

# The Running Father

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn back together to the chapter that we read in the Gospel according to Luke, Luke chapter 15. Let's look again at the section that begins at verse 11, Luke chapter 15 from verse 11.

And Jesus said there was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of the property that is coming to me.

And the father divided his property between them. And so on down. I recently saw or came across a painting by a British artist and a painter called Charlie McKessie.

He's a Christian. He's a believer. And he has painted a beautiful painting called The Prodigal Son. And it shows the father's love for his returning son.

How his hands hold the boy. How he kisses the son. How he embraces him and wraps himself round this son that he thought was dead and gone forever.

[ 1 : 29 ] And when I saw that picture, it started me thinking. Because when we look at this story, this well-known story, you've all heard, I'm sure, sermon after sermon after sermon on this story.

But when we look at it, we have a tendency to look at it from the son's point of view. From his perspective. And that's no bad thing. But if that's all that we do when we read this, then we're missing so much about what's going on here.

Because we miss the beauty of the father's love, of our father's love, if all we concentrate on is the son. Charlie McKessie has captured that love with nothing but a few strokes of his paintbrush. It's a very, very simple picture if you ever see it. But it's beautiful. That love is what I want us to look at this morning for a few moments as the Lord allows.

And this, of course, is known as the story of the prodigal son. And the prodigal son, he was a renegade. He came to his father and he asked his father for his share of the estate.

[ 2 : 46 ] Now from the law, the Jewish law, this was a Jewish family. From the Jewish law, the younger son, where there was two sons, the younger son, he wasn't Jew half of it.

He was Jew a third of it. But what he was actually saying when he came to his father demanding his share of his inheritance, what he was actually saying to his father was, Do you know what, Dad?

I'm sick and tired of you. I want to be free from you. I want to be free from your control of my life.

What he was actually saying to his father was, I wish you were dead.

It's a horrible thing to say. It's an awful thing to say. No child should ever say that to their parents.

And this boy's request was pure selfishness.

Look at the words that he uses. It's give me. His focus, everything that he's zeroed in on is me himself.

[ 3 : 53 ] He's all wrapped up in himself and his life and what he could do and how he could live and how far he could go. If only he had what he was Jew. He doesn't care a bit about anybody else.

Especially doesn't care about his father. Doesn't care about his father's feelings. But his father, he loves his son. He could have refused.

He was perfectly within his rights to refuse. He could have kicked his backside. Kicked the boy out of the family home. Sent him packing. But he gave his son exactly what he asked for.

The boy wanted what the father could give him. But he did not want the father. Do you know that we have exactly the same attitude?

We live our lives with exactly that attitude. We constantly say, I wish you were dead to God. I wish you weren't there.

[ 4 : 53 ] I wish you weren't controlling my life. Ruining everything I could do. We want God's air. We want his food.

We want his water. We want what God can give us. What we think we're deserving of. But we don't want him in our lives. We don't want him in our lives.

Well, if you want to live like there is no God. If you want to live a life that ignores God. And that leaves God. Then that's fine. He'll let you do that. If you take everything that he gives to you in this life.

Every good and perfect gift, we're told, comes from God. And if you take all of that without so much as a backward glance at a thank you very much.

Then he'll let you do that too. But at the end of a life lived without Jesus Christ. There's an eternity that's experienced without Jesus Christ.

[ 5 : 58 ] And that's hell. So this son, he gets what he wants. And he takes it and he goes. And he wastes it.

The phrase there, reckless living, covers so much sin. It tells us exactly how he lived. Basically, if it felt good, he did it.

He did and experienced everything that he could. There was no moral restraint in his life from when he left home. Nothing held him back.

And eventually, the money was gone. And because the money was gone, his friends were gone. And it was then that he started to find out about the downside, the true cost of sin.

Because this boy, this well brought up Jewish boy, he ended up broke and alone. He ended up miles away from his father, his parent, who had done nothing except love the boy.

[ 7 : 09 ] That's true for every lost soul. That's a picture for everybody who is not saved. They're separated from God. God loves them. He looks for them.

But between him and them, their sins stand in the way. And then the boy, he began to be in need. This young man, he couldn't even do the basics. He didn't even have the resources to provide for the basics. He couldn't feed himself. Couldn't clothe himself.

