

**Bible  
Teachings  
Series II**



*A self-study  
course on  
God's love and  
forgiveness*

# **Broken Hearted Father**



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A self-study course on  
God's love and  
forgiveness



**Multi-Language Publications**

*Bringing the Written Word to the World*

Original text produced by the Prison Ministry Committee of the Commission on Special Ministries of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

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## **Getting Started**

This book is about a story Jesus taught in the Bible. The story is about a lost son. This booklet is divided into five chapters. At the end of the first four chapters is a test. The test questions cover only what you read in that chapter and the questions you have answered in the chapter.

When you finish answering a group of questions, you will be given a page number where you can turn to check your answers at the bottom of that page. Check your answers carefully. Correct any mistakes that you made. Make sure you understand all the answers before reading any further.

At the end of the booklet there is a final test. Before you complete the final test go back and review the chapter tests. Please look in the booklet if you need help to answer any of the questions. When you have completed the final test, you can either give the test to the person who gave you this booklet or mail it to the address on the back cover of the book. Someone will check the test and return it to you.

May God help you to learn more about Jesus Christ and bless the hours you spend studying God's Word.

**Luke 15:11-32**

<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued, “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger son spoke to his father. He said, ‘Father, give me my share of the family property.’ So the father divided his property between his two sons.

<sup>13</sup> “Not long after that, the younger son packed up all he had. Then he left for a country far away. There he wasted his money on wild living. <sup>14</sup> He spent everything he had.

“Then the whole country ran low on food. So the son didn’t have what he needed. <sup>15</sup> He went to work for someone who lived in that country, who sent him to the fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup> The son wanted to fill his stomach with the food the pigs were eating. But no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> “Then he began to think clearly again. He said, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food! But here I am dying from hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will get up and go back to my father. I will say to him. “Father, I have sinned against heaven. And I have sinned against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers.”’ <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father.

“While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him. He was filled with tender love for his son. He ran to him. He threw his arms around him and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup> “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.’

<sup>22</sup> “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattest

calf and kill it. Let's have a big dinner and celebrate.

<sup>24</sup> This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.'

"So they began to celebrate.

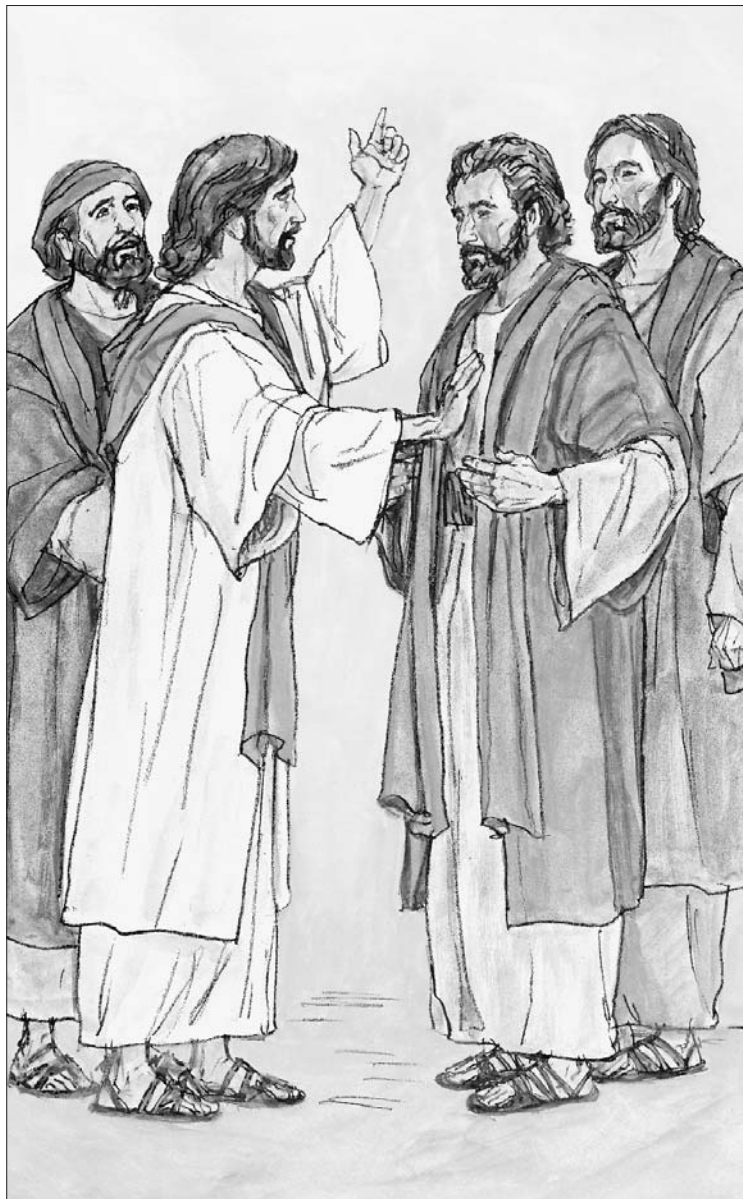
<sup>25</sup> "The older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants. He asked him what was going on.

<sup>27</sup> "Your brother has come home,' the servant replied. 'Your father has killed the fattest calf. He has done this because your brother is back safe and sound.'

<sup>28</sup> "The older brother became angry. He refused to go in. So his father went out and begged him.

<sup>29</sup> "But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've worked like a slave for you. I have always obeyed your orders. You never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But this son of yours wasted your money with some prostitutes. Now he comes home. And for him you kill the fattest calf!"

<sup>31</sup> "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me. Everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and be glad. This brother of yours was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.'"



*Jesus teaches his disciples using parables.*



## ***Chapter One***

# **Parables**

Of all the big questions you will ever have to answer in your life, probably the biggest question is: “How does life under God affect what I do?” After all, God is in charge. He is in charge of the world, the universe, the future, eternity. God is in charge of everything. When you find out how to live with God and experience sins forgiven and peace of mind, everything else in life will be blessed. Jesus said, “Put God’s kingdom first. Then all those

other things will also be given to you” (Luke 12:31).

One of the ways Jesus helped people find answers to that question was to tell stories called parables. He would say something like, “Here is what the kingdom of heaven is like.” Then he would tell a story about a situation people might experience as they were doing their jobs, raising their families, and living their lives. Because a lot of the people Jesus talked with were farmers, he told some stories about raising crops and herding sheep. Other stories were about the ways workers work together with their bosses or the ways sons and daughters work together with their parents. All these parables were meant to give people an understanding of how our life led by God works.

Jesus used parables to teach people about life under God’s leadership for a couple of reasons. First of all, you can not even see God, so how can you learn how to have life under him? The parables Jesus told were about things that people could easily see and understand, and then they could apply the



*Jesus is our Good Shepherd.*

truth of the story to the question of how life under God's influence works.

1. The biggest question you need to deal with is, "How does \_\_\_\_\_ under \_\_\_\_\_ work?"
2. One problem with understanding God is that you can not even \_\_\_\_\_ him.
3. Jesus likes to use stories called \_\_\_\_\_ to give people an idea of what life under God's leadership would be like.
4. Jesus' stories would be about things like farmers raising \_\_\_\_\_ or herding \_\_\_\_\_, or about workers and their \_\_\_\_\_, or parents and their \_\_\_\_\_.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 11)

Another reason Jesus used parables is that sometimes it takes a story picture to get us to understand what he is teaching us. People's answers to the question, "How does life led by God work?" usually go something like, "You have to act real religious all the time," or, "You have to try your best to live right," or, "You have to make sure you get to church and not do evil things like rape or murder." Those

answers have to do with something the Bible calls “the law.” “The law” is all the rules about what you are supposed to do and what you are not supposed to do and what is going to happen to you if you do not obey. People usually think that having life under God has something to do with “the keeping of God’s laws.”

