

## RESTORING YOUR FAMILY'S FOUNDATION

## STUDY SIX

**A Father Everyone Admires***Luke 15:11–24*

*God's Word has a lot to say about fathers. Among the most admirable fathers is the man who appears in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**OULD you like to hold her?"

His trance broken, the new father saw the nurse smiling at him. He had been gazing raptly at his daughter, now only one hour old.

The nurse bundled the baby, then lifted her to him. "Support her head . . . like this," she said.

As she placed the sleeping newborn in his arms, a heavy weight called fatherhood settled on his shoulders. Looking at the child's delicate face, he thought of her innocence. What did she know of the world and its dangers? Of the greed and the violence and the darkness? It was up to him, now, to protect and nurture her—this fragile flower.

Most fathers recall the moment they first sensed fatherhood's weight of responsibility, as well as the overwhelming feeling of inadequacy. Fathers need a role model who can show them how to be the man their children need. This *Searching the Scriptures* study highlights a dad who models the most admirable qualities of a good father—qualities anyone can emulate.



## A Father Everyone Admires

Luke 15:11–24



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

This father is featured in the parable known as The Prodigal Son. Despite the name, the real focal point of the story is not the son but the dad, who exhibits a flesh-and-blood image of our gracious heavenly Father . . . to whom we pray.

*Father, Your qualities shine through the teaching of Your Son, who portrayed You as the compassionate Father enfolding sinners in Your arms of grace. As I seek to emulate the father in the parable, I am really emulating You. Open my eyes to who You are and draw me near Your heart. In Jesus' name, amen.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Through His parable, Jesus addressed widely divergent groups of people separated by a vast moral chasm. On one side, stood the “tax collectors and other notorious sinners” (Luke 15:1), represented by the younger son, and on the other ledge stood the “Pharisees and teachers of religious law” (15:2), represented by the older son.

The first group lived to please only themselves, pushing aside every moral standard that stood in their way. The legalistic Pharisees, on the other hand, lived to please a religious system, setting up moral standards as fast as the libertines could knock them down.

Any common ground between the two groups had sunk to jagged depths. Yet, from Jesus' perspective, there was really no such division. Like two brothers, their moral DNA was linked. One group had committed what we might call *detestable* sins and the other group, *respectable* sins. Both stood guilty and in need of grace before their heavenly Father, who loved them all.



### Observation: The Parable of the Compassionate Father

Jesus often dispensed eternal truths in parables. Sweetened by a story, His points could more easily pass through people's defenses into their souls where the medicine could do its best work. Experience Jesus' parables with all your senses. Hear the dialogue, see the characters' faces, smell the atmosphere, feel the tension. Imagine how the audience members might have reacted as if you were one of them.



## A Father Everyone Admires

*Luke 15:11–24*

In the first lines of the parable, [Luke 15:11–12](#), what do you observe about the father—his affluence, his character, and his relationship with his sons?

*When a father is willing to listen to his adult children, even to something he may not want to hear, he earns the right to say things to them they may not want to hear.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What happened “a few days later,” according to [15:13](#)? What do the son’s hasty actions say about him—his personality, his character, his attitude toward his family and his Jewish heritage, and his view of God?

How did Jesus describe the son’s downward spiral in [15:14–16](#)? Hearing about the son’s pitiful state, what do you think Jesus’ Jewish audience would have thought and felt?



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*Luke 15:11–24*

*The father didn't take responsibility for his son's irresponsibility. I'll tell you what he did do. He prayed. And he watched, looking for that familiar silhouette on the horizon.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What marked the turning point for the son, and what was his plan in *Luke 15:17–19*?

Jesus' parables often included an unexpected turn, elements in the story that took people by surprise. What details about the father's response in *15:20–24* would have surprised Jesus' audience?

What do you observe about the father's response to the older brother in *15:25–32*? What lesson was the father teaching his older son?

*The father said not one word of blame to his wayward son—"Look at yourself. You're filthy!" None of that condemnation. The father's kisses covered it all.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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*Luke 15:11–24*



### Interpretation: Admirable Qualities to Emulate

In interpretation, we seek to understand the meaning of Jesus' parable in its context. Jesus' previous parables featured a lost sheep that was found and a lost coin that was found and the rejoicing that followed (*Luke 15:3–10*). The parable in our passage about the lost son who was found rounds out this set of three parables. The main point of all three was to illustrate the “joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents” (15:7). As the father told his oldest son, “We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!” (15:32).

Woven into these parables are the golden qualities of our God who celebrates when sinners repent. Write down all the qualities of God you see represented by the father in *Luke 15:11–32*.

Summarize what you learn about your heavenly Father through the father in Jesus' parable?

Which of these qualities can earthly fathers emulate?



## A Father Everyone Admires

*Luke 15:11–24*

*When the son came to his senses, he thought, “I will return to my father. I don’t need a sermon from my brother. I need forgiveness and understanding. I need a loving, tender touch. I need grace greater than all my sin. I need my daddy.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Correlation: The Father’s Love Displayed through Christ

During His ministry on earth, Jesus embodied the love of the Father in everything He did. Read [Matthew 9:35–36](#) and write down how Christ demonstrated God’s love. Note: the same Greek word for *compassion* in [Luke 15:20](#) is used in Matthew 9:36 to describe Jesus.

How does [Colossians 1:21–22](#) explain how Christ restores us? How are we like the prodigal son?

*When you decide you’re going to come to the Father, He takes you just as you are in all your filth and mess and rebellion. It’s the original “come as you are” party.  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



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### Application: Four Final Questions to Ponder

The admirable father in Jesus' parable calls to fathers today to love their children as he loved his sons. If you are a father, what action does this model of fatherhood encourage you to take in your relationship with your children?

Building on this application, let these four questions offer further guidance:

1. *Is there a father you need to thank?* Don't neglect telling the father or father figure in your life how much you appreciate his tough love, grace, and forgiveness.
2. *Is there a son or daughter you need to release?* The father in the parable didn't cling to the son; he let him go. Neither did he chase after the son; he waited for him to return.
3. *Is there a prodigal you need to forgive and restore?* Show him or her grace today.
4. *Is there a celebration you need to have?* Don't place your returning prodigal on probation. Rejoice that the one who was lost has been found.

Which of these points is God leading you to apply?



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The weight of fatherhood feels particularly heavy when we must deal with a prodigal son or daughter. Lean on a friend or find a wise counselor who can help you bear the load. You don't have to carry the burden alone. Mostly, cry out to your heavenly Father, who, more than anyone, understands your broken heart and who waits patiently with you for your wayward one to return.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, bring hope to every broken heart in homes fractured by rebellion. Give peace to replace anxiety, patience to support weakness, and love to cover shame. Help me wait. And please, Lord, by Your grace and mercy, bring the wayward ones home. In the name of Jesus, amen.*