He couldn't put a roof over his head. Sin took absolutely everything that he had and left him hopeless and left him helpless. And that's what sin does.

Rebellion, sin, call it what you will. It always promises the world. Satan, back in the garden of Eden, promised to Eve that she would be like God.

[ 8 : 10 ] That she would know good and evil. Sin promises the world. But all that it brings is hopelessness. All that it brings is desolation.

And all that it ultimately brings is death. It really does pay to live for sin. It pays dividends that you could never imagine.

It pays with broken lives. It pays with ruined marriages. It pays with shattered dreams. Broken families. These are all part of sin's pay packet.

Here's a Jewish boy. A well brought up Jewish boy. From a loving family. And he ends up feeding pigs. That was really rock bottom.

This boy would have been ashamed. Jesus' audience as he told them this story. As he relayed the events. How far the boy fell. Without Jesus' audience.

[ 9 : 16 ] They would have been shocked. At what the boy came to. If we let sin rule in our lives. Shame always comes.

Sooner or later. The shame of a wasted youth. The shame of a wasted life. The shame of all the wasted opportunities. When Jesus comes.

And he knocks at the door of our hearts. And we turn him away. But worst of all. There's the shame. Of a wasted eternity.

What a disgrace. Nobody cared for this boy. Nobody loved this boy. Everybody looked down on him. He's starving.

He's in the pig pens. He's starving. He would have eaten the pig's food. If he could have got off with it. All because of the stupid. Selfish. Self-centered choices. That he had made.

[ 10 : 14 ] What a state. He ended up in. But you know what? That state was the first step.

In getting this man. This young lad home. Jesus says in verse 17. Of the chapter of Jesus. Jesus says. He came to himself.

The boy got his head straight. The boy started thinking right. He started thinking about home. He started thinking about his father. He started thinking about the love that was there.

He started thinking about where he had come from. And he remembered that there's no place like home. And so he gets up. And he heads home.

And he heads home with a plan. He hatches a plan. Even the servants. Even the slaves. In his father's house. Are better off than him. In the pigsty.

[11:12] And so he goes home. To be just a servant. In his father's house. The son goes home. And he's still wearing the rags.

He's still wearing the clothes that is on his back. They're all he's got. They're all that he's got left. Of everything that he was due. He's filthy.

He's stinking. Of the pigsty. Before he gets to the door. Before he gets home. Before he gets the chance.

To knock on the door. Or put his hand on the lever. And open the door. His father sees him. And he runs to him. And if that's not a picture of love.

I don't know what is. The father sees him. And he runs to him. This is where we meet. We met the renegade son. This is where we meet the running father.

[12:12] Father has spent his days. Scanning the horizon. For just one glimpse. Of a familiar shape. Of his son.

Of his younger son. Who he last saw. With his back turned to him. Resolutely heading for the far country. And every day. Every morning. I can see him coming out of his house.

And the first thing that he does. In the morning. As the sun rises. Is gaze down the road. And see. If his son is coming. Maybe today. Maybe he'll be home today.

Maybe he'll see him today. The last thing he would have done at night. As dusk fell. As the shades came.

Was take a last look. Down the road. And say. Well maybe tomorrow. Maybe he'll be home tomorrow. I pray that he'll be home tomorrow. Every day.

[13:09] His son was on his mind. He knew. He knew where the boy had gone. He wasn't under. Any misapprehensions. To the kind of life.

That this boy was living. This reckless life. That the boy. Had dived head first into. But he still wanted him back. He still wanted him home.

He still wanted to wrap his arms around him. Because he loved him. He still loved him. And he loved him deeply. And that's a picture of our heavenly father.

Because that's true. About how God looks at us. He's looking out. He's searching. He's waiting. He's looking. He's longing. For us to come home.

But he's not blind. To the way we're living our lives. He still sees us. When we're far away. He's seen everything. That we've done. Every single wrong thing.

[14:11] That you and I have done. Every wrong word we've said. Every wrong thought. We've entertained. In our heads. In our hearts. He has had a front row seat.

To all of that. There's nothing that you and I have done. That he has missed. That's passed him by. That's caught him unawares.

He's seen it all. He knows. What we're like. And he's more honest about us. Than we are about ourselves. But he still yearns.

