

## I. Read Luke 15:11-24

- A. This passage describes the remarkable parable of *the prodigal son*. According to the *New Geneva Study Bible*—

“The firstborn son was entitled to two-thirds of his father’s property (Deuteronomy 21:17). Sometimes the father would give the capital (which meant that he could not dispose of it himself, though the son could sell it) and return the income (if the son sold the capital, the buyer could not take possession until the father’s death). But to give the capital to one of the sons as in this parable was unusual.”

What is the central theme of this parable?

**The primary or central theme is the father’s willingness to welcome and forgive a wayward son.**

How does this theme relate to God’s willingness to forgive a repentant sinner?

**It demonstrates clearly that God will forgive even the most foolish and destructive behavior.**

- B. In vs. 11-13, how is the essence of sin’s power portrayed?  
**It is the power of covetousness. The younger son wanted what pleasures the world offered so much that he would squander his inheritance. Once he surrendered to it, he was headed down a path that could only lead to destruction.**

How does James 1:13-15 describe the same thing?

**In these verses, James clearly describes the manner in which our sinful flesh (the old nature) desires what it should not have. This wicked desire becomes lust, leading to the commission of sin, resulting in death or destruction.**

- C. How does Paul explain the struggle he faced? (Read Romans 7:14-25.)  
**Paul explains that though he has been regenerated and thus has a new nature, he still retains the old nature (the flesh) as well. While the new regenerate nature is dominant, he is still not free from the struggle with the old man. This struggle bothers him and he wishes he were entirely free of the old nature. Those folks that are not conscious of a struggle between their flesh and their regenerate nature have a serious problem.**

What term do we use to refer to the spiritual struggle in which we slowly, yet progressively, become more Christ-like?

**Sanctification.**

- D. Would the younger son in the parable of Luke 15 represent a believer or an unbeliever?  
**Since he is referred to as the *younger son*, it would seem to correspond with a believer’s *adoption* into the family of God; hence he would be a believer. However, in the larger scheme of things, it doesn’t really matter. The point is that God is willing to forgive the repentant sinner, no matter what he has done! This is true for the new convert who has yet to be justified as well as the believer who has allowed sin to break his fellowship with the Father.**
- E. In Luke 15:14-16, we read of the depths one caught up in sinful behavior may fall to. Read 2 Peter 2:18-22 and explain the consequence for one who knows the truth, yet chooses to stray.  
**Like the prodigal son who fell so far that the pig’s food began to look good to him, one pursuing a course of sin will “return to its own vomit” and “wallow in the mire” (NAS). The**

point seems to be that you cannot play with sin; once started down a destructive path, you may have to *bottom out* before you come to your senses.

- F. In Luke 15:17-20, the prodigal son's repentance is described. In what way does it model true repentance for all men?

**It has a rational element, an emotional element, and a volitional element. As he "came to his senses" (NAS) he realized the folly of sin and the destructiveness of rebellion. He must have come to hate his sin as he saw what it had done to him. He then made a decision to return to his father — "I will get up and go to my father" (NAS). Thus, all three elements are represented. While the degree of our understanding of sin and hatred of it will vary in degree depending on our maturity, the volitional aspect will be the same if true repentance is present.**

- G. What is the key element of repentance?

**It is change. Though repentance involves intellectual and emotional elements, the proof of the pudding is in the willingness to change. The prodigal son said "I will get up and go" (NAS).**

- H. What aspect of the process of repentance is portrayed in Luke 15:18b-19?  
**Confession to God the Father.**

How does Scripture instruct us in this regard? (Read 1 John 1:8-9.)

**We must confess our sins to the Father as we become aware of them. The Scriptures make it clear that we have direct access to the Father, in Christ, and need not go through someone else to confess. That doesn't mean that confession to someone in spiritual authority over us may not be beneficial at times (see James 5:14-16), but this is never necessary to obtain forgiveness from God.**

- I. What was the father's response to the repentance of the prodigal son?

**Not only a willingness to forgive but also a celebration at his return. There were no recriminations and no "I told you so" — just joy at the son's return.**

What is God's response to us as we confess our sins to Him?

**This is described in Luke 16:8-10. All of heaven rejoices, certainly at our conversion and subsequent justification, but also during our sanctification as we are continually renewed after the image of God.**

***NOTE TO LEADERS: It must be understood that all of the above — the discussion of repentance, forgiveness, and God's loving acceptance of us — is a matter of His sovereign grace. This means that though we are called to repent of our sins in Scripture — "Repent, therefore, and return, that your sins may be wiped away" (Acts 3:19, NAS) — even the desire and willingness to do so — is a gift from God. The result of our understanding this is not a fatalistic antinomianism, which creates apathy, but rather a humble dependence upon God the Holy Spirit and the absolute unmerited favor of God. Paul discussed this in Romans 6:15 — "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? May it never be!"***