

The Prayers of the Prodigal

by John Follette

The sermon explores the theme of prayer and the prodigal son's journey, highlighting the importance of coming to oneself and seeking God's guidance for the building of Christian character.

Scripture: Luke 15:11, Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 14:1, James 4:3, 1 John 5:14

Topics: "Prayer Life", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

John Follette delves into the story of the prodigal son from a fresh perspective, focusing on the theme of 'The Prayers of the Prodigal.' He emphasizes the importance of prayer in the prodigal's journey, highlighting the transformation from a self-centered 'Give me' prayer to a humble 'Make me' prayer, reflecting a deeper understanding of spiritual growth and character development. Through the prodigal son's experience, Follette challenges the audience to examine their own motives, desires, and prayers, urging them to seek a deeper connection with God and a transformation of heart.

Transcript

I wish to share with you some of the thoughts suggested by reading once more the story of the prodigal son as told by Luke in the fifteenth chapter of his Gospel. This incident makes rich appeal to almost anybody, good or bad, rich or poor, old or young, experienced or otherwise, purely on the basis of its very human and natural elements. It is colorful and intensely dramatic; perhaps that is the reason it so interests the minds of young people.

I am sure we have all heard messages based upon this narrative, and are familiar with the usual interpretation and application of truth and the salutary moral lessons deduced. Tonight, I do not wish to trace the lines of thought from the usual points, but rather share with you the bread of truth as I have found it tucked away in the story--fully as suggestive and instructive as the stereotyped lessons often drawn.

I have already suggested the theme for this meditation in the subject, "The Prayers of the Prodigal." At once we stop at the thought of prayer in connection with the prodigal, for one does not usually think of the prodigal praying. As a rule he is held up as an example in all the shame of his weakness and sin, but never do we picture him praying, and that twice.

Shall we review together the account and familiarize our minds with the general structure of it, so we may more fully appreciate why and for what he prays? We find here a typical home. It need not be only the one mentioned here, but may be duplicated a thousand times over our countryside. The characters and

conduct are essentially the same there or here, then or now.

We do not know how long these two brothers have lived happily together, sharing the common blessings of the home and enjoying the fellowship of each member. But the time is reached (sooner or later by all) when the discovery of self-expression comes, with a keen desire to venture out upon life, to experiment and try out many potentialities of being. The thrill of a new step and the responsibility and joy of being on one's own, as we say, captivates this younger brother.

Let us here be tolerant. The two boys are evidently of very different temperament and disposition. Life appeals to each from very different angles. And surely there is nothing wrong in this. If the older son is satisfied to remain at home, continue in the general routine and perhaps prosaic life (at least to the younger son), let him stay. He is no doubt contented to go and come, come and go, and live out the life for which he seems fitted. Perhaps his gifts and callings are lodged in that field, and he would prove a great misfit did he try to adapt himself to a realm or condition for which he has neither capacity nor experience.

Nor shall we condemn the younger son. I am neither defending him nor excusing him. I do want to be fair and understand him. He may have been spoiled because he was the younger, as sometimes happens. That, how-ever, would be the fault of the parents. At any rate he has quite a different make-up from his brother, and for this he cannot be blamed. He begins to find within and ever pushing through to manifestation in life, a thousand unsatisfied desires and promptings. He may have been, shall I say blessed or cursed, with an imagination ? I will leave that for you to settle. At least he feels certain desires stirring; the Spirit of romance and adventure common to youth give him a sense of crampedness; and a great hunger fills his heart to get out, out, out--ever out.

He dislikes the confines of the natural environment and its limitations. The robust, visionary, throbbing life wants to try its wings. He feels the pull of the free, sunny air; he sees the blue sky of youth, the distant hills, green and luscious. Yes, they are green (just as green as inexperienced youth). But the dear lad does not know that. And do not try to tell him unless you wish to have war and trouble.

If you wish to help him, I trust God may give you grace, love, understanding and sound judgment. Try to see from his viewpoint. He has no background of experience as yet to help him, and so he is not capable of very sound judgment on many issues. He has not yet learned (as a Christian) the difference between possibility and probability. It takes some people a long, long time to learn this. Some seem never to learn it.