He still longs. For us to come back home. Our God. Our Father. He loves us enough.

To give us his own beloved son. So that we could be saved. That's how far his love goes. He was willing to give. His only begotten son.

[15:10] So that he could have you and me. As sons and daughters. Look at the compassion of this father. As soon as he catches sight of the boy. Now remember.

His son doesn't look anything like. He did when he left. He would have been clean and tidy. And well dressed. And well groomed. And well shod when he left. But he comes back.

And he looks like a tramp. He's been through the mill. Doesn't even smell like he did. When he left this boy. Because he spent his time in the pig pens.

Like living in a sewer. But when the father sees him. When his eye catches sight of him. He forgets all of the hurt. He forgets all of the lonely.

Heartbroken days. He forgets all of the miserable hours. He spent longing and praying. That his son would come back. Because all that matters is. That his son is back.

[16:10] Look at him. Here he comes. Look at him down the road. Ah but he's coming slowly. Look how his head is down.

Look at how he's bowed. Look at what life has done to him. Look how broken he is. This story. This parable is called.

The prodigal son. But somebody said. That a better name for this. A more significant. A more fitting name.

For this story. Would be the running father. God. Because when the father. Catches sight of his son. When he catches a glimpse. Of that shape. That he loves.

That he's known. From a baby. He runs. And he kisses him. And he kisses him. And he holds him. And he kisses him. Again. And again. And again. Why all the excitement?

[17:07] Wasn't he angry with the boy? I know as a father. That. Your children. Know just exactly. The right buttons. To press.

To release. The worst side of you. Sometimes. And when you get angry. Oh boy. Sometimes. It's. It's not pleasant.

For either you or them. But this father. Wasn't angry. And this father. Didn't go up to his son. And said. Yeah. Look at the state of your boy. Look at the life.

Look what life has done to you. I told you so. You should have stayed home with me. You should have stayed here. Like I said to you. I told you so. It was none of that.

Because this father. Is so overjoyed. To see the boy. That he runs. And this is noteworthy. This is something significant. This is something special. That this father does here.

[18:04] It's completely out of character. For eastern men. Of that time. It was something. That they just. Did not do. They did not. Break their stride. They walked. They did not run.

But this father. Doesn't care. Doesn't care. About his dignity. He runs. As fast. As his two legs. Will carry him.

And he runs. To his son. It was a beneath his dignity. Normally. To run. Broke all the conventions. For the head of a family house.

To run. Especially to a child. But this father. Is bursting. With joy. He's bursting. With love. He's desperate.

To wrap himself. Around his son. He'll do anything. To get to his boy. And so he runs. And when he gets to him. He wraps. His arms.

[18:59] Around. His son. He clings to him. And he embraces him. And he hugs him. And he takes hold of him. And it's like he's never. Going to let him go.

Why did he cling to him? Many. Many reasons. Why he clung to him. He loved the boy deeply. This was his youngest son.

And he had a special place. For his youngest son. Rebel. Though he was. And his prayers. Had been answered. He'd been praying. Every day. Every night. Every morning. All of his waking hours. He'd been praying. That this boy. Would come home. And here he was. And he was bursting. With joy. That his prayers. Had been answered. But maybe.

Because he was a Jewish man. The head of a family. Because he had brought. His children up right. Because he knew. God's word. Maybe he knew. That the law.

[20:02] The Jewish law. Demanded. That sons. Who behaved. As this boy. Had behaved. The law demanded. That they be put to death. That they be killed.

In Deuteronomy. Chapter 21. In verse 18. There's a law. That says this. Let me read this to you. Deuteronomy 21. Verse 18. Says this. If a man has a rebellious son. Who will not obey his parents. And. Though they discipline him. Will not listen to them. Then his parents.

Will bring him to the elders. Of the city. And say. Our son is stubborn. And rebellious. He will not obey our voice. He is a glutton. And a drunkard. And do you know what the punishment.

To be meted out. On sons. On sons. On children. Who behaved like that was. Then the men of the city. Shall stone him to death.

[21:03] The father. The running father. Loved. His renegade son. Who wanted him dead. The son wanted him dead. But the father loved him.

And he loved him so much. That when he got to his son. He wrapped himself around him. And he put his own body. Between him. And the punishment. That he deserved.