But the Bible says it does not work that way. “It has nothing to do with obeying the law. We are made right with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ” (Romans 3:21,22). God loves and accepts us because of what Jesus did for us, not because of what we do for God. Life with God does not happen by us doing things to get God to accept us. Life with God happens as we learn to trust that he already accepts us because of Jesus dying for us.

People hear what the Bible says about God’s way of giving us life with him and they often think, “Yes, but it can not be that simple or easy! There must be something I have to do to get God to accept me!” To help us to understand all that, Jesus told a parable about a man who had two sons who were very



*God gives Moses the Ten Commandments.*

different from each other. The man loved and accepted those two sons with all his heart, but neither of the sons trusted that he really meant it. This parable is written in Luke 15:11-32.

Sometimes this parable is called “The story of the lost son”. In this book we are going to call it “The story of the broken-hearted father.” As you read the story it is very easy to know that the father is God. Watch and see if the father in the story is anything like what you think God is like, or if he is very different from the way you think of God. Watch and see if you are anything like either of the two sons, or even if you are something like both of them. See if the way this father loved and accepted his two sons helps you feel more like you can trust in God’s love and acceptance of you.



Answers from page 8: 1. life, God’s influence; 2. see; 3. parables; 4. crops, sheep, bosses, children.

5. Another problem people have with understanding God is that they think life with God is all about how well they obey the \_\_\_\_\_.

6. The Bible says that God \_\_\_\_\_ you and \_\_\_\_\_ you because of what Jesus did for you when he \_\_\_\_\_ on the cross.

7. The father in this parable gives us an idea of what \_\_\_\_\_ is like, and the sons give us an idea of what \_\_\_\_\_ are like.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 14)

## ***Review of Chapter One***

The most important thing we need to learn is how life under God's leadership works. But because we can not see God, it can be hard to understand Him. So to help us out, Jesus liked to tell stories called parables. These were stories about things we can see, like farming or relationships between people. He did this to give us an idea of how life works with this God we can not see.

Another reason it is hard for us to understand how life with God works is that we want to think that God's love and care are things we have to earn by living right. It is hard for us to understand how God can love us without our doing something to deserve or have a right to have it. Some of Jesus' parables, like the parable of the broken-hearted father, help us understand that God's love is ours without fulfilling any demands or doing any good things. God accepts us because of what Jesus did by dying for us.

## Test on Chapter One

True or false? Mark the true statements with a + and mark the false statements with a 0.

1. \_\_\_\_ You can not see God.
2. \_\_\_\_ People usually think God will reject them if they do not live right.
3. \_\_\_\_ God loves us and accepts us because of what Jesus did when he died for us.
4. \_\_\_\_ You will not be saved unless you live a very religious life.

Fill in the blank:

5. Jesus told stories called \_\_\_\_\_ to help us understand life with \_\_\_\_\_.

6. The rules about what you are supposed to do and not supposed to do and what happens if you do not obey are called the \_\_\_\_\_.

7. Some of these stories Jesus told help us understand that there is nothing we have to \_\_\_\_\_ to get God to \_\_\_\_\_ us.

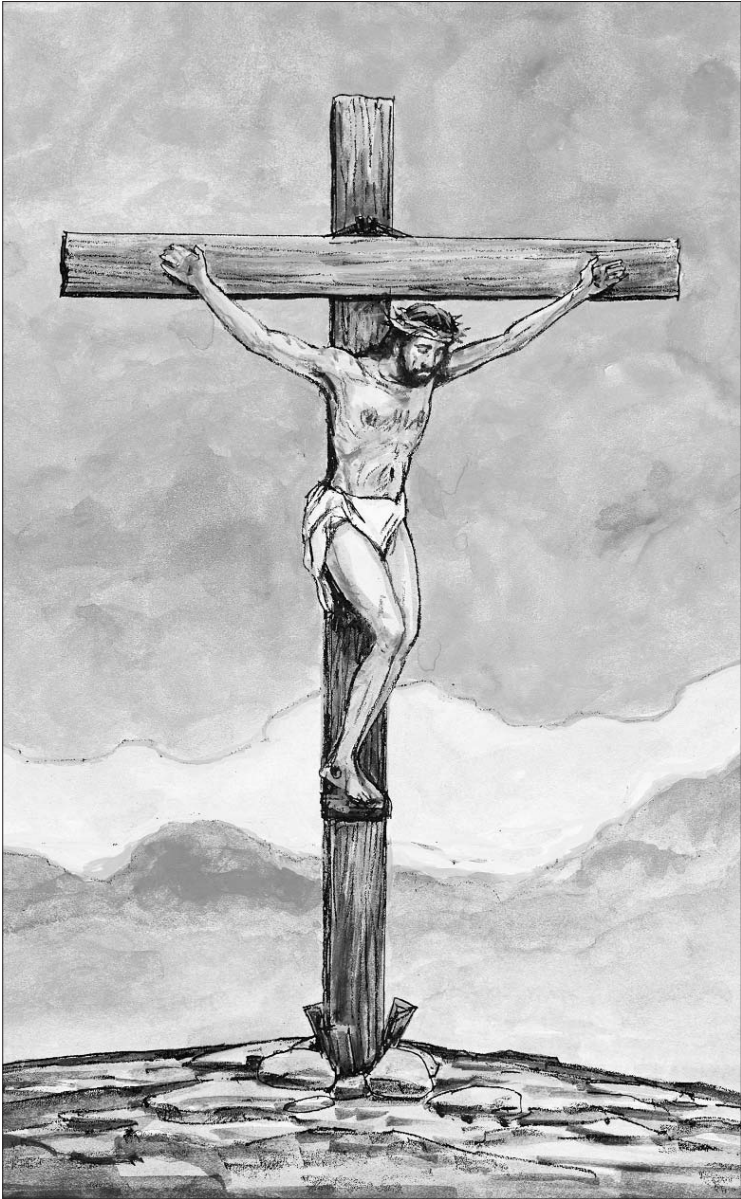


Answers for page 12: 5. law; 6. loves, accepts, died; 7. God, we.

8. This story is about a \_\_\_\_\_ who had two \_\_\_\_\_.

9. The father wanted his sons to \_\_\_\_\_ that he really \_\_\_\_\_ them.

(Check your answers on page 71)



*God's plan to save us.*



## ***Chapter Two***

# **Leaving Home**

Have you ever noticed how it is the people you love the most who hurt you the most? You might have hurt most the people who love you the most. That is a scary thing about real love; it leaves you wide open to getting hurt.

The Bible says that God loves you. He knew very well that loving you would mean getting hurt by you. He did it anyway. That is where Jesus' parable starts out:

“There was a man who had two sons. The younger son spoke to his father. He said, ‘Father, give me my share of the family property.’ So the father divided his property between his two sons. Not long after that, the younger son packed up all he had. Then he left for a country far away. There he wasted his money on wild living” (Luke 15:11-13).

Look at how much those few sentences tell about what the younger son and his father were like.

What the younger son did here was just plain cold or without feeling or love. First, he demanded his inheritance early. That is more than just asking a person’s father for a little money. It is almost like saying, “I wish you were dead.”

The father gave his son what he asked for. A part of the property was now the younger son’s property. It was not part of the family’s shared property any more. The younger son did not call that inheritance “ours;” he now called it “mine.”

