

## THE FATHER'S PURPOSE

Luke 15:11-24

Here are just a few things you probably never heard your Dad say or ever will.

1. Well, how about that? I'm lost! Looks like we'll have to stop and ask for directions.
2. Here's a credit card and the keys to my new car – GO CRAZY!
3. Your mother and I are going away for the weekend, you might want to consider throwing a party.
4. Whaddya wanna go and get a job for? I make plenty of money for you to spend.
5. Father's Day? Ahhh – don't worry about that – it's no big deal.

In 1900, fathers prayed their children would learn English.

Today, fathers pray their children will speak English.

In 1900, fathers could count on children to join the family business.

Today, fathers pray their kids will soon come home from college long enough to teach them how to work the computer.

In 1900, a father gave a pencil box for Christmas, and the kid was all smiles.

Today, a father spends \$800 at Toys 'R' Us, and the kid screams because he didn't get an X-Box.

And speaking of wanting things: After successfully passing his driver's test, the teen came home and asked his Dad if he could use the family car. The father agreed, but indicated that there were several rules that the son needed to follow. He needed to get good grades, keep his room clean, make the yard neat, and get a haircut.

Several months passed and the teen one day came into the house to talk to the father with his report card in hand. He said, "Dad, I got great marks on my report card. I've been keeping my room neat as a pin, and the yard is always ship-shape. How about letting me use the car now?"

The father replied that in fact he had noticed all his hard work, but stated that he still needed to get his haircut. To which the son replied, "but Dad, Jesus had long hair." The father said, "Yes Son, that's true and He walked everywhere he went."

A number of years ago a guy by the name of Jack Kammer wrote a short story about what fathers do as he met Pablo, Juan and Richard. He had just spent four days at a men's conference discussing new solutions to old problems. They had decided that the nation was in urgent need of a massive dose of strong, noble, loving, nurturing, healthy male energy to counteract America's moral and social decline. They talked a lot about the importance of fathers being a pattern to model after and how to achieve that.

Hauling a heavy suitcase behind him he needed to get to the Los Angeles Airport. He couldn't find a phone he could understand or a cab interested in his fare. He relates spotting three young men hanging out at a fast food restaurant and decided to take a chance. He approached them and asked how they were doing and then asked how much money they would take to get him to the airport. The young men looked at each other and one said they'd do it for \$10. The author said he'd pay \$20. Listen to their exchange.

The driver popped the trunk and offered to put the suitcase in to which the author declined and stated he would keep it with him in the car. "That's cool," the guy in the T-shirt said.

So there I was, entrusting my life to what I hoped to be "positive male energy." I was thinking we should go west to Lincoln Avenue. We headed east. Now

what? But then we turned south and soon we were on a freeway. I knew it could have been stupid, but I took out my wallet, removed a twenty and said to the driver, "Here, I want to pay you now." The driver took it with a simple "thanks."

"So here I am, guys," I said. "I sure hope you're going to take care of me."

T-shirt, sitting in the back seat with me, my suitcase between us, smiled knowingly and said, "It's okay, man. We're good guys."

I nodded and shrugged, "I sure hope so, because if you're not, I'm in big trouble, aren't I?" They all laughed and then T-shirt spoke up. "So where you from?" "Baltimore," I answered. "Oh, man, it's nice back east. That's what they say. Green and everything." I smiled and nodded, "Yeah. And back east, L.A. is our idea of heaven." "Naah, it's rough here, man. It's hard," said T-shirt.

"How old are you guys?" I asked. They were sixteen and seventeen. They were all in school and had part-time jobs. T shirt and the driver worked in a restaurant. The quiet young man riding shotgun didn't say.

"Tell me about the gangs. Are there gangs at your school?"

"There's gangs everywhere, man. Everywhere. It's crazy."

"Are you guys in a gang?"

"No way, man."

"Why not?"

"Because there's no hope in it. You just get a bullet in your head."

"Yeah, but what hope is there for you outside the gang?"

"I don't know. I just want to get a future. Do something."

"What's the difference between you guys and the guys in the gangs?"

"I don't know, man. We just don't want to do it."

"Yeah, but why not? What's the difference?"

"I don't know, man. I don't know. We're just lucky I guess."

I let the question sit for a moment, then started up.

"What about fathers? Do you have a father at home?"

"Yeah. I do."

"How about you?" I asked the driver.

"Yeah, I got a dad."

"Living with you?"

"Yeah."

And the shotgun rider volunteered, "I got a dad, too."

"How about the guys in the gangs? Do they have fathers living with them?"

"No way, man. None of them do."

"So maybe fathers make a difference?" I suggested.

"Absolutely, man. Absolutely."

"Why?" I probed. "What difference does a father make?"

"He's always behind you, man, pushing you.