Any stones. That would have been thrown. In the direction of the son. Would have hit the father first. What a picture of God's love.

That is. What a picture of what God did. For you and me. That is. God looks for. Our heavenly father looks for.

He longs for. And he loves. All. Who come to him. And when you take a step. Of faith. Of faith. Towards God. He moves. Towards you.

[22:00] He runs. To us. He embraces us. He clings to us. He puts himself. Between us. And his anger. And his punishment.

Against sin. Because that is what Jesus did. On the cross. All of God's anger. All of God's anger. All of his hatred. All of his wrath. All of his punishment. Against our sin.

Against our sin. Yours and mine. Was poured onto Jesus. So that we could be saved. From the punishment. That we deserve. The punishment.

Hit Jesus. Not us. Somebody said. That God. Took an eternity. Of what we deserve. That he bound it up.

Into a moment. And that he unleashed it. Onto his son. At Calvary. So that he could give us. An eternity. That we don't. Deserve.

[ 22 : 58 ] God. Protects us. The father. Protected. The son. From the punishment. He deserved. God.

Protects us. By Jesus Christ. From the punishment. For sin. That we deserve. And that's love. And that's the father's love. The boy had come home.

With a plan. He wanted to be a hired servant. A hired servant. Were lower than slaves. Slaves. Could become part of the family.

They belonged to the family. Hired servants. Were just people. Who could be hired. And fired at will. The boy didn't think. That he deserved. To be a son.

Anymore. The boy was worried. About being turned away. Because of what he'd said. Because of how he'd lived. Because of what he'd done. With his inheritance.

[ 23 : 57 ] But that's not what happened. My friend. You don't need. To worry. About God. Turning you away. When you come to him. Because he loves you.

Because his word. His living word. Is full. Of his love. For you. From the first page. To the last page. It's all. About his love.

For you. And if you come to him. You will find welcome. You will find love. You will find. That he holds himself.

To you. He won't find. Rebuke. Jesus himself said it. In John chapter 6. All that the father gives me. Will come to me. And whoever comes to me. And that's an important word there.

Whoever. Because that's open to everybody. Whoever. Whoever. Comes to me. I will never cast out.

[ 24 : 53 ] You will find welcome. Like you've never known. Welcome before. But the son. He comes home. He plans. To be a hired servant. And he's got this speech.

He's probably been working it out. In his head. Just exactly. What he's going to say. How he's going to say it. And he starts this speech. The father interrupts.

Cuts straight across him. Yes. That's all very fine and well. The father doesn't want. Another hired servant. The father doesn't even want. A slave. The father wants a son.

Boy stands there. Before him. In front of him. He stands. In rags. He stands there. Stinking. He stands there. Wearing the legacy.

Of his ruined life. He looks like a tramp. Doesn't look like a son. What does the father do? He orders his best robe.

[ 25 : 49 ] Not just any old robe. But his best robe. For the boy. And he puts it on him. And this robe. Covers all of the dirt. That the boys.

Picked up. All of the rags. That resulted. From his wasted life. Took away all the stains. Of his sinful. Reckless past.

Took away the stench. Of the pigs. In fact. To somebody passing by. This robe.

This robe. Made the son look. Just a little bit more. Like his father. A little bit more. Like the family. He belonged to. And this robe.

Is a symbol. Of what every sinner. Is given by God. When we come home. Isaiah says. The prophet. In chapter 61. He says. I will rejoice in the Lord.

[ 26 : 46 ] Why? Because he has covered me. With a robe. Of his righteousness. That's Jesus righteousness. It's given to everybody. Who trusts in him.

All of the pain. All of the stain. All of the stench. Of our past lives. All of that is gone. It's all covered. All of the dirt. And the filth. Of a life of sin. Is wiped away. Forever. And there are times.

When we begin to look. A little bit like our father. We start to show. A little family resemblance. Maybe not much. Maybe. Certainly not as much.

As we'd like to. But. Certainly. We're seen by our father. As if we'd never left home at all. Because it's Jesus righteousness.

[ 27 : 45 ] And that's perfect. After the robe. The father sends for the ring. Ring was special. If you wore a ring. That meant you were a son.

And if you had the ring. You were a son. And you could speak. On behalf of your father. And sons have all of the access.

