

**LUKE 15:11-32**  
**RESTORING A FAMILY**

Honour your father and your mother. Dad, I wish you were dead, so that I could get my inheritance today. Honour your father and mother. There's no mother in this parable, maybe she's in the background, or maybe Jesus just speaks of a single father so that we can more easily relate this parable to our single Heavenly Father. That's who the Father in the parable is meant to point to, but we can still look at this parable and reflect on how many children don't honour their earthly parents, let alone their heavenly Father.

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and other authorities, but honour them, serve and obey them, love and cherish them. This commandment points to our earthly parents – mothers and fathers or guardians, and other authorities whom God has placed over us in government, school, place of work and church, and ultimately it points to God, back to the first commandment of not having other gods.

This younger son had other gods. In the next chapter Jesus will say, "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Luke 16:13). The younger son chose money over father, over family, and over God.

This younger son can't wait until his father is dead so that he can get his share of the property and immediately convert it to cash. He doesn't remain at home to care for his aging father, but rather he goes off to a far away country. There, for years, he squanders his money in wild living. The older brother gets a jab into his younger brother adding that the money was spent on prostitutes.

And, this older brother isn't innocent in not honouring their father. He's disrespectful and not trusting the love of his father. He thinks that he has to earn his father's love by serving and obeying him. He's resentful that his younger brother didn't earn their father's love, or anything else that he had given him, but rather he wasted everything. However, the older brother didn't earn anything either. Love and possessions were given to him right from the beginning, and he never saw it.

Right at the beginning Jesus says the father divided his property between them. While the younger son took his share and sold it and went off to his wild living. The older son stayed home and tried to work to earn what his father had already given him.

The younger son seems to understand the situation better than the older son. To keep the fourth commandments means to honour our parents and other authorities by regarding them as God's representatives. And even before

returning to honouring his father Jesus says that “he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.” This young man is starving, and he’s out in a field with the pigs. If he’s that hungry to want to eat the pig food, why didn’t he just take some of it and eat it? That would’ve been stealing, breaking the seventh commandment, and not honouring his employer, breaking the fourth commandment.

Then in his starvation he comes to himself, as Jesus said, and realized that his father back home had food for the servants. So, he gets the bright idea to make himself a servant, just like his older brother thought of himself as a servant. Both sons struggled to receive the love of their father. Remember in this parable God is the father and we are the sons. Do you see yourselves in this parable from time to time. Do you struggle with the idea that God loves you unconditionally, and you don’t have to earn His love?

Well, this younger son realizes that he has sinned against his father, and against heaven. When you sin against any authority, parent or government that sin is also against God. Do you think you can work your way back into God’s good favour as these sons were trying to do? I hope not. None of us can earn our salvation.

The repentance of the younger son was great, but that doesn’t earn him his father’s forgiveness. Jesus has already died on the cross to pay for your sins. In fact, the sins of every human being have already been forgiven. What God does through the church is try to get you to realize and believe that your sins have been forgiven in Jesus.

This younger son starts to come home with his rehearsed confession in hand, but what the father does is even more amazing. So often we rehearse our repentance, thinking that if we say certain things that will appease the person whom we’ve offended, and our rehearsed speech will lead them to forgive us.

This father, God our Father, isn’t led to forgive us by the things that we say or do. This father is watching and waiting, hoping to see his son come home. Then he sees his son covered in pig filth. He sees his son having lost weight with the rags of his clothes hanging from him. He sees his son with no shoes on his feet or dignity in his step, and the father feels compassion.

Such a son who has disrespected his father to such an extent as to wish him dead so that he could have his father’s money isn’t deserving of his father’s love anymore. He should do what this young son is preparing to do, get down on his knees and grovel for forgiveness. Yet, before he could do that his father feels compassion for this rag covered filthy son of his. The father runs to his son. The father embraces his son. The father kisses his son.

All of what we see for the next ten verses is forgiveness in action. Both sons show how they try to earn forgiveness from their father because they don't trust their father, and so their father shows them why they should trust, honour, love and cherish him as their father. Earthly parents and other authorities will often fail in showing us that we should truly honour and obey them, but if they don't ask us to do things that are contrary to God's Word, then we're still to honour and obey them. We need to note that earthly parents do fail us as we go onto look at this example of a perfect father, because this is God our Father whom we're looking upon here, and not our earthly parents.

So, let's just call things what they are as we look at the rest of the parable. The Father is God, and the sons are us. God has come running to us, embraced and kissed us. Stunned as we are we still manage to mutter our rehearsed confession. We have sinned against our Father in heaven and are no longer worthy to be called His children.

Now, because words aren't going to be enough for us – God can tell us that He forgives us, but does He really forgive us, for that sin? – thus God shows us that He forgives us. He embraces us with the outstretched arms of Jesus from the cross. He cloths us with the robe of Christ's righteousness in our baptisms. A ring back then was the family seal, and God puts His seal on us in our baptisms. In our baptisms God seals us with His name – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are His children. Then we're given shoes for our feet, which is symbol in the Bible for the Gospel of peace (Ephesians 6:15). We're at peace with God. A meal is prepared for us, which could point to the Lord's Supper or the heavenly banquet feast.

Either way, God our Father tells us that we have died because of our sin and are alive again because of His forgiveness. Forgiveness is a restored relationship with God our heavenly Father, which can also be experienced in earthly families, and church families.

Yet, it can be hard to receive unconditional forgiveness. The parable ends with us not knowing if the older son ever received his father's forgiveness. The Father left the party and went out to His older son, just as He ran to His younger son, just as He comes to us where we hide ourselves from Him, or hang our heads in shame.

This is the kind of Heavenly Father that we have to love, honour and obey. This is the kind of Heavenly Father that all parents and authorities have as One they can model themselves after. Our Heavenly Father gives us all, especially when He gave us the life of His own Son for our lives. Our Father forgives all by covering our sin with the righteousness of Jesus. Our Father welcomes all to come home to Him, in His church, and in heaven. All younger and older sons and daughters are welcome to come home here. Amen.