

**Bible
Teachings
Series**

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



Broken Hearted Father

Broken Hearted Father

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

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Level 1, Book 13



Table of Contents

Getting Started	1
Chapter 1: Parables	5
Chapter 2: Leaving Home	17
Chapter 3: The Son's Worst Days	29
Chapter 4: Welcome Home	43
Chapter 5: "I Do Not Understand It"	57
Glossary	67
Answers to Chapter Tests	71
Final Test.....	73



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

¹¹ Jesus continued, “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² 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.

¹³ “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. ¹⁴ He spent everything he had.

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

¹⁷ “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! ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers.”’ ²⁰ 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.

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

²² “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. ²³ Bring the fattest

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

²⁴ 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.

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

²⁷ "'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.'

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

²⁹ "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. ³⁰ But this son of yours wasted your money with some prostitutes. Now he comes home. And for him you kill the fattest calf!'

³¹ "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me. Everything I have is yours. ³² 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

One of the biggest questions you will ever answer probably is: “What is a Christian life – a life led by God?” 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 as a Christian with God loving you and leading you and experience sins forgiven and peace of mind, everything else in your life will be blessed. Jesus said, “Put God’s kingdom first. Then those other things will also be given to you” (Luke 12:31).

One of the ways Jesus helped people understand how God is at work in the life of a Christian 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 many of the people Jesus talked with were farmers, he told some stories about raising crops and herding sheep. Other stories were about the ways hired men 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 changes when it is led by God.

Jesus used parables to teach people about life under God’s leadership for a couple of reasons. First of all, you cannot see God, so how can you learn about the way God loves you and wants to lead you? The parables Jesus told were about things that people could easily see and understand, and then they could apply the truth of the story to the question of living under God’s influence.



Jesus is our Good Shepherd.

1. One of life's biggest questions you need to answer is, "What is a Christian _____?"
2. One problem with understanding God is that you cannot _____ him.
3. Jesus liked to use stories called _____ to give people an idea of what life under God's leadership is like.
4. Jesus' stories were about things like farmers raising _____ or herding _____, or about hired men and their _____, or parents and their _____.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 13)

Another reason Jesus used parables is that a story helps us picture what he is teaching us. People who wonder, "What is a Christian life?" usually think, "You need to act very religious all the time," or "You must try your best to live right," or "You should make sure you get to church and stay away from evil things like rape or murder." All of those answers reveal a misunderstanding of something the Bible calls "the law." "The law" is a collection of rules that tell you 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 a Christian life led by God is nothing more than “the keeping of God’s laws.”

But the Bible says that Christian life is not like that. It is joyful. First of all, God enters our lives when he fills us with his love, not when we keep his laws. “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). Life with God does not start when we do things so that God will accept us. Life with God begins when he wins our trust. We start to live as Christians when we believe that God loves and accepts us because of what Jesus did for us, not because of what we do for God.

When people hear what the Bible says about God’s love for us, they find it hard to believe. They often think, “Yes, but it cannot be that simple or easy! There must be something I have to do to get God to accept me!” To help us to understand God’s love for us, Jesus told a parable about a man who had two sons who were very 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.



God gives Moses the Ten Commandments.

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 important to know that the father is a picture of what God is like and the father’s sons are a picture of us. Watch and see if the father in the story is anything like your idea of God, or if he is very different from the way you think of God. Also, 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 understand and trust God’s love and acceptance of you.

5. Another problem people have with understanding Christian life is that they think life with God is all about how well they keep God's _____.
6. The Bible says that God _____ us and _____ us because of what Jesus did for us.
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 13)

Review of Chapter One

One most important thing we need to learn is: What is a Christian life, a life led by God. We cannot see God, so it can be hard to understand how much he loves us and wants to lead us. To help us, Jesus liked to tell stories called parables. These were stories about things we can see, like farming or people. He did this to give us an idea of what life is like when it is led by this God we cannot see.

Another reason it is hard for us to understand life with God is that we usually 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 it. Jesus' parable of the broken-hearted father helps us understand that God loves us even if we haven't fulfilled any demands and haven't done any good things. God accepts us because of what Jesus did by dying for us.

Answers to questions in Chapter One:

1. life; 2. see; 3. parables; 4. crops, sheep, bosses, children;
5. laws; 6. loves, accepts; 7. God, we.

