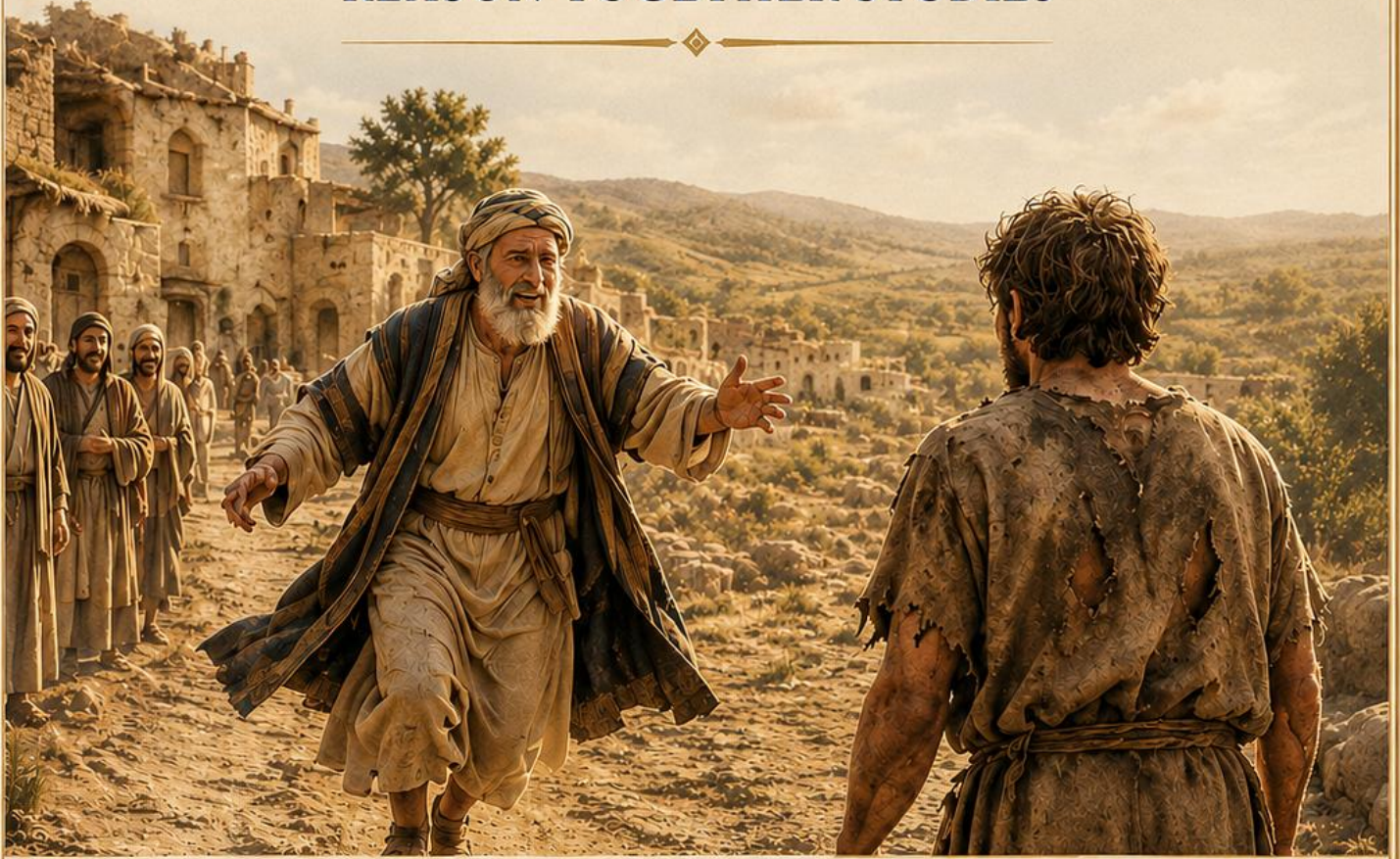


REASON TOGETHER STUDIES



WHY DID THE FATHER RUN?

Was He Rejoicing, or Was He
Rescuing His Son from Rejection?

Luke 15:11–32 KJV

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Aloha, church family.

It is wonderful to welcome you to Reason Together Church.

Whether you are here with us in the sanctuary or joining us online, thank you for spending this time with us.

If this is your first time here, we want you to know that you are among friends.

You do not need to pretend that you have every answer.

You are welcome to bring your questions.

You are welcome to open your Bible with us.

And together, we will reason through the Word of God.

Today's question grows out of one of the most familiar stories Jesus ever told.

People who have attended church for many years know the story.

People who have never opened a Bible may still recognize the phrase "the prodigal son."

We remember the inheritance.

We remember the far country.

We remember the riotous living.

We remember the famine.

We remember the pigpen.

We remember the robe, the ring and the fatted calf.

But there is one action in the story that we may read without stopping to consider it.

Jesus said that the father ran.

That raises our Reason Together question for today:

Why did the father run?

Was he simply rejoicing because his son had returned?

Or was he also rescuing his son from the rejection and public shame that might meet him in the village?

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for giving us Your Word.

Thank You for the stories of Jesus that remain familiar while continuing to reveal truths we have not fully considered.

Help us enter this parable carefully.

Help us see the younger son honestly.

Help us see the elder brother honestly.

Most of all, help us see the heart of the father.

Give us wisdom as we consider the culture surrounding the story.

Help us distinguish what Scripture clearly says from what history may reasonably suggest.

Protect us from repeating an interesting tradition as though it were a verse in the Bible.

Protect us also from reading the passage so quickly that we miss the costly and public nature of the father's grace.

Show us Jesus Christ.

Show us the seriousness of repentance.

Show us the wonder of restoration.

And if someone listening today is far from You, use Your Word to call that person home.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Our Scripture reading is Luke 15:11-32.

Jesus said:

"And he said, A certain man had two sons:"

"And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living."

"And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living."

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want."

"And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine."

"And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him."

"And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!"

"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,"

"And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."

"And he arose, and came to his father."

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

"And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

"But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:"

"And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:"

"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry."

"Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing."

"And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant."

"And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound."

"And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him."

"And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:"

"But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf."

"And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

"It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

Before we continue, let me briefly explain how giving works at Reason Together Church.

It does cost money to keep the lights on, provide ministry materials and carry the message beyond this room.

Our church family has been faithful in providing what is needed from week to week.

We do not pass a collection plate.

If you are visiting with us today, we are not asking you to give.

You honor us with your presence, and that is more than enough.

If you have a home church, we encourage you to support that church faithfully.

Members who choose to give may use the gift box or the online option.

Giving should be willing, cheerful and free from pressure.

If this is your first time with us, you may complete a guest card with only your first name and email address.

That is all we request.

Our Keiki Kids Center is available during our services and events.

After the service, please join us at the Reason Together Café.

We have free locally grown coffee, an RTC mug waiting to be filled and free refills on conversations.

Now let us return to the road leading home.

