**

Key Takeaway:**
The Father loves you so much, He wants you to come home as if nothing happened.

**Key Verses:**
Luke 15:11–32

**THE “F” WORD**

I want to talk to you guys about the “F” word. It’s a word that causes some people to cringe when they hear it. Some people become angry and bitter. Most people are happy when they hear the “F” word. Most people don’t say the “F” word; they usually say the “D” word instead.

Most of you thought I was talking about cuss words, but the words I’m talking about are “Father” and “Dad.” Everybody has a biological dad, but the word “father” probably causes a different reaction in everybody’s brain.

When I say the word “father,” you might think of playing catch or daddy/daughter Dates. Some of you might have a reaction of fear or annoyance, as you think of an overbearing parent. A lot of you might think of nothing because your father has been absent your entire life.

[**Author Note:** The following is my personal experience. Share your own experience with your dad.]

That last one describes me. My dad divorced my mom when I was 3 years old and left her alone with four kids. When I was 5 years old, I was reconnected to my father, but I only saw him four times out of the year, and I would talk to him on the phone every other month. But I didn’t care—I loved the time I got to spend with my dad, because he was my dad and I loved him.

Until one day, how I saw my dad was changed entirely. When you live in a split family, you tend to see your parents try to bash each other in order to make your kids hate the other parent. When I was 6, my mom changed my perception of my dad when she let some harsh truths slip out. She told me, “Your father only invites you over to the house because the judge is making him spend time with you. He only calls you because he’s been ordered by court.”

That was the moment I realized that I had a dad—who I didn’t want to be my dad. Over the next 10 years, I spotted more and more behaviors like this that solidified that truth.

The ultimate blow came when I graduated from high school. The day of my graduation, my dad texted me to let me know he couldn’t make it because he had a sinus infection. I was crushed on the day I was supposed to be proud. To make things more brutal, my friend’s dad had to have his leg amputated two weeks before graduation because of cancer. If any dad deserved a cop out, it was his dad, and yet his dad navigated the graduation crowd on crutches to watch his son graduate. One dad made an excuse. Another dad sacrificed to show how proud he was.

**THE PRODIGAL SON**

For some, the word “father” brings a feeling of happiness, and for others, it brings bitterness. How you see your dad can affect the way that you see God, because God is constantly referred to as “Father.” I think Jesus knew that the word “Father” would be received differently by different people, which is why He told this story about a father.

Jesus is telling this story to thousands of people who have thousands of different ideas about what a father looks like. But the father in this story is unlike any father, because this father represents God the Father. Jesus starts the story like this:

*"There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me…”* (Luke 15:11–12, ESV)

To you and me, the opening of this looks harmless. It looks like a typical kid going to his dad for some lunch money.

If you’re a girl, you might approach your dad and say the magical word—“Daddy”—and then you proceed to ask for $500 for a new prom dress, and because you used the magical word, it might work. If you’re a guy, you might approach your dad with some of your accomplishments, like good grades. Then, you make the pitch on why you deserve *Destiny 2* [or another recently released video game that’s popular with your students] or why you should be allowed to borrow your dad’s car.

But the son in this story is not making a harmless pitch. Every father would set up an inheritance for his kids, but the catch to an inheritance is the father had to die before the kid could receive. So this son is coming to his father and saying, “That money should be mine right now. You’re better off dead to me. I don’t need your rules, and I don’t need you as my parent.”

Let’s be honest: if you said that to your dad, he might either kick you out or something worse. The crowd listening to this story has the same reaction, too. In fact, they’re expecting a Jerry Springer throw down. In their culture, dishonoring your parent was punishable by death, and that’s what this son deserved. But this father was different. He does the unthinkable and gives his son the money that he’s asking for.

**BANKRUPT**

The son ends up taking the money, and Jesus says he went off to a faraway land and spent it on reckless living. Reckless living is a nice way of saying drugs, alcohol, and prostitutes. The son ends up treating every moment like a party, until one day, the money runs out. He’s bankrupt.