Test on Chapter One

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

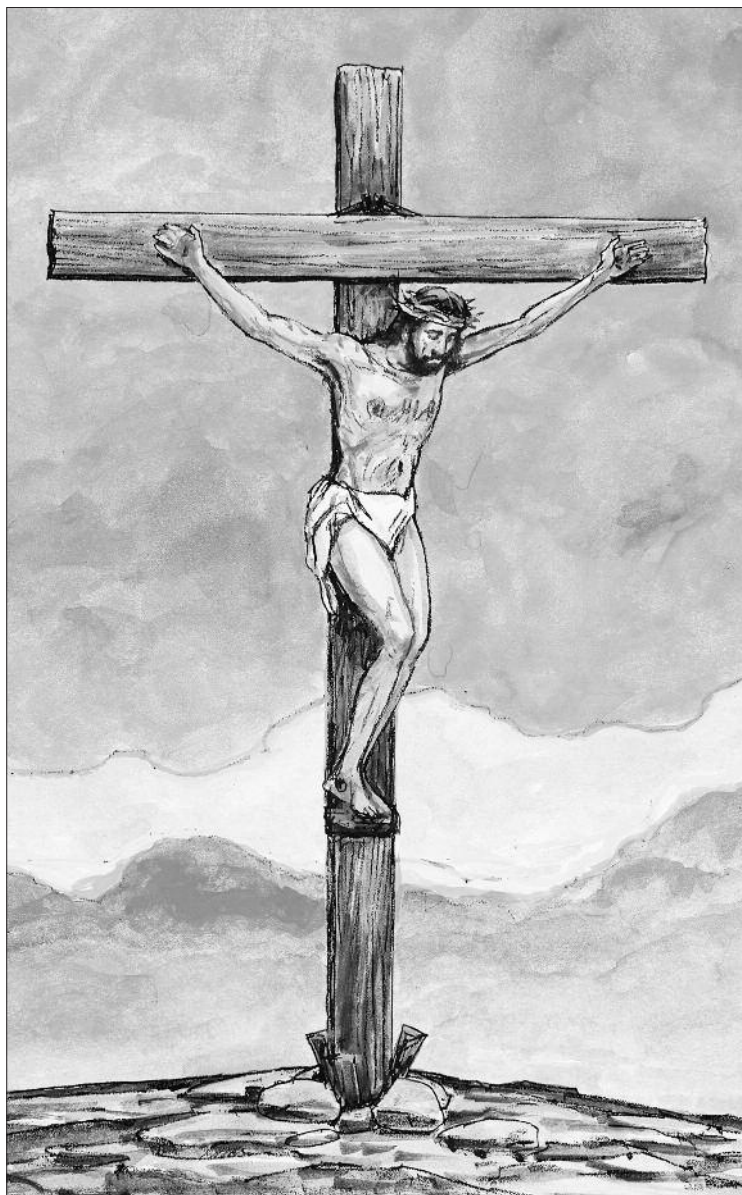
1. _____ You cannot see God.
2. _____ People usually think God will not accept them if they do not live right.
3. _____ God loves us and accepts us because of what Jesus did.
4. _____ You are not a Christian unless you act very religious all the time.

Fill in the blank:

5. Jesus told stories called _____ to help us understand life with _____.
6. The rules about what you should do and not 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 make God _____ us.

8. This story is about a _____ who
had two _____.
9. How this father loved and accepted his
_____ helps you understand how
_____ loves and accepts you.

(Check your answers on page 71)



God's plan to save us.



Chapter Two

Leaving Home

Have you ever noticed how the people you love the most can hurt you the most? You might have badly hurt 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 how Jesus' parable starts:

“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 the younger son and his father.

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

The father gave his son what he asked for. And when he did, a part of the family property now belonged to the younger son. It was not shared property any more. The younger son did not call that inheritance “ours.” He called it “mine.”

Then the younger son quickly sold it. Suddenly 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 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. Freedom 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 the feelings the father must have had during all this. He felt grief and was hurt. “Why are you doing this to us?” “Why have you sold our property, your inheritance, to strangers?” “My son, I have given you a lifetime of love, but you look down on me as worthless. And now you are leaving.”

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. When his younger son left the father felt _____ and was _____.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 24)

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 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 his son's labor if he was unhappy or his presence if he didn't want to be there. 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."

What about you? Are you like the younger son? Have there been ways that you ignored

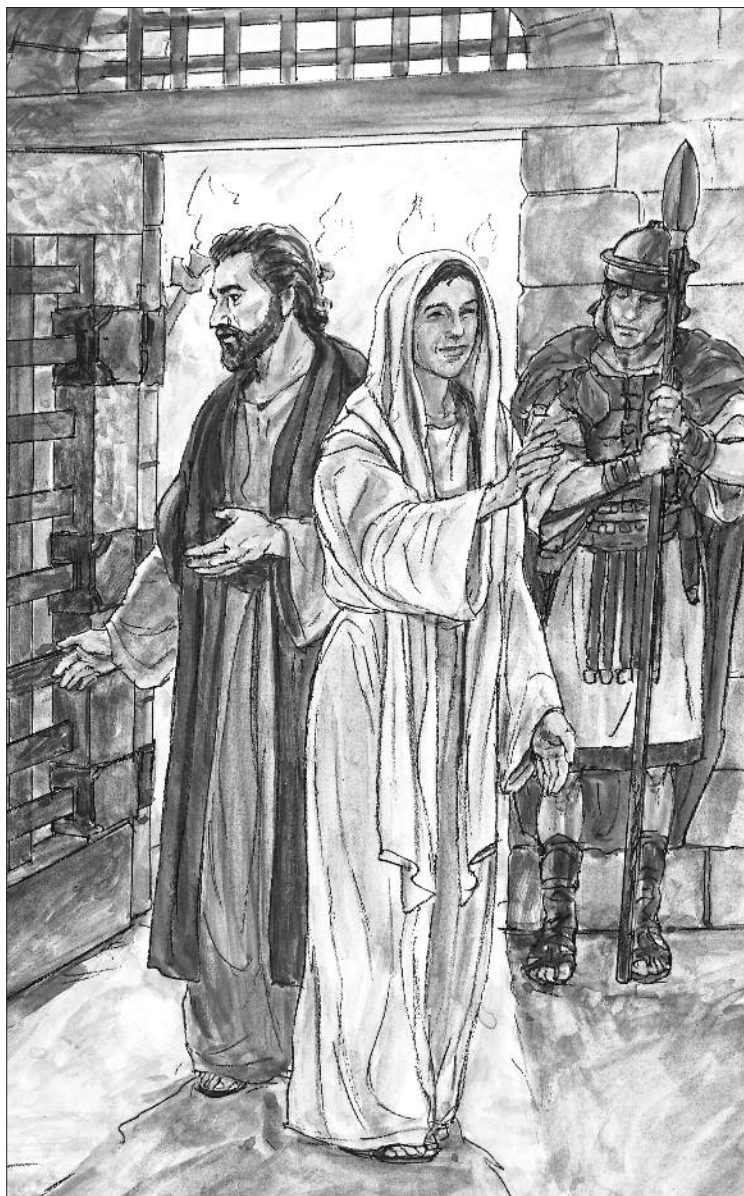
God's love and hopes and plans for you? Did you think you could do better on your own, just like the younger son who wanted none of his father's love and hopes and plans?