The story is often called the parable of the prodigal son.

That title is useful, but Jesus began by saying:

"A certain man had two sons."

There are two sons in this story.

There are two different forms of lostness.

And there is one father who goes out to meet both of them.

To understand why the father ran, we must first remember why Jesus told the story.

Luke 15 begins before the younger son ever requests his inheritance.

Luke writes:

"Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him."

And then:

"And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

That complaint is the doorway into the entire chapter.

The religious leaders did not complain that Jesus was unclear about sin.

They complained that He received sinners.

They objected to His welcome.

They objected to His table.

They objected to grace being extended to people they had already defined by their failures.

Jesus answered their complaint with three connected stories.

First, a shepherd had one hundred sheep and lost one.

He went after the one that was lost until he found it.

When he returned, he called his friends and neighbors to rejoice.

Second, a woman had ten pieces of silver and lost one.

She lit a candle, swept the house and searched diligently until she found it.

When she found it, she called her friends and neighbors to rejoice.

Then Jesus told the story of a father and two sons.

Again, something precious was lost.

Again, restoration produced rejoicing.

And again, not everyone was ready to celebrate.

The Pharisees saw categories.

Jesus saw people.

The Pharisees saw publicans and sinners.

Jesus saw lost sons and daughters who mattered to the Father.

The younger son began his rebellion while he was still living in his father's house.

He said:

"Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me."

We can make that request sound polite if we read it too quickly.

It was not polite.

An inheritance ordinarily comes after the death of the person who owns it.

The younger son wanted the father's possessions without the father's presence.

He wanted what his father could give him.

He did not want his father.

His request carried the cruel implication that the father was worth more to him dead than alive.

This was not merely poor financial planning.

It was rejection.
And the father divided his living between the sons.
The father did not stop loving the younger son.
But neither did he chain him to the furniture.
He allowed the son to make a real choice.
Love does not turn another human being into a prisoner.
God warns us.
God calls us.
God places truth before us.
But people may still choose the road toward the far country.
The text says that not many days later the younger son gathered everything together.
He did not leave a few belongings behind as though he expected to return next weekend.
He liquidated what he could.
He gathered all together.
He took his journey into a far country.
Distance was part of the attraction.
He wanted to live where his father's voice could not interrupt his plans.
He wanted a place where the family name would not restrain him.
He wanted freedom without accountability.
The far country has always advertised itself that way.
It promises freedom.
It conceals the chains.
It promises that nobody will tell you what to do.
It does not mention that someone or something else will eventually become your master.
The younger son wasted his substance with riotous living.
The word "prodigal" refers to reckless wastefulness.
He treated the product of his father's labor as though it were disposable.
He spent freely while the resources lasted.
And then the resources stopped lasting.
Jesus said:

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want."

Two events met each other.

He had spent everything.

The land entered a famine.

We do not control when the famine arrives.

That is one of the dangers of living as though resources, health, friendship and opportunity can never run out.

As long as the money remained, the younger son probably appeared popular.

When the money disappeared, Jesus said that "no man gave unto him."

The far country welcomed his spending.

It did not care about his soul.

He joined himself to a citizen of that country.

That man sent him into the fields to feed swine.

For a Jewish audience, the image was intentionally degrading.

The young man had traveled from his father's table to the feeding place of unclean animals.

He had wanted to escape serving his father.

Now he served a stranger.

He had wanted complete control over his possessions.

Now he did not control what he was allowed to eat.

He was so hungry that the food given to the swine appeared desirable.

And still, no man gave unto him.

Sin will take everything you are willing to carry into the far country.

Then it will leave you hungry beside what it promised would satisfy you.

But Jesus included one of the most hopeful sentences in the story:

"And when he came to himself."

Repentance began when the younger son finally saw his condition truthfully.

He stopped calling bondage freedom.

He stopped calling starvation independence.

He stopped pretending that the pigpen was the life he had always wanted.

He came to himself.

Sin produces a kind of spiritual insanity.

It persuades us that distance from the Father is liberty.

Repentance involves awakening to reality.

The son remembered his father's house.

He said:

"How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!"

Even the hired workers in his father's household were treated better than he was being treated in the far country.

The goodness of the father stood in contrast to the emptiness of the life he had chosen.

Romans 2:4 reminds us that the goodness of God leads us to repentance.

The son did not merely feel bad.

He did not simply become nostalgic.

He made a decision.

"I will arise and go to my father."

That is Biblical repentance.

It is not merely regretting the consequences.

It is not crying while remaining in the same pigpen.

It is a change of mind that produces a change of direction.

The father did not move the house into the far country.

The son arose and came to his father.

He prepared an honest confession.

"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee."

He did not blame the famine.

He did not blame bad companions.

He did not blame the citizen who sent him to feed swine.

He did not blame his elder brother for being difficult to live with.

He did not say that his father had been too strict.

He said:

"I have sinned."

That is where confession begins.

The son also understood that he had surrendered any right to make demands.

He planned to say:

"I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."

He left home demanding his inheritance.

He returned asking for employment.

He had once said, "Give me."

Now he planned to say, "Make me."

He did not expect restoration.

He hoped for survival.

He believed that perhaps he could live near his father while no longer being received as a son.

Perhaps he imagined years of labor.

Perhaps he hoped to repay a fraction of what he had wasted.

Perhaps he expected to stand at the edge of the household and prove that he was sorry.

But the father had a plan the son had never imagined.

Jesus said:

"And he arose, and came to his father."

That sentence is essential.

The son did not remain in the far country discussing his good intentions.

He arose.

He came.

Then comes the sentence at the center of our question:

"But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him."

The text does not tell us how often the father looked down that road.

It does not say that he sat on the porch every afternoon.

It does not tell us whether he had watched for months or years.

We should not claim details that Jesus did not provide.

But we can say what the text clearly says.

The father saw him while he was still a great way off.

The famine may have changed the son's body.

The pigpen may have changed his clothing.

Failure certainly changed the way he saw himself.

But the father recognized him.

The father did not see an unidentified beggar approaching the village.

He saw his son.

Then Jesus said that the father "had compassion."

The Greek expression points to deep inward feeling.

The father was moved from within.

He did not study the son with cold suspicion.

He did not begin calculating the remaining value of the estate.

He did not reach for a list of everything the son had done wrong.

He had compassion.

Then he ran.

That detail is easy for us to miss because modern fathers run.

We run for exercise.

We run through airports.

We run when we are late.

We occasionally run because somebody has announced that the food is ready.

But in the world of Jesus' parable, a dignified older landowner did not ordinarily gather his long robe and sprint down the village road.

Children ran.

Servants ran.

Young men ran.

Respected patriarchs were expected to walk with composure.

Running meant abandoning dignity.

It meant becoming a spectacle.

The father knew people might stare.

He ran anyway.

Why did the father run?

The simplest answer is already in the verse.

He saw his son.

He had compassion.

And compassion moved him toward the one who was returning.

That alone is enough to preach.