A famine hit the land, and he was broke and homeless. To make matters worse, the only job he could get was tending to some guy’s pigs. Pig herding was considered to be the worst job available in Jewish society—you were considered subhuman if that was your job. The pigs got better treatment than this kid, and Jesus goes on to tell us that he was so hungry that he envied the food the pigs were eating.

This son who grew up in a warm, loving home was now living in the cold mud. The son who had a loving father now felt abandoned. The son who grew up with the finest clothes was now caked in pig excrement. He wasn’t just bankrupt in the financial department. He was bankrupt in his soul, and he had lost sight of who he used to be.

At this point, the crowd listening to this story is cheering. This punk is finally getting what he deserves. But the problem is, this story isn’t just a reflection on who God is to us, but it’s a reflection on who we are to God. Everyone in that crowd is the lost son. You and I are the lost son.

The point of this isn’t to show us how evil we are, but to show us how bankrupt we are. We may not be living recklessly like the lost son, but we do live life on our own terms. We go on social media to get the approval that we crave, we wear masks and pretend like nothing is wrong, and we constantly compare our lives to other people. We think that we’re adding value to our lives, but all these things just make us more bankrupt and hopeless.

**HOMECOMING**

Maybe you have never believed in God because you’ve been scared that He will be angry with you. To you, God is this big, scary, judgmental person who wants to take the fun out of your life. Or maybe you believe in God, but this past year you’ve let other things become a bigger priority, and you’ve turned away from Him. You’re probably thinking, “There’s no way God could ever forgive me, or even want me back.”

This was the lost son’s worst fear, too. But finally, he came to a point where he was tired of being bankrupt. So he comes up with this plan:

*I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."* (Luke 15:18–19)

So the son makes the journey back home, practicing this speech in his head, and as he reaches the driveway to his old home, his father sees him in the distance. The father never gave up on his son, and every day that he’s been gone, the father waited for him to return.

Before the son can make it up the driveway, the father sprints toward him. He doesn’t wait for his son to come to him—he runs to meet him, and I like to imagine that tears start to fill up in the father’s eyes. The son he knew looks so different. He’s no longer dressed in fine clothes; instead, he’s covered in pig excrement. His well-fed son looks like a starving skeleton. His son once held his head high, but now he’s sin soaked in shame.

So what does this father do? He wraps his filthy son in a big bear hug, and he starts to kiss him. The son is shocked by the treatment, and he blurts out the speech that he’s been practicing, but the father doesn’t even acknowledge what his son says. Instead, he calls out to his servants:

*“Go find the finest clothes for my son. I want everyone to know that he is no common servant, but he belongs in my household. Put a ring on his finger; I want the world to know that he’s my family. Put the finest sandals on his feet, because I don’t care where he’s been, what matters is he’s here. I want you to kill the fattest cow we have, because tonight we’re going to celebrate his homecoming.”* (Luke 15:22–24, author paraphrase)

And then, the father makes this epic statement. It’s a statement that destroys the guilt and the shame that the son has been carrying:

*For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.* (Luke 15:24)

This is the love of our spiritual Father. When He looks at you, He doesn’t see a mistake or a failure. He sees His child, in need of His love. You may have thought that God was waiting to smite you or punish you, but when you come home, He wants to forgive you and love you.

I used to hate the word “father.” It was a word that brought me bitterness. But that word changed the day my daughter was born. I remember holding my daughter for the first time, and my entire world changed. I knew in that instant that I would sacrifice anything to let her know that I loved her. Every night I lay her down to sleep, I make the same promise: “You will never have to wonder whether or not I love you. You will always know that I do.”

I’m imperfect, and I make mistakes every day. If I’m limited by my own imperfections, and yet I can love my daughter that powerfully, just imagine how a perfect and powerful God can love you.

God doesn’t just want you to come home, He wants to take away your shame and your guilt. He wants you to live a life filled with meaning and purpose. He wants you to know that He would do anything to make you feel loved—in fact, He sent His son Jesus to come pay the price that you and I owed. He fought death, itself, and won so that you could spend eternity in His love.

Let’s pray.