

# Family Worship Booklet



God tells us that Ezra read from the book of the Law,  
day after day, and that the people of God  
were filled with joy!

## Friday – Read Luke 15:17-24 – The father runs to the son.

The son sets off for home, clear in his mind in that he will become a servant of his father because he sees himself as having forfeited all rights to be considered his father's son. I wonder what he is thinking as he is making his way home. We know what he is mulling over in his mind in terms of what he is going to say, but how would his father respond – that's the unknown, or is it? He certainly knew his father's character; his reference to the provision for the household servants shows that. He is also aware of his father's love for him. His previous life at home would have shown him that. Yes, teenage children can think harsh thoughts of and use unjust words towards their parents on occasions, but those who have grown up in a loving home know in their hearts the truth of the situation. That said, the manner of his leaving would have given this young man some reason to wonder how his father would express his love for him. Would there be a trial period in which he would have to prove himself; it certainly would be justified if it were to happen. He would find out when he reached home and knocked on the front door.

Then we read in verse 20, “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and felt compassion and ran and embraced and kissed him.” While he was still a long way off, the father saw him. How did his father see him? Had the son sent a message ahead of his coming? No. Did a servant of the house, who happened to be out on an errand, meet the son and return to the home and tell the father? No. The father saw the son because the father was scanning the horizon looking for the son. The father, who had been abused by this son, who had been relationally left for dead by this son, out of never-ending love for his son, had spent his time looking out from his home in the hope that his son would return. And when he sees the bedraggled figure in the distance, he instantly recognises him, because he is his son, and he runs to him. In a culture when men of age do not run, they walk quietly with grace, barely raising a speck of dust from the ground, this man, with uncontrolled fervour borne of love, picks up his garment and he runs, he runs to embrace and kiss the son who has despised him. Is this not our Father in heaven?

Q1. How does the father see the son coming home?

Q2. What does the father do when he sees his son?

## Thursday – Read Luke 15:17-20 – He came to himself.

Isolated, alone, and destitute because of his life choice to throw off his father's love and gorge himself on the world's emptiness, the young man is brought to a place where he stops and thinks. Note that he is brought to this place by his circumstances, and, of course, who is in control of all the circumstances in our lives – God is. This man is in the far country but there is nowhere, as the Psalmist says in Psalm 139, where we can be out of the presence of God. Whether we are on the earth, in the heavens above, or in the depths of Sheol itself, can we escape God. What a glorious truth! Being in the far country is a bad choice, but it is not a choice that has to end in death, either physical or spiritual.

The young man does two things. The first is that he comes to a realisation about himself. By the grace of God his eyes are opened to the reality that he is a sinner. The second thing he does is to resolve with great humility that he will return to his father. He makes this resolution knowing that there is absolutely nothing the world can do to address his need, and because he now has a new sight of who his father is. It's this new sight of his father that opens the way for him to return home. It's not that his father has changed, he hasn't – it's the son who has changed. Confronted with and having faced his need he now resolves; he now chooses to return home.

We believe that repentance is a grace of God (Acts 11:18); and what a phenomenal thing it is when God the Holy Spirit works in our minds and hearts to show us our eternal need and then our eternal Saviour. Another glorious truth. But let's understand that you and I have a very clear and definite role to play. We are not automatons, lifeless, inanimate entities without a will. We are creatures made in the image of God and we do possess free will. We can and must choose, and not just once but daily, to see the abject futility of walking in the empty and dark ways of the world and resolve to run to our Father in heaven. This requires deliberate thoughtful repentance, and much more repentance than you and I ever perceive necessary. Maybe that's the reason why we face so many trials at a time. Remember, the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and for our good and His glory (Hebrews 12:20).

Q1. What realisation does the young man come to?

Q2. What does he resolve to do and why?

## Monday – Read Luke 15:11-13 – A heartless request?

As we saw on Friday, this young man came to his father seeking his inheritance, and in doing so was effectively saying to his father, 'our relationship is over, you are as good as dead to me'. What a statement for a son to make to his father, a father who has shown him nothing but love every day of his life. And yet, isn't this a proclamation that you and I know so well? Haven't we, like all mankind, declared the very same thing to God every day of our lives? Absolutely incredible as it is, ever since Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, man from the moment of his birth has been daily saying to God, 'I don't need you, and I certainly don't want you in my life.' Naturally proud and self-willed, refusing to delight in fellowship with God, we are, as the prophet Isaiah says, all like sheep who have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way (Isaiah 53:6). How can man be so foolish? You would think that a blind man on a galloping horse could see the need to know and delight in God. But he doesn't and he won't. Why not? Because man is conceived with a devastating spiritual blindness, which means that he cannot see the reality of God's numerous blessings in his life. The fact that they are staring him daily in the face makes no difference, he just cannot see them because his mind and heart are closed, sealed off in a bunker of darkness into which no light can penetrate; except God the Holy Spirit does a miraculous thing and opens up the bunker.

