

PRODIGAL

Overview

Speaker: Youth

Talk #5: The last talk of Day 1, given as part of evening worship.

Length: 15 minutes

The Aim of the Talk

This is the fifth talk of our time together, and it is, in many ways, more contemplative than informative. It builds on the talks before by continuing the themes of both your journey and of God's love and offer of a relationship to us. In the GOD LOVES YOU talk just before yours, participants hear that God's unconditional love for each and every one of us is a divine love that will never let us go and will always be waiting for us with open arms when we turn, or turn back, to God. Your talk includes the prodigal story of God's forgiveness, acceptance, and mercy for us. Here we explore what it looks like when we take unfair advantage of God's relationship and/or turn our backs on God.

With this story and the sharing of your own spiritual journey, you will help participants to awaken, or re-awaken, to God's love. You will remind them that God's love and offer of a relationship does not stop when we leave Chrysalis or when our attitude is not right. God loves us even when we stink—literally (like the pig pen of the younger son in the story) or figuratively (like the attitude of the older son).

Your assignment is not to give a sermon or lecture but to bear witness. That means to share your own story and how it has been a part of your journey—turning away and returning or staying but resenting it, whatever way you fit into this story—and how God still loved you. Reflecting on your own experience will be the richest content for your talk, which is told largely from your firsthand viewpoint.

Before Writing Your Talk

The following pages offer resources to help you connect your story and experiences with the theme of the talk.

- Begin with reading through “Exploring the Theme.” As you read, highlight points that stick out to you, points you really want to emphasize in your talk.
- Then move to the “Engaging Your Spirit” section. This section is to guide your reflection as you prepare for the talk. You do not need to include

them in your talk, but you may include what reflection came up for you, if you would like. The participants will engage with some of these exercises during their table discussions following your talk.

- Spend time in prayer over the “Exploring the Theme” and “Engaging Your Spirit” sections. Pay attention to personal stories that come to mind, making notes on the specific thoughts and words.
- Open yourself to God’s love, pay attention, and see what happens. Do not feel like you have to make every point in the “Exploring the Theme” section; rather, use it as a guide for your writing.

Exploring the Theme/Talk Outline

Introduction

Read Luke 15:11–32, the story of the Prodigal Son.

“My name is _____, and the title of this talk is **PRODIGAL.”**

1. The Prodigal Story (Luke 15:11–32)

- a. The word *prodigal* means excessive, either in wastefulness or generosity.
- b. Each character in this story represents a different kind of excessiveness.
 - i. The father demonstrates excessive generosity with his love. The father makes available to both sons all that he has. When the rebellious son returns home, the father surprises everyone by giving him the forgiveness he needs rather than the punishment he deserves. He does not withhold his love, just as he didn't withhold his inheritance. He gives his love and acceptance without condition, despite the younger son's waste of his inheritance and despite the older son's attitude.
 - ii. The younger son is the one generally referred to as the prodigal son, excessive in his wastefulness of his inheritance. This son demands that his father give him now the portion of inheritance that would normally be his only after his father's death. The son takes it and travels far away, proceeding to waste all he's been given on his own self-indulgent and excessive living.
 1. He not only wastes his physical inheritance; he wastes his relationship with his father (and brother) by leaving home the way he did.
 2. When things get really bad, he finally realizes how desperate his situation is. It takes a crisis to bring him to his senses.
 3. He remembers the abundance of home, where even the slaves are treated well, and decides to return, expecting a less-than-generous reception. He did not expect the extravagant love that is waiting for him.
 - iii. The older son is excessive in his jealousy and judgmental attitude. Outwardly, he stays home, acts responsibly, does what is right, and takes care of his father's property. But inwardly he is also wasting the inheritance—not of property but of relationship with the father.
 1. The older son also does not recognize the father's generous love. When his brother returns home, the older son resents his

father's generosity. He perceives the other son as undeserving and the father's unconditional love as unjust and wasted on a sinner.

2. Maybe he feels jealous; maybe he feels unappreciated and unrewarded for all he does and how hard he tries to do the right thing. His feelings are understandable. But at this point, he's stuck in self-pity, thinking only of how he's more deserving.
3. Unlike his younger brother, he does not yet realize his own need. Outwardly, he looks closer to home, but inwardly, he's far away. He lacks the love we see in the father: to forgive someone who has failed. He lacks the willingness to ask for forgiveness we see in the younger son.
4. Just as the father doesn't scold the younger son, he also doesn't scold the older one. He affirms his love for the older son, the son's total access already to everything the father has, and the importance of sharing in the celebration because his brother is home; the family is whole again.

2. Invitation to the Prodigal Story

- a. Think about all that you have received from God, family, friends, or other people of support in your life.
 - i. More than just material things; often this looks like love and support, honesty, and so on.
 - ii. While people cannot give us all that we need, take a moment to acknowledge what they have given you and modeled for you.
 - iii. You've been given the chance to experience Chrysalis. The fact that you are here represents someone's love for you. Your being here is an experience you can accept or reject.
- b. How have you responded to all you've been given?
 - i. Like the younger son: What have you taken for granted, or in what way have you wasted the material gifts and support you've been given? In what ways have you thrown away or ignored the gift of your life, relationships, and love? In what ways do you need to turn to God, to make a change?
 - ii. Like the older son: Do you think that all the love you have been given is because you deserve it? Do you think you must work to

gain the love of God? Do you enjoy and expect the outward benefits God has given you but ignore the relationship God is offering?

