

"What To Do When We Mess up Bad"

Lk 15:11-32

Have you ever messed up bad in life and wondered if there was any hope for you? Today we want to look at a bible character that really did mess up. It is the story that Jesus told about the prodigal son. I believe we can learn something from the story that might help us gain some assistance in getting our feet back under us following those times of failure in our lives

This story, is really a story about how to relate to our heavenly father and how He relates to us in the living of life. Unfortunately, how we relate to God as our heavenly father is based to some extent on how we relate to our father in this life. If we have the privilege of having a good father then we do not have a problem, but if our father was absent or, if our father was present but we were not able to enjoy a good relationship with him, then that carries over into our relationship with heavenly Father.

In this story, Jesus wanted to present the picture, that our heavenly father is not a father who is just waiting for us to mess up so he can whack us on the head. Instead, he is a loving father who is ready to welcome us home.

Our story is found in Luke 15 where beginning in V 11 it says, "Then He said: *"A certain man had two sons"* and is often called the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Yet in reality it is a story about the love of God and his acceptance of those who have made bad choices, and messed up big time.

Jesus has some important things that he wants to teach us about God the Father. Things I struggle with understanding myself because of a lot having to do with my relationship, or rather lack of one, with my own father. So lets take another look together. First,

I. God loves us so much that He allows us to make our own choices, as we see displayed in our story

"Then He said: V 11,12 *"A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me."* One of the things that maybe bothers us about God is that He refuses to step in and stop us, or others from doing what is wrong.

God has given us the awesome gift of free will. We think that we would like for God to be more controlling, at least in the lives of other people don't we? We would like to have Him force them to do the right things and stop them from doing the wrong things wouldn't we? But maybe not so much when it relates to us. But God knows that the moment He forces any of us to do His will, it means nothing!

V 12 continues with, *So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.* The father granted his wish and gave his son what he wanted. The father gave in to his son, not because he was a permissive parent - not because he did not care what happened to his son - but because he was giving his son what he thought his son wanted.

Sometimes the worst thing God can do for us is to allow us to have what we think we want. Yet many times God allows us to have what we think we want - in the hope that someday we would want something better! Here, God allows this young guy to pursue the world's allurements until he can see the need, and have the desire, to have them replaced by the memories of a home where he was loved and valued.

II. Three ways the Prodigal Son offended his earthly father.

A. He asked for his inheritance early V 12 *"Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me."*

He asks for his inheritance in a legal although highly unusual request. It seems like he was in effect basically saying, *"Dad I do not want to have to wait around to get what is mine, and since you haven't died soon enough to suit me, I want what is mine now."* Isn't it interesting that this young man's fall began the moment he started demanding his rights. That is a picture of our nation. Demanding rights and look at us!!

B. He Sold His Inheritance! V 13a *And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together..."*

Ralph Earle says in his book Word Meanings in the NT that the word "gathered" comes from a verb that probably means turned into cash. He goes on to say "The Father's property would need to be converted into usable currency before the son went on his journey." He not only received His inheritance early, he then sold it!

In the culture of that day you did not sell the land that belonged to your family. So apparently giving no thought to how his selfishness would affect the entire household, he took his share of the family resources and left home to live it up. He was not simply moving out to live on his own, I think we can safely assume that he had no intention of ever returning.

C. He Squandered His Inheritance. V 13 again it says he *"... journeyed to a far country, and there wasted, or other words could be squandered or misspent, his possessions with extravagant, uncontrolled, living."*

This suggests a life of wild parties, loose women, loud music and bright lights. And the word translated "wasted" means "to blow away" - the same word used to describe "separating grain from the chaff. "So, quite literally it means "He took it and blew it on wild living."

Some might say, well everyone tends to sow some wild oats!" The problem is, when we do, we forget to add, Galatians 6:7 says, "*Be not deceived, God is not mocked: for whatever a man sows that he will also reap!*" True, we can come back to God but, we will come back in worse shape than when we left, scarred by sin and with the memory of wasted years.

Remember this song?