The father did not wait for the son to cross every remaining foot of the distance alone.

The moment the son turned toward home, he discovered that the father's compassion was moving toward him.

But there may be another layer to the picture.

The explanation shared in many sermons is connected with a Jewish practice often called the kezazah.

The word carries the idea of cutting off.

Some teachers have said that if a Jewish man lost his inheritance among Gentiles and later returned, villagers might meet him, break a clay vessel at his feet and declare him cut off from the community.

According to that interpretation, the father saw the son before the village saw him.

He ran because he wanted to reach his son before the rejection reached him.

It is a powerful picture.

It may preserve a reasonable possibility within a culture shaped by honor, shame, family and ancestral property.

But we must be careful.

The exact version of that ceremony frequently repeated today is not described in Luke 15.

The Bible does not say that villagers were standing along the road holding clay pots.

The surviving rabbinic discussions were written down later and describe related practices in circumstances that are not identical to this parable.

One concerns an unsuitable marriage.

Another tradition concerns ancestral property sold to a Gentile.

Those sources do not prove that every returning prodigal in first-century Galilee faced the exact ceremony described in modern sermons.

We should not turn a historical possibility into an additional verse of Scripture.

At Reason Together Church, we do not need to exaggerate the evidence to make the Bible powerful.

The text is already powerful.

So let us phrase the possibility honestly.

The father may have known that his disgraced son would face mockery, hostility or formal rejection as he entered the village.

He may have run, at least in part, to reach his son before the condemning community could reach him.

We cannot prove the precise ceremony.

But we do not need speculation to see the public meaning of the father's actions.

The father reached the son before the son reached the house.

He embraced him on the road where others could see.

He kissed him before anyone could require proof of repayment.

He publicly identified the returning man as someone under the father's welcome.

Whatever the village might have thought, the father had spoken with his embrace.

This man was not abandoned.

This man was not unclaimed.

This man was his son.

The father took control of the reception.

Before shame could deliver its speech, grace ran down the road.

Before accusation could list the son's failures, the father fell upon his neck.

Before the community could define him by the far country, the father identified him by relationship.

The son had expected to walk into the village carrying his disgrace alone.

Instead, he entered under the public embrace of his father.

Do not miss the cost to the father.

The younger son had already shamed him by demanding the inheritance and leaving.

Now the father accepted another moment of public indignity.

He ran.

He did not protect his own image.

He moved toward the son who had damaged it.

The father's love was not a quiet emotion hidden inside the house.

It became a public action on the road.

Grace is not God pretending that sin never happened.

Grace is God acting to rescue sinners who cannot repair what they have broken.

The father "fell on his neck, and kissed him."

The son returned smelling like the road and perhaps like the swine he had fed.

He had no new robe.

He had no restored fortune.

He carried no evidence of successful reform.

He had only repentance and an honest confession.

The father embraced him before he could prove himself.

The son began the speech he had rehearsed.

"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight."

That confession mattered.

Grace did not require the father to call rebellion harmless.

The son had sinned.

He needed to admit it.

He continued:

"And am no more worthy to be called thy son."

That was true in one sense.

He could not claim restoration as something he deserved.

But notice what he did not get to say.

In the pigpen, he had planned one more line:

"Make me as one of thy hired servants."

When he reached his father, Luke does not record him completing that proposal.

The father interrupted the plan to earn a place.

The father turned to his servants and gave orders of his own.

"Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him."

The son arrived wearing the evidence of his failure.

The father covered him with the best robe.

Many interpreters reasonably suggest that the best robe would have belonged to the father himself.

Whether or not we can identify its former wearer, its meaning in the scene is unmistakable.

The father did not give him a servant's work garment.

He gave him the best robe.

The robe publicly covered disgrace with honor.

The father continued:

"Put a ring on his hand."

The ring was not a sentimental souvenir from the gift shop.

It represented family identity, standing and authority.

The son expected to be placed among hired workers.

The father placed the family ring upon his hand.

Then the father said:

"And shoes on his feet."

Servants and the desperately poor commonly went barefoot.

The shoes reinforced the message.

He was not being received as disposable labor.

He was restored as a son.

The robe said honor.

The ring said belonging.

The shoes said sonship.

The father's embrace was followed by visible signs that the entire household could understand.

He was not restored secretly.

The father removed every reasonable doubt about how others were to receive him.

Then the father ordered the fatted calf to be killed.

This was not dinner for three people.

A fatted calf provided enough meat for a community celebration.

The father did not merely permit the son to sleep in the barn.

He called people together to celebrate the restoration.

If the community had been prepared to shame the son, the father gave them a different event to attend.

Not a ceremony of rejection.

A feast of reconciliation.

Not broken pottery.

Broken bread.

Not a declaration that the son was cut off.

A declaration that the son was alive again.

The father explained:

"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

Listen carefully to those words.

The younger man had just said:

"I am no more worthy to be called thy son."

The father answered, not by debating his worthiness, but by declaring the relationship.

"This my son."

The son defined himself by what he had done.

The father identified him by whose he was.

The father did not minimize the seriousness of the rebellion.

He said the son had been dead.

He said the son had been lost.

Those are not gentle descriptions of a minor mistake.

But the father did not stop the sentence there.

He was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found.

Grace does not rewrite the far country as though it were a healthy vacation.

Grace refuses to let the far country write the final chapter.

The father had run.

The son had confessed.

The household had responded.

The feast had begun.

And this would be a comfortable place for us to end the story.

But Jesus did not end there.

Remember the opening sentence:

"A certain man had two sons."

The elder son was in the field.

As he approached the house, he heard music and dancing.

He asked a servant what was happening.

The servant said:

"Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound."

The elder brother should have rejoiced.

His brother was alive.

His father was happy.

The broken family had an opportunity for reconciliation.

But the elder brother became angry.

He refused to enter.

The younger son had once left the father's house physically.

The elder brother now separated himself from the father's joy while standing just outside the door.

One son was lost in the far country.

The other was lost in the field of self-righteousness.

One broke the rules openly.

The other obeyed outwardly while resentment grew inwardly.

One said, "Give me."

The other said, in effect, "You never gave me."

Both sons measured the father by what they believed he owed them.

And notice what the father did.

The father went out again.

He ran to meet the younger son.

He came out and entreated the elder son.

The father moved toward both lost sons.

He did not say that the elder brother's anger proved he was beyond hope.

He pleaded with him to enter the joy of reconciliation.

The elder brother revealed his heart.

He said:

"Lo, these many years do I serve thee."

The word translated "serve" carries the sense of serving as a slave.

The younger son expected to return as a servant.

The elder son had remained home while thinking like one.

He did not understand his relationship with the father as the joy of sonship.

He saw it as a contract.

I obeyed.

You owe me.

He continued:

"Neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment."

That is an astonishing claim to make while publicly refusing his father's request.

Self-righteousness can make us blind to the disobedience occurring in our own sentence.

The elder brother wanted justice for the younger son and reward for himself.

