



# Praying the Scripture - a few simple steps at home

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> Sept 2019



1. Start with stillness and quietening down; then gently read the passage, noticing any feelings and connections to your own experience.
2. Read the passage again and spend understand. *The notes in your Bible may be of help at this point.*
3. Read the passage a third time - wondering how you yourself might pray the text over the next few days.
4. This weekend's Gospel is a long one (*so I haven't included it all here*) with a few parables that essentially are giving the same message in different ways. One of the most well know is the prodigal son – I have broken it down and the suggestion is that after reading the full Gospel take a little section in prayer each day.

## THIS SUNDAY'S GOSPEL - Luke 15:1-32 *There will be rejoicing in heaven over one repentant sinner*

The parables in Sunday's Gospel today effectively tell the same story, but with different words. Out of this story, here are **three main points to think about**.

1. **God isn't interested in preaching to the converted:** God is certainly pleased with the son who stayed with his father or the flock who sticks together. Indeed, to the son who stayed, the father says "everything I have is yours." But there is greater rejoicing in heaven over the sinner who repents – the son who returns, the lost sheep that is found – than over the flock that stays faithful. This, of course, isn't an invitation to stray so that God can celebrate our eventual return. But it does suggest we should focus more of our energies on restoring the flock. Christ didn't spend all of his time sitting with his devoted followers and teaching. He went out, had dinner with sinners who hadn't heard his teachings and talked with them. That's where the real work needs to happen.
2. **Forgive. Forgive again and again and again.** Perhaps you feel bad for the son who stays. Why should the father celebrate his other son's return after squandering his fortune, instead of celebrating the son who always treated his father with respect? Jesus teaches us to forgive – not seven times, but seventy-seven times (*Matthew 18:22*). It's a lesson in humility, to be sure. But it is also a demonstration of God's unconditional love. After all, God forgives us not just once – but time and time again.
3. **We are welcomed, always and unconditionally, with open arms.** We all have times where we feel the space between us and God is an impossible chasm. We have all had times where God can feel irrelevant, distant, not needed... One of the reasons people say that it can take them a long time to come back is that they're sure that if there was a God, He would be angry with at them for doubting and for ignoring Him all this time. But like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal, God greets us with joy and celebration on our return. It's never too late to return, and indeed, as last Sunday's reading taught us, there's no time like the present.

## Suggestions for Prayer

1. *There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.*

Why does the son leave his home? Perhaps he is bored with the routine and feels he needs to 'take a break'. So he leaves his busy life at home and seeks out supposedly good times. But the promise of good times turns out an illusion.

- *Have I run away from God my Father?*
- *Why do I run away?*
- *Where do I meet God in the busy-ness of my life?*

**Period for quiet reflection – in silence repeat the phrase - *Lord, help me not to run away from you and my life.***

2. *When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!'*

The son feels real hunger in his stomach but he feels more than hunger for food. He is lonely and nobody cares about him. He is desperate. Have I ever felt real despair?

- *Where do I turn when I feel desperate?*
- *Do I feel hungry and empty, even when I have plenty?*

**Period for quiet reflection – in silence repeat the phrase - *My God, my God why have you forsaken me?***

3. *I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." So he set off and went to his father.*

In the moment of weakness, he turns back to father. But this is also the moment of enlightenment because he believes his father will not reject him.

- Have I replayed events, scenarios in my mind and reached conclusions that stop me taking the risk?
- The hardest step in any journey is the first – The reason for making it is not important. What is, is that we do
- Where do I find such strong faith that God accepts me?

**Period for quiet reflection – in silence repeat the phrase - *Lord, help me to come back to you.***

4. *But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.*

While he was still a long way off, the father forgave him. Such a small step by the son meets such strong love from the father. The father never stopped loving him but now he can show the love. What joy to picture God wanting to show his love if only I will turn to him.

- Can I admit that I make mistakes – sometimes intentionally, sometimes not?
- What is keeps me from doing this?
- Have I felt the freedom, the liberating and healing effect of forgiveness?

**Period for quiet reflection – in silence repeat the phrase - *Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.***

5. *Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'*

The elder brother is a busy and serious man. Of course he is angry, but sadly, he is unable to step outside his own world and his own self-importance. What a missed opportunity.

- Where is the elder son in me?
- Do I put my interest or pride before the good of others?
- The hurt I carry who does it do most harm to?
- Why stops me from just let go?

**Period for quiet reflection – in silence repeat the phrase - *Lord, make me a channel of your peace***

Each day, as a conclusion, say a familiar prayer such as 'Our father...