Wasted years, wasted years, oh how foolish
As you walk on in darkness and fear
Turn around, turn around love is calling
Keeps calling me from a life of wasted years

Have you wandered a lot on life's pathway
Have you lived without love, a life of tears
Have you searched for a great higher meaning
Or is your life filled with long wasted years

Wasted years, wasted years, oh how foolish
As you walk on in darkness and fear
Turn around, turn around love is calling
Keeps calling you from a life of wasted years

This guys errors seem so clear to us as we look at the text, and we can see the results of his destructive lifestyle before they even come about. But when we're actually in the middle of such a situation, it is not quite so easy to see. The ways of the world look so appealing and people seem so full of life and having such a good time.

We have the idea that the bad things that happen to others, will never happen to us. After all we are smarter than they are aren't we?? But as always in life, sooner or later, choices have consequences. V 14-16 gives us the truth about sin, *About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him to feed his pigs. The boy became so hungry that even the husk he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.*

Isn't it true, from your experience as well as mine, that sin leads us away from the Father's house by promising us something we "think" will satisfy us. Sin promises us freedom, but brings only slavery... it promises success, but brings only failure... it promises life but, "*the wages of sin is death.*" The problem becomes the longer that we are in the "far country" in other words, the longer we rebel against God - the hungrier and emptier we will become.

III . Three steps to returning home after we mess up.

The first step on the road home is to

A. Wake up to our true condition.

V 17 "*When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired men have food enough to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger!*" When his money ran out, he probably told himself that this was just a temporary set back. But finally things got bad enough to get his attention.

The combination of being forced to hire himself out as a slave, and seeing that the pigs were better cared for than he was, caused him to do clear, serious, thinking about his situation. The first step home is the realization of how far away we have roamed. It has been said this way, To be good, you must first look and see that you are bad

Our road home begins when we realize that we are headed in the wrong direction and head back to God. It says, "*when he came to himself*" - which simply means that when he began to see things as they really were.

Someone once said, All sin is really a form of insanity. So repentance begins with seeing things straight and in a sane way. In other words seeing it with our head on straight, Or, once the fog of the hangover is gone

The second step on the road home is

B. Confession.

V 18-19 Confession is not the same as being sorry we were caught. It is being sorry we sinned. To confess means to own up to the fact that, our behavior is the result of our own choice to do bad. It is not the result of bad parenting, poor genetics, jealous siblings or a chemical imbalance caused by too many Twinkies.

In Psalm 51:4 we read David's great confession after his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, when he said, *Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is*

evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.

True confession then is no deals....no negotiations...no strings attached. In other words we could say it this way, I did it, I chose to do it, even though I knew it was wrong, because I wanted to do it no matter what!

The third step on the road home is

C. Repentance

V 20a *"So he returned home to his father. The sign that he had truly repented was when he turned from his wrong choices and headed home.*

Recognition of his sinful choices was good, but it was not enough. Confession of how wrong he was, was good, but it was not enough. All of these things were no good unless he is willing to turn around and return to the Father.

Proverbs 28:13 says it this way, *"He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but who ever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy."*

Repentance has also been stated this way: Repentance is not only saying I'm sorry, it is saying I'm through. God loves us so much that He allows us to make our own choices even though it may be very costly to us, and usually is

But secondly from the story we learn that,

IV. The Father is willing and anxious to accept those who return home.

V 20-24 It is interesting to note that when the son left, the father did not chase after him. The father did not fall apart. He did not give up hope and when he returned he did not retaliate by withholding his forgiveness.

Everything about the reception given this son by his father is significant. A kiss in Palestinian culture is a sign for full acceptance and friendship. The father didn't stop with a kiss and a hug. He called for a robe, a ring, and sandals. That robe stands for honor; the ring stands for authority-for you see, if a man gave to another his signet ring, it was the same as giving him the power of attorney.

The shoes stand for a son, as opposed to a slave, because children of the family had shoes and slaves did not. **I read where** someone once asked Abraham Lincoln toward the end of

the American Civil War, "How are you going to treat the rebellious Southerners when the War is Over?" He replied, "I will treat them as though they had never been away."

That's what this father in our story did, that is what God is willing to do when we mess up!