To all of the resources. That their father has to offer. And when we're saved. We become God's children. And we're given the privilege. Of speaking. For our father.

Into this unbelieving world. We get the privilege. Of living lives. That are letters. That are read of men. We get to speak. In our words. And in our actions.

In our lives. To this world. We also have access. To all that belongs. To the father. And he opens. The storehouses.

[ 28 : 41 ] Of his grace. And he gives us. Everything. That he has to offer. Jesus' words again. He says. Fear not. Because it's your father's will.

To give you. The kingdom. Your father wants. To give you. The kingdom. His kingdom. And then he calls. For shoes. Only slaves.

Went barefoot. Sons. Wore shoes. Boy just wanted. To be a servant. That was his plan. That was. When he spent. The days. And the journey.

And the way home. Working out. In his head. Hatching the scheme. He would go home. He would be a son. He would get a roof. Over his head. He would get. Three square meals. A day. He would be dry.

He would be warm. That's all he thought. He was worth. Because of the life. That he lived. But the father. Thought differently.

[ 29 : 39 ] The father. Had a different plan. The father. Was determined. To make this boy. A son. This is. My son.

He says. Did you notice that? This is. My son. If you've been saved. If you know Jesus. As your savior.

Then you are not. A nobody. You are a child. Of God. He doesn't see you. As a slave. He doesn't see you.

As a minion. Just to mindlessly. Do his bidding. He sees you. As his darling. Child. He sees you. As his beloved. He loves you. Just exactly. The way. That he loves. His only begotten son. Jesus Christ. There may be times.

[ 30 : 35 ] That come. Where you don't feel. Particularly loved. Or particularly close. Let me tell you this. My friend. Do not let. The devil.

And his works. Do not. Do not let him. Keep you down. By saying. That you don't deserve. To be a child of God. Do not let him.

Kid you into thinking. That you are not worth. Saving. Because none of us. Are worth it. I certainly am. Not. None of us.

Are worth. What Jesus did. But if you are saved. You have been chosen. You have been accepted. By God. Because of what Jesus did. And Jesus did it. Because he loved you. And you are worthy. Because what Jesus did.

[ 31 : 32 ] His sacrifice for you. Was worthy. This is my son. But there was another son.

We met the renegade prodigal son. But there was also the sulking son. Who sat outside. And had a strop. The fatted calf.

Was called for in verse 23. As a calf kept for special occasions. For special guests. And the father calls for it. Because he wants fellowship for the son.

I heard. A story about a highland farmer. Who was reading this. And he says. Well. That shows that the father. Was preparing for the son. Because you can't. Fatten a calf. Just in a minute.

The father had planned for this. All along. He had the celebration in mind. Every day. As he looked for his son. And God. Has that celebration. That fellowship. Prepared for you.

[ 32 : 31 ] When you come to him. Before. It was like the boy was dead. And now he's home. And the father and son. They can rejoice together. They can embrace each other.

They can enjoy. Each other's company. They can have fellowship. Our father rejoices. Over each and every sinner. Who repents. We saw that. In the earlier part.

Of the chapter. The joy that there is in heaven. Even when one soul. Turns to Christ. Not only does he rejoice. But he allows us to have fellowship with him.

And the father here in the story. He invites everybody that he can speak to. To the celebration. Everybody to come. This my son. He was dead. And he's alive. Let's celebrate that. But where's his older brother? Where's the one that he spent every day with. He grew up beside. Well he's sulking. And he stays away.

[ 33 : 33 ] This guy had stayed at home. He hadn't indulged himself. He hasn't really enjoyed much from his father. Either. He complains that he's not had a goat.

To party with. Never mind a fatted calf. He may have stayed. This boy. This older son. May have stayed in the father's home. Working the father's field. But he didn't love the father. Like he should have done. He may have been at home. But his cold. Hard heart. Was just as far away. In the far country. As the prodigals was.

Jesus was singling out the Pharisees here. Jesus was pointing at them here. When he was talking about this. They were cold. They were hard. They were harsh. But unfortunately for us.

This too is a picture of. Of some people who are maybe around the family of God. Who attend church regularly. And take pride in that. That their place is never empty.

[ 34 : 31 ] But they don't enjoy the fellowship. That there is in Jesus Christ. They don't enjoy the fellowship. That there is with the father. Through Jesus Christ. They don't rejoice.

