

The Prodigal Son

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“And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.” (Luke 15:13)

The prodigal son. What a great story of Jesus. One that is familiar to us and one that we know too well from personal experience. There are many interesting facets of this parable: the reason why Jesus told this; the attitude of the prodigal; the older brother who was lost at home; the loving father who mirrors our Father in Heaven.

Today, I want to focus upon just one aspect - the call of the far country. It was that distant country in the mind and heart of the prodigal that led him to approach his father about his inheritance, insulting as it was, since the father was still alive. There is something about that far country. The idea of adventure, excitement, thrills, and mostly living without the restrictions and rules of the father. It meant doing what he finally wanted to do. It meant the rejection of the way he was brought up. The far country tugged on his heart for a long time. I don't see this as being an impulsive whim but something that the prodigal thought and thought about for a long time. Finally, he mustered up the courage to approach his father. Finally, he was going to set out and go.

In Jesus' story, the far country was more than the dreams of a young man. We all have them. They are what motivate us through college and those early jobs. The dream of owning a house is what people in apartments think about. More space, your own yard, buying instead of renting. The dream of a decent full time job instead of sacking groceries. The dream of being married. We all have dreams. This is not what Jesus has in mind.

The far country or the “distant land” (NASB) was far from the way he was raised. It involved the immoral and the wrong. It is the sinful. There is an attraction and a pull. Sin does that to a person. The thrill of wrong. The excitement of sin. The appeal of doing what you can't do tugs on many hearts. The book of Proverbs tells us not to envy the evil doer. Hollywood does that. There are not very many movies about decent people just living each day with the Lord. But the bank robbers, the kidnappers, the wicked – they are glamorized in the movies.

The prodigal had been thinking about the far country for some time. He wanted to go. It began with a thought. Then those thoughts conquered what he knew was right and wrong. He fed those thoughts and kept them alive. He planned. He calculated. He was in the far country a long time before he ever approached his father. And that's the thought we need to consider.

Most marriages do not simply crash at a moment. One in the marriage has been thinking, and for a long time, about getting out. Just as the prodigal had thought and thought and in his mind he was already there, so it happens in marriages. The thought of leaving is fed and built upon. The person sees it, thinks it, until one day, they announce, I'm leaving.

The same concept happens within a church. Rarely does someone just decide to quit attending and quit walking with the Lord. It's gradual. It's a downward slippery slope. It begins by feeling disconnected to everyone else. Mistakes of others are highlighted. Misery is fed. The person starts thinking that there is nothing to church services. Those feelings accelerate until one Sunday the person decides no

longer to come. Guilt bothers them for a bit. They do it again, and again. And before long, they simply do not “believe the way the rest of you do.”

Three parallels here: a prodigal who ran from home; an unhappy mate that leaves a marriage and a discouraged Christian who leaves the church and God. All of these began with thinking about leaving. All knew it was wrong, but the far country called them and pulled on their hearts. Instead of defeating those thoughts, they fed them. They grew them. They could see this being a reality. Finally, they got the nerve to act upon them.

The far country still calls. What is a person to do? First, quit dwelling upon it. The far country means throwing away everything that you believe in and everything that is right and good. Feed your faith, not your doubts. Dwell upon what is right. Paul told the Philippians to let their minds dwell upon that which is good, pure and right (4:8). The Colossians were told to set their minds on things above (Col 2). Could it be that we are our own worst enemy?

The story of the prodigal tells us how wrong his thinking was. He wasted everything. He didn't think about famines. His friends left when the money left, and in the end the only one he could count on was his father. Life at home was far better than life with pigs. His dreams became a nightmare. Ruined, shamed, and guilty were not the experiences he anticipated. Nothing can be better than God's way! Nothing.

Got some far country stirring around in your heart? Be careful. It's not good. You know better. You know what's right. Time to get back to feeding your faith. God has always been good to you. He has treated you better than you deserve. The far country makes us only think of self: how happy I will be...how much I deserve this...how it's time for me to do what I want to do. Dumb thinking. Satan talk. Stick with the Lord, that's the answer.