

the RETURN of the PRODIGAL SON the FATHER

Day 1 — Luke 15:1-2

to whom is Jesus speaking

There are three characters in this story. Over the past few weeks, we've looked at "the sinners" (younger son) and "the tax collectors" (older son). This week we want to focus in on Jesus (father). In this scripture, with whom is Jesus sitting? How does he treat them? To whom is he speaking? **NOTICE** how no one in the story is excluded. **CONSIDER** how Jesus may be feeling towards the sinners and tax collectors as he tells this story.

Days 2 & 3 — Luke 15:20-24; 31-32

the heart of the father

This week as we consider the father, how does the father react to each of his sons? Does this seem strange to you? Does it seem fair after what they've done? How would you feel in his shoes? **LOOK** at how the father is feeling in these moments. What words are used? What feelings can you imply from the text?

READ the following writings from *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (pg 122-123) and **ASK** yourself the same questions. "But what of the father? Why pay so much attention to the sons when it is the father who is in the center and when it is the father with whom I am to identify? Why talk so much about being like the sons when the real question is: *Are you interested in being like the father?*"..."Who has truly challenged us to liberate ourselves from immature dependencies and to accept the burden of responsible adults? And aren't we ourselves constantly trying to escape the fearful task of fatherhood?" How comfortable are you in trying to picture yourself as the father?

Days 4 & 5 — What's in the painting?

the hands of the father

"We need to be a father who can claim for himself the authority of true compassion... I have come to know in a small way what it means to be a father who asks no questions, wanting only to welcome his children home." Henri Nouwen - *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (pg 22)

The life of Rembrandt is filled with sorrow. Not only does he lose everything he owns, but he loses his wife and five children as well. How many tears has he cried in his lifetime? What would he have given to hold his family in his hands once again? **EXPLAIN** how he, in Nouwen's words, "can claim for himself the authority of true compassion?"

Nouwen asks (pg 128) "Is there a way to this spiritual fatherhood?...Can I give without wanting anything in return, love without putting any condition on my love?" **STUDY** the painting for a time focusing on the father and keeping the previous two questions in mind.

Through the story of the prodigal as well as Rembrandt's painting, we can see three ways to take on the hands of compassion. **REFLECT** on how the following actions may have matured you in ways you wouldn't have expected.

- **Grief** allows us to experience the world in its full brokenness—broken relationships, broken dreams, broken bodies. Grief cracks open our hearts and allows God in to make amends. Grief allows us to receive anyone with compassion because of a shared brokenness.
- **Forgiveness** from the Father for our own offenses allows us to forgive others. That doesn't mean it isn't difficult, especially for deep or repeated wounds. But recognizing the mercy that God has bestowed on us allows us to face the pain and allows God to transform it into forgiveness.
- **Generosity** is all about pouring yourself out on others. This is the radically opposite response we would normally have, but it's the beautiful picture of the heart of God. Generosity reflects the love, kindness, goodness, and faithfulness of God. When we can live with true generosity, we are one giant step closer to knowing and becoming like the Father.

PRAY: Father, thank You for Your love and concern and that You haven't excluded me from Your story. Thank You for waiting for me when I'm lost and welcoming me home with celebration. I ask that You prepare my heart to become like Yours, to love without conditions, to share in another's brokenness, to forgive in all circumstances, to be generous with those around me. Give me a heart of compassion as You are compassionate. Guide me and love me as I take steps to become like You.