

FORGIVENESS

Deciding that someone who has wronged you doesn't have to pay

The Lost Son

Luke 15:11-24

MEMORY VERSE | Colossians 3:13

When Jesus was on earth, He lived like one of us. He slept and ate and worked and made friends and traveled. But His main purpose was to show us what God is like in everything He said and did—and in the stories that He told.

Some of Jesus' parables portray God as a shepherd. Or a king. Or as someone searching for a lost coin. And in one of those stories, Jesus explained God's heart by sharing how He is like a good father. If Jesus told the story today, it might sound something like this.

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THERE ONCE WAS A WEALTHY FARMER who had two sons. We'll call them Peyton and Eli.

Peyton never failed to do exactly what his father asked. "Cow stalls are mucked out, carrot patch fertilized, horse tails braided, and I should have time to give orders about the wheat harvest before breakfast," he announced.

Eli, on the other hand, was less enthusiastic. "What . . . ?" he mumbled, rubbing his eyes as he finally sat up and yawned. "Guess I overslept again. Can I get breakfast in bed already? And make sure the pomegranate juice is freshly squeezed."

Frankly, Eli was a lot less interested in his family and the farm than he was in having a good time. And he knew that when his father died, he would inherit a big chunk of his dad's money and property. The more Eli thought about that money, the more it consumed him. At last, he rushed out to the field where his father and older brother were overseeing the wheat harvest.

“Dad. Hey, Dad!” he demanded.

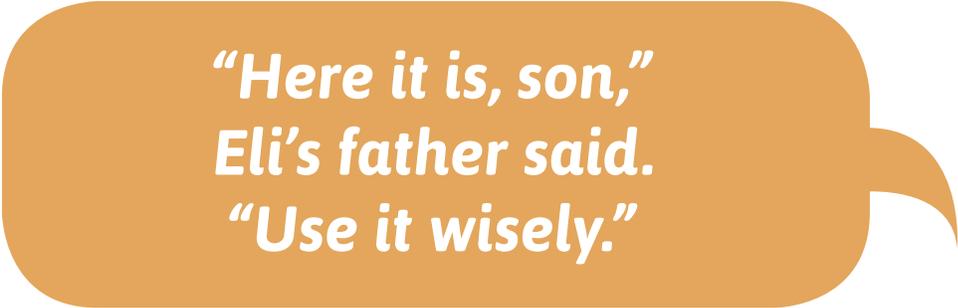
“Look who finally showed up to work,” Peyton scoffed.

“Work?” Eli laughed. “I’ve got a better idea. Dad, I want you to give me my share of your property and money right now. Like today.”

Eli’s words were cruel. It was like saying he wished his dad were already dead! But Eli’s father cared enough to let Eli make his own mistakes and learn his own lessons. So the father divided up everything he owned and gave Eli his share of the money.

“Here it is, son,” Eli’s father said. “Use it wisely.”

Eli lost no time in packing up and heading out of town on the family’s best horse. He soon arrived in a foreign city full of colorful markets and even more colorful characters. Within days, Eli had rented a fancy home and bought an entirely new wardrobe. He celebrated with peacocks in the courtyard and a party every night.



***“Here it is, son,”
Eli’s father said.
“Use it wisely.”***

“Pizza Party Sunday!” he announced. “Paintball Party Monday! And don’t forget Taco Tuesday!”

Eli made dozens of new friends. As long as he kept throwing parties, they happily showed up every day.

But then . . . a terrible famine swept over the land. Everyone ran low on food—even Eli. In fact, he soon ran out of money, too. All his new “friends” disappeared, and Eli found himself alone and hungry with nowhere to go.

“I guess I’ll have to get a job,” he sighed.

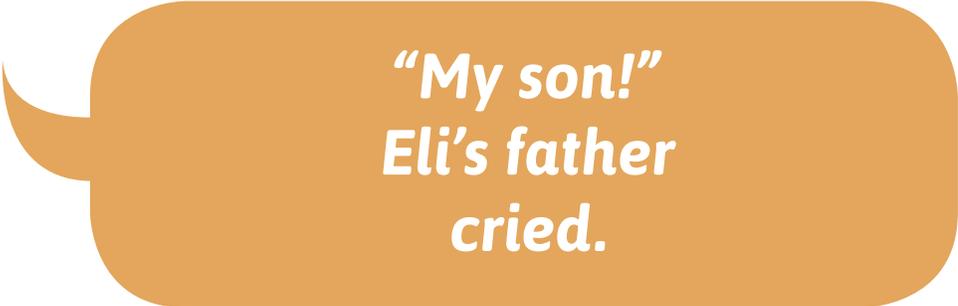
Work was as scarce as food, but at last Eli found a job taking care of pigs. He could hardly afford food, so he was always hungry. In fact, even the scraps he fed the pigs started looking pretty good!

Eli's days out in the field with the pigs gave him plenty of time to think. And at last his thoughts turned to the home he'd tried so hard to leave behind. "My father's servants eat like kings," he recalled, "and here I am practically starving!"

Carefully, Eli began to make plans. If he went home, he figured his father would be so angry he might fly into a rage or send him away.

"I'll have to talk fast," Eli decided. "I'll say, *'Father, I've 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 servants.'*"

Eli had sold the horse long ago, so he trudged back home on foot. The journey took many long days, but at last, Eli neared his home. He took the back roads so no one would see him.



**"My son!"
Eli's father
cried.**

"Dad's probably out in the field," he told himself. "I wonder if he'll even know who I am..."

But as Eli approached the house from a distance, he could just see a figure standing on the porch. In moments, the person rushed down the steps and ran into the lane. As the man grew closer, Eli could see it was his father!

Eli froze, unable to believe what he was seeing.

"My son!" Eli's father cried. He threw his arms around Eli, hugging and kissing him.

Eli stepped back, struggling to catch his breath and to remember the words he had memorized. *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son."*

To Eli's amazement, his father ignored these words, ushering his son back to the house. Many of the household servants had come out to see the commotion.

"Quick!" Eli's father called, "Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet."

Eli stood speechless as servants buzzed around him.

"Bring the fattest calf and kill it," Eli's father added. "Let's have a feast and celebrate."

"But Dad," Eli protested. "I'm the one who should be doing the work."

Eli's father shook his head and announced to everyone around. *"This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found."*

Eli had expected to have to work to make things right. But instead, he found himself the honored guest of a big party—all because his father had chosen not to make Eli pay for the wrong he had done.



Let's
Talk!

**Take a few moments and share your answer to this question:
Do you feel like you need forgiveness a lot, or do you mostly
feel like you've got it together?**

Whether you end up in time out a lot or never get in trouble, whether you have a hundred Bible verses memorized or have never even opened a Bible—there's one thing that's one hundred percent true. You need God's forgiveness. Being human means we mess up and do things that hurt each other. There's no sin so big it can't be forgiven, but there's also no sin so small that it doesn't need forgiveness. Think through the last week. Are there things you've done that need God's forgiveness? If so, pray together and ask God for His forgiveness. If you can't think of anything, ask each other for reminders—or ask God to bring those things to your mind and heart so you can ask for forgiveness.

If you've never asked God for His forgiveness and chosen to give Him your life, this is a great time to start thinking about it. If you want to learn more about God and how He feels about you, you can get started by reading the Book of John.