



# Love Community Baptist Church

## Wednesday Night Virtual Bible Study

Dr. Michael O. Oyedokun II, Senior Pastor/Founder

[pastor@lovecommunitybc.org](mailto:pastor@lovecommunitybc.org)

Wednesday, April 30, 2025



## The Prodigal Son

By John MacArthur

### Luke 15:11-32

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons: 12 And the younger of them said to [his] father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth [to me]. And he divided unto them [his] living. 13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. 14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. 15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. 16 And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him. 17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, 19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants. 20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. 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. 22 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: 23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill [it]; and let us eat, and be merry: 24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. 25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. 27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. 28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. 29 And he answering said to [his] father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: 30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. 31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. 32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

### BACKGROUND CONTEXT

It was delivered orally to an audience that included (on the one hand) a mix of corrupt tax collectors and some of society's most down-and-out sinners who were eager to hear Jesus' good news—along with (on the other hand) a hostile group of hyper religious Pharisees and scribes who were angry with Jesus and grumbled that He “receives sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1–2).

If we understand the parable correctly, its spiritual lessons leave a far more indelible impression on our hearts and minds than any literary analysis of the parable could accomplish.

Many of these unique parables are embroidered with the themes of prayer, repentance, forgiveness, justification, and divine grace. The parable of the prodigal son is the magnum opus and centerpiece of these uniquely Lucan parables, weaving together several of those same pivotal themes.

## **THE PRODIGAL SON**

Jesus introduces the main characters in the first verse: “A certain man had two sons” (Luke 15:11). As the story unfolds, the focus shifts from one character to another. The younger son—the Prodigal—is the main focus at the start (vv. 12–20). But then midway through the story, the father takes center stage (vv. 20–24), followed by the elder brother (vv. 25–31).

The three-part form of this parable is deliberate and ingenious. It highlights in quick succession three important ideas, all closely related to the central theme of Luke 15: heaven’s joy when a sinner repents. The Prodigal Son is an object lesson about true repentance. The father personifies the joy of heaven. And the embittered elder brother stands in stark contrast to both of those ideas. He is the embodiment of the Pharisees’ pretentious self-righteousness and its natural byproduct—ungodly resentment over the grace and goodness of God to others.

The main idea behind the word prodigal is that of wastefulness, immoderation, excess, and dissipation. The derivation of that name is worth pausing to notice. The word prodigal doesn’t appear in the King James Version.

The young man is a classic illustration of an undisciplined young person who wastes the best part of his life through extravagant self-indulgence and becomes a slave to his own lust and sin. He is a living picture of the course of sin and how it inevitably debases the sinner.

The picture Jesus paints is of a young man, who is apparently not yet married—because he wants to go and sow his wild oats. He was probably in his teens and obviously filled with shameless disrespect toward his father. His request for an early inheritance reveals how passionately deep-seated and wickedly hard-hearted his defiance was.

### **DISREGARD FOR HIS INHERITANCE**

To begin with, the younger son’s attitude regarding his inheritance was entirely inappropriate. A principle known as the law of primogeniture governed the transfer of a family’s inheritance in Israel. It meant the firstborn son would receive a double portion of the family legacy. On rare and extraordinary occasions, the double portion could be given to a younger son instead—such as when Isaac rather than Ishmael became Abraham’s sole heir, or when Jacob got the birthright from Esau. But normally the birthright went to the eldest son.

It is patently obvious that the younger son in Jesus’ parable had not an ounce of gratitude in his heart for the legacy that generations of his family had provided for his father—and one day for him. He lacked both patience and discipline. Worst of all, by all appearances, he lacked any authentic love for his father.

### **DISHONOR FOR HIS FATHER**

This was perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the Prodigal Son’s behavior. For a son in that culture to request his inheritance early was tantamount to saying, “Dad, I wish you were dead. You are in the way of my plans. You are a barrier. I want my freedom. I want my fulfillment. And I want out of this family now. I have other plans that don’t involve you; they don’t involve this family; they don’t involve this estate; they don’t even involve this village. I want nothing to do with any of you. Give me my inheritance now, and I am out of here.”