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 stop me?" The reason is that God is like the father in this story. He wants to hold us with love, not with force. He wants our hearts, not our unwilling loyalty or cold obedience to his laws.

If we are not willing to receive his love, he is patient to wait until we are ready to receive it. 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 to love him. Even though it breaks his heart, God lets people do what they think they need to do. When they finally learn that what they really need is God's love, he is there to love them.

4. The father did not try to _____ his son 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)



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. So Jesus told a story about a man whose younger son demanded his inheritance before his father died. This showed the father that his son did not love him or care about his feelings.

This son then turned his inheritance into money and moved far away where he wasted his money on wild living. His father did not try to force him to stay. The father wanted his son to stay at home only if he trusted his father's love, not because he had to stay.

Whenever we try to live our way and not God's way, it shows we do not love God. And we do not believe that he 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 to questions in Chapter Two:

1. inheritance, dead; 2. father; 3. grief, hurt; 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. be rewarded for your good behavior and punished for your bad behavior.'"

_____ B. break down until you are ready to do everything my way.'"

_____ C. enjoy success. I will give you hope for years to come.'"

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

_____ A. his love.

_____ B. making 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 love 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 believe that God loves us and wants what is best for us.

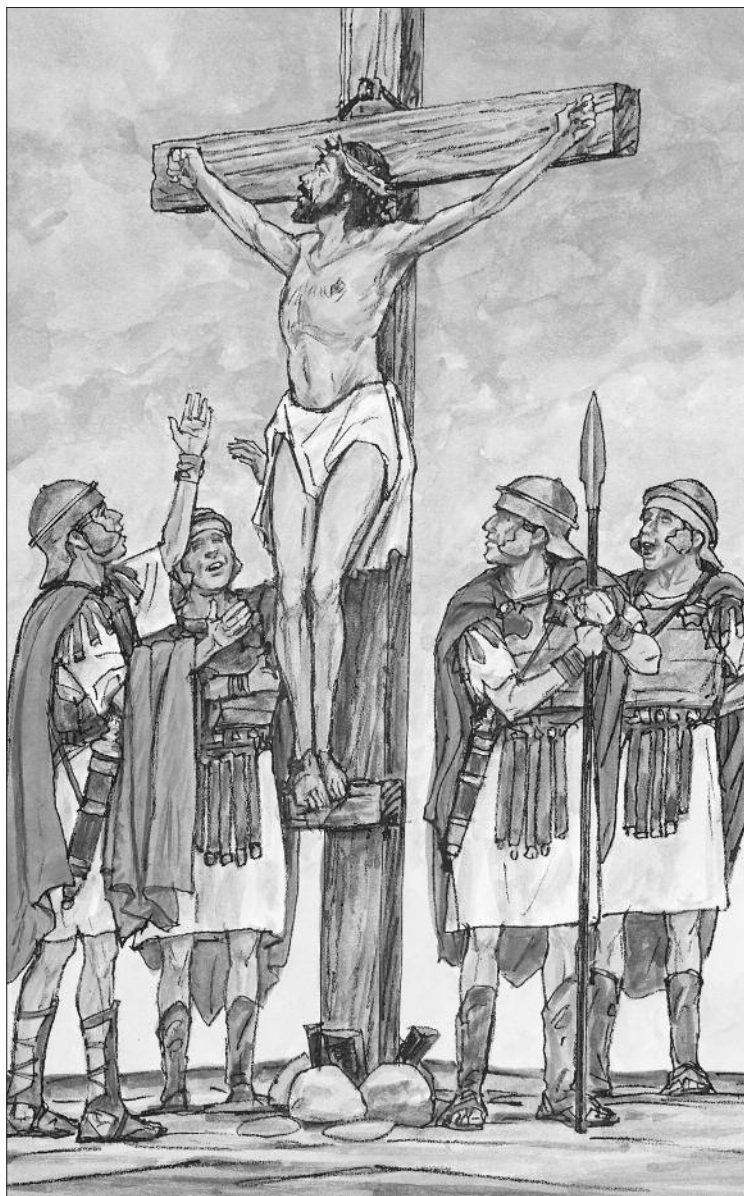
7. If we are not willing to receive God's love,
God

_____ A. will stop loving us.

_____ B. is patient to wait until we finally learn
we need God's love.

_____ 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, everything that 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: “A

moment of clarity.” That means not only knowing, “I’m in big trouble,” but also knowing, “It doesn’t 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 of those experiences: “hitting rock bottom” and “having a moment of clarity.”

