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**The Prodigal Son: God's unconditional love**  
**Luke 15: 11-32**

Ever felt like running away from home? Well don't!

The Bible story concentrates on the Father and his love for his two boys. One runs away in a most unpleasant way, treating his father as a cash machine. The other stays at home and resents everything his Father does. Both receive what they don't deserve, but the younger finds grace and forgiveness, while the older only finds bitterness inside himself unless he also turns away from his pride and bitterness.

Lets concentrate on the Father for a bit because Jesus is clearly saying that his Father, God, is like this. He was a wealthy man. How wealthy is not stated as that is not relevant to the story. What mattered to the younger brother was that his dad had money and money , he thought, would buy him happiness. How wrong he was! The father was amazing. He allowed the younger son to have his bit of the inheritance even though it hurt him. What grieved him most was that the younger son wanted more than his Father's love. He wanted freedom! So he left home for the bright lights and fun! But money cannot buy happiness or love. When things went wrong, his new friends dumped him and he was reduced to

finding a job at a time of high unemployment. He ended up starving.

Jesus said : <sup>17</sup> *"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'*

It dawned on him that his Father was a safe place! He knew his father treated everyone well. God is not cruel and maverick, he cares for every person. He realises he doesn't deserve the Father's love but his only hope is his father, so he heads for home.

What has the Father been doing while he was away?  
Among the daily routine, he was looking out for his son.  
Jesus is telling us God loves us and longs for us to turn to him.

And when he sees a distant figure stumbling down the road, he runs to meet him.

If you want to understand God's love, here is a picture to start with. God running down the road, so happy to see you stumbling towards him.

If you are not convinced by that, how about his reaction to the penitent son.

Fetch the Best robe, the best ring, the best meal. God's grace is super-abundant. It exceeds all we could think of.

Outrageous? Over the top? The older son thought so. What's the value of strict obedience if God forgives the runaway brother?

Your reaction to this depends on your understanding of the Father. What matters to the Father is that the younger Son comes home. Later in the story what matters to the Father would be that the older son shares in his father's joy.

Here is a description of God taken from Psalm 103:8-18

READ Psalm 103:8-18

It echoes God's description of himself in Exodus 34:6

*The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.*

John 3:16 puts it this way:

*<sup>6</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.*

We may not run away from home but we have all messed up in our lives at some time. And if you can admit it, frequently. And that is based on our own standards. Jesus is the real standard and we all fail to live up to his values in life.

That is why he came. He came to earth to be the way back to God. That is why Jesus died on a cross. He took the punishment for our sins.

Faced with all that love so freely offered, what we have to do is what the younger brother did. Go to him, in prayer, and say “*Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.*” What you will find is God eager to rescue you from the mess you are in. You need to receive his forgiveness and accept his love.

The alternative to receiving God’s love is awful. The younger brother could have stayed in the far country and died of starvation, the Older brother could have maintained his bitterness.

As John 3:16 goes on to say :

*<sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.*

*<sup>19</sup> This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.*

God loves you so much , he is like a Father looking out for his missing son and running down the road to meet him.

We have messed up, going our own way rather than his way. We need to turn to God and seek him and discover he has done amazing things for provide for your salvation.

Jesus died so we could receive forgiveness.

We have a choice and what we need to do is turn from our wrong ways and receive his salvation.