He did not recognize how much grace he also needed.

Then he said:

"But as soon as this thy son was come."

He could not bring himself to say, "my brother."

He pushed the returning son away through his language.

"This thy son."

That is the voice of rejection.

That is the voice that says:

He may belong to you, but he does not belong to me.

The father corrected him gently.

"Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

The father reminded the elder son that he had never been treated as a slave.

He had lived in the presence and provision of the father.

Then the father restored the relationship the elder brother tried to deny.

"This thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found."

The elder brother said, "This thy son."

The father answered, "This thy brother."

The younger son's restoration changed the responsibilities of everyone in the household.

If the father had received him, the elder brother was called to receive him too.

Here the parable turns toward the Pharisees and scribes.

They had complained:

"This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them."

They were the elder brothers standing outside the celebration.
They had remained near religious institutions.
They knew the commandments.
They valued outward obedience.
But they could not rejoice when lost people drew near to Jesus.
The parable ends without telling us whether the elder brother entered.
Jesus left the door open.
The unresolved ending placed the decision before His listeners.
Would the Pharisees enter the joy of God?
Would they recognize restored sinners as brothers and sisters?
Or would they remain outside, nursing a grievance against grace?
That question now comes to the church.
We may preach beautifully about the father running toward the prodigal.
But how do we respond when the prodigal sits beside us?
What happens when the person smells a little like the far country?
What happens when the consequences of yesterday are still visible today?
What happens when God saves someone whose past makes respectable people uncomfortable?
Do we celebrate restoration?
Or do we stand outside rehearsing why that person does not deserve a robe?
The truth is that none of us deserved the robe.
None of us earned the ring.
None of us purchased a place at the Father's table.
Ephesians 2:8-9 says:
"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:"
"Not of works, lest any man should boast."
The far country and the elder brother's field look different.
But neither road can earn salvation.
The immoral sinner needs grace.
The self-righteous religious person needs grace.
The person who ran away needs grace.
The person who stayed nearby while resenting the Father needs grace.

There is another danger in the familiar title "the prodigal son."
We may assume the younger son is the only prodigal character.
The word can describe reckless extravagance.
The son was reckless in wasting the inheritance.
But the father was extravagant in extending compassion.
The son was wasteful with property.
The father appeared almost reckless with grace.
He ran when dignity said walk.
He embraced when shame said reject.
He clothed when resentment said expose.
He celebrated when accusation said punish.
The father was not careless about sin.
He was lavish in restoration.
This points us toward the Gospel.
The parable is not an exhaustive explanation of the cross.
We should not force every object in the story to represent a separate doctrine.
But the heart revealed in the father agrees perfectly with what God has accomplished through Jesus Christ.
We were not merely inconvenienced by sin.
We were lost.
We were dead in trespasses and sins.
We could not repair our relationship with God through labor.
We could not repay the debt.
We could not sew a robe worthy of His presence.
God moved toward us.
John 3:16 says:
"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."
Jesus left the glory of heaven and entered our world.
He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.
He ate with publicans and sinners.
He touched people others considered unclean.

He received those religious society rejected.

Then He went to the cross.

Hebrews 12:2 says that He "endured the cross, despising the shame."

The father in the parable accepted public indignity to reach his son.

Jesus accepted the shame of the cross to save sinners.

The father ran down a village road.

Jesus carried a cross outside the city.

At Calvary, He bore the judgment our sins deserved.

He did not merely shield us from the accusation.

He satisfied divine justice through His own sacrifice.

Second Corinthians 5:21 says:

"For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

Jesus died for our sins.

He was buried.

On the third day, He rose bodily from the dead.

The risen Christ offers forgiveness, reconciliation and eternal life.

The Gospel does not say that God overlooks the far country because He has become sentimental.

The Gospel says that Christ paid for sin.

Mercy and truth meet at the cross.

Grace is free to us because it was costly to Him.

What does that mean for the person who feels too far away?

It means the distance has not made you invisible to God.

The younger son was still a great way off when the father saw him.

You may look at your past and see nothing but wasted years.

God sees the person He is calling home.

You may believe that you must first clean yourself up.

The son did not bring a robe from the far country.

The father supplied the robe.

You may believe that you must work as a servant until you repay everything.

The father did not negotiate an installment plan on the road.

He restored the relationship by grace.

You may fear what people will say if you return.

The father's welcome is greater than the village's accusation.

People may remember the old story.

The Father declares that in Christ you are a new creature.

People may point toward the far country.

The Father points toward the feast.

People may call you by your failure.

The Father calls those who trust Christ His children.

First John 3:1 says:

"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."

But we must not remove repentance from the story.

The father ran toward a son who had arisen and was returning.

The young man came to himself.

He admitted his sin.

He changed direction.

Grace does not tell us to remain in the pigpen and simply think warmer thoughts about the Father's house.

Jesus calls us to repent and believe the Gospel.

Repentance does not purchase the Father's love.

It is the turning by which we stop fleeing that love.

The son did not return because he had made himself worthy.

He returned because he finally understood both his need and his father's goodness.

Perhaps someone listening today identifies with the younger son.

You know you have wandered.

You know that you have wasted opportunities, damaged relationships or ignored the voice of God.

You may have rehearsed a speech explaining why God should keep you at a distance.

Hear the invitation of Scripture.

Arise and come to the Father through Jesus Christ.

Do not wait until you can bring something impressive.
Come confessing the truth.
Come trusting what Christ has done.
Perhaps someone else identifies more closely with the elder brother.
You did not travel into the visible far country.
You remained near church.
You learned the language.
You served.
You followed rules.
But somewhere along the way, service became resentment.
You began keeping score.
You became more interested in who deserved the feast than in whether the lost had been found.
The Father comes out to you too.
He calls you away from pride.
He invites you into His joy.
It is possible to be near the house while far from the Father's heart.
Ask God to show you whether there is someone you continue to call "this thy son" when the Father is telling you, "this thy brother."
The church should resemble the Father's house.
That does not mean approving sin.
The father never called rebellion wise.
He said the son had been dead and lost.
But when repentance brought the son home, the father did not establish a committee to determine whether grace would look irresponsible.
He restored him.
Reason Together Church should be a place where truth and grace are both visible.
We will call sin what the Bible calls sin.
We will also receive repentant sinners as people Christ died to save.
We will not turn the sanctuary into an elder brother's porch.
We will not require people to pretend they have never visited the far country.
We will point them toward Christ.

We will help them grow in the Word.

We will celebrate when the lost are found.

And we will remember that every person at the table is there because of grace.

So why did the father run?

He ran because he saw his son.

He ran because he had compassion.

He ran because the son was coming home.

He ran because love was unwilling to remain motionless while the returning son carried shame alone.

He may also have run to reach the son before public rejection could reach him.

We cannot prove every detail of the commonly described ceremony.

But we can clearly see that the father's welcome became public before the son's restoration entered the house.

He ran into the place of shame.