“He spent everything he had. Then the whole country ran low on food. So the son didn’t 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 now he was 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 had no money to rent a place to sleep or even a few coins to buy food.

And jobs were hard to find. The only work he could find was taking care of pigs, which made him really ashamed. He grew up in a rich family. This 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 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. But 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. Your bright ideas and your big plans turned out to be foolish. Your brains and your strength and your charm were not what they should be, and they never would 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 self-condemnation is part of what the Bible is talking about when it uses the word "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 ways to get out of the hole he has dug for himself but 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.

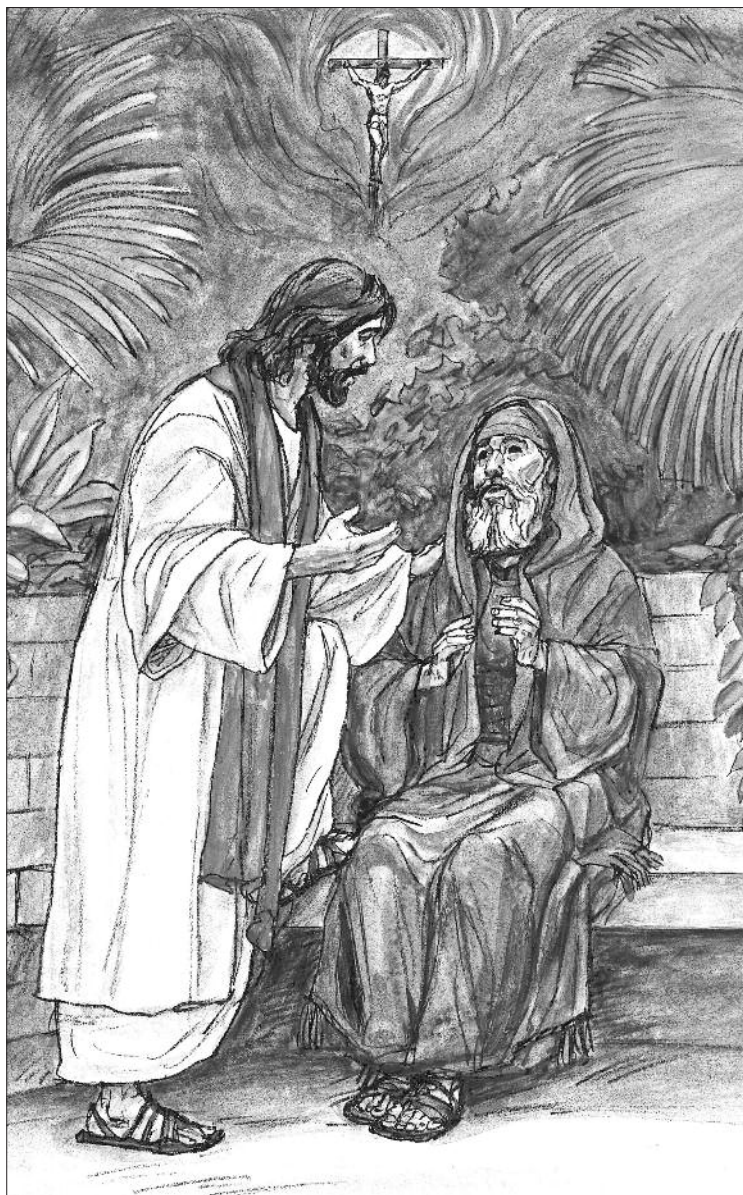
1. The younger son's friends and good times left him when he ran out of _____ and had to take a job feeding _____.
2. The younger son remembered that there was always enough to eat in his _____.
3. When a person stops thinking he can handle his own life without God and starts thinking he is throwing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

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 38)

But we 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 hired man 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 life with 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, what happened? Did you manage to keep up your part of the bargain? Probably not. But does that mean that God will turn away from you? Absolutely not! God will help you because he loves you, not



Jesus speaks about God's love for all people.

because you live right and have a good way of thinking or acting.

God loves you freely and willingly. He forgives you because Jesus died for you. One important part of repentance—"a change in the way you think"—is that God changes the way we think about him and his love. We stop thinking that God will not love and accept us until we start living right. We start thinking that God loves us just the way we are.

4. The younger son thought he would have to offer to do _____ for his father or his father would not let him come back.
5. The Bible says that God gives us the change of thinking called _____. That is, God 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)

Review of Chapter Three

In Jesus' story, the younger son hit rock bottom when he ran out of money and began to starve. 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 younger son also had a moment of clarity when he realized that he would not be starving if he went back home to his father. 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 a son. He thought that the only way he would be able to stay at home would be if he would work to pay back his father for all he had done wrong. Many people

Answers to questions in Chapter Three:

1. money, pigs; 2. father's house; 3. gift, repentance;
4. something; 5. repentance, love, accept; 6. way, are.

think that God will not accept them unless they promise to live right and then try hard to keep that promise.

