

# *the* RETURN *of the* PRODIGAL SON MORE *than a* STORY

## **Day 1 — READ Luke 15:1-2.** *To whom is Jesus speaking?*

Have you ever read a story in Scripture and made a judgment about one of the characters? For example, perhaps you think Jonah was being an idiot for not listening to God the first time he was told to go to Ninevah. You may think, “If God had asked me, *I* would have gone right away.” Or maybe you’re on the other side of the story thinking, “I can totally relate to Jonah. I would have run in the other direction too.”

Relating to people in the story is a key piece to reading the story of The Prodigal Son. USING the scripture today, which group of people can you relate with—the Pharisees or the “sinners?” Why? To whom is Jesus speaking? Would you sit at the feet of Jesus or stand in the back withdrawn?

## **Day 2 — READ Luke 15:3-10.**

THINK of a time when you may have lost something of value. Some common valuables to lose would be a pet, your phone, a wedding ring, keys, or a wallet. How did you feel? What did you do? Did you find it, and how did you feel when you had it in your hands again? Have you ever celebrated with a friend or family member when they’ve found something they lost?

IMAGINE God losing His children. First heartbreak, and then an all out search for them. He rearranges circumstances as the saints pray. SPEND some time feeling the depth of joy in celebration as His children return to Him. “There will be more rejoicing in heaven,” and “rejoicing in the presence of angels of God” for those who repent. ASK God to reveal to you His heart for finding His children. Who are you helping to find his/her way back to God?

## **Days 3-5 — READ Luke 15:11.** *What’s in the painting?*

Over the next few days, REFLECT on the man and his two sons in the painting by Rembrandt. If you didn’t pick up a copy at the Welcome Center, you can find a picture on our website [www.jacobswellec.org](http://www.jacobswellec.org). JOURNAL your answers to these questions.

### *Light as the focus*

- Where does Rembrandt focus light in the painting? Why do you think he’s done this?
- What are your thoughts about the sections of light and dark in the painting?
- What questions do you have about the painting?

### *Stories within a story*

- If you could write a short story about the journey of the prodigal son, how would it go? DESCRIBE his feelings throughout the journey.
- What is the older son thinking and feeling as his father celebrates the return of this long lost child? What has his life looked like since his brother left home?
- What has the father experienced since his son asked for his inheritance? How much time has passed? How often does he think about his son? Pray for his son? Imagine the return of his son?

### *The author’s story within the painting*

- Did you know that Rembrandt’s arrogance and extravagance in his younger life led to bankruptcy and the loss of all his possessions?
- Did you know that he lost several children and his wife? Only a few family members survive him after he dies on 1669. Did you know that *The Return of the Prodigal Son* was one of his last paintings?
- Can you imagine the depth of experience in Rembrandt’s life that contributed to the depth of the painting? EXPLAIN how you may study the painting differently knowing his background.

### *Your story within the story*

- Which of the characters in the story can you relate to the most? Why?
- Can you relate to more than one of the characters? How so?
- Which person do you *sympathize* with the most?
- What is God revealing to you this week about your own story?

*It is easy to see others in such a story,  
but healing and depth come  
when we see ourselves in each aspect of the story.*

## **NEXT STEPS**

CONSIDER reading *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen. It’s one of the most in-depth looks at the story of The Prodigal through the study of Rembrandt’s painting.