Keeping you in line, telling you what's what," driver and shotgun agreed.

And I was taken safely right where I needed to go. The driver even asked what terminal I wanted. On time. Without a hitch. I met eighteen amazing men at the conference in the mountains. I am eternally grateful for their wisdom and their urge to heal the nation.

But the most amazing men I met on my trip were the three youngest ones, Pablo, Juan and Richard -- amazing because in spite of everything they were trying to be good. And the men to whom I am most grateful are the men I never met. The men to whom I am most grateful are their fathers. It was their fathers who got me to the airport. It was their fathers who kept me safe.

Sometimes we can wonder what our role is in the family. I mean, really. We spend time putting toys together and fixing them when they break, trying to get past the difficult scenes in a Wii game, taking care of all the hard chores around the house and yard, fix bikes, put up swing sets and at the end of the day when it's time to get tucked into bed or want a story read who do they call for? Mom. Lest you think your role to be insignificant in some way let me share with you a few sobering statistics about the importance of being a Dad. Maybe this will help you measure your worth.

According to the U.S Department of Health 63% of teen suicides come from fatherless homes, 5 times the national average.

90% of all runaways and homeless children are from fatherless homes, 32 times the national average.

80% of rapists with anger problems come from fatherless homes, 14 times the national average.

85% of children with behavioral problems come from fatherless homes, 20 times the national average.

75% of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes, 10 times the national average.

The U.S. Department of Justice reports that 85% of all youths in prison come from fatherless homes, 20 times the national average.

Children with Fathers who are involved are 40% less likely to repeat a grade in school and are 70% less likely to drop out of school.

Father's play an important role both in society and in families. There is a wonderful story about a father in Scripture that I would like us to turn to. It's a familiar story, one that you'll know right away, but one where our focus is generally not on the father but rather on his son. Today though, I would like to take this passage and consider the impact of the father in this story. Turn with me if you will in your Bibles to Luke 15:11-24. We often call this the story of the prodigal son, but today I'd like us to consider the purposeful father.

First of all let's notice the father's pain.

### I. THE FATHER'S PAIN – v. 11-13

As we read through this parable we come to understand that this man was quite well-to-do. We also understand that the son is motivated by nothing more than pure selfishness. In essence he was saying "Pops, give me what's coming to me. I want it now; I can't wait around for you to die." When he asked the father to give him his portion of the

estate, it was a demand. He wanted the father to give him his portion as if the amount were a debt the father owed him. Keep in mind the son hadn't worked for any of it.

In Bible days and according to the law the oldest son was given a double portion of whatever the father had and the rest of the siblings divided up the rest. Both are as much different as they are alike. The older was hard working, the younger wanted a life of ease.

The older was patient to wait for his inheritance, the younger wanted it now.

The older was driven to succeed, the younger was impulsive and reckless.

But they both had hearts of selfishness.

Enter the father, here he is with these two sons. The first born got 2/3's of the estate and the other son got 1/3. What the father had to do to get everything around would have been a laborious task. His assets weren't just sitting in a bank vault; they were tied up in land and livestock. Everything would have to be calculated to determine their value. Some of the property or possessions would then have to be sold to give the son the dollar amount he had coming. It was an unusual request because typically it was all handled after the man passed away. But the son wanted his portion now. He was impatient and selfish. "Give it to me now, I'm tired of sitting around while the world is passing me by."

He no longer wanted to live under the protection and rules of the father. He wanted his freedom, his independence. He wanted to make his rules and live life the way he saw fit. He felt cooped up and chained to the father's old fashioned ways. He was tired of being told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. "Give me my space. I want to live it up"

Everything the son needed for peace, joy, happiness and contentment was at his disposal through the father, but he refused it. He didn't want to be subjected to the father's will or ways. And I want you to notice that the son had no intention of coming back. Our passage states that he didn't waste any time once he had the cash. He got together everything he had and left and he went as far away as he could. The Bible says that it was

there that he lived wildly. He took all his belongings so that he would have nothing that would stir his heart to return and he lived it up. He lived for pleasure. He lived for things. He lived for freedom from parental authority and restraints. And he thought “man, this is the life.”

How it must have grieved the father. The pain must have cut deep into his soul. Maybe you’re here today and know the same pain as a father of what this man must have felt, the sadness that rends the heart because you know deep down inside that the child is about to make bad choices, foolish choices. You grieve over their decisions and no amount of discussion is going to change their mind. You understand the anguish of seeing your child walk out the door, perhaps never to see them again. You feel the pain of rejecting everything you have attempted to teach them about life and making right choices only to watch them throw it all away. You hope that you trained them in such a way that they will return to walk the path of righteousness. III John 4 “I have no greater joy than to see my children walk in truth.”