God wants to change that way of thinking. He wants people to believe that he loves them. Jesus died to pay for all they have done wrong. And they do not need to make themselves right with him. Jesus has done this already.

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 cannot handle my own life.

B. God forgives me because Jesus died for me.

C. Sin messes things up.

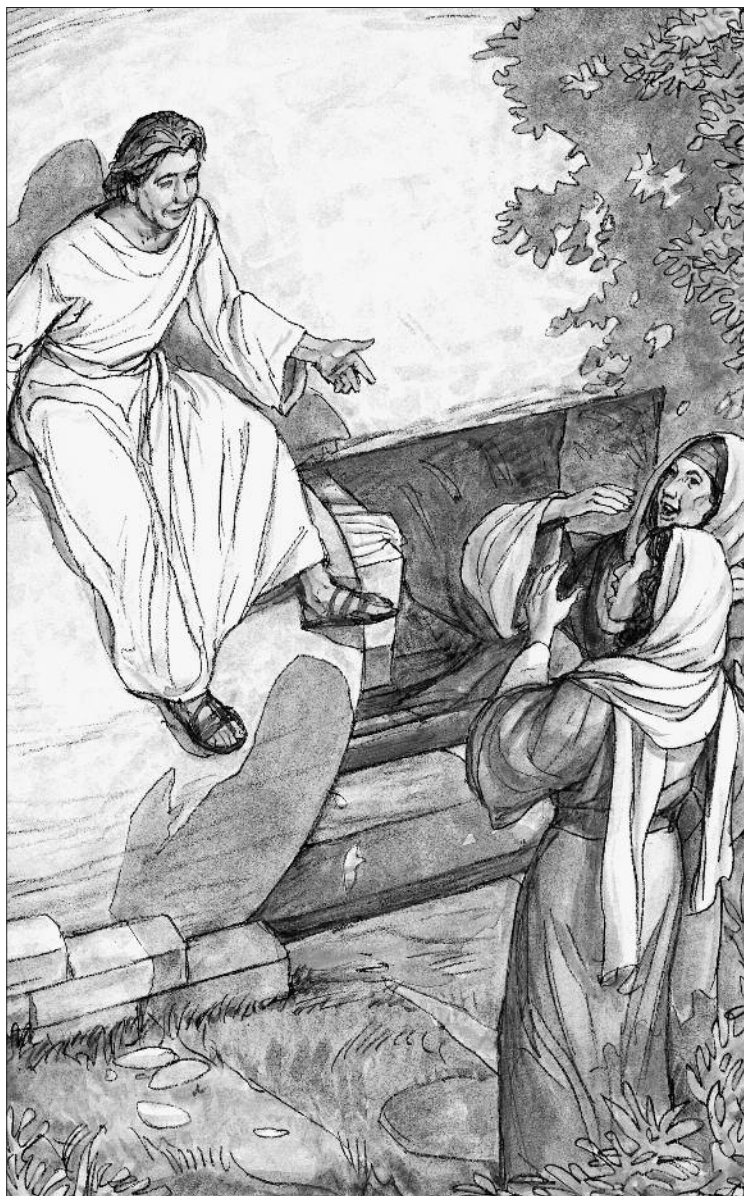
D. I need God to take care of me.

