

My First Love

By Elizabeth Richardson

Legend has it, nothing made three-year-old me more excited than my father coming home from work. Every evening, I knew it was him by his gentle three knocks on the back door to alert us of his return. As he entered, no matter where I was in the house, I'd run straight to him and into his arms.

Since then, I've always had a close relationship with my father. During my childhood, I loved spending every moment with him, whether it was sitting next to him as he sipped his Saturday morning tea, listening to the radio with him, or helping him handle power tools for home projects. In these moments, I learned of Dad's character and biblical manhood: his strength, patience, diligence, and care for our entire family. My father's love gave me a preview of God's love at such an early age.

Do you take the time to know your heavenly Father? Even the immense joy of a caring father-figure when his child embraces him is incomparable to the joy God has when we seek Him. The familiar parable of the prodigal son is a reminder of God's patient love--and a reminder of the blessings we miss by not putting Him first.

1. We miss warning signs.

"Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living" (Luke 15:13 ESV).

When we walk away from God, we walk away from wisdom. The father in this parable gives his young son a share of property, yet the son loses it in a matter of days! We can just as easily make careless decisions without God that leave us empty-handed. Hungry and needy, the son desperately longs to eat pig's food, but even that is withheld from him (v. 15-16). Similarly, we may seek provision from other people or opportunities, but we will find ourselves unfulfilled and spiritually empty.

2. We misplace our identity.

"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 ESV).

Out of guilt, the son believes he's no longer good enough to be considered his father's son. He settles for the very least, when his father is prepared to give him much more. God is faithful to forgive us, but we cannot underestimate the consequences of sin. Walking away from our Father creates shame that blinds us from who we are and what He has in store for us.

3. We miss the point.

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

Direction lies on the other side of repentance and obedience. We don't have to wait to make a terrible mistake in order to learn a lesson. The lifestyle the son practices outside his father's house leaves him with nothing. However, when he returns home, he receives a love that restores him with more than he had before. We cannot clean up the past ourselves, but we can stop, turn around, and get on the path we need to be on.

God's love is patient, but why wait to come to Him? When I visit home from college, my dad and I catch up on lost time, but I can't help but wonder how many lessons from him I miss when I forget to call. Similarly, we cannot be who we need to be without regularly coming "home" and consulting our heavenly Father.

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