Do not quarrel with nature. Meet the condition as it is, honestly, and help the boy make the decisions necessary from his own heart, because he wants to do so. Do not buy him and worse still, do not force him to do the right, because you think if he does not he will break your heart. Never mind your heart. It is his heart you are after.

A most interesting question of motives comes in here, and I am tempted to talk upon that line but must not. If you are older than he then try to retrace your steps, remembering your costly experiences, until you come to his level of understanding. He has not lived long enough to appreciate your good advice. He may listen out of respect, but it is most difficult for him to see how in any way, his present condition and mood could be helped by what you are telling him. He cannot feature himself facing results which you suggest. "You cannot put old heads on young shoulders." Use tact and find the approach to "where he lives," and work from that angle. Ask God for wisdom to discover the motive of appeal, and always remember it is a most delicate and sacred ministry. Drench it with prayer and intense love for his soul and well being.

Let us look again at this lad. The everyday going and coming, the humdrum life of Dad and the home folks near-ly kill him. He thinks his brother is perfectly stupid, and all the rest of the world, to him, seems asleep. Oh if he could only once do something different, something he wanted to do! And what does he not think and feel he could do!

Perhaps he is still in High School (this is, of course, all imaginary). I have to say this because some people are so unimaginative and literal they would probably ask me for a "proof text" that he ever went to school! Maybe he has finished college and is quite sophisticated, and has acquired that bored air so many young folks have. Life is slow and he has to endure so much from the "whole unenlightened universe." Even a college graduate may have a technical knowledge of many points of learning, but there is one thing that a diploma can never give you, and that is the good sense and judgment that come from experience.

Now be patient, you older folk; he is not yet to be blamed. His whole attitude is a part of his nature and outlook. Perhaps he has fought down some foes with which you were never asked to contend. Sometimes people are praised for victory when, after all, it is not victory; for the person praised was too great a coward and too weak to be trusted with a real battle. I think we many times look into the eyes of dear souls who bravely meet enemies we are never asked to face. Be tolerant! The lad is not to be condemned, judged, and criticized--he needs help! He needs someone to help direct the fire and desire, someone to understandingly assist him, put these fine qualities to use and great blessing. Shall I be frank with you? I like this lad very much. And I like very much every girl and every boy today clothed once more with his temperament and rich possibilities.

I cannot tarry here to consider why he goes to his father, etc. The whole field is fertile, suggestive and real. He can stand the cramping no longer, so he asks of his father his share of goods--"Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." And here we can find no sin. It was not wrong that he should have what lawfully belonged to him. It was coming to him, and no doubt since he was of age the father consents at once to give him his portion.

Now we come to a field for speculation. It has been a great pleasure for some to let their imagination run on full leash, to sniff all the possible trails of discovery as to how he spent, where he spent, why he spent, and when he spent his goods in riotous living. But after all, the detail is not so necessary. At least God thinks so; I am sure He could have told us were it for our good. The point is, he wasted it in riotous living.

Now we find the fault, the sin which brought the younger son to the pigpen. All the different things he did, and the many ways he wasted his substance, are surely wrong. But the chief sin was the self-will of inexperienced youth. Self-will is, after all, the root sin of the human race. All the manifestations of sin as we see them in their out-working, are in the last analysis the fruitage of self-will. All this young man did was to have his own way. Let that be what it may, it landed him in the place of defeat, failure, tragedy and loss. It always does.

All you have to do to land in hell is to have your own way in all the thousand patterns it may trace upon your map of life. The self-will of some men does not make so ugly a picture, but it will keep them away from God and truth fully as well as the self-will of another appearing in more picturesque and colorful trappings. Who knows but the self-will of the older brother at home may have been as nasty, in some ways, as that of the younger brother. At least he did not show a very happy and thankful spirit when his brother returned. I am afraid there was something "awful good" and perhaps smug about that older son. I don't seem to feel I would like his general personality very much. "Awful good" folks bother me sometimes.

Do not mistake me--goodness in itself never bothers me, for it is like God, and I love God. But folks goodness does. Do you see the difference?