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

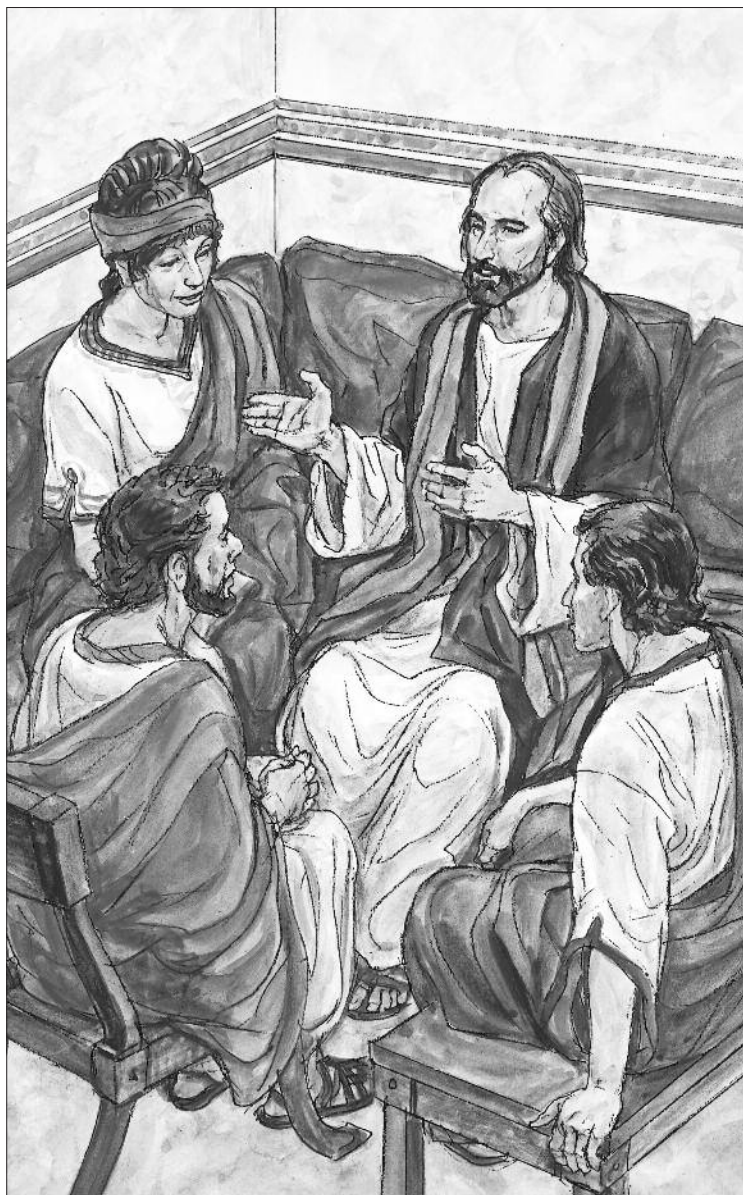
Welcome Home

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 promise to be faithful before I come to God.” And so those people don’t start praying to God or going to Bible studies or coming 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 drift away from God? In fact, if you actually were totally sincere and loyal to God, 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). There is 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 had a chance to say anything. At best, he thought that his father might listen to his little speech about how badly he had acted. He was only asking to be a hired man instead of a family member. 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 his father would put him on a trial period and give him a chance to work his way out of his debt.

You can picture the son walking more and more slowly as he got closer to home. You can 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 came close to home, he saw someone running down the road toward him in a cloud of dust. And he heard that person yelling something. Then he saw what was happening. It was his father! His father was running down the road to meet him, crying and shouting his name.

The son probably started crying, too. Maybe that is when he 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. He said that he was only looking for a job because he knew he did not deserve to be treated like a member of the family.

His father did not let him finish his speech. He did not care about how his son deserved to be



The lost son is welcomed home.

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 or how sorry he was or how much he wanted 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 53)

How do you think God is looking at you as you think about living a Christian 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 your coming home! Picture God telling you, “I am glad you are back with me, because now I can show you how much I love you!”

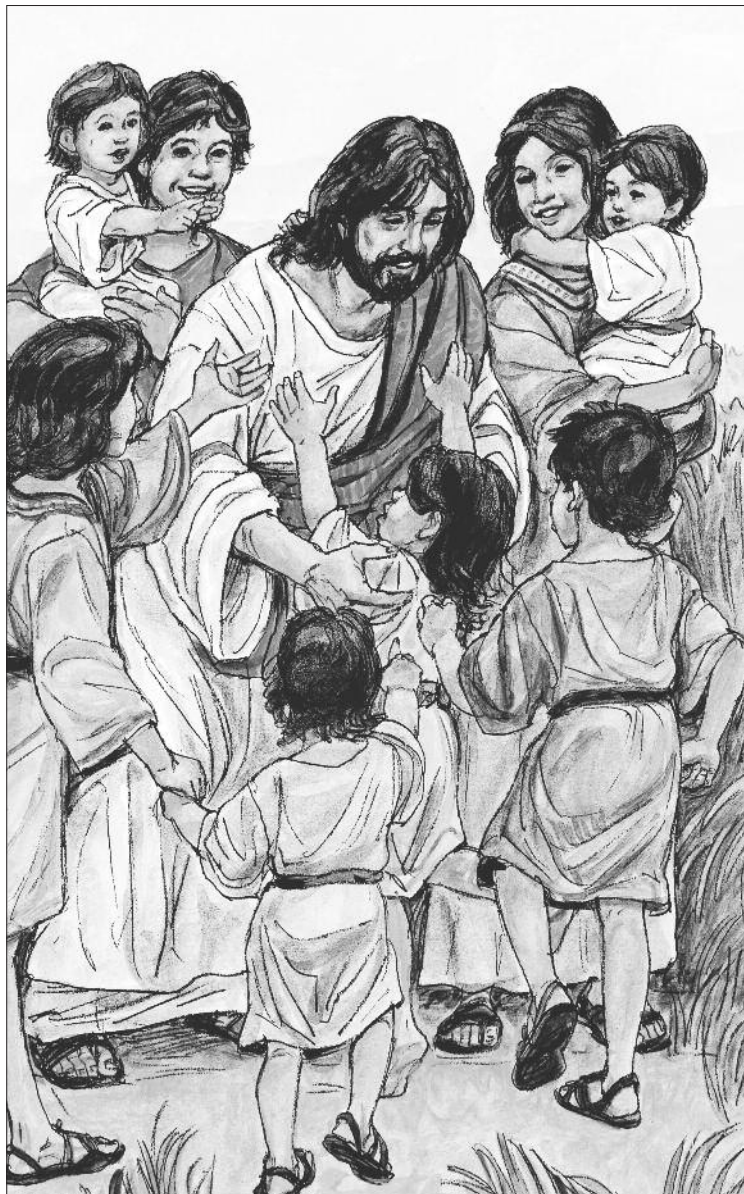
When you see a picture of Jesus dying on the cross, does it make you feel guilty and ashamed? That is not what Jesus wants you to feel. He died on the cross to get rid of your guilt. You can come to God, and you will be accepted and welcomed and loved. Of course, you cannot do enough good things to get God to accept you back. But you do not need to do

good things to earn his love. 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. Come to God as you are. Let 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 are _____ and _____ and _____ by God.
9. Let God _____ you.

