

It is the very essence of the Father heart of God that he does not impose his will on others but lets every person make his own choice.

Freedom or emptiness?

The young man packs his bag and walks away. He wants independence and freedom. Full of pride and determination he heads off to a faraway land, as far away from home as possible. He enjoys the pleasures of life, goes from one city to another and spends his money in wild living with parties and prostitutes. He goes from bad to worse till his pockets are empty and his friends are gone. Tired and hungry he looks for work, but there is none. At last, in desperation he hires himself out to a citizen, who sends him to look after the pigs. Here we see how low this young man has sunk. He is not only herding pigs, he is even longing to fill his stomach with the pods the pigs are eating. Here is a lost son in the most miserable state, due to his rebellion. His way of life has brought him further and further away from his father's house, so far that there is nothing left to fill his emptiness anymore.

Now he has a lot of time to think. "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death", he says. Coming to his senses, he decides to return home. It is his father, who sees him from far and

runs to meet him, throws his arms around that filthy son and kisses him.

Father I have sinned

The lost son says to his father, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men". He makes no demands, no excuses, but literally throws himself on the grace and mercy of his father. There is no question that the father had been waiting for this moment. He orders his servants to prepare the greatest feast for the return of his lost son. He calls for the best robe – the robe of a prince and treats his son like royalty. He puts a ring on his hand – a ring to show his identity and position. He puts shoes on his feet symbolizing that he was his rightful son. Hired people did not wear shoes. He calls for the fattened calf, the finest meal to be served for the greatest occasion.

Outside or inside?

So together with his family, and all the servants, the father celebrates the return of the lost son. But the older son stays outside, jealous and angry, missing out on the celebration. "I have been slaving away for you for years and you never prepared such a feast for me", he says bitterly. It seems he was every bit as lost as his brother.

Somewhere along the way the loving relationship to his father had cooled off. His father pleads with him to join the celebrations inside saying, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

My Father's house

When God created the world, he looked at his handiwork with pleasure and said, "It is good". All of creation was in perfect harmony. Man and woman were created in God's image, in beauty and perfection. God was like a Father to Adam and Eve. He visited them, walked and talked with them. It was here "in the Father's house" that love, joy and peace were the way of life.

Look at the earth bringing forth fruit and flower;

Look at the sky, the sunshine and the rain.

*Look at the world, so many joys and wonders,
look at the world and marvel every day –
so many miracles along our way.*

*Every good gift, all that we need and cherish
comes from the Lord in token of his love;
Praise to thee, o Lord, for all creation,
give us thankful hearts that we may see:
All the gifts we share and every blessing,
all things come of thee. (John Rutter)*

Tragedy strikes

Actually these lines characterize only the beautiful side of the world we live in today. More often than not tragedy strikes. We are confronted with people who are not happy. Maybe we feel cheated by people who said they were our friends. Maybe we are in bondage to alcohol, sex or drugs, or we damage other people's property or easily pick a fight. The tragic fact is that we, as in the parable of the prodigal son, have turned our backs on our Maker and have chosen to go our own way. In selfish pride we have walked away from our Father God, and are no longer in harmony with Him and our fellow men.

In our sinful life in this fallen world we waste and squander the gifts and blessings which the Father gave us. We have lost our identity as sons and daughters of God. We have recklessly cut ourselves loose from the guidelines that God the Father has handed down to us in his Word the Bible. We are proud and do not humble ourselves to follow his way. We reject his love. No wonder we are starving physically and spiritually, starving for satisfaction, peace and fulfilment. Can you hear the voice of Jesus Christ calling to you, "**Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest**" (Matthew 11:28). – "**I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty**" (John 6:35).

Return to the Father

God does not find joy in the destruction of the lost and the wicked but in the recovery of sinners. If we are willing to return, to admit that we have sinned and that we are not fit to be called his children, the Father will never shut us out of his house. There is nothing that would bring more joy to God the Father than us returning into his loving arms, into His caring presence.

You may go to church or to a Christian college, you may have Christian parents or Christian friends. But your surroundings do not make you a son or a daughter of God the Father. Not even your Christian activities make you part of God's family.

Jesus Christ pointed out the way back to the Father's house. "I (Jesus Christ) am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). That is why he gave his own life in death on the cross to pay for all our sins and wrong ways. He offers us his forgiveness for everything which has separated us from the Father. Come with me to our Father's house. There is grace, love, joy, peace.

If you are serious about turning to God and living his way, you may want to say the following prayer:

"Jesus, I'm sorry for running my own life and rebelling against you. I'm sorry for the hurt I've brought to myself, others and you. I need the forgiveness that you

paid for on the cross. Jesus, save me! I give you my life, messed up as it is. I commit myself to follow you. I can't live it alone, come into my life and help me to become the person you want me to be. Thank you for your promise to listen to all who call on you."

If you pray this from the heart, then you will receive God's forgiveness and be adopted into his family. Welcome! Becoming a Christian is just the start. Now comes a lifetime of growing. These four things will help you grow:

- **Pray (talk to God every day)**
- **Go to a Bible believing church**
- **Read and obey the Bible ***
- **Tell others about Jesus**

Join the feast

Maybe you are one of those like the older brother, who was part of the family and had experienced life in the Father's house – life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

But what has happened to you since then? Has your relationship to your Saviour grown cold? Have you forgotten that Christ forgave you? Why then do you carry a grudge against others who might have offended you? Or are you back in your old life wasting the good things God gave you like your brain or your muscles?

* We suggest you sign up for a Bible correspondence course, based on the gospel of John. Write to us for a copy.

Do not let self-pity and bitterness or self-righteousness keep you from joining the celebration in the Father's house. If you are refusing to forgive people or think that you are better than others, you are missing a wonderful opportunity to experience joy. Let your joy grow. Forgive somebody who has hurt you, accept forgiveness for your own wrong doing and come join the feast.

The party is not in honour of the son but in honour of the forgiving Father. The joy in the middle of the party is the joy of God Himself. So, let us rejoice with the Father, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found again!" Wonderful. God's great love reaches out and finds sinners no matter why or how they got lost.

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(partly from 'Sermon of The Prodigal Son', by John MacArthur)

Published by: Distribution of Christian Literature
Bernstrasse 73, 3613 Steffisburg, Switzerland
dclit.net / info.dclit.net

For Ghana: Distribution of Christian Literature
P.O. Box AH 1256, Achimota, Accra, Ghana
www.ghana.dclit.net

For Nigeria: Distribution of Christian Literature
c/o P.O. Box 4343, Somolu, Lagos, Nigeria

10.2020

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Life 4 you

No. 04

My Father's house

The two sons

"There was a man who had two sons." With these words Jesus Christ introduced his listeners to a well-known and timeless parable. Do you know the story?

The father loved his sons dearly and gave them everything they needed. He was good, caring and rich. However, one day the younger of his two sons selfishly and disrespectfully demanded his share of the inheritance. He wanted the money straight away. We would expect the father to punish him for this shameful request. Instead the father gave it to him and let him go, with a heavy heart, no doubt.