So now we see our young friend reduced to the level of a pigpen. He has had, as people say, his fling in life. He has tried out all the experiments and thrills he feels he was made for; he has had the tremulous excitement of venturing out upon the thin ice of personal freedom. He has come at last with tired heart and weary feet to the green hills only to find them decked with the brush of human experience thousands of years old. All those wise and subtle suggestions of h/s mind have been swallowed up in a vortex of human philosophy as old as the human race. How many, many things he has come to in his thrilling, bold adventure! He has come to wealth and he has spent it; to beauty and he has marred it; to truth and he has ignored it; to life and he has dissipated it.

And now the story says, he came to himself. My! my! What a revelation and what a discovery! Thank God he met himself. This is the revelation for which he was made. Only it is sad that he should have to travel so rough a road, and have to have this auspicious meeting in so un-poetical and crude a place. But never mind the pigpen; it is the place of discovery and revelation for him. Let us think of that and not the pigs. The pen is not the end; it is the first step out and up. Where was your pigpen? To what level of the human and sinful failure did you move before you, too, came to yourself? Perhaps your pen had a few straggling morning glories over it to hide its real character, but it takes more than a morning glory to hide it. Let us leave the pen. It is God's glory that hides us. Thank His wonderful Name!

The youth's restless heart has climbed the hill and now makes friends with him.

Have you, too, come to yourself and sat down to think through to such a revelation? Life (real life) is not a matter of the material world nor to be valued in the common terms used to appraise its worth. Jesus said, "For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." I am glad that He used the word things. That is so inclusive, comprehensive and limitless. Material things, of course, come first to mind--money, houses, lands, etc.; but things may be otherwise--fame, name, honor, power, intellect, gifts, position, etc. These are also often mistaken for life. So one may have an abundance of these and not have life or know life.

This young man discovers that life consists not in the abundance of things possessed. It is not things, but life, which is of supreme importance.

Also the lad finds that he is more than the body in which he lives. Man is essentially spirit. The body with all its sensations, acquisitions and functioning is but the vehicle of expression. The invisible, evasive, almost unknown personality is the living reality, and will outlive the poor, perishing body. He came to see these simple, fundamental truths.

There also were the principles and laws of being to be considered, and here the prodigal came upon a field of dynamic truth and power. The temporal, material world is not the world for which he was created. He discovers some of the first, hidden, potential values of character building and spiritual culture. How it thrills him! Pigpen or no pigpen, he cannot remain here. Life means more than things, gifts, or all the material age. So he does the right and only important thing--he goes home, confesses his sin and rests at the feet of his father.

I know this story is intensely colorful and dramatic, I want it to be so; and do not let us miss the heart attitudes because of the bodily postures. "But when he was yet a great way out his father saw him, and

had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Is that not wonderful? The father does not stand still and wait until the son comes and falls at his feet and begs. The heart attitude of the Father is never that. He ran to meet him. Oh, the deep, unfathomable love of a God like that! God running to meet a sinner, a poor, self-willed fool. How can you keep away from a God like this? I can't half see the robe, the ring and the fatted calf for seeing the anxious, loving heart of the Father. And did he not know all the story? Do not worry--He knows only too well.

Now some of you are asking, "What about the prodigal's prayers?" We will come to them soon, but in order to appreciate his prayers let us review a little. What was the character of his first prayer? Was it not, "Give me"? Prayer is a sincere desire of the heart which causes one to focus all his forces toward the realization of that desire. It may not always be expressed in words; it may be the actuating and dominating force in your innermost being causing you to bring to play all your powers for its material gratification.

As a lad at home the younger son was eaten' up, as we say, with the desire to hold in his own hands the powers of his life. It became a prayer--"Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." He wanted material things and got them. He misused his powers and gifts in life. He exhausted them, and discovered that they could not and did not serve to satisfy the deep-seated desire for life.

So the revelation of the spiritual side of life and its meaning and the vision of growth and development of the real being and personality he found himself to be, roused him to new prayer. "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." How lofty and glorious such a prayer! Now the father can take a hand in the matter and can make him into the desire of his heart.