When they see or hear that somebody is saved. In fact maybe there is a touch of jealousy there. They don't think that that person deserved it. The fact is.

Not all prodigals leave home. Some stay at home. And sulk. What a blessing for this family. If this older brother had got up.

Had got over himself. And had run with his father to greet the boy. What a difference there would be in God's house. If all of those of us.

Who are already here. If we would join the father in searching. Combing the highways and byways. The hedgerows. For those who aren't home yet.

[ 35 : 37 ] And rejoiced with him. When they finally do return. What a blessing that would be. This parable is left.

Open ended. We never really do find out. If the brother. Eventually went into the feast. Whether he reconciled.

With the younger brother. We just don't know. Because Jesus left this story. Like this. To allow his audience. The scribes.

The Pharisees. The cold and the harsh. The unsaved. The publicans and sinners. He allowed them. To write the final paragraph. Of themselves.

For themselves. You too. Get to write the final paragraph. Today. Have you been. In the pigsties of life.

[ 36 : 34 ] Have you. Been. At rock bottom. Where you felt that you couldn't get. Any lower. Why not come home. Why not discover. The father's love.

For yourself. Because he will receive you. He will embrace you. He will fold his. Loving. Arms. Around you. He'll cover over your past.

With Christ's righteousness. And he will restore your soul. He will say. This is my son. This is my daughter. And he will cling to you. And he will never. Let you go.

Maybe you're like the older brother. Today. Maybe there's a touch of that. In you. You're here in the father's house. Every week.

Your place is never empty. And that's a good thing. But there's not much joy in it. And that's not a good thing. You see other people.

[ 37 : 32 ] Being saved. People who don't. Deserve it. People with lives. Stained by drink. By drugs. People whose lives.

Have been. A train wreck. From beginning to end. People who have wasted. Everything that they've had. With reckless living. Even people who've never really.

Bothered. Much with church. Well let me tell you this. And with this I'm done. The Bible says that salvation is not a reward for the righteous.

Salvation is not a reward. It's not a medal that gets pinned on your chest for living a good. Clean. Upright life.

It's not a badge that you get given. As you go through the gates into glory. Because you lived a clean life. Salvation is a gift for the guilty.

[ 38 : 39 ] That's what it is. It's something that God gives us. And why does he give us? Salvation. He gives it because he loves us.

And because we need it. Maybe it's time to come to the feast. Maybe it's time for you to come to the Father.

Friends there's no place like home. It's a place beyond belief. There's no Father like our Father. There is nobody that has loved you.

Like he loves you. The doors open. Tables set. Everything is ready. And our Father is watching and waiting.

To welcome. To embrace. To cling to. Anybody. And everybody. Who will come. So come. Come home. Amen.

[ 39 : 39 ] Let's pray. Eternal Father. We thank you for the love. That you have for us. We thank you. That your word. When John said what God was.

He said God is love. We thank you for your love. We don't deserve your love. We deserve nothing but hell. But that's not what you give us.

You give us love. Help us Lord. To bask in your love. And to give thanks for your love. Through Jesus Christ.

Amen. Let's. Sing. In conclusion. From the Sing Psalms version.

Of Psalm 130. From the beginning of the psalm. We'll sing a whole psalm together. Lord from the depths. I call to you. How like the prodigal that is.

[ 40 : 38 ] Lord hear me from on high. And give attention. To my voice. When I for mercy cry. Lord in your presence. Who can stand. Of you our sins record.

But yet. Forgiveness is with you. That we may fear you Lord. Psalm 130. Page 173. In the psalm books. The whole of the psalm.

From the beginning. To God's praise. Lord. From the depths. I call to you. Lord. Hear me from on high.

I'll give a message. To my voice. When I for mercy cry.

Lord in your presence. Who can stand. With you. With you.

[ 41 : 48 ] Our sins make hard. But yet forgiveness. Is with you.

That we may fear you Lord. I wait. I wait. My soul waits for the Lord.

My hope is in His word. For mercy is with you.

With Him. And all redeemed. From their sins.

His people. He'll redeem. Then be the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 43 : 16 ] The love of God the Father. And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Abide with us all. Now and forevermore. Amen.