Then the younger son turned around and sold it. Now the crops and animals that had been shared by the family were in the hands of strangers.

With the money he got from the sale of the property and the animals, the younger son left his home. He made it very clear to his father and his brother that he wanted to live a life without the supervision of his family and that life meant a lot more to him than they did. He walked out of their lives and left them no reason to think that they would see him again.

You can imagine or have an idea about the feelings the father must have been having during all this. He was confused. His thinking was mixed up. “Why are you doing this to us?” “What are those people doing with their inheritance?” “I have given my son a lifetime of love, and he has looked down on me as worthless. And now he is gone.”

1. When the younger son demanded his share of the \_\_\_\_\_ early, it was like telling his father, “I wish you were \_\_\_\_\_.”
2. The younger son cared more about having a good time than he cared about his \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The main thing his father was feeling when his younger son left him was \_\_\_\_\_.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 22)

But remember what the father did to stop his son from leaving: nothing. He did not try to force him to stay. If his love could not hold his son, he was not going to try to find some other way to make him stay. The father did not threaten his son or offer him a reason to stay home or find some way to stop the sale of the property. He did not want just his son's labor or even just his presence. He wanted his son's love.

The Bible says, in Jeremiah 29:11, “ ‘I know the plans I have for you,’ announces the Lord. ‘I want you to enjoy success. I do not plan to harm you. I will give you hope for the years to come.’ ” Can you see yourself to be like the

younger son? Have there been ways that you ignored God's love and hopes and plans for you? Did you think you could do better on your own, just like the younger son did with his father's love and hopes and plans?

People often look back at all the pain they have brought on themselves and others by their selfish, stupid choices. They ask, "Why didn't God just stop me?" The reason is because God is like the father in this story. He wants to hold us with love, not with force. He wants our hearts, not just our behavior or way we live our lives.

If we are not willing to receive his love, he is patient to wait until we are ready to receive his love. The Bible says in Ezekiel 20:39, "People of Israel, the Lord and King says, 'Go, every one of you! Serve your gods. But later you will listen to me.'" God does not force people into a relationship with him. He lets people do what they think they need to do. When they come to know that what they really need is God's love, he is there to love them.

4. The father did not try to \_\_\_\_\_  
his sons to stay home.
5. Even though God loves us and has great  
plans for us, sometimes we think we can do  
\_\_\_\_\_ on our \_\_\_\_\_.
6. God wants to hold us with His \_\_\_\_\_,  
not with \_\_\_\_\_.
7. If we are not willing to receive God's  
\_\_\_\_\_, he is \_\_\_\_\_ to  
wait until we are.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 24)



Answers for page 20: 1. inheritance, dead; 2. father; 3. grief.



*God sent an angel to help Peter.*

## ***Review of Chapter Two***

Jesus wants us to understand that when we turn away from God, it breaks his heart and he is sad. God then is very unhappy and hurt. So Jesus began telling a story about a man whose younger son demanded his inheritance before his father died. This let the father know that his son did not trust him or care about his feelings.

This son then turned his inheritance into money and moved far away, where he spent his time and his money partying. His father did not try to force him to stay. The father wanted his son to stay at home because the son trusted in his father's love, not because he had to stay.

Whenever we try to live our lives our way and not God's way, it shows we do not trust that God cares about us or knows what is best for us. God does not force us to come back to him. He is patient to wait until we know we need him and we are willing to receive his love.



Answers for page 22: 4.force; 5.better, own; 6.love, force;  
7.love, patient.

## ***Test on Chapter Two***

Put a checkmark by the best answer.

1. When we turn from God

- A. he doesn't care.
- B. it breaks his heart.
- C. he forces us back to him.

2. Jeremiah 29:11 says, " 'I know the plans I have for you,' announces the Lord. 'I want you to

- A. reward your good behavior and punish your bad behavior.'"
- B. break down until you are ready to do everything my way.'"
- C. enjoy success. I do not plan to harm you.'"

3. God doesn't want to hold onto us by force. He wants to hold onto us by

- A. his love.
- B. having us promise to stay with him.
- C. taking away our ability to make choices.

4. When the younger son in Jesus' story left home, it broke his father's heart because
- \_\_\_\_\_ A. he knew his son did not trust him.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ B. he was going to lose a worker.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ C. this would make him look like a bad father.
5. When the father in Jesus' story knew his younger son was going to sell his part of the property and leave, he
- \_\_\_\_\_ A. tried to get a court order to force him to stay.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ B. yelled at his son and threatened him.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ C. did nothing to stop him from doing what he had decided to do.
6. When we go off on our own and refuse to live God's way, it means we
- \_\_\_\_\_ A. are confused and ignorant.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ B. are going to hell.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ C. do not trust that God loves us and wants what is best for us.

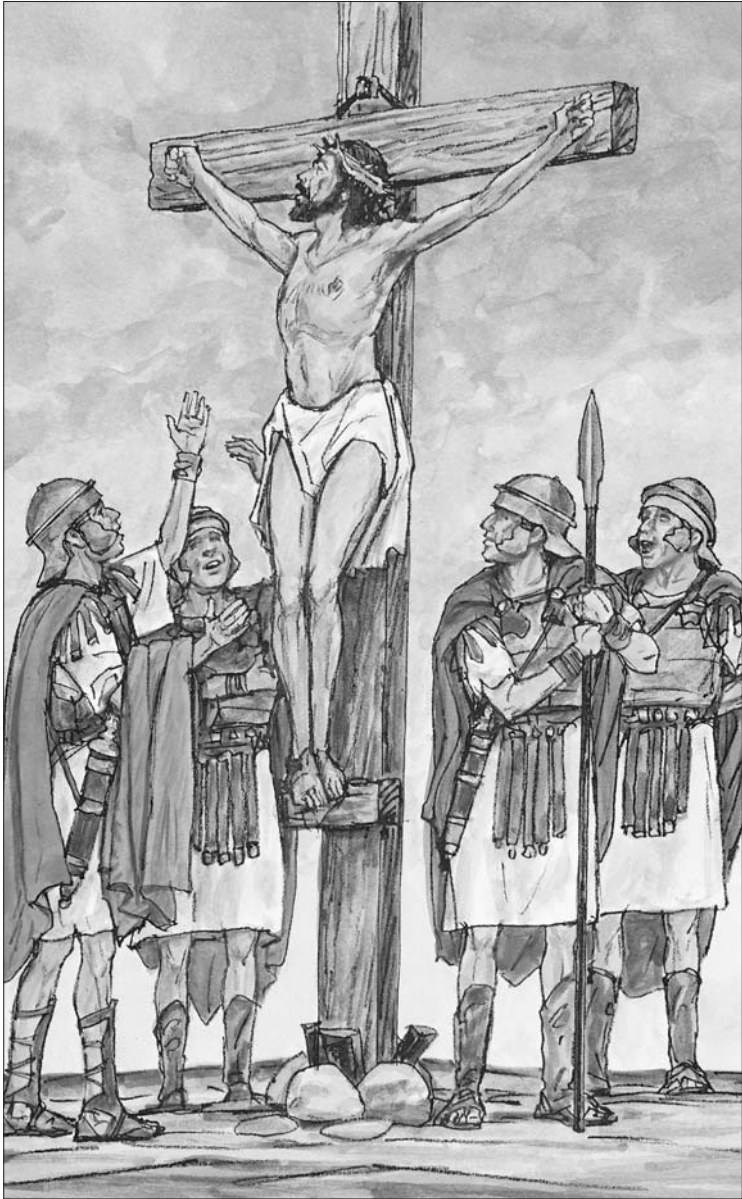
7. If we are not willing to receive God's love,  
God

\_\_\_\_\_ A. will stop loving us.