Roy Angell writing in *Shields of Brass*. (1965) told a beautiful story about a widow during the first World War who lost her only son and her husband. " She was especially bitter because her neighbor, who had five sons, lost none of them. One night while this woman's grief was so terribly severe, she had a dream. An angel stood before her and said, 'You might have your son back again for ten minutes. What ten minutes would you choose? Would you have him back as a little baby, a dirty-faced little boy, a schoolboy just starting school, a student just completing high school, or as the young man who marched so bravely off to war? The mother thought for a few minutes and then, in her dream, told the angel she would choose none of those times. 'Let me have him back,' she said, ' when as a little boy, in a moment of anger, he doubled up his fists and shook them at me and said 'I hate you! I hate you!' Continuing to address the angel she said, 'In a little while his anger subsided and he came back to me, his dirty little face stained with tears, and put his arms around me. 'Momma, I'm sorry I was so naughty. I promise never to be bad again and I love you with all my heart.' 'Let me have him back then,' the mother sobbed, 'I never loved him more than at that moment when he changed his attitude and came back to me.'"

Jesus says this is how God feels about each of us. You see, the Father is willing and anxious to accept those who return home.

V. The Father expects His children to rejoice over the return of the fallen.

V 25-32 The elder brother really did not understand his father any better than his younger brother had. He apparently considered himself nothing more than an unappreciated servant to his father because he stayed home and did not go and blow it all like the other one did.

He expressed this when he basically said, "*Look I have been slaving for you for years, and for what.*" He is angry and resentful that the father has not catered to his wishes and rewarded him as he thinks he deserves.

The awful possibility exists that we too, can be in the Father's fields as servants but not in his house as sons and daughters. Sadly, This is where I mainly find my self in this story. We may be moral and respectable but not really know the father who is loving, accepting and forgiving. But it is interesting that this story does not have an ending? We do not know how the elder brother eventually reacted to his brother's return.

We can imagine some possible endings to the story.

1. Perhaps the older brother finally gave in and forgave his brother. He shared the inheritance with him and they both lived in the father's house as brothers once again.

2. Or in our world, it is more likely if we were to try and imagine, the older brother more than likely became increasingly bitter against the father and left his house, never to be reconciled either with his brother or his father. I don't know about you, but sometimes I think we are like the elder brother and we are not too pleased to see the father forgive someone other than ourselves.

If *we happen to be the erring son* who has messed up really bad, the three truths that Jesus wants us to understand about the Father are:

1. God loves us so much that He allows us to make our own choices even the stupid ones we have all made

2. God loves us so much that He is willing and anxious to accept those of us who return home once we realize our stupid choices

3. The Father expects His children to rejoice over the return of the fallen.

I would simply add this. When it comes to wayward children, not necessarily us, but our kids, who in our sight have messed up bad, God loves them more than we do. God doesn't chase them so we shouldn't either. But he uses all situations to bring them back around in the intervening chapters of their lives. He uses Romans 8:28 in order to fulfill Romans 8:29

Finally when we feel discouraged don't forget, the last chapter of their lives is not yet written. One of the great joys of heaven might just be for a parent to see their prodigal greeting them and God getting the praise for it all as they rejoice together in his presence.

In closing, all of us are prodigals in some way. We have been on the run away from God, living the fun and frivolous life. Now we realize that if we were to die on the dance floor in a far and distant land that we could not make it back to the father that loves us.

If you are willing to come back, He is willing to forgive, no matter how bad you have messed up. If this is you, why not read a few more lines and find that Father, the one who will see that you get to heaven?

Realize you are a sinner Romans 3:23

Understand that the payday for sin is death or eternal conscious separation from God.
Romans 6:23a

Know that there is a way of escape for you. Romans 6:23b and John 1:12

Desire to escape and pray this or a similar prayer.

"Dear God, I know I am a sinner. I am truly sorry for my sins, and I confess them all to You [name them]. Lord Jesus, forgive all my sins and come into my heart as my Saviour and Lord. I receive You right now. Help me from this time forward to live for You. Thank You for hearing and answering my prayer. In Jesus' name. Amen."

On the _____ day of _____ I became a Christian by inviting Jesus Christ into my life to forgive my sin.

Signed: _____

If you have further questions or have chosen to do this, be sure to let us know so we can help you, pray for you and encourage you in your new life.

You can reach us at lapeerchurch@gmail.com Subject line: (Salvation)