	WASHINGTON
CAROLINA	FALCONS	MINNESOTA	RAVENS	