\_\_\_\_\_ B. is patient to wait until we are willing.

\_\_\_\_\_ C. will force us to believe in him.

(Check your answers on page 71)



*Jesus is punished for our sins.*



### ***Chapter Three***

## **The Son's Worst Days**

People who try to help men and women with recovery from addiction to alcohol or drugs talk about “hitting rock bottom.” “Rock bottom” is the time in an addict’s life when he knows: “I am about to lose everything I really value or is important in life because of my addiction—or maybe, I already have lost everything important in my life.” Hopefully, when a person “hits rock bottom” he experiences something else they

talk about in recovering from addiction: “A moment of clarity.” That means not only knowing, “I am in big trouble,” but also knowing, “It does not have to be this way.”

Even if you are not an addict, you might have had that kind of experience. Maybe you are going through something like that right now. It feels terrible, but it is actually a blessing. In Jesus’ parable, the younger son may not have been an addict, but he was blessed with both those experiences: “hitting rock bottom” and “having a moment of clarity.”

“He spent everything he had. Then the whole country ran low on food. The son did not have what he needed. He went to work for someone who lived in that country and who sent him to the fields to feed the pigs. The son wanted to fill his stomach with the food the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

“Then he began to think clearly again. He said, ‘How many of my father’s hired workers have more than enough food! But here I am dying

from hunger! I will get up and go back to my father. I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and I have sinned against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers.” ’ So he got up and went to his father” (Luke 15:14-20).

The younger son experienced a strong feeling of not liking what he had done. For a long time he thought, “If I can just get away from my father I will be able to live the life I want and everything will be all right.” So here he was now, far from his father, but everything was far from being all right. The happy, care free life was over and the money was gone. The friends he made when he was able to pay for drinks and prostitutes were not his friends anymore. Now he could not even pay for rent for a place to sleep or buy food.

And the jobs were hard to find. The only work he could find was taking care of pigs, which made him really ashamed as a man who likely grew up in a rich family. This just was not right. And then, when he started looking at the pig

food and seriously thinking about forcing some of it down to quiet his hungry stomach, it made him say to himself: “What is wrong with my life?”

He started thinking, “What have I done?” Even though he did not like many of the things about living in his father’s house, at least no one ever starved there. He knew that the only thing keeping him from trying to go back home was his pride. His pride was not going to feed him. He started thinking about going home. It is very painful to know that you threw away your life; that your bright ideas and your big plans turned out to be foolish, or that your brains and your strength and your charm were not what they should be and never will be. Three of the hardest words to say are, “I was wrong,” even if you are only saying them to yourself. It hurts your pride. That is part of what the Bible is talking about when it talks about “repentance.” The word “repentance” means “a change in the way you think.” One of the changes a person needs to make is the change from thinking, “I can handle life,” to, “I am really messing up my life.”



*Proud Old Testament people try to build a high tower.*

Without that change of thinking, a person could go on and on, trying his own methods or ways to get out of the hole he has dug for himself and only succeed in making things worse. That is why the Bible talks about repentance as a gift from God. For instance, in Acts 5:31 the Bible says, “. . . He did it so that He could turn Israel away from their sins and forgive them”. It is a gift that hurts your pride, but it can save you from more pain in the future.

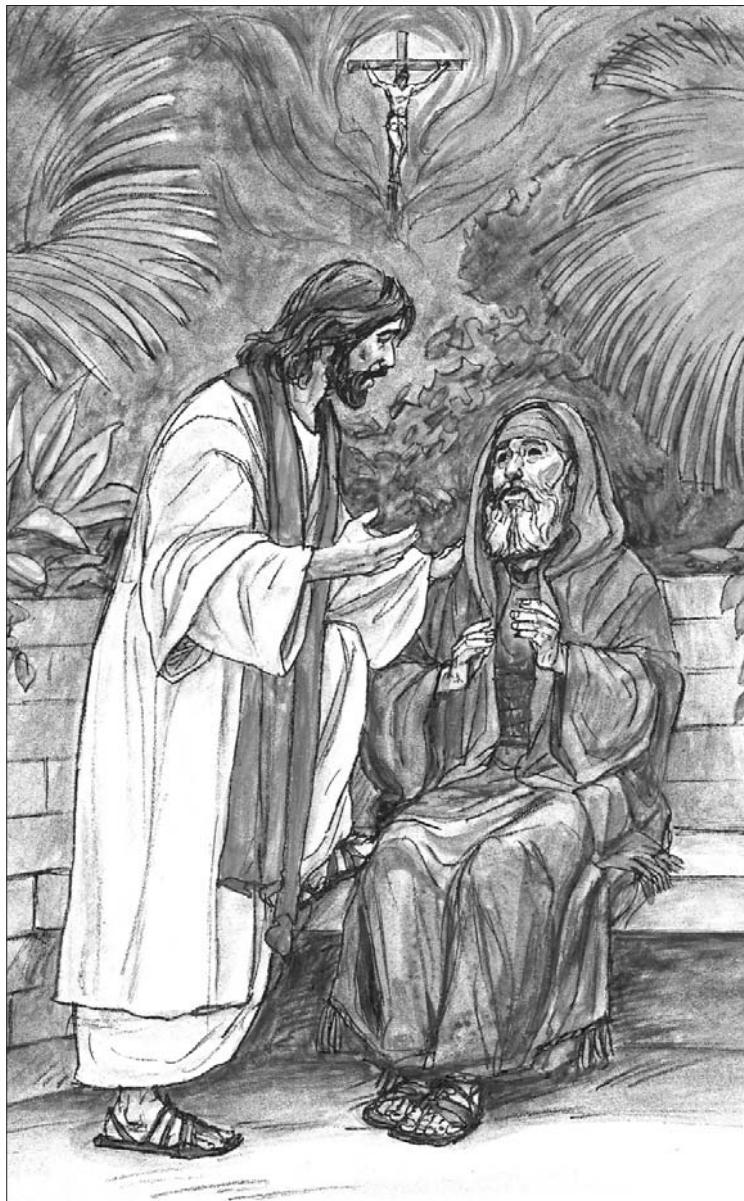
1. The younger son's friends and good times left him when he ran out of \_\_\_\_\_ and had to take a job feeding \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The younger son remembered that there was always enough to eat in his \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
3. When a person stops thinking he can handle his own life without God and starts thinking he is throwing it away, that change in thinking is a \_\_\_\_\_ from God that the Bible calls \_\_\_\_\_.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 37)

But learn that the younger son in Jesus' story still had some problems with his thinking. For one thing, he thought his father was not going to let him come home unless he did something for his father. He thought that he had to offer to be a worker on his father's farm or his father would not let him in the door. That is the way a lot of people think about God.

How about you? Did you ever try to make a promise with God, like, "If you get me out of this problem in my life, I promise, I will never do it again and I will worship you in church every week"? You were probably thinking just like the younger son in Jesus' story. You thought that you had to offer to do something for God or he would not do anything for you.

If you ever tried to bargain with God so he would help you, how did it work out? Did you manage to keep up your part of the bargain? Probably not. But does that mean that God is not going to help you? Absolutely not! God does not love you and help you because you live right and have a good way of thinking or



*Jesus speaks about God's love for all people.*

acting. God loves you because he wants to. He forgives you because Jesus died for you. One important part of repentance—“a change in the way you think” —is that God needs to give us a change in the way we think about him and his love. We need to stop thinking that God will not love us until we start living right. We need to start thinking that God loves us just the way we are.