3. My Prodigal Story (Speaker's Prodigal Story)

- a. Choose a personal story that relates to this scripture.
- b. You may choose a story that identifies with either the younger son or the older son. You may choose a story that has elements of both.
 - i. Describe your background: your family, friends, faith experience, and so on.
 - ii. Share about how you were off-track, apart from the relationship God was offering.
 - iii. Share about a point where you realized what was happening and decided to turn in a different direction. What helped you become awake to God's love?
 - iv. Describe the celebration and difference you've felt in coming home to God.
 - v. This kind of coming home, this transformation is what Chrysalis is all about.

4. Participants' Prodigal Stories

- a. Invite participants to consider the following:
 - i. Where, like the younger son, are you focused on your own desires, guilt, hurt, and shame?
 - ii. Where, like the older son, are you still trying to earn God's love?
 - iii. Are you hearing the invitation to come home? Where is this "home" for you? It may be the place where you live and/or the people who live there with you. It may be other people or places as well. Consider how you experience love from God and from other people at "home."
- b. So, what's your story?
- c. Like we heard in the GOD LOVES YOU talk, God's unconditional love for each and every one of us is a divine love that will never let us go and will always be waiting for us with open arms when we turn, or turn back, to God.
- d. The first step to that journey back is made through faith—reaching out to God from behind our walls, stepping out of our comfort zone, and letting Jesus show us the way.

- e. Once we make that first step toward “home,” God is there, eagerly waiting to embrace us and shape our lives so that we can become the unique creations God intended us to be.
- f. Remember that God loves you and receives you just as you are.
 - i. God’s love and forgiveness is perfect.
 - ii. When you accept God’s love and offer of relationship, you begin the journey home.

Engaging Your Spirit

Seeking and Celebrating All Those Who Were Lost

These stories teach us that God does all in God’s power to welcome us back. Jesus doesn’t say how the father reacts when his younger son asks for his inheritance or while his son is off in a “distant country.” Jesus focuses on the father’s reaction when his son comes home. He wants to celebrate! When a person leaves behind a destructive lifestyle or when someone joins the family of faith, God wants us to celebrate. Like the father in this story, God gives us the freedom to make mistakes. God appreciates those who have been faithful servants throughout their lives. God also wants all people to be part of the family and celebrates whenever someone “comes home.” Spend some time reflecting on the following:

- When have I been the one celebrated?
- Have there been times when I have refused to celebrate others?

Your Place in the Story

Take a moment to think about all you have received from God, your parents or guardians, friends, and others. You have been given more than just material things—including love, support, moral standings, a sense of honesty, quality of life, and so on. Reflect on this and write a list of the things in your ‘inheritance.’ What have you done with your inheritance so far?

- In what ways are you like the younger son? How have you taken for granted or wasted the material gifts and support you’ve been given? Have you heard God’s invitation to let go and come home?
- In what ways are you like the older son? Do you think that all the love and support you’ve been given is because you deserve it? Are you still trying to earn God’s love?

- In what ways have you been like the father in the story, giving generous love to others?

The Story in Art

Art can be a wonderful way to engage with scripture when we use it as part of our prayer and meditation. There are many artistic renderings of this story, and spending time with them may be helpful as you place yourself in the story. One at a time, over the course of preparing your talk, spend some time with each of the following renderings (or as many as you can find):

- *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Caravaggio
- *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Rembrandt
- *The Prodigal Son* by George Pemba
- *The Prodigal* by Beth Slovenski
- *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Bartolomé Esteban Murillo
- *Parable of the Prodigal Son* by Bertram Poole

Many others are available online; choose any that catch your eye. As you sit with each artwork, reflect on these questions. You might want to keep track of your reflections in a journal.

- How does this depiction of the parable compare to the way you imagine the story?
- What does this depiction say about the relationships between the characters?
- What do you think the artist is trying to say through the settings, colors, and postures captured in the painting?
- Is anything missing that you expected to see?
- Which painting best represents how you have experienced God's forgiveness?

Writing Your Talk

- Use the "Exploring the Theme" section as your main guide as you write.
- Allow what you have learned and the experiences you have remembered to point to ideas and stories that will help you outline your talk and begin writing.
- You will want to speak from the heart, ***to be honest and real***. As you share personal stories, make sure to do so in a way that does not pretend to have

all the answers or everything figured out. Share authentically about the joys and the challenges of living out the topic of your talk.

- As you write, continue to remain open to God’s love and presence in your life. Let writing your talk become a spiritual practice, a creative exercise that engages both mind and spirit to help you express your own thoughts, understanding, and experience. By doing so, you will be helping others experience God’s love.

Be Sure to Include

- Luke 15:11–32, Prodigal Son story
 - With what character do you relate? Sharing experiences from your own life that relate to one of the characters in this story will help the story come to life for participants.
 - Include the perspectives of each of the characters in your talk, even if you don’t relate to them all. It’s possible that someone listening needs to hear that other perspective, too.
- We receive the love and relationship God offers to us as we are—in any of these roles—because God created us and loves us as we are. Wherever we are, we can turn (or return) to God and God will already be waiting for us with open arms.

For details and tips about how to write, rehearse, and present your talk, see the “Preparing Your Talk” section in the *Chrysalis Team Manual* (pp. 35-38).