The action of the son was a slap in the face to the father who had given him everything. And as the son ventured off to this far away country his heart longed after him even though the son never gave a look back. He wondered about him and hoped and prayed that everything was okay. Day after day the anguish of uncertainty mounted on an already broken and heavy heart hoping to hear some news of his wellbeing – but nothing. The inner turmoil was always present on his face. His shoulders sagged. There was an ever present sadness in his eye. He wanted the very best for this son, but the son wouldn’t have it.

Alexander MacLaren writes “this parable...appeals to the universal emotion of fatherhood, which yearns over a wandering child just because he has wandered.”

Maybe you were that child who at one point stood in the doorway of home and because of selfishness and sin took that step out the door. Maybe you were the prodigal who didn’t care about the pain you would cause your father. Only one thing was on your mind, getting what you wanted.

Have we stopped to consider that there are times in our own selfishness whether man or woman – boy or girl, that we have caused our Heavenly Father pain? In our selfishness we have wanted our own way. I think it pains Him that there are so many who have turned away from His love. We tell the Father we want to spread our wings a little more, sow our oats. There are those who tell him they no longer need Him. And like the father in the parable He lets us go to that distant land where we think happiness awaits. He never forces His way or His will on us. How painful it must be for Him to see people walk away from so much that He has to offer.

Notice beginning in verse 14 what happens next. Vs. 14-19

About the way the son lived Matthew Henry offers this comment: “willful waste brings woeful want.”

After he had nothing left to live on because he had spent it all on loose living a severe famine hit the land and he began to be in need. The only job he could get was feeding pigs. To a Jew he took on the most degrading job. It was considered the ultimate indignity. If you’ve ever worked with pigs you know how disgusting it can be. They’re messy. They’re dirty. They stink. Had the father known everything that was happening to his son, I’m sure as you would be too; his pain would have been exponentially intensified. The son could go no farther and he could sink no lower. How deep the father’s pain must have been.

I want you to see in these next verses the father’s pardon.

## II. THE FATHER’S PARDON – v. 17-20a

In thinking about home and perhaps the last careless words he had so hastily said to his father, he considered that his father was a reasonable and fair man. He also knew that his father was a generous man because the servants had more than enough. Through the years growing up the son would have noticed how his father had demonstrated forgiveness. When he was cheated by a farm hand, or another business or when he or his brother did something they should not have done, the father was forgiving. He knew his father was a forgiving

man and that was the best place for him to go. He knew that it was the only place he could go. He was willing to bear the consequences of his actions and accept a position as one of the servants to work for his Dad. He even rehearsed what he would say.

Do you realize how generous your Heavenly Father is? Do you know how forgiving He is? Have you experienced His forgiveness? It does not matter how far away from Him you have gone. It does not matter how riotous your living has been. It does not matter how long you have been away. Our Father is forgiving and how like Him we should be.

I John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Psalms 103:8-12 “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor His anger forever; He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love for those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our sins from us.”

Exodus 34:6-7 “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.”

It is in those moments of utter despair and hopelessness that the wanderer desperate for what he had begins to ponder life before being destitute. He began to think about what he had given up. He thinks about the waste he has caused. He became homesick.

If you have ever been in that place, you know well of what I speak. Some feel too ashamed to venture back home. To them it's an admission of failure. It's an admission of guilt. But having considered all his options, the only option left to him, the only right option left to him, was to return home because he knew deep down the father the character of the father.

Have we come to realize just how forgiving our Father is? Oh, now it doesn't mean that we should

just go out and continue to sin. We are not to continue in sin so that God's grace can increase. God forbid. (Romans 6:1-2)

How comforting it should be that when we sin and have strayed from the Father, that He will forgive when we return to Him and ask forgiveness. If you are that wanderer from God, return to Him for His forgiveness. If you have a son or daughter who is that wanderer, when they return from that far off land in repentance, be willing to pardon.

The father experienced pain at his son's leaving. The father had a heart to pardon. Next, notice the father's passion.

### III. THE FATHER'S PASSION – v. 20b

We have no idea how long the son had been away. The father has no idea about the kind of life the son had lived. But notice the kind of reception the father gave his son. I suspect that the father daily looked down the road to see if there was any sign of his return. The father longed after his son. And so it is that one day “while he (the son) was still a long way off...”

Do you know that God the Father continually looks for those who seek Him? Because of sin we have been estranged from God we have gone to that far off land. He longs for our return into a relationship with Him like it was before sin entered to the world. He looks for us to return. He waits patiently because He doesn't want anyone to perish.

