

The Prodigal Son

By [Larry Bray](#)

And he 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. (Luk 15:11-24)

The selfishness of the prodigal son is seen in his words "give me." Though this was a natural son of the father, he didn't love his father. Now when I use the word "love" I use it in the sense that God uses it, not in the way that the world does. The world tends to call love that warm fuzzy emotional feeling that we can have for something or someone. God's Word uses love in the sense of giving oneself to another. That's why God doesn't just tell us to love those who evoke that emotion from us, but to even go so far as to loving our enemies. Clearly if we are to love our enemies, love is not some emotion that happens to us but rather a willful act of putting another above ourselves.

The prodigal son saying, "give me" shows that his concern was for himself above his father. We have very similar signs of selfishness in today's Church.

In marriages that are falling apart we hear things like "I want this from my

spouse” or “I want this out of my marriage,” but we rarely hear “I need to do this for my spouse” or “I need to do this for my marriage” or “in what ways can I do more to put my spouse’s interests above my own.”

In church membership we hear things like “how can this church bless me” and “what programs are in this church for me”. When what we should be hearing is “how can I bless this church” and “how can God use me here.” The Scriptures are where we get God’s idea of what a Church is supposed to be, and I don’t think He mentions programs at all. A Church is really about the communion of the saints, the preaching of the Word of God, and the administration of the sacraments.

As parents many of us have witnessed selfishness in our children. They are very bold to make selfish statements like “I want”, “give me”, and will even throw temper tantrums when they don’t get their way. Let’s not fool ourselves, adults aren’t much different – we just hide it better. It’s really only as we grow in God’s grace that we’re able to be less interested in our own desires, and more interested in the desires of God and others.

As we look at how the prodigal son was selfish and the results of that mindset, let’s take a close look at our own hearts and see where in our lives we are still like the prodigal son.

So we know this selfish mindset led the prodigal son to want things other than the Father’s love. Instead of saying to the father, “give me your love” he said, “give me my inheritance.” And because this son took the inheritance and left the father to go spend it on himself and his lusts, he also said “give me my independence.” How many times do we fall into this same pattern with our heavenly Father? How many times do we ask our Father for things so that we can spend them on our lusts? How often do we approach our glorious heavenly Father with worldly requests? Instead of being transformed by God’s presence so that we seek His holiness and piety in our lives we try to pull God down to our worldly level. In James 4 we have this warning...

You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.

You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (Jam 4:3-4)

This prodigal son was not only selfish, but he was also rude and unkind. He didn’t say “please give me” or “may I please have”, he simply said “give me.” As a matter of fact, he told the father to give him the inheritance as if it was his right. He said, “Give me the share of property that is coming to me.” The idea behind what he’s saying here is basically, “give me what belongs to me.” As if the father had no right to the son’s inheritance before his death. Some commentators have even gone so far as to say that the son asking for the inheritance in this way is

tantamount to saying that he wished his father was dead so that he could have his share in the inheritance.

This rudeness is a direct result of a selfish mindset. When we are consumed with ourselves we treat others as mere objects in our quest for self-satisfaction. We use them and think of ourselves and our own interests as being more important than theirs. This self-centeredness is evidence of a worldly mindset. The selfish are interested in what the world has to offer. They are consumed with coveting and lusting after what the world seems to offer them. The Scriptures have many things to say about this kind of self-centered, worldly mindset:

It chokes out the Word of God that's planted in our heart:

but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (Mar 4:19)

It gives the wrong idea of what our lives are all about:

And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luk 12:15)

It is the root of all kinds of other evils:

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Ti 6:9-10)

These passages are a strong warning for us against such a mindset. We're not to be worldly minded, but spiritually minded. We're not to put ourselves above others, but others above ourselves.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. (Rom 8:5)

Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. (Phili 2:3)

So the Scripture doesn't leave us wondering what mindset God desires us to have, He tells us quite plainly in His Word. So the question we should ask ourselves is, "how are we conforming our lives to the Word of God in terms of our mindset?" Are we setting our minds on the things of the flesh or of the spirit? Are we putting ourselves above others or do we esteem others as more significant than ourselves?