4. The younger son thought he would have to offer to do some \_\_\_\_\_ for his father or his father would not let him come back.

5. When the Bible says that God gives us the change of thinking called \_\_\_\_\_ it also means he helps us to quit thinking that we need to start living right or He will not \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ us.

6. God wants us to believe that we have his love right now, just the \_\_\_\_\_ we \_\_\_\_\_.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 38)



Answers for page 34: 1. money, pigs; 2. father's house; 3. gift, repentance.

### ***Review of Chapter Three***

In Jesus' story, the younger son hit rock bottom when he ran out of money and started starving. He had a moment of clarity when he knew that he would not be starving if he went back home with his father. Anybody who knows his efforts at living his own life are not working and that he is completely messing up is "hitting rock bottom." The Bible calls this kind of change in thinking "repentance." Repentance is being sorry for your sins and believing that God forgives your sins for Jesus' sake.

The younger son in the story still needed more changes in his thinking. He was making the mistake of thinking that his father would not take him back as his son and that the only way he would be able to stay at home would be if he would work for his father. Many people think that God will not accept them unless they promise to live right and then try hard to



Answers for page 37: 4. work; 5. repentance, love, accept; 6. way, are.

keep that promise. God wants to change that thinking. He wants people to believe that they do not have to do anything to make themselves right with him. He wants people to believe that he loves them and he died for all of their sins.

## Test on Chapter Three

Draw a line between the old way of thinking and the new, repentant way of thinking that God gives.

### OLD THINKING

1. Sin is fun and good.

2. I can handle my own life.

3. I can take care of myself.

4. God does not want me unless I live right.

5. God will not forgive me unless I promise to stop sinning.

### REPENTANT THINKING

A. I can not handle my own life.

B. God forgives me because Jesus died for me.

C. Sin messes things up.

D. I need God to take care of me.

E. God loves me just the way I am.

Circle the word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

6. If I promise to live a better life, I need [God] [my friend] to help me.

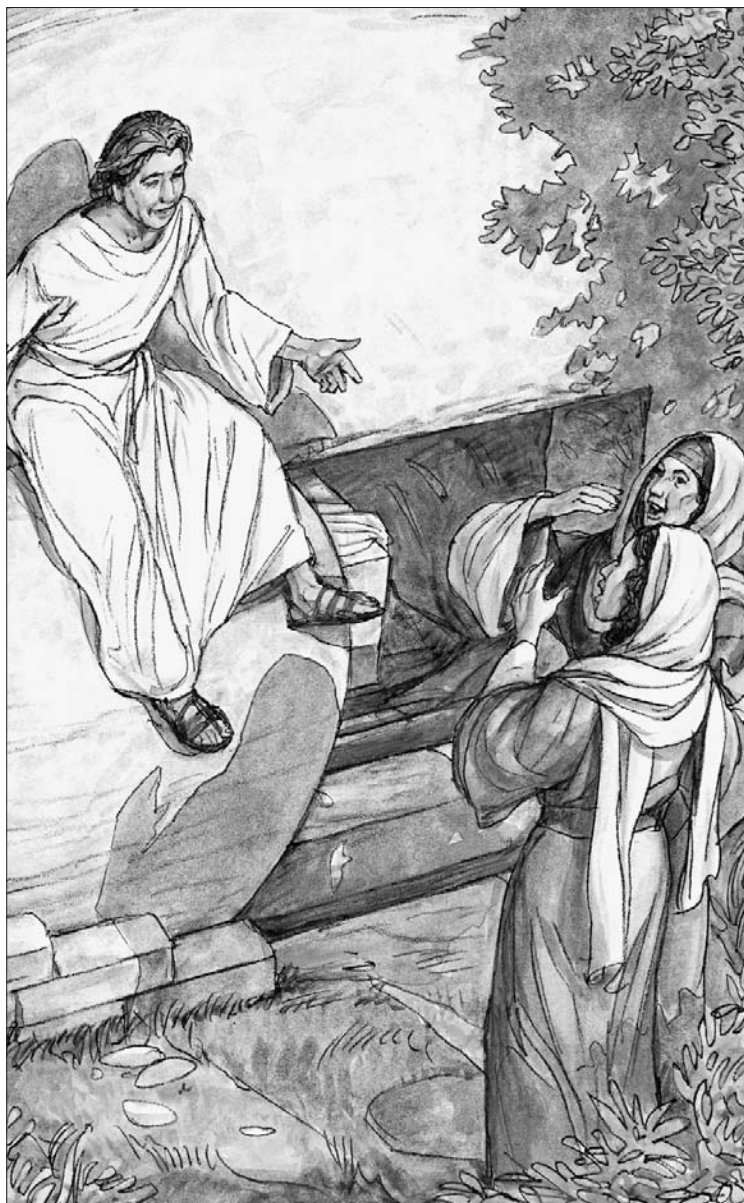
7. The hardest words to say are, ["I was wrong."] ["I will try harder."]

8. If I keep trying to work out my problems on my own I will end up making things [better.] [worse.]

9. God forgives me because [I am a good person.] [Jesus died for me.]

10. God accepts me because [he knows I will serve him.] [he loves me.]

(Check your answers on page 71)