(Check your answers on the bottom of page 53)



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

Review of Chapter Four

The younger son knew that he had hurt his family badly. He thought he would never be accepted back home as a family member. He thought that the only way he could come home was if he promised to work for his father. His father surprised him by running down the road to meet him, welcoming him back as his son. He even gave 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 making any demands. And he is looking forward to showing us how much he loves us in this world and in heaven forever.

Answers to questions in Chapter Four:

1. son; 2. hired man; 3. ran; 4. heart; 5. loved; 6. disappointed;
7. done; 8. accepted, welcomed, loved; 9. love.

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.

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

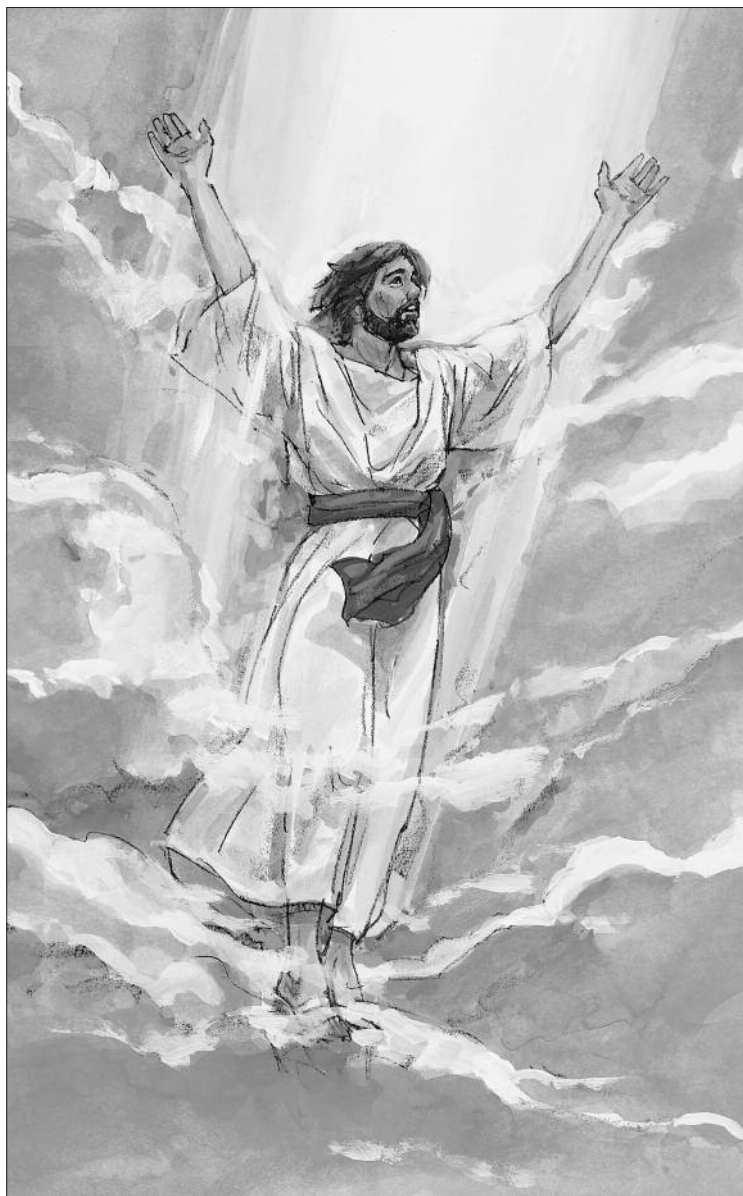
9. Why did Jesus die on the cross?

- _____ 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. Keep reminding yourself you do not deserve it
- _____ B. Promise to worship regularly
- _____ C. Live right so he will never stop loving you
- _____ D. 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 of 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 see and believe how much he loved them.

You remember that this was a story Jesus told to give us an idea of what it is like to live a Christian life, a life with God. God is like the father in this story. What he wants most of all is that we 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. Let that show you how much you are loved by God.

“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. He asked him what was going on. ‘Your brother has come,’ the servant replied.’ ‘Your father has killed the fattest calf. He has done this because your brother is back, safe and sound.’

“The older brother became angry. He refused to go in. So his father went out and begged him. 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. 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. 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 listen to the first thing he told his father: “Look! All these years I’ve worked like a slave for you. I have always obeyed your orders.” In

other words, he thought of himself as no more than a slave to his father, a prisoner. He did not feel like a son who lived in his father's love, but like a slave who lived only 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 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. 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 difficult for you. 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. He is much more loving 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).

