

Restore Series (13) / Restoring Relationship (Father's Day) // Steve Sutton

Today I want to talk about the good Father. This passage is often called the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the word prodigal means wasteful. But I think a better title for this story would be The Parable of the Good Father because the central character is not the wasteful younger son or the diligent older boy but their good and wise Dad.

Luke 15:11-32

This is the story of a good Father and his two sons: both of whom are disconnected from their Dad. I think it's a story that gives us insight into how God goes about restoring the broken relationship between himself and his kids.

The story begins with the younger son demanding his share of his inheritance whilst his father is still alive. In its day this was the height of disrespect, it doesn't get any worse than this – culturally this son was saying to his Dad, “Dad, I wish you were dead.”

To the original hearers of this parable, the story begins with a scandal and then becomes even more scandalous.

As the story unfolds, what is more shocking than the son asking for his inheritance is the response of the Father: who doesn't argue with or throw out his disrespectful son, instead he hands him his inheritance and he lets him go.

My first point is this: To heal and restore the broken relationship between God, and humanity, God loves us enough to let us go. Love will always release those it says it loves.

Why would the Father do this? Why didn't he plead with his son and try and coerce him to stay?

I think the Father knew that his younger son's heart was somewhere else other than at home with him. He had already left the farm and in his heart he was living in a far away place. His affections weren't with his Father, he wanted to escape and explore the world and the Father knew it. This is an important principle for those of us who are parents: **we have to learn to read our kids. Good parenting involves knowing where our kids are at.**

The Father knew that trying to hold onto his son wouldn't work out in the long run, it was best to let him go.

God is more interested in having an authentic relationship with us than simply putting up with us going through the motions of religious duty. God never wants to keep us under duress. He's looking for relationships not robots.

Relationship sits at the core of Christianity. Christianity is all about relationship. The great tragedy though is that for many people both inside and outside of the church is that they equate being a Christian with following a list of rules and regulations: Thou shall not drink, smoke, swear, grow your hair long, etc, etc. But Christianity is living in a loving relationship with the Creator, and it's out of that relationship we learn how to live well and behave appropriately.

Louise and I have been married for nearly 27 years. I'd like to think that I'm a different person because of Louise and my relationship. Doing life with Louise has changed me – hopefully for the better. I've adapted my behaviour to please Louise because I love her.

It's the same with our relationship with God, as you get to know and appreciate him, you begin to change the way you live not because you have to but because you want to – it's just the nature of loving relationships. We adapt to please those whom we love.

God loves us enough to let us go because he's more concerned about having a relationship based on reality than religious duty or blind compliance. God prefers honesty to hypocrisy. And if nothing else this younger son was at least honest.

In the letting go, however, the good Father does not give up on his son; he's not washing his hands of the boy and thinking to himself 'good riddance I never want to see him again'. No! He's watching, he's waiting and he's longing for his son to come to his senses and come home. He fully expects that one day his son will return.

Even when this boy is at his worst, the Father **remains optimistic** that his son will come good. He's not sitting whining and complaining about what his son has done, and how selfish and unappreciative he is. Rather, the Father has his eye on the horizon anticipating that moment his

son reappears and for the joy of being reconciled to the one to whom he is currently estranged. Letting go is not giving up but believing that the best is yet to come.

It's a challenge, let's face it particularly as a parent, not to step in to rescue the child you love when things aren't going well for them. Imagine this Father – news filters through to him that his son is making all kinds of bad decisions, choosing unhealthy friendships, wasting all his money, going to all the wrong kind of places, living in a pig pen.

It's a natural instinct to want to intervene and stop someone you love from hurting themselves further. But the Father's goal was to see his son to come to the end of himself. And rescuing him wouldn't achieve this.

Matthew 5:3, "You are blessed when you are at the end of your rope. With less of you there is more of God and his rule." The Father doesn't rush into rescue because he knows his son needs to come to the end of himself.

Sometimes our interference keeps people away from home longer than God would want. We step in and circumvent

the process that is needed to help someone come to his or her senses. Our helping can sometimes hinder someone coming to God because we don't allow them the opportunity to hit rock bottom.

The purpose behind God letting people go is not to punish but to restore. God knows that some of us need to experience the futility of life without God for a season in order for us to come to the realization of how good life with God can be.

Letting go of someone you love and staying confident that they will come through is a sign of mature love and wisdom.

And the son does come good. He recognizes the futility of his wastefulness and wild living and begins the long journey home.

Letting go and keeping a positive attitude has brought the boy to a place of repentance. Repentance is one of the most beautiful words in the Bible, it signals a shift in thinking and a resolve to change the direction of ones life.

Repentance is saying, “God, I was wrong and you are right.”

2 Cor. 7:10, “Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation...” Sodzo! To heal, make well or make whole, to deliver, to restore.

Repentance is different to remorse and regret. Remorse and regret express disappointment that the way we have acted has impacted negatively upon us and we’re sorry for the price that we have had to pay for our stupidity. However, repentance is acknowledging the impact that our actions have had on others and takes steps to rectify the wrong.

You pick up repentance in the change that takes place in the son’s language: He’s moved from ‘give me my’ to ‘you make me’ (like one of your hired men). He’s shifted from arrogance to humility.

The good Father responds to the son’s change of heart by forgiving, and restoring and celebrating his son’s return. The scandal of the story continues because the Father doesn’t lecture him or condemn him for his behaviour. He

doesn't say, 'You've hurt me'. 'You've ruined my reputation'. 'Look at what you've done'. 'I told you so'. God will never shame those who make their way home to him. Nor does he require his son to jump through a whole bunch of hoops – he doesn't say – “Well, now that you're back you have to clean up your act.” He's not given a set of rules to follow but he's welcomed home with open arms, so that he can get to know who his Father is and when he finally sees how good his Father is and he falls in love with his Dad, he will learn to adapt his lifestyle.

The younger son is a snapshot of me and my journey home to God but not everyone is like the younger son. Not everyone is a rebel intent on living a wild life. There are also people like the older brother. They are compliant and follow all the rules – in verse 29, the older son says to his Father, “Look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.” He's a well-behaved son. Yet, despite his diligence and hard work at the end of the day, the older brother is not enjoying relationship with the Father. He is just as far from the Father as his younger brother was and needs to see the relationship with his restored as much as the younger son did.

The way that the Father sought to restore relationship with the older son was to reason with him. He pleaded with him to understand why he's been so gracious and kind to his wayward brother. The Father tries to help him see that he's loved and he's valued. He answers his questions and responds to his doubts and concerns. For some people their broken or distorted relationship with God is healed by reason, appealing to their intellect to convince them that God is good and wise and is someone worth committing to.

The Good Father restores us into relationship with himself by...

Letting go of those he loves because relationship is more important to him than duty

He lets go with a positive expectation that we will one day come to our senses

When we return the good Father doesn't shame us about our past but welcomes, restores and celebrates

For others the good Father seeks to restore us with reason – he answers our questions, helps us to dismantle our distorted views of him and the relationship built on duty and obligation.

Conclusion

Whoever we are and whatever we are like, a wild child or compliant child, God will do whatever he can to reach you.

Song Good Good Father