*An angel tells the women that Jesus has risen from the dead.*



## ***Chapter Four***

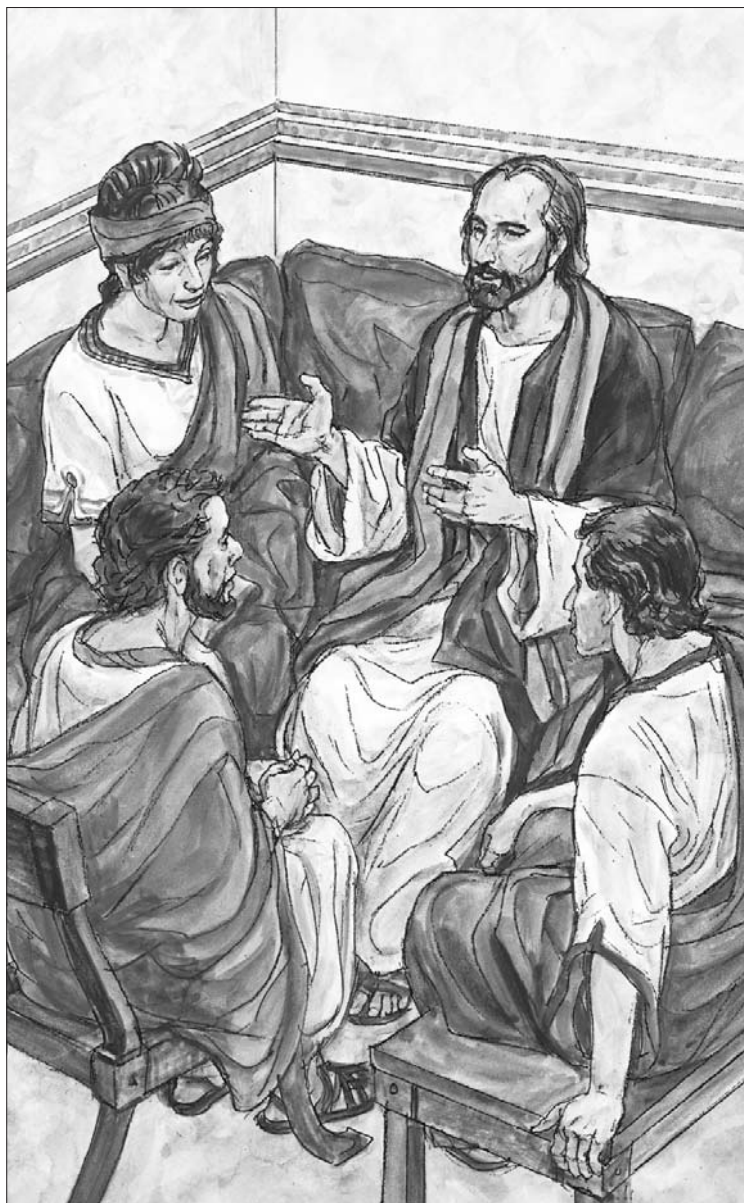
# **Welcome Home**

Sometimes you hear people say, “I do not want to play around with God. I do not want to start being a Christian and then go backward and not believe in God. Before I come to God I want to be sure I really mean it. I want to be able to make a 100 percent sincere commitment before I come to God.” And so those people hold off on praying to God or going to Bible studies or to worship him until they feel they are completely ready.

If you are thinking like that, you might find yourself waiting forever. When are you ever going to be 100 percent sincere and 100 percent sure that you will not go backward and not believe in God? In fact, if you actually were that sincere and committed, you would not need to come to Jesus for help! That would be like calling someone to come and clean your house and then cleaning up the mess yourself before they arrived.

The truth is, you need to come to God just the way you are, no matter how bad your life is. The Bible says, “Now is the time God shows His favor. Now is the day He saves” (2 Corinthians 6:2). No need to wait until you are living right and thinking right. Come as you are, and God will love and accept you just the way you are.

“While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him. He was filled with tender love for his son. He ran to him. He threw his arms around him and kissed him.



*The apostle Paul teaches God's Word.*

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.’”

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattest calf and kill it. Let’s have a big dinner and celebrate. This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found’ ” (Luke 15:20-24).

The younger son was not expecting his father to treat him this way when he got home. He thought that he would be chased away from home before he got a chance to say anything. The best he was hoping for was that his father would listen to his little speech about how badly he had acted. He was only looking to be a worker instead of a family member, and then, maybe his father would say something like, “Okay, I will give you a job and a place to sleep, but if you mess up one more time you will have to leave.” He was hoping that maybe his father would put him on a trial period and give him a chance to work his way out of it.

You can picture the son walking more and more slowly as he got closer to home. You can just see him going over and over the speech he was going to try to give. Maybe he thought when he arrived he would find his father standing at the edge of his property with his arms folded and a frown on his face. But instead, as he got close to home he saw someone running down the road toward him in a cloud of dust and he heard that person yelling something. And then he knew what was happening. It was his father! His father was running down the road to meet him, crying and shouting his name.

Then the son probably started crying, too. Maybe that is when he first started to understand how badly he broke his father's heart when he left home. As his father was hugging him and kissing him, the son tried to make his little speech about how he was only looking for a job because he knew he did not deserve to be treated like a member of the family.



*The lost son is welcomed home.*

His father did not let him finish his speech. He did not care about how his son deserved to be treated. He did not care about how much work he could get him to do. The only thing he cared about was having his son back. He did not make his son promise him he would never mess up again. He did not put him on a trial period. He knew his son might break his heart all over again, but he took him back anyway. He did it gladly!

For this father, what mattered most was NOT how sincere his son was about being sorry and wanting to do better. What mattered most to this father was his love for his son.

1. The younger son thought his father would not accept him back as a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The younger son thought he could only come back home as a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The father \_\_\_\_\_ to meet his son.
4. The father knew his son might break his \_\_\_\_\_ all over again.
5. The only thing that mattered to the father was how much he \_\_\_\_\_ his son.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 50)

How do you think God is looking at you as you think about trying to have a life with him? Do you think of him looking at you with a disappointed frown on his face? Do you think of him pushing you away and telling you, “I want to see if you are really sincere before I take you back”? Do you think of him taking you back but warning you, “You better not mess up again or I am done with you”?

What if you would think of God as being like this father? Picture God being happy to have you back! Picture God throwing a welcoming party in heaven to celebrate having you! Picture God telling you, “I am glad you are back together with me, because now I can show you how much I love you!”

When you see a picture of Jesus dying on the cross, does it make you feel guilty and ashamed? That is not what Jesus wants you to feel. He died on the cross to get rid of your guilt, so that you could come to God and



Answers for page 49: 1. son; 2. worker; 3. ran; 4. heart; 5. loved.

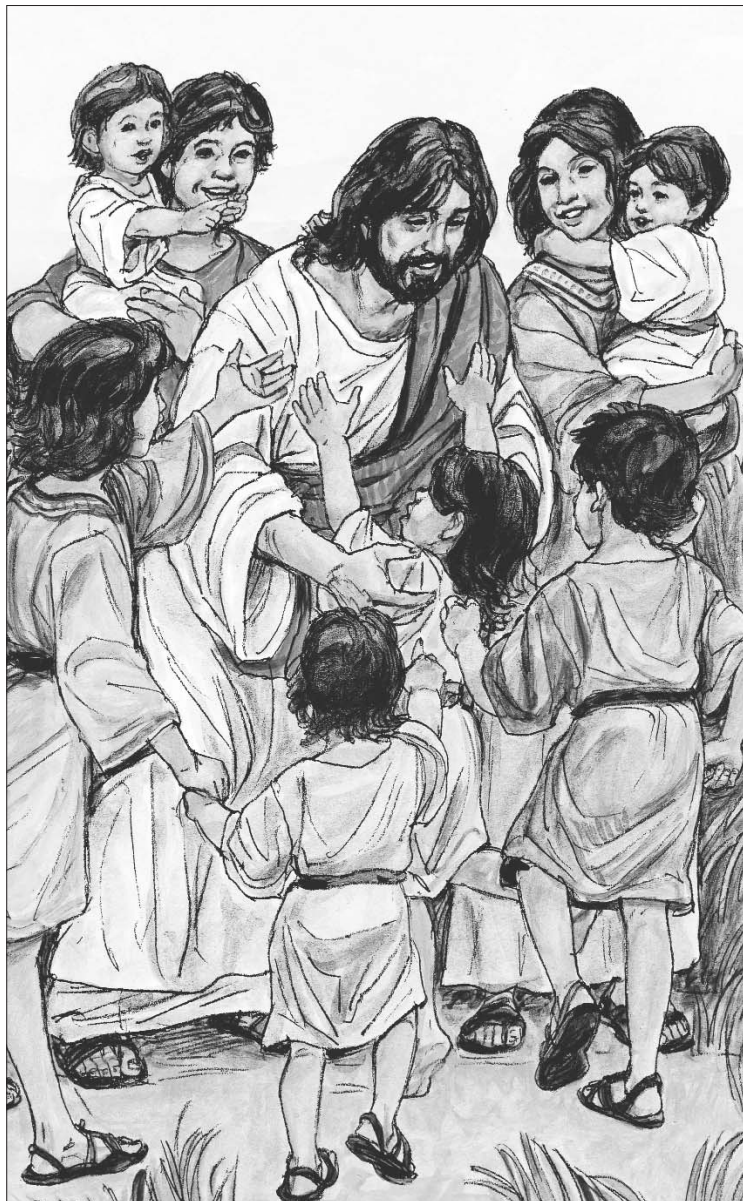
expect to be accepted and welcomed and loved. You can not do enough good things to get God to accept you back. And you do not have to do good things. When Jesus lived and died in this world, he did everything that needed to be done so that you can live with God.