How does the father respond? Well, what are his options? He could ignore his son's request and tell him to go away, either pleasantly or otherwise, but he doesn't. There was provision in Jewish law for the father to give a portion of property to a younger son. Legally, the eldest son in the family received two-thirds, with the other third being divided among any remaining sons; but this division would have taken place following the death of the father. It would have been rare and would have required some very exceptional circumstances for this to be done while the father was still alive. And yet here this father accepts his son's heartless request and proceeds to divide his property and presumably give him the one third share he was expecting. Which, given the scale of the celebration which the father puts on for him later in the parable, would probably have been a significant amount.

God has created man with free will, and even though men daily reject Him, God doesn't stop providing for them through His common grace.

Q1. What does the younger son do? Is that something we can identify with?

Q2. What does the father do?

## Tuesday – Read Luke 15:11-13 – The seriously mistaken choice.

With his inheritance obtained, the son doesn't take long before he leaves his home. Now there is a time in a young person's life when they must take the step of leaving home. That's natural, it's how new families are established, but it's the reason for and the manner of the leaving that is critical. This man is not leaving the nurture and love of his home because he desires to establish a new home of his own. No, he's leaving because he is done with his father's oversight. His heart has long since hardened to his father's love. In his self-centeredness he is impervious to his father's unstated grief and sets out for what he perceives will be his exciting new life. How many covenant children have made this sad life-choice? Of course, he has no idea of what will ultimately happen to him. But let's be careful not to have any sympathy for him as things unfold in his life. I say that not simply because of his harshness towards his father, but because he knows exactly where he is going, and what he plans to do when he gets there. After all, he wasn't the first to make this journey, and I am sure he'd either seen or heard of others who had done the same thing and ended up with broken lives. So, his leaving home is not simply a rejection of his father's loving oversight, it is a blatant refusal to accept the foreseeable consequences of his actions. Yes, he couldn't have anticipated the seriousness of what would befall him, but neither did he act in complete ignorance as to what would happen.

As man lives today rejecting God, he does so knowing full-well that there will be consequences. His guilty conscience screams that at him daily, and yet he chooses to proceed without an apparent care. Why? Because, in his own eyes, he is unique, and will be able to handle whatever comes his way. Of course, as we shall see here, that is not the case.

So where does this young man go? He travels to a 'far' country. That could mean that he either went somewhere far from his home, or to a life far from the lifestyle he had been raised in, or both. One doesn't have to travel far today to be far from godly behaviour; the reality is that it can be done while still living at home. The occasion for sin arises in the heart and can be engaged in anywhere; and, whether physically far from home or not, the consequences of sin are real, and they are bad.

Q1. Why does the young man decide to leave home?

Q2. Is he totally ignorant of what might happen to him?

## Wednesday – Read Luke 15:11-16 – Squander leading to immense need.

In the far country, the young man wasted his inheritance on frivolous and extravagant things. In verse 30 his older brother has his say on what he thinks it was spent on, and what he says may be true; but it is also a statement arising from a bitter heart, and bitter hearts always have ways of twisting and exaggerating things. This carelessness with resources comes because this money has come easy to this young man; and as the saying goes, 'easy come, easy go'. It is something we need to be very conscious of in respect of our receipt of God's Word. You have a number of opportunities to receive the Word of God into your life, some of which are being handed to you well prepared and on a plate. The question is – are you productively digesting it?

The far country has its pleasures, but as with all sinful pleasures they are short lived and always end in frustration, grief, and anger. Sin NEVER turns out well; it can't because it is rebellion against the goodness of God. Having squandered his entire inheritance on reckless living, the young man is left penniless, and for the first time in his life he finds himself in need. That is where sin always leads to – real need. As Solomon writes in Proverbs 13:15, 'the way of the treacherous or the transgressors is ruin'.

Throughout his life, the young man's needs had been met by his father, but he'd fled from his father's loving provision and cast himself on the pleasures of the world. Now he is faced with the known reality that the world will never meet his needs. The world cares nothing for the human body, mind, and soul. Yes, there are certain provisions made from a sense of benevolence for humanity, but the truth is that these are always limited in nature, and transitory in duration. They are never enough. The amazing thing is that the godless soul always lives in the false hope that somehow, against all the odds, sufficient provision will be made for them, because after all they are unique. Although in the history of mankind, the world never has.

Left destitute by his profligate living, a situation compounded by the consequences of a localised famine, the young man hires himself out in servitude to a farmer, and not just any farmer, but a pig farmer. He's working among animals that he would have considered to be unclean, the ultimate degradation. Well almost, because we read that he is not simply tending the pigs, but he is reduced to eating the husks provided for them to eat. He's reduced to eating pig food. His life from every perspective is at an end; such is the way of those who throw off the blessings of God.

Q1. What does the son do with the inheritance? What previous thing did we need to get the most of?

Q2. What does he get in return?