Not only was he implying that he wished his father were dead; he was in effect purposely committing a kind of symbolic filial suicide. Any son who made such a brazen demand could expect to be written off as dead by his father.

So a son guilty of dishonoring his father to this degree could well expect to be dispossessed of everything he had and then permanently dismissed from the family. Reckoned as dead. That's how serious this breach was. As a matter of fact, that is reflected when the Prodigal comes back and the father says, "This my son was dead" (v. 24). The father says it again to the older brother: "Your brother was dead" (v. 32).

Once disowned by a father, there was almost no way for a rebellious child to come back and regain his position in the family. If wanted back at all, he must make restitution for whatever dishonor he caused the family and for whatever possessions he might have taken when he ran away. Even then, he might expect to forfeit many of the rights that he previously enjoyed as a family member.

### **DEMAND FOR HIS BIRTHRIGHT**

The way the Prodigal made his demand was calloused and coldhearted: "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me" (Luke 15:12).

The Greek expression translated "portion of goods" is found nowhere else in Scripture. It's not the normal Greek word for inheritance. It's not a term that would normally be applied to real estate, fixed assets, or anything permanently situated on the family property. Instead, it's a word that speaks of personal valuables— especially movable property and liquid assets. It literally means "my share of the family's belongings." He was demanding that his father's household goods, personal valuables, and miscellaneous material possessions be inventoried and distributed early.

It's doubtful that the Prodigal really expected his father to meet such a demand. No matter. He would happily accept payment in coins or banknotes. He was undoubtedly willing to settle for far less than the fair market value of his actual inheritance. He was basically asking to be cashed out. In effect, the Prodigal Son was offering to sell his birthright for whatever money his father had on hand. He wanted whatever he could get now, chiefly because he needed it to finance his rebellion. He didn't want any of the responsibility that came with the inheritance. He wanted no part in the ongoing management of the estate. In fact, what he seems to have wanted most of all was to get rid of the duties, the expectations, and the stewardship that came with being the son of such a successful man. But the Prodigal was not asking for that kind of gift. He was demanding a way out of the family.

### **THE FATHER'S SURPRISING RESPONSE**

Sadly, for the father, there was nothing he could do to cover or remove the shame, short of publicly disowning the boy. That is no doubt precisely what others in the village would expect and possibly even urge the father to do. Any self-respecting father in that culture would naturally feel he had to disgrace the son as publicly as possible — giving him the ceremonial slap across the face, a public denunciation, formal dismissal from the family, and possibly even a funeral. After all, it was the only way to avoid allowing the boy to bring a lasting reproach against the family's good name.

### **DIVISION OF HIS LIVELIHOOD**

Instead, the father "divided to them his livelihood" (v. 12). Rather than publicly strike the boy across the face for his insolence, this father granted his rebel son exactly what he asked for. If the father had divided his estate between his sons out of his own will and gracious generosity, then it would be understood and perhaps even admired. But to honor an impudent request from a defiant youth in this way was unheard of — especially since this course of action quite literally cost the father everything he had.

In fact, the Pharisees would no doubt regard the father as even more shameful than the son at this point because, in giving up his livelihood, he was in effect handing over the family honor and giving the boy license to trample it.

The way the original text is worded is significant. “Livelihood” is a translation of *bios*, the Greek word for life. He divided up and gave his sons his whole life — his living, his livelihood, and everything the family had accumulated for generations. The fact that the younger boy was free to take his father’s bequest and go off into a far country suggests that the father gave the sons the family estate with no strings attached.

## **DEVOTION FOR HIS SON**

The father’s actions demonstrate that he was a truly loving father—not a tyrant—and he was willing to endure the pain of spurned affections and public humiliation rather than disown his son. He voluntarily suffered what is arguably the most painful personal agony of all: the grief of tender love rejected. The father’s love for this boy was obviously profound. And the greater the love, the greater the pain when that love is rebuffed.

This is especially amazing when we remind ourselves that Jesus is giving an illustration of His own love for sinners. And because Jesus is God incarnate—the Lord Himself in human flesh—we need to understand that the reaction of the Prodigal’s father depicts the love of Jehovah for rebellious humanity.

**MacArthur, John F. The Prodigal Son: An Astonishing Study of the Parable Jesus Told to Unveil God's Grace for You**