The father's heart went out to his son. As he saw him drawing closer he noticed his son's deplorable condition. He carried none of the bags he had left with. His clothes were dirty and torn from work he had done and the long, weary miles of travel. He probably looked much thinner and sickly due to a lack of food. His stride seemed more laboring. He perhaps interprets the return of his son as repentance. And the father couldn't bear seeing him take another step so he ran out to meet him. His compassion for the son moved him to run. He stripped off his own dignity and did what no elder statesman did – he ran. And when he reached the section of road where his son now stood before him, there were no lectures, there was no scolding, there

was no anger, there was no questioning. There was only love. There was only passion for his son as he embraced him and kissed him. How tender that scene must have been. If you have ever been a wanderer who has come home you know the utter exhilaration of such a tender moment by a father who had waited so patiently for that day to come. I can vividly see the father just standing in that road holding his son. Who cares what the neighbors thought. My son has come home.

Oh, dear friends, how passionate is God's love for us. From God's own testimony He has said "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you." Jeremiah 31:3 It was the loving nature of the father that drew the son home.

He whose nature is love, because He is love, reached through the corridor of time and entered into our world to seek and save the lost – all because of that great love. I Corinthians 13:8 reminds us that love never fails. And because God is love, God's love never fails because God never fails.

Lamentations 3:22-23 "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed because His compassions never fail, they are new every morning, great is Thy faithfulness."

Dear friends, if you have wandered from the Father, know that He is looking for you to return to Him. Know that He is ready to lavish His great love on you. Know that He has already poured out His love on us demonstrated when we were still a long way off from Him, Christ died for us. How passionate is the Father's love to each of us.

The father had pain.  
The father is always willing to pardon.  
The father is filled with passion.  
Finally, notice the Father's pleasure.

#### IV. THE FATHER'S PLEASURE – v. 21-24

The son began to speak his rehearsed confession when the father stopped him in mid sentence. It is the pleasure of the Father to bestow on us the right to being a son.

II Corinthians 6:18 "I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

The father gave every sign of a son. The son felt he was unworthy to be in the family, but the father felt differently. Out of his pleasure notice what the father gave to the son.

The son was wearing tattered clothes. Don't just bring something from the attic out of a box going to Good Will, bring the best robe. The robe was a sign of position. When God adopted us as sons, He gave us the best robe. He gave us the robe of righteousness. We are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. God doesn't see us in filthy rags any more. He sees us in the best adornment He could give – His Son. He took off the old garments and made us a new creation.

The son thought he had no identity. He was willing just to be a servant, but the father gave him the family ring, the emblem of authority. It's a symbol of his affection. When we got married Robyn and I exchanged rings. I gave her a ring that spoke of my affection for her and that she was now being identified with me. She belongs to me and that ring gives her the right to act on my behalf.

The ring was a mark of someone who was free. The ring was a sign of wealth, position and honor in the family.

The son came barefoot, the sign of a servant. A servant didn't wear sandals, but the son was given sandals. He was undignified, but the father showed him dignity. He wanted to be a servant, but the father said you are my son.

The son came hungry and the father gave him a feast. As children of God we await such a feast that will be given in our honor.

Revelation 19:9 "Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'"

The father said "We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

The Pharisees ridiculed Jesus because He was a man who welcomed sinners and ate with them. But

through repentance, the Father doesn't see us as sinners, He welcomes us as Sons, lavishing us with every privilege of a son. Out of His great love for us, the Father has so much that He will bestow on us when we finally meet face to face. So when you read this passage, think about the father's pain, Think about the father's pardon, Think about the father's passion, Think about the father's pleasure, and remember that is how God feels about you. Do you need to come home to Him? Do father's really matter? There is one Father who does. I want to close by playing a song *When God Ran*.

Benny Hester  
When God Ran lyrics

Almighty God,  
The Great I Am  
Immoveable Rock,  
Omnipotent powerful

Awesome Lord,  
Victorious Warrior  
Mighty Conquerer,  
Commanding King of Kings  
And the only time,  
the only time I ever saw Him run  
Was when

He ran to me,  
Took me in His arms, held my head to His chest  
And said "My son's come home again".  
Looked in my face, wiped the tears from my eyes  
With forgiveness in His voice  
He said "Son, do you know I still love you?"

It caught me by surprise when God ran  
[ Lyrics from:  
[http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/b/benny\\_hester/when\\_god\\_ran.html](http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/b/benny_hester/when_god_ran.html) ]

The day I left Home,  
I knew I'd broken His heart  
I wondered if  
Things would ever be the same,

Then one night,  
I remembered His love for me  
And down that dusty road, ahead I could see  
It was the only time,  
the only time I ever saw Him run

Was when He ran to me,  
Took me in His arms, held my head to His chest

And said "My son's come home again".  
Looked in my face, wiped the tears from my eyes  
With forgiveness in His voice  
He said "Son, do you know I still love you?"

It caught me by surprise, It dropped me to my knees  
When God ran

Bridge  
Holy God, Righteous One  
Who turned my way  
Now I know, You've been waiting  
For this day

{Interlude}

{Repeat Chorus}