If you have been trying to come to God with promises about how well you are going to behave from now on and how you will worship him with other believers every week and maybe even become a minister or pastor, try dropping those promises. Try just coming to God as you are. Try just letting God love you.

6. People sometimes think God is always looking at them with a \_\_\_\_\_ frown on his face.

7. People sometimes think God accepts them back but warns them, "If you mess up again I am \_\_\_\_\_ with you."

8. Because Jesus died for you, you can expect to be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ by God.



*Jesus wants all people, also children, in his kingdom.*

9. You need to try just letting God \_\_\_\_\_  
you.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 54)

## **Review of Chapter Four**

The younger son thought that because of how badly he hurt his family, he would never be accepted back home as a family member. He thought that the only way he would be able to come home was if he promised to work for his father. His father surprised him by running down the road to meet his son, welcoming him back as his son, and throwing a welcoming party to celebrate having his son back.

A lot of people think that because they have sinned, God is angry with them, and that God will only accept them if they work very hard on living right and never messing up again. The truth is that God gladly accepts us back, without any demands of us, and is looking forward to showing us how much he loves us in this world and in heaven forever.

### ***Test on Chapter Four***

True or false? Fill in the blank with + for true and 0 for false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The younger son had broken his father's heart badly.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The younger son thought his father would forget what had happened.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. The younger son thought he would have to earn a place in his father's house.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The father took his son back but gave him a trial period.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The father was ashamed of his son and did not tell people he was back.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. The father was not interested in how much work he could get out of his son.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The father did not make his son promise not to mess up again.



Answers for pages 51 and 53: 6. disappointed; 7. through;  
8. accepted, welcomed, loved; 9. love.

Check the best answer to each question.

8. What does God tell you that you have to do before he will accept you?

- A. Promise to try to live right
- B. Be really sorry for your sins
- C. Show that you are sincere by the way you live
- D. Nothing

9. Why did Jesus die on the cross?

- A. To make you feel bad about your sins
- B. To give people an example of true obedience
- C. As a warning to sinners
- D. To give you complete forgiveness for your sins

10. What is the best way to respond to God's love?

- A. To keep reminding yourself you do not deserve it
- B. To promise to worship regularly
- C. To live right so he will never stop loving you
- D. To just let him love you

(Check your answers on page 71)



*Jesus returns to heaven.*



## ***Chapter Five***

### **“I Do Not Understand It”**

The father in Jesus' story had two sons: one who left home and lived a wild life and one son who stayed home and kept working for his father. But the thing is: BOTH these sons broke their father's heart and disappointed him. Even though the older son kept doing the things he was supposed to do, he really did not believe that his father cared about him. What his father wanted most for both of his sons was that they would know how much he loved them.

You remember that this was a story Jesus told to give us an idea of how life with God works. God is like the father in this story. What he wants for us most of all is to know how much he loves us. Sometimes we just do not understand this love and that breaks his heart. Take a look at the way the father in this story reached out to both sons, both the obedient son and the disobedient son, and see if that helps you to see how much you are loved by God.

“Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattest calf. He has done this because your brother is back, safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and begged him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been like a slave for you. I

have always obeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But this son of yours wasted your money with some prostitutes. Now he comes home. And for him you kill the fattest calf!’

“ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me. Everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad. This brother of yours was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found’ ” (Luke 15:25-31).

The older son was angry when his younger brother got a party, because he had never gotten such a party. But his father told him, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.” In other words, he could have had a party with his friends any time. All his older son had to do was ask. So why hadn’t he ever asked?

You can see why the older son did not ask if you look at the first thing he told his father: “Look! All these years I have been slaving for

you and never disobeyed your orders.” In other words, he thought of himself as just a slave to his father. Not a son, who lived in his father’s love, but a slave, who lived just to work for his father. He did not believe his father cared about him. He believed his father only cared about how much work he could get out of him.

So of course the older brother had never told his father what he really wanted. He did not believe his father really cared about his feelings. He thought that all his father cared about was his obedience.

Maybe that is how you have thought about your relationship with God. Maybe you have thought that God did not really care about what you like and dislike, or what you want in life, or how you feel. Maybe you have thought that all God really cared about was your obedience. Maybe you have thought you could not really ask God for much of anything, because you thought that you had not been good enough to get anything good from God. Maybe you have thought that life with God was all work and no fun.

But God has been looking at you all this time as his child, and he has been wanting you to think of him as your Father—not your boss or your judge or your owner, but your Father. If you had a father who did not seem very loving or kind to you, this might be very hard for you to understand. But if you have children of your own, you know how you feel about them. You probably love giving your children things they need and things they want. They are your children, and you probably love it when you can meet their needs and make them happy.

God is a good and loving parent to his children, way more than we are. Jesus said, “Even though you are evil, you know how to give good gifts to your children. How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!” (Matthew 7:11).

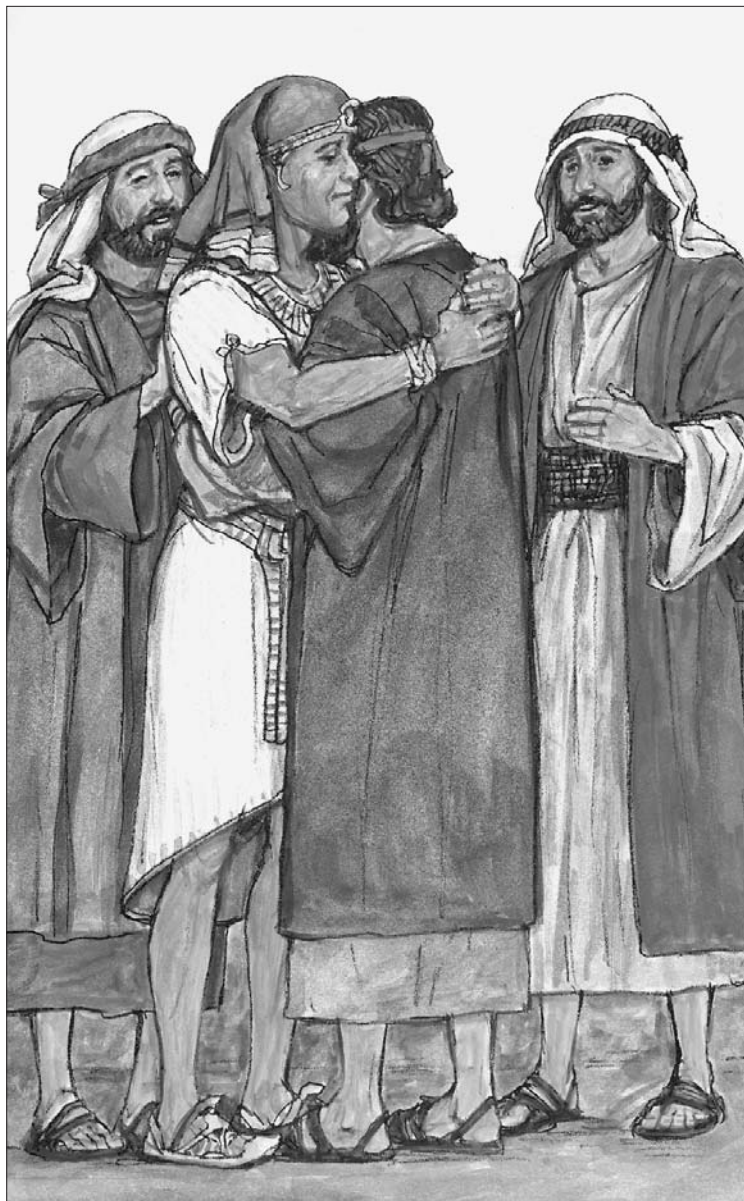
The older brother in Jesus’ story broke his father’s heart and made him unhappy when he did not believe that his father loved him and cared about him. But that was not the only thing he did that broke his father’s heart. The

other thing that broke his father's heart was the way he looked at his younger brother.

