

## **“What Made the Prodigal Son’s Father a Good Dad?”**

**Luke 15: 11-24**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor  
Smoke Rise Baptist Church  
Stone Mountain, Georgia

### **Fathers’ Day**

The title of my sermon assumes something, doesn’t it? It assumes that the prodigal’s dad was a good father. I suppose that is risky to assume based upon how little we know about him, but I’ll take my chances. Any man that handled his two sons with such wisdom and patience had to be a good man and father.

So, my question on this Fathers’ Day is what made the father of the prodigal a good dad? I am indebted to Dr. O. S. Hawkins for his insight into the answer to this question. He claims that this man was a model father because he had open hands, open arms and an open heart. Let me explain.

**The prodigal’s father was a good dad because he had open hands.** He knew when to release his grip and let go. When his son came and asked for his inheritance so that he could leave home, he gave him what he asked for and let him go.

I wonder how hard this was for him especially knowing his son would not make wise decisions? Words cannot express it, I’m sure.

The hardest I ever cried in my life was the day my oldest child left home. I thought I would die. Jackie told me that she has never seen me sob so hard before or since. It even caught her by surprise.

I am sure I cried for a variety of reasons. I wasn’t ready to see our family of five get smaller. Those growing up years had gone so quickly. Surely it was not time to let a child go. There was so much more I wanted to say and do. How could he go without me? Would he be safe? Would he be loved? Would I see him again? What would it be like around home without him? All these questions and feelings that welled up inside of me poured out after he was gone. I could even cry thinking about it now.

Letting go is hard. I’m sure it was no different for the father of the prodigal.

My mother died suddenly in 1995. Days before she died, I talked to her on the phone. I asked her a question that was heavy on my heart at that time. Before I share the question with you, I need to tell you what I thought was her greatest virtue. I quote from her eulogy that I wrote.

“Her greatest virtue was her ability to let her children go. Like a mother bird, she reared us four boys to fly and then let us soar. She encouraged us to chart our own course and pursue our own dreams. She never interfered or pulled on the umbilical cord. I never recall any unrealistic or selfish expectations. Our mistakes were never accentuated but our accomplishments were never forgotten. She defined and embodied the words encouragement, independence, strength and discipline.

In the last conversation I had with her before she died, I asked her how she did it. I wanted to know how she let us go without revealing her pain and agony. I told her I wasn’t doing so well sending my first born to the Marine Corps and preparing to send my only daughter to college. Little did I know I was going to have to let her go, too.

‘At times, I hurt so badly I thought I would die,’ she said, ‘but I was too grateful for you boys and too proud of you and your families to want it any other way.’ ”

No one said parenting would be easy. Responsible parenting can be a heartbreaking experience, can’t it?

**The father of the prodigal was a good dad because he had open arms.** When the prodigal decided to come home after squandering his inheritance, Jesus said, “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him” Luke 15:20.

Is there anything more affirming and welcoming than a hug? I don't know what it would be. If a picture is worth a thousand words, a hug is worth a million. It communicates what words never could. To me, a hug says that you don't have to be perfect for someone to embrace you. Since no one is perfect, we all need hugs.

Can you imagine how the prodigal felt when his father hugged him? How nervous and apprehensive he must have been about returning home. He prepared a speech about his remorse and expectations and even rehearsed it. He never got to give that speech in its entirety, did he? Actually, he was unable to say anything until his dad hugged and kissed him. What a relief that must have been.

That hug tells me two things that I think are important. It tells me how hard it must have been for this father to let his son go. I still remember the first time I saw Jason after boot camp. I thought I was going to squeeze all the air out of his lungs.

It also tells me that this father wanted to make sure that his son knew that nothing was more important than his well being. The problems that must be dealt with because this boy had made bad decisions would be dealt with in the proper time and place. That time was not then nor was the front gate the place. It was now time to let a scared and humiliated son know that home was still home and always would be. Nothing mattered until that was understood.

A Spanish story says that a father and his son became estranged. The son ran away and the father had no idea where to look for him. After months passed with no communication, the father put an ad in a Madrid paper that read, "Son, meet me in front of the newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you. Your Father." At the appointed time, over eight hundred boys showed up hoping the request was from their father.

**The father of the prodigal was a good dad because he had an open heart.** He loved his son at his best and his worst. He loved him when it was easy to do so and when it was hard. He loved him when he made bad decisions as well as good ones. He loved him and wanted everyone to know it.

It is easy to love lovely people, isn't it? It is easy to love our children when they have achieved their potential and made us proud. For sure, they need our love and affirmation then, too.

However, the time they need us most is during their identity crisis, when they have failed to achieve a goal or when they are reeling from foolish mistakes. When no one else loves them and they don't even love themselves, they need to know their parents love them and will be there for them.

John Hinckley, Jr. tried to assassinate President Reagan in March, 1981. In the book, Breaking Points, Hinckley's parents described their first visit with their son after the shooting.

"What do you say the first time you see your son after he has done the unthinkable? 'Why did you shoot the President, son?' Of course you don't. Instead, as we had done a number of times on the phone since Monday, we told John that we loved him. No amount of anger or revulsion could change that and that we intended to see this thing through together." Sounds like something the prodigal's father would say.

Was the father of the prodigal son a good dad? He gets my vote.