He embraced the one who expected rejection.

He covered the one whose failure was exposed.

He claimed the one who believed he had forfeited the name of son.

He turned a road of humiliation into the entrance to a feast.

The final question is not simply why the father ran two thousand years ago in a parable.

The question is what we will do with the grace Jesus placed before us.

Will the younger son arise and come home?

Will the elder brother lay down resentment and enter the celebration?

Will the church reflect the Father's welcome?

And will we trust the Son of God who endured the cross and its shame to bring sinners into the family?

The Gospel invitation now comes to every one of us.

Romans 3:23 says:

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

You may have sinned in the far country.

You may have sinned while standing outside the Father's house.

Either way, you need a Savior.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

He lived the sinless life we have not lived.

He died upon the cross for our sins.

He was buried.

God raised Him bodily from the dead on the third day.

Salvation is not earned by working long enough as a hired servant.

It is received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Admit that you have sinned against God.

Believe that Jesus died for your sins, was buried and rose again.

Repent.

Turn from sin and from every false object of trust.

Place your faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Romans 10:9 says:

"That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved."

Romans 10:13 says:

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

You do not need to be inside this building to call upon Christ.

You do not need a pastor physically standing beside you.

You do not need to repeat a magical formula.

Speak to God honestly in your own words.

Confess that you are a sinner.

Tell Him that you believe Jesus died and rose again.

Ask Him to save you on the basis of Christ alone.

The prayer does not save you.

Jesus saves the sinner who places faith in Him.

If you make that decision here today, please speak with me after the service.

We would be honored to help you understand what has happened and connect you with faithful believers who can walk beside you.

If you are joining us remotely, please visit www.ReasonTogether.Church and use the contact information there to tell us about your decision.

We would love to hear from you and help you take your next step.

For those who already know Christ, remember the road home.

Do not stand at a distance rehearsing the prodigal's failures.

Join the Father's joy.

When repentance is real, make room for restoration to be real too.

Remember that you are not at the table because you earned the chair.

You are there because the Father is gracious.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the words of Jesus.

Thank You for the younger son who came to himself, arose and returned.

Thank You for the father who saw him while he was still a great way off.

Thank You for compassion that did not remain inside the house.

Thank You for the father who ran, embraced and restored.

Give us humility when we consider the historical setting.

Help us use cultural possibilities to illuminate the text without pretending that speculation is Scripture.

What we know is already glorious.

The father publicly claimed the returning son before accusation could define him.

Thank You that Jesus Christ endured the cross and despised its shame so that sinners could be reconciled to You.

For anyone still in the far country, bring conviction and clarity.

Help that person arise and come home through faith in Christ.

For anyone standing outside like the elder brother, expose pride, resentment and self-righteousness.

Teach us to rejoice when the lost are found.

Make Reason Together Church a place where truth is spoken faithfully and grace is extended freely.

Help us welcome people without approving sin.

Help us restore the repentant without forcing them to wear their worst moment as a permanent name.

Remind us that every robe, every ring and every place at Your table is provided by grace.

For those who have trusted Christ today, give assurance, courage and a desire to grow in Your Word.

May we leave remembering that before the community could have the final word, the father ran.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Thank you for being with us today.

Please join us at the Reason Together Café for free coffee and conversation.

If this was your first time worshipping with us, we do not simply say goodbye.

We say, Aloha Nui Loa.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Aloha.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S
COMMENTARY

WHY DID THE FATHER RUN?

Was He Rejoicing, or Was He Rescuing His Son from Rejection?

Luke 15:11-32 KJV

“But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.” Luke 15:20

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION The father ran because compassion moved him to reach his returning son while he was still far away. His public embrace and commands restored the son before shame, suspicion or rejection could define the homecoming. A connection with the later-described kezazah tradition is possible and illuminating, but Luke does not name that ceremony or say that the father was racing villagers carrying a broken pot.

The parable is familiar enough that many readers can tell its main movements from memory. A younger son demands his inheritance, travels to a far country, wastes everything and returns in desperation. His father sees him, runs to him, embraces him and celebrates his restoration. An elder son then refuses to join the celebration. The story is simple, but every movement answers the complaint that introduced it: “This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.”

The strongest answer to the title question comes directly from Luke 15:20. The father saw his son and “had compassion.” Compassion is not a detail added after the explanation. It is the explanation Luke places immediately before the run. The father closes the distance because mercy has moved him.

The cultural proposal adds another dimension. Some scholars suggest that the father ran to protect his son from the public rejection that could await someone who had dishonored his household and lost family wealth among Gentiles. Later Jewish literature describes symbolic breaking ceremonies called kezazah in connection with an objectionable marriage and ancestral property sold to a Gentile. These texts help us imagine the power of communal shame, but they do not establish the complete village-boundary banishment scene often repeated in sermons and videos.

We therefore do not have to choose between rejoicing and rescuing. The father rejoiced because the lost son was returning. His joyful compassion also rescued the son from being permanently named by the far country. Before a servant, neighbor or angry brother could announce what the son deserved, the father called him “this my son.”

CONTROLLING STATEMENT The father may have been protecting his son from communal rejection. Luke certainly shows him overruling rejection through a public welcome. Compassion moved faster than condemnation.

1. Luke 15 Begins With a Complaint

Jesus Received the People Religious Leaders Rejected

Luke tells us that publicans and sinners drew near to hear Jesus. The Pharisees and scribes murmured because He received them and ate with them. Their complaint was not simply that sinful people existed. They objected to the welcome Jesus extended and to the table fellowship that made His welcome visible.

Jesus answered with three stories. A shepherd searched for a lost sheep. A woman searched for a lost coin. A father received a lost son and then went outside to plead with another. Each story moves from loss toward recovery, and each recovery calls for joy.

The opening verses protect the parable from becoming only a lesson about parenting. The father and sons speak powerfully to family relationships, but Jesus first told the story to explain why He receives sinners and why religious people should rejoice when the lost return.

READING KEY Begin with Luke 15:1 and 2. The parable answers murmuring about grace.

2. The Father Had Two Lost Sons

One Was Lost Far Away and One Was Lost at Home

The younger son is visibly lost. He rejects life with his father, gathers his goods and leaves. His rebellion is easy to identify because it produces distance, waste and ruin. He eventually knows that he is hungry and unworthy.

The elder son is harder to recognize as lost. He has remained near the house, continued working and avoided his brother's scandal. Yet when mercy fills the house with music, anger keeps him outside. He describes years of obedience as slavery and measures his relationship with his father by what he believes he has earned.

The father goes out to both. He runs toward the younger son and later comes out to entreat the elder. Open rebellion needs grace, and religious resentment needs grace. The parable is not complete until both sons have been placed before the hearer.

PASTORAL WARNING A person can be distant from the Father in a far country or distant while standing near the house. Visible morality cannot substitute for loving the Father's heart.

