

A Father's Joy!

"So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." - Luke 15:18-20.

1. *"So he got up and went to his father."*

Alas! The young man made good on his decision, and returned to his father's house. When he left with his share of wealth for the distant land, his father's heart was broken. Now that he had returned, in spite of being a destitute, the father was overcome with compassion and joy!

The Father in Heaven is filled with much sadness when we turn our backs on Him for a worldly life of sinful pleasures. Though we may have our temporary fill of enjoyment and 'the good life,' that too eventually loses its appeal, and soon we are left empty and unfulfilled. Pastor Shane Idleman says: *"While I had focused on prosperity, wealth, and success, I had starved my soul. I tried everything that the world had to offer, but ultimately, I found that it offered little of lasting value."*

The prodigal son also found out that the world "offered little of lasting value," and took a hard decision to return to his earthly father. Likewise, we too, may have to make difficult decisions to turn our back on worldly pleasures, and cease wrong relationships and bad habits, as we find our way back to our heavenly Father.

The journey back to the Father is not always an easy road to travel.... Isn't it much easier to leave, as the young son did at the start of the parable, than it is to return back to the father's house? On the way back to the father's home, the young man had to cross bridges of past hurts, walk along the side-walk of discouragement, jump over rocks of pride, as he wipes off sweats of fear. But, he finally reached his destination, and got a reception of love from his father which he least expected.

No ocean of sin is too wide or too deep that Jesus can't reach us in our time of need and despair. Let's not drown in our sins, but take hold of the hand of Jesus, as He lovingly and gently comforts us back to our heavenly Father.

2. *"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him..."*

Wow! This meant that the father watched everyday with expectation and hope that one day his 'lost' son would return home. And today was the day that his father's hope shook hands with reality. This is faith in action. The father never gave up hoping and watching.... Maybe, just maybe, this is a message to parents who have 'lost' their rebellious children to the world. Continue to hope, watch and pray for their safe return home. What is impossible with man is possible with God!

I believe that just as it is with this earthly father, so it is with our heavenly father. God, always have joyful expectation, that one day, through His Son Jesus, that we will return to Him. This is the extent of His love for us:

"¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." – John 3:16.

But it is a choice that we must make, without fear and discouragement, just like the young man, to take that first step back to our father's house.

3. *“and was filled with compassion for him”*

The father had compassion for his son who made a mess of his life. Compassion means, *“a strong feeling of sympathy and sadness for the suffering or bad luck of others.”* The father was overcome with strong sympathy filled with sadness as a result of the suffering that his son endured. Clearly, signs of sufferings were visible, perhaps, by his tattered clothes and dishevelled hair and overgrown beard. But, one thing is certain. The father did not descend into a tirade of ‘tongue lashing,’ anger and loud criticisms towards his delinquent and destitute son. Although the father would have been justified by this behaviour, he overlooked his son's misfortunes and wrongdoings as were evident by his physical appearance. Instead, the father was overcome with compassion for his errant son as he saw the heart of a battered and penitent sinner – who struggled back to his father's house.

May God give me those qualities instead of a spirit of condemnation in similar circumstances. Although we may be right at times, we too, may have to be filled with a spirit of compassion and forgiveness towards others, including our loved ones, who may have caused us unspeakable pain and hurt. Like the father in the story, instead of giving that person a good ‘tongue lashing,’ showing compassion may be the better option.

I believe that certain misgivings and fears which children have over how their parents would react are barriers to coming back home.

To the child who may have rebelled against his parents, remember that the father's house was always there for the young son...welcoming and inviting. Most, if not all parents, will always have a heart of love, even for the unruly, obstinate and delinquent child who has strayed, but want to return home. Alternatively, the penitent sinner can always find compassion in the loving arms of our heavenly Father.

Yes, the journey back home may be a long one filled with pain, hurts, disappointments and regrets. Where your parents may reject you, you still have a room in your heavenly Father's house where you are always loved and welcomed.

4. *“he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”*

The father was overcome with unspeakable joy when he saw that his prodigal son had returned home. His great love for his son was evident as he ran towards him, hugged and kissed him. Although, it is said that men don't usually show such emotions, any father who had not heard from his child for months and years – not knowing whether he or she was dead or alive – will be elated, and will show great affection upon his child's return.

This is an indication of the immense joy in heaven when a sinner, through repentance, returns to his Father's house. Luke 15:7 reiterates:

"I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

Let us all rejoice when the sinner returns to the Father's house. To God be the glory!

Heavenly Father,

"I pray today that broken relationships between parents and children be mended. O Lord, may we all be filled with compassion towards our children who have lost their way and rebelled against You and their parents, and yet made the journey back home. Let us not condemn and criticize them, and say "I told you so!" But let the spirit of love and forgiveness guide our actions, as parents. A special prayer for those children that may have left home, and who are contemplating mending their relationships with their parents. May they go the extra mile like the young man, and return to their parents' homes. Every voice of double-mindedness, fear and discouragement be silenced today, in Jesus' name. May the lines of communication between parents and children be re-opened as children reach out, in faith, to their parents and vice versa. May the spirit of peace, love, compassion and joy prevail in the hearts and minds of both parents and children. In Jesus' mighty name I pray with thanksgiving. Amen."

Memory Verse:

"...his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."- Luke 15:20