Let me point out that the term “conceit” in Philippians 2:3 is really “empty conceit” and the term “humility” is really “humility of mind.” The only reason that I point this out is to show that whatever conceit we have is empty, there’s nothing in us that deserves to be exalted. We are just fooling ourselves when we are conceited and think of ourselves above others. And that’s why we are called to have humility of mind. If we don’t understand our true state of lowliness any humility that we acted out would be just that, an act. But when we truly understand how lowly we are, our humility is naturally manifested. This is only done through a work of God as it is only in the light of His countenance that we can be truly mindful of the nature of our own lowliness.

This empty conceit and selfishness that are seeds in the prodigal son’s character leads to a particular fruit...as all seed leads to its own kind of fruit. This kind of seed produces the fruit of suffering. We see in our passage that the prodigal son suffered in 5 things.

He suffered being destitute. He spent all that he had, he wasted his entire inheritance and had nothing to show for it. He lost his:

- Money
- Property
- Talents
- Purpose
- Opportunities

All of these things he used to fulfill the lusts of his flesh. All of these things that should have been a blessing to him, turned into a curse because he fed his flesh and not his spirit. This son misused the gifts that his father had given to him, and it led to utter poverty. This son rebelled against his generous father...and the gifts that the father had given him, that should have been used to bring honor to the father, were used to further sin by feeding the son’s lusts.

How many times have we used the gifts that our Heavenly Father has given us for our own lusts? How many times have we used money, property, talent, and opportunities to further our own little kingdoms instead of using them to further the great and awesome kingdom of our God? I fear that it’s too many times to even count. Do we spend our gifts on the God who gave them to us or do we spend them on ourselves? Do we walk in the Spirit in all that we do or do we walk in the flesh, which lusts against the Spirit?

One of the greatest gifts that God gives us is time. I realize this more and more as I see people who die in their prime of life. Time is a gift that we must use while we have it because every moment that we neglect is a moment that we have lost, we can’t get it back. God tells us in His Word to:

Look carefully how we walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. (Eph 5:15-16)

Are we making the best use of our time? Are we living the life that Christ died for us to live? A life that is patterned after Christ, not the world? Or are we living a life that looks no different from those whom Christ has not redeemed? How much time do we spend at work, watching t.v., going to sporting events, going to movies, and on and on? Compared to that, how much time do we spend in prayer, reading the Scripture, evangelizing, communing with the saints? I would encourage all of us to take a serious look at how we spend our time, that we may learn how to better use it for the glory of God.

This prodigal son clothed himself with the world. He tried to find satisfaction in the world and to be comforted by the world. Make no mistake; we can't be clothed both by the world and by Christ. Being clothed by the world leaves us just as it did this prodigal son, alone and destitute. Being clothed with Christ leaves us always in the blessings of God because in Christ we are:

Blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3)

If we truly put on Christ why do we look so much like the world and so little like Christ? Our Lord tells us to...

walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. (Rom 13:13-14)

Can any of us accomplish what God demands of us here? Can we work to make no provision for the flesh? We are helpless and completely unable to do this, but that is why we are first told to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." For though it is impossible with man, all things are possible with God (Mk 10:27). There is one thing that we are called to do in order to make no provision for the flesh...put on Christ. Some may say, "But wait...what about the armor of God? Surely that's many things that we must put on." Well, let's look at that. In the armor of God we have:

- Belt of truth – Jesus is the truth
- Breastplate of righteousness – Jesus is our righteousness
- Shoes of the Gospel of peace – the Gospel of peace is the work of Christ
- Shield of faith – our faith is in Jesus
- Helmet of salvation – salvation comes from Christ
- Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God – Christ is the Word, and He will slay His enemies with the sword of His mouth

So you see, the armor of God is nothing less than Christ Himself!

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