3. The Younger Son Wanted the Goods Without the Father

The Inheritance Request Was a Relational Wound

The younger son asked for “the portion of goods that falleth to me.” Deuteronomy 21:17 gives the firstborn a double portion, so a household with two sons would ordinarily be divided into three shares. The elder son would receive two and the younger one.

Luke says the father divided unto them his living. The word translated living can refer to the means by which life is sustained. The request therefore did more than rearrange an account. The father's livelihood and household were divided so the younger son could convert relationship into possessions.

Preachers sometimes summarize the request with the sentence, “I wish you were dead.” That line communicates the severity of claiming an inheritance early, but it is an interpretive paraphrase rather than a quotation from Luke. A careful commentary can say that the son acted as though the father's property mattered more than the father's presence.

The tragedy of sin often follows the same pattern. We want God's gifts without God's rule, God's world without God's will and God's breath without gratitude to God. The far country begins in the heart before it appears on a map.

CLAIMS DISCIPLINE Describe the demand as a profound rejection of relationship, but do not place modern explanatory words inside the son's mouth as though Scripture quoted them.

4. The Far Country Exposed the Promise of Sin

Freedom Without the Father Became Bondage

The son gathered all together and journeyed into a far country. There he wasted his substance with riotous living. The verb carries the image of scattering. What the father had gathered through a life of provision was dispersed through the son's self-directed life.

When the wealth was gone, a famine arose. The son joined himself to a citizen of that country and was sent into the fields to feed swine. For a Jewish hearer, work among swine would represent more than an unpleasant job. The animals were unclean, and the scene strongly suggests life in a Gentile setting far from the covenant household.

The elder brother later accuses the younger of devouring the living with harlots. Luke records the accusation as part of the elder brother's angry speech. It may be accurate, but the narrator has not independently supplied that detail. The sermon is strongest when it says everything the text says without turning an angry brother's assumption into additional narration.

Sin promised independence and delivered dependence. The son who would not live under his father became subject to a stranger. The son who demanded his portion could not obtain food fit for animals. The far country did not create the emptiness in his heart. It revealed it.

PASTORAL INSIGHT God's warnings are not attempts to keep us from life. They protect us from roads that promise freedom and end in slavery.

5. He Came to Himself

Repentance Began With Truth and Became a Change of Direction

Luke says, “And when he came to himself.” Hunger forced the son to see his condition truthfully. He remembered that his father's hired servants had bread enough and to spare while he was perishing with hunger.

Some interpreters emphasize that his first motive was food and that his proposed hired-servant arrangement still treated the problem as an economic debt he might repay. That observation is useful. His understanding was incomplete, and grace would exceed the bargain he rehearsed.

Incomplete understanding does not require us to call the return fraudulent. He recognized that he had sinned against heaven and before his father. He resolved to arise, and then he arose. Biblical repentance includes honest recognition, confession and a real turning of direction.

The son did not repair his life in the far country and then present the father with an improved version of himself. He came home in need. Repentance brought him toward the father, and grace would show him that sonship could not be purchased through hired service.

BALANCED JUDGMENT Hunger may have awakened him and his plan may have been limited, but Luke portrays an actual return: he came to himself, arose, came to his father and confessed his sin.

6. The Father Saw Him a Great Way Off

The Father Was Attentive Before the Son Arrived

The son had not yet reached the house when his father saw him. The detail suggests longing and attentiveness. It is reasonable to picture a father who had often looked toward the road, but Luke does not tell us how many days he watched or whether he occupied a particular tower, gate or rooftop.

The words “a great way off” matter because they show that the father's response did not begin after a formal hearing at the door. Mercy saw the return while distance still remained. The father did not wait with folded arms to see whether the son could crawl the final steps.

God's knowledge is deeper than the father's vision in a parable. He knows the truth about every far country and every returning heart. The point is not that God must be persuaded to notice. The point is that His mercy is not reluctant when sinners turn to Him through Christ.

ASSURANCE The returning sinner discovers that the Father is not indifferent to the road home.

7. Compassion Is Luke's Stated Reason

The Father's Heart Moved His Feet

Luke places a decisive word between seeing and running: the father “had compassion.” The Greek verb describes a deep inward movement of mercy or pity. Luke uses the same word when Jesus sees the widow of Nain and when the Samaritan sees the wounded traveler.

Compassion in Scripture is not passive emotion. Jesus touched the widow's bier and raised her son. The Samaritan bound wounds, carried the injured man and paid for his care. The father in Luke 15 runs, embraces, kisses, clothes and celebrates. Mercy becomes action.

This is the surest answer to the question Why did the father run? He ran because he had compassion. Cultural background may help us appreciate the cost and public meaning of the act, but no reconstruction should displace the motive Luke explicitly gives.

FIRST ANSWER Before discussing villagers, ceremonies or robes, say what Luke says: the father ran because he had compassion.

8. Why Was the Father's Running So Striking?

A Dignified Household Head Abandoned Distance

In the honor-conscious world reflected in the parable, an established father would ordinarily be associated with composure and dignity. Running in public was not the expected movement of a respected patriarch. The father does not preserve his status at the cost of the son's isolation. He closes the distance himself.

Some descriptions say that he had to lift a long robe and expose his legs. Long garments would make gathering cloth likely when running, and the loss of decorum is credible. Luke does not describe how much cloth was lifted, what could be seen or precisely how every observer would react.

The important truth does not depend upon exaggeration. The father accepted public indignity rather than leave the son to walk alone beneath his shame. He valued reconciliation more than the appearance of restraint.

This creates a responsible bridge to Christ. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame, for the joy set before Him. The father's run is not itself the atonement, but it points toward a love that is willing to bear shame in order to restore the lost.

CULTURAL GUARDRAIL Say that the run was socially surprising and costly. Avoid presenting a precise robe-lifting scene as though Luke narrated it.

9. What Is the Kezazah Explanation?

A Popular Proposal About Community Rejection

The popular explanation says that a Jewish son who lost his inheritance among Gentiles could face a ceremony called kezazah, a symbolic cutting off. Villagers would meet him, break a pot and declare him severed from the community. The father therefore ran to reach the son before the people could reject him.

The proposal is compelling because it fits several features of the story. The son has lost family wealth in a Gentile-associated setting. He approaches from a distance. The father runs and embraces him before he can prove anything. The household then receives visible commands that establish the son's restored status.

The proposal also captures a sound pastoral truth. The father does not allow shame to deliver the first public verdict. His embrace tells every observer how the son will be received. Even the elder brother's later anger demonstrates that resistance to mercy is not an imaginary concern.

WHAT THE PROPOSAL CONTRIBUTES It helps us feel the possible social danger of the return and the protective force of the father's public welcome.

10. What Do the Jewish Sources Actually Say?

The Evidence Is Related but Not Identical

A later discussion in Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 28b, asks how kezazah was performed. It describes a case in which one brother married a woman considered unworthy. Members of the family brought a cask of fruit, broke it in an open place and made a declaration so that future descendants would not intermarry.