When the older brother looked at the younger brother, all he could think to do was compare their lives. He told his father that he had “been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders,” but his younger brother “has wasted your money with some prostitutes.” The older brother thought that this meant that he should be accepted and his younger brother should be rejected. Or at least, he thought, his father should love him more than he loved the younger brother. When the older brother compared himself with this younger brother, he thought he deserved better respect than his brother.

When he saw his father loving and accepting this younger brother of his, who did not deserve it, he got confused and angry. He did not understand what his father had done.

Are you like the older brother? Do you compare yourself to other people and think



*Joseph forgives his brothers.*

who is the better person or who deserves God's blessing more? Do you ever say things like, "God forgives and accepts anybody, as long as they do not . . ." and then name some sin you think is especially bad? Do you think that people should only be part of the Christian church if they are at least as sincere as you are or as repentant as you are or trying as hard as you are? Where do you stop?

Jesus is in the business of erasing lines. He does not see a dividing line between people who should be saved and people who should not be saved. He only sees people he loves and wants in his family. He gives out this invitation to everybody: "Come to me, all of you who are tired and are carrying heavy loads. I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

If you have been comparing yourself to other people and judging them, that is a heavy load you have been carrying. Are you getting tired of doing that? Jesus is inviting you to drop your burden and join the celebration. Everyone is welcome. And the celebration goes on forever.

God wants you! “That is good. It pleases God our Savior. He wants everyone to be saved. He wants them to come to know the truth” (1 Timothy 2:3,4).





## ***Glossary***

<b>accept</b>	to agree to or to believe
<b>addiction</b>	surrendering oneself to something like drugs, alcohol, tobacco
<b>affect</b>	to bring forth a change or to change one's feelings
<b>apply</b>	to put to use or to give careful attention to something
<b>ashamed</b>	a feeling of guilt or sorrow for something
<b>bargain</b>	an agreement to do something for each other
<b>celebrate</b>	to honor someone or something by rejoicing
<b>clarity</b>	to make something more clear or understandable
<b>commitment</b>	a promise to do something
<b>deserve</b>	to be worthy of or suitable for something
<b>disappoint(ed)</b>	unhappy at not seeing hopes fulfilled
<b>disobedient</b>	refusing to obey or not following orders to do something
<b>eternity</b>	time without end, in this case, after we die

<b>experience</b>	something that happens to a person
<b>frown</b>	to wrinkle the forehead in anger or disapproval
<b>guilt</b>	the knowledge that you have done something wrong
<b>hypocrite</b>	a person who pretends to be what he is not
<b>ignore</b>	to fail to take notice of something or someone
<b>influence</b>	to have an affect on
<b>inheritance</b>	receiving money or property after someone has died
<b>manage</b>	to be able to take care of a problem
<b>obedient</b>	to do what a person is asked to do
<b>party</b>	a group of people gathered together for food and fun
<b>patient</b>	able to wait calmly
<b>pride</b>	too high an opinion about one's importance or abilities
<b>reject(ed)</b>	to turn down or to turn away from someone or something
<b>relationship</b>	a connection with someone
<b>religious</b>	concerning religion (a system of what one believes)
<b>respect</b>	to feel high regard for or to honor

<b>scary</b>	something that makes you afraid
<b>sincere</b>	honest, without being false
<b>situation</b>	a set of circumstances (a condition that influences people or events)
<b>starve</b>	to lack food
<b>stupid</b>	not wise, or not intelligent
<b>supervision</b>	watching over someone or something
<b>supposed</b>	to accept something as true
<b>treat(ed)</b>	to act or regard a person in a certain way
<b>universe</b>	all space including all stars
<b>value</b>	to think of something as being of great worth or very good





## **Answers to the Chapter Tests**

### **Chapter Test One (Pages 13-14)**

1. +; 2. +; 3. +; 4. 0; 5. parables, God; 6. law; 7. do, accept;  
8. father, sons; 9. understand, loved.

### **Chapter Test Two (Pages 44-55)**

1. B; 2. C; 3. A; 4. A; 5. C; 6. C; 7. B.

### **Chapter Test Three (Pages 44-55)**

1. C; 2. A; 3. D; 4. E; 5. B; 6. God; 7. "I was wrong."  
8. worse; 9. Jesus died for me; 10. He loves me.

### **Chapter Test Four (Pages 44-55)**

1.+; 2. 0; 3. +; 4. 0; 5. 0; 6. +; 7. +; 8. D; 9. D; 10. D.





## **Broken Hearted Father Final Test**

Fill in the blanks.

1. To help us understand how life with God works, Jesus told stories called \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Because you can not see \_\_\_\_\_, Jesus used stories about things people would see in their normal lives.
3. The Bible calls the rules about what you have to do, and what you better not do, and what is going to happen if you disobey, the \_\_\_\_\_.
4. One reason Jesus told his stories about life with God was to help people understand that there is nothing they have to \_\_\_\_\_ to get God to \_\_\_\_\_ them.
5. In the story of the broken-hearted father, the father's heart was broken because his two sons did not \_\_\_\_\_ that he loved them.

What did you understand about God from reading about the father in this story? Mark “Yes” by statements that tell what God is like and “No” by statements that do not tell you what God is like.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Jesus died for you, and God accepts you just the way you are.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. The better you live, the more God loves you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. When you turn your back on God, it breaks his heart.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. God cares about your feelings, not just what you do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. God really wants you to trust that he loves you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. God does not really care about whether you have any fun or happiness in life.

Mark “O” next to statements that come from our old way of thinking and “R” next to statements that come from the new, repentant way of thinking.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. “I have sinned too much. God will not take me back.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. “If I am really sorry for what I have done God will be more likely to accept me.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. “I need God in charge of my life, because I am messing it all up when I am in charge.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. “I deserve God’s love and acceptance more than people who are worse sinners than I am.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. “God loves me, not just my acts of obedience.”
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. “I do not have to wait until I have a good attitude to come to God.”

Put a checkmark next to the TWO correct answers to each question.

18. What should I do when I know I have messed up my life?

- A. Clean up my act so God will accept me.
- B. Admit that I have messed up.
- C. Come to God right away for forgiveness and help.

19. What should I do when God tells me, “I love you”?

- A. Believe it.
- B. Enjoy it.
- C. Think that these words only apply to really religious people.

20. What should I do when I see really bad sinners coming to Jesus?

- \_\_\_\_\_ A. Think they are hypocrites and God will reject them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ B. Think, "If God can forgive me, why not them?"
- \_\_\_\_\_ C. Celebrate along with God.

21. What should I do when I am unhappy with my life?

- \_\_\_\_\_ A. Think I am on my own, because God is not interested in my happiness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ B. Talk to God about it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ C. Believe that God cares about my happiness.

22. Why should I try to live right?

- \_\_\_\_\_ A. Because life works better that way.
- \_\_\_\_\_ B. Because that is something God and I can work on together.
- \_\_\_\_\_ C. Because if I do not, God will reject me.

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