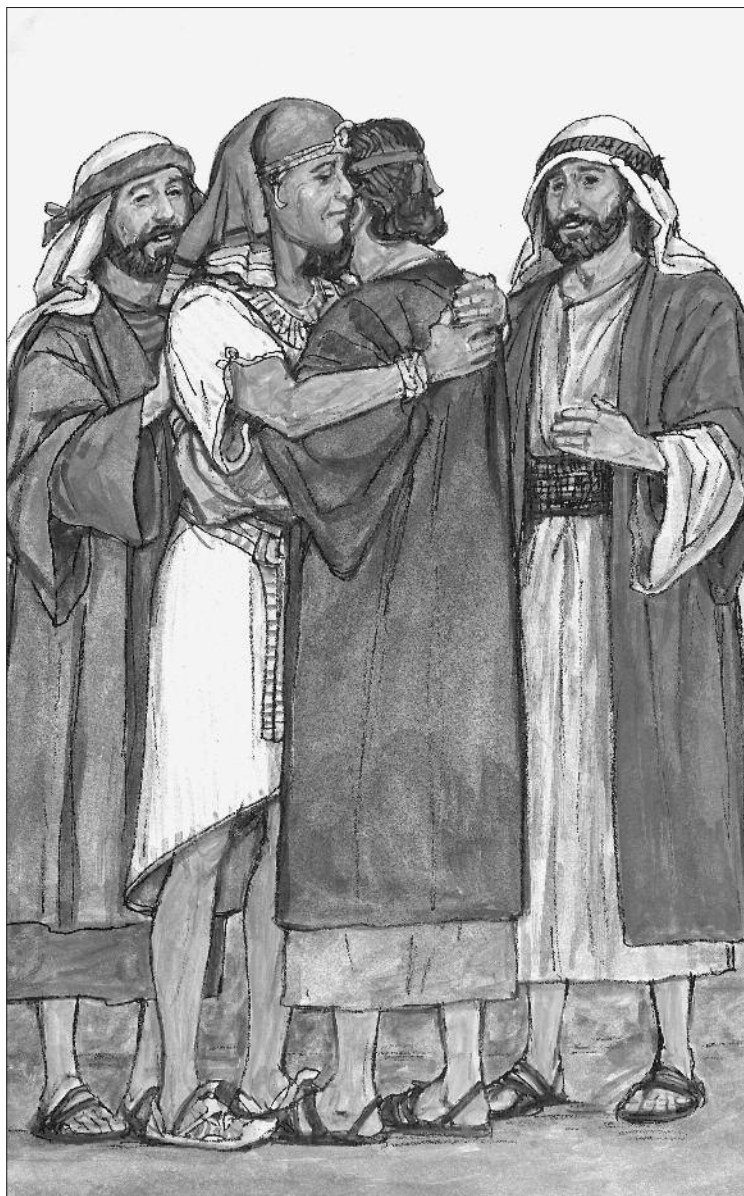
The older brother in Jesus’ story broke his father’s heart and made him unhappy because he did not believe that his father loved him and cared about him. But that was not the only

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 his younger brother, all he could think of was the difference between their lives. He told his father that he had been slaving for him and never disobeyed his orders, but his younger brother has wasted his father's money with some prostitutes. The older brother thought 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 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 don't . . ." 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 draw the line?

Jesus is in the business of erasing lines. He does not see a dividing line between people who deserve to be saved and people who don't deserve it. 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. That is what a Christian life is – a celebration of God's

love for us. 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

accept	to agree to or to believe
addiction	surrendering oneself to something like drugs, alcohol, tobacco
apply	to put to use or to give careful attention to something
ashamed	a feeling of guilt or sorrow for something
bargain	an agreement to do something for each other
celebrate	to honor someone or something by rejoicing
clarity	something made clearer or more understandable
commitment	a promise to do something
deserve	to be worthy of or suitable for something
disappoint(ed)	unhappy at not seeing hopes fulfilled
disobedient	refusing to obey or not following orders to do something
eternity	time without end, in this case, after we die
experience	something that happens to a person

frown	to wrinkle the forehead in anger or disapproval
guilt	the knowledge that you have done something wrong
ignore	to fail to take notice of something or someone
influence	to have an effect on
inheritance	receiving money or property after someone has died
manage	to be able to take care of a problem
obedient	to do what a person is asked to do
party	a group of people gathered together for food and fun
patient	able to wait calmly
pride	too high an opinion about one's importance or abilities
reject(ed)	to turn down or away from someone or something
religious	concerning religion (a system of what one believes)
scary	something that makes you afraid
sincere	honest, without being false
situation	a set of circumstances (a condition that influences people or events)
starve	to lack food

stupid	not wise, or not intelligent
supervision	watching over someone or something
supposed	to accept something as true
treat(ed)	to act or regard a person in a certain way
universe	all space including all stars
value	to think of something as being of great worth or very good



Answers to the Chapter Tests

Chapter Test One (Pages 14-15)

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

Chapter Test Two (Pages 25-27)

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

Chapter Test Three (Pages 40-41)

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 54-55)

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, “What is a Christian life, a life with God?” Jesus told stories called _____.
2. Because you cannot see _____, Jesus used stories about things people would see in their normal lives.
3. The Bible calls the rules about what you are supposed to do, and what you are not supposed to 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 obedience.”
- _____ 17. “I do not have to wait until I am completely ready 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 so bad that God will not accept 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 a Christian life?

- _____ A. Because Jesus died to forgive my sins.
- _____ B. Because Jesus loves me and leads me.
- _____ C. Because if I do not, God will reject me.

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