Ruth Rabbah 7:4 records related customs. One concerns a person who sold ancestral property to a Gentile. Relatives brought containers of roasted grain and nuts, broke them before children and declared that the person had been severed from ancestral property. The passage also describes a related response to an unsuitable marriage.

These sources show that symbolic breaking ceremonies existed in later Jewish tradition and that family status, unsuitable marriage and ancestral property could be publicly remembered. That evidence is genuinely relevant. It is not the same as a report that every first-century Galilean village permanently expelled a returning spendthrift at the boundary.

The surviving texts were compiled centuries after the ministry of Jesus. Later sources can preserve earlier customs, so later dating does not make them worthless. It does require humility. We cannot simply assume that every detail of a later account functioned in the same way, in the same place and with the same penalty in Jesus' day.

HISTORICAL CONCLUSION The kezazah connection is plausible comparative background. It is not direct proof of the complete modern village-ban story.

11. What Should We Say From the Pulpit?

Careful Language Protects a Good Insight

Responsible preaching does not require us to ignore the proposal. We may say, "Some scholars suggest that the father was protecting his son from public rejection." We may say, "A later Jewish tradition helps us imagine how serious communal shame could be." We may say, "The father may have reached the son before hostile neighbors could define him."

We should not say, “Jewish law required the town to ban him.” We should not claim that everyone in Jesus' audience expected a pot to be broken at the village boundary. We should not describe the father and villagers as a literal race reported by Scripture.

The corrected wording does not weaken the sermon. It strengthens it. The central truth rests on the inspired text: the father saw, had compassion, ran, embraced and kissed. The historical possibility helps the hearer imagine a social dimension without carrying the weight of the message.

Reason Together Church asks honest questions beneath the authority of Scripture. That means we can appreciate a powerful explanation and still ask how much the evidence establishes. Faithful preaching does not fear calibrated language.

APPROVED WORDING The father may have been outrunning public rejection. Luke certainly shows him publicly overruling rejection.

12. The Embrace Came Before the Bargain

The Son Was Received Before He Could Earn His Place

The father ran, fell on the son's neck and kissed him. The Greek verb for the kiss can carry the sense of warm or repeated affection. This is not a distant legal pardon announced across the road. The welcome is personal and open.

The son begins the confession he rehearsed: he has sinned against heaven and before his father and is no longer worthy to be called a son. In the earlier rehearsal, he planned to ask to be made as one of the hired servants. Verse 21 does not record that final request.

Many sermons say that the father interrupted him before he could finish. The narrative movement certainly shifts from confession to the father's commands, and the hired-servant proposal is not accepted. Luke does not explicitly state that the father cut off a word or sentence. The secure point is that restoration does not rest on a servant contract.

Grace does not deny the confession. The son really sinned and knows he is unworthy. Grace answers that truth with a gift he cannot finance. The father does not hire his son back into the household. He restores him as a son.

GOSPEL PATTERN Repentance tells the truth about sin. Grace tells the returning sinner that reconciliation cannot be purchased through wages.

13. The Robe, Ring and Shoes Made Restoration Visible

The Household Was Commanded to Share the Father's Verdict

The father speaks to the servants: bring forth the best robe, put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet. The commands matter because restoration is not hidden inside the father's private feelings. The household must act according to his welcome.

The best robe gives honor to the person whose clothing would have displayed the far country. The ring marks belonging and standing. It may have functioned as a signet, but Luke does not specify its design or legal authority. The shoes answer destitution and prepare the son to stand and walk with restored dignity.

Preaching sometimes turns each item into a rigid code: robe equals righteousness, ring equals legal authority and shoes prove only sons wore footwear. These associations may illustrate aspects of restoration, but ancient life was more varied and Luke does not provide an inspired legend for the symbols.

The items are strongest when read together. The father publicly replaces shame with honor, exclusion with belonging and destitution with provision. The servants are not invited to conduct their own trial. They are told to embody the father's decision.

CHURCH-FAMILY PRINCIPLE When God restores a repentant sinner, the church should not keep dressing that person in the labels of the far country.

14. The Fatted Calf Turned Welcome Into Celebration

The Father's Joy Was Meant to Be Shared

The father orders the fatted calf to be killed and calls the household to eat and be merry. A calf reserved and prepared for a special occasion supplied more than a private meal for two people. The scale of the feast made the restoration known.

The father explains the celebration: “this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.” The paired words connect the story with the lost sheep and lost coin. In each account, recovery produces joy that invites others to participate.

Grace is not embarrassed to celebrate repentance. The father does not hold a quiet meal in a back room until everyone forgets the scandal. He names the reality of death and loss, then names the greater reality of life and recovery.

The feast does not mean the wasted inheritance magically returns. Consequences remain, family pain is real and trust may require time in ordinary life. The parable's focus is the restored relationship. The son who was gone is home, and the father's house must respond with joy.

MINISTRY APPLICATION The church should preserve truth and wise safeguards, but it must not treat visible misery as more believable than God's restoring grace.

15. The Elder Brother Refused the Father's Joy

Self-Righteousness Can Stand Outside the House

The elder son returns from the field, hears music and asks a servant what is happening. When he learns that his brother has returned safely and the father has killed the fatted calf, he becomes angry and refuses to enter.

His speech reveals how he understands the relationship: “Lo, these many years do I serve thee.” The verb can carry the sense of slave service. He has counted years, commands and rewards. He speaks as though obedience has placed the father in debt.

He will not say “my brother.” He says, “this thy son.” Resentment pushes the younger man out of the family vocabulary. The father answers, “this thy brother.” Grace restores not only the relationship between father and son but the truth that the sons belong to one another.

The elder brother represents the danger facing the Pharisees and scribes. They are near the Scriptures and active in religion, but Jesus' reception of sinners fills them with murmuring rather than joy. The

parable leaves the elder son at the door because Jesus is asking His hearers whether they will come inside.

PERSONAL EXAMINATION It is possible to avoid the far country and still resent the Father's mercy toward someone else.

16. The Father Went Out to Both Sons

Compassion Pursued Rebellion and Resentment

The father runs to the younger son, but he also leaves the celebration to entreat the elder. He does not answer anger with immediate expulsion. He speaks tenderly: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine."

The younger son had wanted the father's property without the father's presence. The elder son had the father's presence and property but did not enjoy the father's heart. Both measured life by goods. One demanded his portion and left. The other remained and kept an internal account.

The father reminds the elder that fellowship itself is a gift: "thou art ever with me." He then explains why celebration is fitting. The issue is not whether the younger brother deserved a party as wages. The issue is whether death becoming life and loss becoming recovery should produce joy.

A healthy church carries both invitations. It calls the openly rebellious to repent and come home. It calls the religiously resentful to lay down comparison and enter the Father's joy.

TWO INVITATIONS Come home from the far country. Come inside from the porch of self-righteousness.