The Christian character which God desires to manifest through us is not like a gift or an isolated experience which may be realized in a moment. The new birth is that and so is the Baptism of the Spirit. Both are spoken of as gifts--and gifts may be received and possessed immediately. But Christian character comes by process, building, growth, and continual development. The new birth is unto and the Baptism of the Spirit is unto the eternal purpose of conformity to the divine. Listen to these wonderful words which back up this truth:

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son."

"And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one even as we are one."

"But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

"Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

We are born of the Spirit and so become partakers of the divine nature which gives us the basic, potential material for the ideal. We are also baptized in the Holy Spirit which gives us the power for the mighty transformation and accomplishment of His purpose: making us witnesses to that image. You will remember Jesus said, "But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witness unto me" Note He does not say, "Ye shall become servants unto me." We serve by

means of gifts and callings, divine and supernatural qualifications. He says, witnesses--the word really means martyr. It suggests the whole life as a living testimony rather than the restricted meaning usually taught--such as to testify, speak, serve or minister for Him. Of course, to testify or speak for Him is included, but is only a fragmentary aspect of this mighty witnessing wrought by the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. The whole life witnesses (even unto martyrdom) to His name, character, nature, conduct, likeness and image.

We also receive gifts of the Spirit. This is the equipment for service. We are to occupy until He comes. The gifts thus exercised become channels and means of expression for the life of Christ within.

So you see, my dear, young friends, we are greatly privileged in having in our hearts and working through us the sweet and at the same time powerful Spirit of God. He has come to make us. Perhaps you, too, prayed, "Give me, give me," and God gave you the gift of the Spirit (the portion of goods that falleth to you). Is He now making you ?

Life is primarily for the glory of God. "...Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." Any spending of life or using of life's gifts or the gifts of the Spirit for selfish or ignoble purposes is wasting your substance in riotous living. You must know there is much riotous living aside from the night-clubs, road-houses, amusement halls and such places. The misuse or abuse of the gifts of life or the Spirit makes riotous living in an Assembly, home or the private life of a Christian. So let us look out and mind our step and don't feel too smug--take a little inventory now before you begin to smell a pigpen.

I never saw the possibility of such an experience befalling a Christian until one day in my study the Lord directed me to Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church. Time will not allow me to make a study of this situation and to run, as it were, an analogy between the prodigal son and the Corinthian. Nevertheless, by a few suggestions you may detect it. This church, too, had prayed, "Give me, give me." And God had given her the portion of goods that befell her. She had the testimony that she came behind in no gift. But with all her gifts and power we find her in great need and difficulty until Paul has to write this corrective epistle to her.

What was the matter ? The church at Corinth was wasting her substance in riotous living and had not prayed the second prayer, "Make me, make me." The building of Christian character had not kept up with the display of gifts. And that is very possible. We know this from the word Paul uses in the 15th chapter, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels," etc. The word though throws the whole matter into possibility. And Paul saw that was just what was the matter. The motives back of the use and display of the gifts were wrong. The gifts were right and were of God but the way was selfish and not to God's glory. They had power--plenty of power and gifts--but the motive, love (born of true Christian character) was missing.

Therefore there were present in the church, unkindness, envy, vaunting, puffed-up spirits, unseemly conduct, provoked spirits, evil surmising, etc., etc., and yet there were gifts and manifestations wonderful to behold. Yes, there was plenty of riotous living and wasting of substance, so Paul shows them a better way. The thirteenth chapter is the better way, or law for the operation of the gifts. They were to have lives backed up by the transforming power of the Spirit. When the church learned to pray the second prayer, "Make me, make me," she became a glorious testimony and witness unto God.

Dear young people, for what are you praying? Are you still wanting things, things, thing -- Even the gifts of the Spirit merely for the sake of having them ? Listen, I want you to have gifts, God wants you to have gifts

(He even says to pray for them) but with all that, do remember to pray, "Make me, make me." Shall we not all afresh yield our hearts and lives more fully to His wonderful will that He may make us the witnesses He desires in this needy, perishing world?

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