

## Amazing Grace

Jesus told a lot of stories. There's no doubt that He was a master story teller, and could hold the attention of an audience for as long as He wanted to. But we need to remember that His purpose was not to entertain, but to teach. Every story had a point that He was trying to make, for those who had “ears to hear.” Our ears and our minds need to be trained, by human teachers and by the Holy Spirit, so that we can get the point of each story. We also need to remember that the story is just a story; that there is only so much one can do by trying to analyze it; and that **the important thing about the story is the point Jesus was trying to get across.**



There are two parables of Jesus that are perhaps remembered more than the others. They are the parable about “The Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:30-37) and the one about “The Prodigal Son” (Luke 15:11-32). This month I would like to dig into the Prodigal Son story a bit with you. **But before you read any more here, please turn to the third page of this issue and read the parable again, so it will be fresh in your mind.**

Most people would say, after reading the story once or twice, that this is a story about a wayward son, a young man who made some bad decisions, lost everything he had, went through some bad times, then got himself turned around and achieved a happy ending. All of which is quite true, as far as it goes.

Other people might say, “Wait a minute, how about the older brother? He didn't behave very well, either. Surely there's a lesson in that.” Which is also true, of course. But I don't think this parable is really about either of the brothers. I think it's about the other main

character in the story — the father. The actions and attitudes of the two sons are not nearly as important and revealing as the actions and attitude of their father.

Let's look at the story. The younger son is restless and a bit of a rebel, and doesn't want to hang around and work, waiting for his father to die. He wants to go have a good time. So he asks his dad for all the money he would get eventually anyway, and he goes and blows it on high living — booze, women, and fun times. If they took drugs in those days he probably dabbles in that, too. Before very long he has wasted it all, and he's flat broke. He gets a minimum-wage job, but because there's a famine going on he can't get enough to eat no matter how hard he works. He's desperate. He has to do something.



First of all, let's see what he does NOT do. He doesn't go out and rob somebody. He doesn't sneak around helping himself to whatever he can find that's not secured. At least he has sense enough not to turn to crime. He's finally beginning to show some intelligence. So he makes up his mind to go home and work for his father. That way at least he won't starve.

We don't know how long the kid has been away. He blew all the money, but that may not have taken very long. We do know that the father is waiting for him to come home. He keeps watching the road, hoping that someday he'll see his son walking toward him. How do we know this? Because he sees the son coming when he is still a long way off. Anyway, he does something extravagant — he runs out to meet the boy. Now in those



days, respectable men with land and livestock just didn't make a spectacle of themselves by running down the road. It wasn't dignified. But this father does. He is so happy to see his son that he doesn't care what the neighbors think. He doesn't even listen to the son's confession. He just grabs the boy and hugs and kisses him. He calls the servants to bring him a robe, and some sandals, and a ring for his hand, then go kill and prepare the very best animal they have. Get ready to celebrate, he says, because his son, whom he loves, and who might very well have died in some faraway country, has come home safe and sound.

Can you imagine your own father acting like this father did? Many of you can't. In fact, many of you have grown up without ever having a father to love you and train you in the ways of responsible adulthood. Either your father wasn't there, or he didn't have time to be the kind of father he should have been. That's a shame — perhaps the greatest shame of our society. Because this parable of Jesus is not only showing how our loving Heavenly Father loves us; It also shows us how we ought to love each other, and particularly how we ought to love our children — unconditionally — willing to do things that are extravagant or even embarrassing to demonstrate that love.

Please notice how truly unconditional this father's love is. He does not say, "After you apologize for being an idiot, then you can come back." He does not say, "I hope you've learned your lesson." He doesn't even say, "It's about time." He simply says, "Welcome home, son. I'm glad you're home. I love you."

When we come home to our Heavenly Father, it's good for us to confess our sins, because we need to admit them all and repent of them — but God doesn't have any need to hear it. He probably won't even wait for us to finish confessing. He is always saying, "Welcome home, my son, my daughter. I love you."

What about the older brother? What's his problem? Well, he has been working at home while his brother was off living it up in that foreign land, and now he's really ticked off because the younger brother not only isn't getting the punishment he deserves, he's getting a party! Like he's being rewarded much better for bad behavior than the older one ever was for diligence and obedience. This is not right!

And the father very gently says, "That's not the point. You're my son, and you know what that means. All I have is yours. But it is essential that we celebrate your brother's safe return. After all, he was lost to us, and now we have found him again. That is something we really need to celebrate."

Our Heavenly Father is like that. If you serve Him all your life, then you have the blessings that go with being His faithful servant. No need to be jealous of the one who comes home late after living away from the Father. Yes, he is loved just as much, and is welcomed with a celebration. But for the faithful servant of God, nothing special needs to happen because every day is special. Every day can be a celebration. And if you haven't served Him—if you have been wayward and rebellious, or even just ignorant of His love for you, I hope you have turned to Him and said, "Father, forgive my sins and let me stay with you." If you haven't done that, you must. Not for His sake, but for yours.

You're either for Jesus or against Him. If you're for Him, He is for you, all the way to the end of this life and then into eternity with the Father. If you're against Him, guess who the loser will be. It won't be Jesus. So pay attention to His words, turn your heart toward your heavenly home, and come home to the Father. He is waiting and watching for you. He loves you — He always has, and He always will, no matter what.

Blessings and Peace,

*Brother Roland*

**(Luke 15:11-32 ESV)** [Jesus] said, “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. 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.

“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”

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**Moving?** If you're being released, or moving to another facility, please send me your new address. Maryland inmates, don't forget to include your SID number. I would like to keep sending you the "Good News Guide" for as long as you'd like to receive it.

As always, if you want to send me a question or a comment, send them to me at this address:

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# The Prodigal Son (or The Loving Father)

The parable is retold here in the form of a puzzle. As you search for each phrase, think about the love that our Heavenly Father has for each of His sinful children — even you and me! Enjoy!

## Puzzle:

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

## 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