17. The Church Must Not Become the Rejecting Crowd

Truthful Restoration Is a Ministry Responsibility

Even if no formal kezazah ceremony stands behind Luke 15, the danger of communal rejection is real in every generation. Churches can create informal cutting-off ceremonies through gossip, permanent labels, public suspicion and the refusal to believe that grace can change a person.

The answer is not careless reinstatement. Repentance should be truthful. Harm should be acknowledged. Restitution may be appropriate. Positions of trust may require safeguards and time. Forgiveness, access, trust and leadership qualification are related but distinct questions.

The father in the parable does not call the far country good. The son's confession is not corrected as unnecessary. Mercy and moral truth stand together. The household receives a restored son without rewriting rebellion as virtue.

Pastors and congregations should define restoration according to Scripture so that neither gossip nor favoritism controls the process. We should make it possible for repentant people to take honest steps home while protecting those who have been harmed.

PASTORAL SAFETY This parable must never be used to pressure someone to return to an abusive person or unsafe household. Reconciliation with God does not cancel wise boundaries or legal accountability.

18. The Father Points Us Toward the Gospel

The Cross Accomplishes What the Parable Illustrates

The parable reveals the Father's compassion and explains why Jesus receives sinners. It does not provide every detail of the doctrine of atonement. We should therefore resist making each character and object carry a fixed secret meaning.

The wider Gospel tells us how sinners are reconciled to God. Jesus Christ is the sinless Son of God. He died for our sins, was buried and rose bodily from the dead. At the cross He bore sin and shame. In the resurrection He opened the promise of new life.

Second Corinthians 5 says that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself and that Christ was made sin for us, though He knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. The father's costly welcome can point toward that grace, but the saving work belongs to Jesus.

The sinner does not enter God's family by paying off a spiritual debt through hired service. Salvation is by grace through faith. Repentance turns from sin and false confidence. Faith rests in Christ alone.

GOSPEL CENTER The father's run illustrates costly welcome. Christ's death and resurrection accomplish reconciliation.

19. Why Did the Father Run?

The Direct Answer Returns Us to Compassion

He ran because compassion would not leave the returning son at a distance. He ran because the son who had been lost was coming home. He ran because joy was already moving toward celebration.

He may also have run to shield the son from neighbors who would shame or reject him. A later Jewish tradition gives that possibility historical texture. We should honor its value without claiming that Luke reports a formal ceremony or a race to the village boundary.

What Luke clearly shows is enough to transform the church. The father reached the son before the son could prove himself. He embraced him before the household could debate him. He called him son before the elder brother could reduce him to "this thy son."

The sermon and commentary therefore return to one sentence: compassion moved faster than condemnation. The Father receives repentant sinners, restores them by grace and calls His household to rejoice.

PERMANENT DETERMINATION Rejoicing and rescuing meet in the father's run. The possible cultural background serves the text, while Luke's explicit compassion carries the conclusion.

Questions for Personal Reflection

- What complaint in Luke 15:1 and 2 caused Jesus to tell the three parables?
- How are the younger and elder sons lost in different ways?
- What does the far country reveal about the promises of sin?
- What actions show that the younger son's awakening became a real return?

- What motive does Luke explicitly place before the father's run?
- Why would a respected father running in public have been socially surprising?
- What do Ketubot 28b and Ruth Rabbah 7:4 actually describe?
- Can I explain why the kezazah connection is possible rather than certain?
- Have I ever allowed another person's past to define someone whom God is restoring?
- Do I identify more easily with the far-country son or the angry elder brother?
- Can I celebrate grace when it is given to someone I believe has received more than deserved?
- Have I personally repented and placed my faith in Jesus Christ alone?

A Personal Invitation to Salvation

The younger son could not rescue himself from the far country, and none of us can rescue ourselves from sin. We have sinned against a holy God. Religious service, good intentions, family history and personal improvement cannot purchase reconciliation.

Jesus Christ is the sinless Son of God. He died for our sins, was buried and rose bodily from the dead. He is alive and able to save everyone who comes to God through Him. You do not need to be inside a church building or standing beside a pastor to call upon Christ.

Admit that you have sinned and cannot save yourself. Believe that Jesus died for your sins and rose again. Repent of sin and every false object of confidence. Place your faith in Christ alone.

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Romans 10:9

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Romans 10:13

There is no magical prayer formula. Speak to God honestly in your own words. Confess your sin, tell Him you believe Jesus died and rose again and ask Him to save you because of Christ. If you are with us in person, please see the pastor after the service so we can help connect you with other believers. If you are participating from another location, visit www.ReasonTogether.Church and use the contact page so we can encourage you and help you find a faithful local church.

A Closing Prayer

Our Heavenly Father,

Thank You for giving us Your Word and for welcoming honest questions beneath its authority. Teach us to value historical background without allowing a compelling possibility to become more certain than Scripture.

Thank You for the father who saw his son, had compassion and ran. Thank You for the embrace, the robe, the ring, the shoes and the feast. Help every returning sinner understand that grace is greater than shame.

Protect us from the far country of open rebellion and from the porch of religious resentment. Do not let our church become a rejecting crowd. Give us wisdom to restore truthfully, protect the wounded and rejoice when the lost are found.

Draw unbelievers to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Strengthen believers who fear that their past will always define them. Fix our hope upon the cross and resurrection of Christ.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

Selected Sources

Primary Scripture

Deuteronomy 21:17; Psalm 103:8-13; Isaiah 55:6-7; Ezekiel 18:21-23; Luke 5:30-32; Luke 15:1-32; Romans 2:4; Romans 5:8; Romans 10:9, 13; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Ephesians 2:1-10; Hebrews 12:2; 1 John 3:1. All public Scripture quotations follow the King James Version.

Historical Sources

Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 28b, was consulted for the later rabbinic description of kezazah involving an unsuitable marriage and a broken cask of fruit. Ruth Rabbah 7:4 was consulted for the related tradition concerning ancestral property sold to a Gentile and the breaking of containers before children.

Interpretive Resources

Kenneth E. Bailey's *The Cross and the Prodigal*, *Poet and Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes and Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* were consulted for the Middle Eastern cultural reading of the father's run, public shame and village reception. Major commentaries by Joel B. Green, Darrell L. Bock and I. Howard Marshall are recommended for further study of Luke 15.

Language Study

The Greek text of Luke 15:11-32 was reviewed for the vocabulary of possessions, compassion, running, embracing, kissing, restoration, anger and entreaty. Lexical observations clarify Luke's narrative without being used to prove a cultural reconstruction.

Interpretive Cautions

This commentary distinguishes Luke's explicit statements from historical reconstruction. It treats protection from community rejection as a meaningful possibility, not as a fact directly reported by the parable. The surviving rabbinic texts are later comparative evidence and do not independently establish the full modern village-boundary banishment claim.

Pastoral Note

This commentary accompanies the approved Reason Together Study *Why Did the Father Run?* It does not replace the sermon transcript or internal Study Vault. Its purpose is to provide a readable public explanation of the principal Biblical reasoning, historical cautions and pastoral applications.