

Teen Devotion

Year C – Lent 4

Crushed



One truth shared: When the weight of our sin makes us fearful of God's condemnation, he reveals his grace yet again.

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy 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 fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."

Luke 15:11-24

Our Condemnation Is Crushed by God's Grace

Luke chapter 15 is commonly called, "The Story of the Prodigal Son." *Prodigal* is not a common word in our modern vocabulary. Today, we would use words such as *extravagant* or *lavish*. When this word is applied to humans, it is usually not a compliment. In the story, the younger of two sons asks his father for his inheritance. At that time and in that culture, this was like the son telling his father that he wished he was dead so he could have the only thing that mattered to him—the only thing that his father was good for to him—money. He got what he wanted and lived a lavish, extravagant life with it. Now, we might say we would never go that far, but in some ways we do. We live in a world that says, "If it feels good, it must be good," and, "Do what makes you happy." But what made the prodigal son happy didn't keep him happy for long, or healthy. Neither do the sinful choices we make.

It is sadly natural to rely on one's own intuition and reason. Just like the prodigal son, we come up with plans and focus on them to get what we desire. 1 Corinthians 1:25 says, "The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." How often do we find our weakness is our own wisdom? We often go to great lengths to justify what we think and do. Sometimes, only in hindsight, we look back and see how we went down a path that did not trust God—but revealed a misplaced faith. Perhaps we over relied on human wisdom.

What is faith from the perspective of human wisdom? What society often calls "faith" may better be called "speculation." The hunger for "hopeful speculation" is driven by the need to feel "okay" with ourselves and to feel we are not alone. So we start creating excuses for ourselves, for our mistakes, and for the ever-present problem of suffering that accompanies our lives. Faith is said to be "an idea that I have come up with—in which I can hope. It really doesn't matter what the idea is; it just matters that I hope in it." In other words, "Have faith in your faith." What we are trying to do is justify ourselves, all the while wondering if we have ever done enough. What a travesty! It replaces Christ as the object of faith. Christ alone makes faith valuable.

But know this: we have a prodigal God. He is extravagant and lavish—particularly when it comes to his forgiveness. Led by the Holy Spirit to the cross, we confess our sins. At the cross we see the wildest act of wastefulness—an innocent man, completely without fault, no guilt, no filth, no dirt, no shame being treated like a wretched sinner. There our condemnation is crushed, and we see just how lavish, just how extravagant, just how reckless the love God has for us—we see it through Christ. We see that salvation is not merit-based, but grace-given, something that sounds foolish to human ears.

Let this be your takeaway: while today's story is about a prodigal son, it is really about a prodigal father and his amazing grace toward a son that didn't deserve it. Now it's our story. When you feel lost and beyond return, may the extravagant and lavish grace of our Lord Jesus always find and restore you!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, there are times you allow hardships to be part of my life. Too often, I grumble or complain about them. When facing temptation, I give up too easily. Help me remember that Jesus is my way back to you. And in the moment of hardship and temptation, be faithful in your promise to help me bear it and overcome with your strength. Amen.

Foundations Teen Facilitators Guide

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Starting the Discussion: *This first section is intended to be light and easy, to engage and get the conversation going. Have a little fun with these questions.*

Bring a prize (make it cheap but fun). Announce that the prize will be awarded at the end to the person who tells the best “I ran away from home” story. It could be funny (they got angry and announced they were leaving home). Or, it could be real. *(Leader: If you hear crickets, set an example and go first. Be prepared with a story of your own to help your teens feel more comfortable sharing their own experiences, as well as give them time to think.)*

Connecting: *This section serves as a bridge between the opening conversation and the body of the study/discussion. It should get the group thinking about the topic/text even before they've looked at it.*

- Hand out blank piece of paper to each student. Now, write briefly about a recent time you “ran away” from God. What happened? Why did it happen?
- How do you find your way back home to him? Let's find out...

Digging In: *Here we want to dig into some texts or the text for the day and see what Scripture says. The questions are meant to be open ended to give a beginning of a scriptural conversation. These are a guide for a spiritual and scriptural conversation.*

Read **Luke 15:11-32**. *(If possible, try to read it in parts: Narrator, Father, Younger Son, Older Son)*

- Let's talk about the younger son:
 - What different 'stages' do we see him go through?
 - What causes him to finally make a change to his attitude?
 - Recount a time in your own life where you hit rock bottom and realized a need for a change.
- Now let's talk about the father:
 - If you were the father, what do you think your kid would do with his inheritance?
 - Why did he still give it to his son?
 - Reread verse 20. The son has been gone for quite a while, but what was the father still doing and how does it reflect on his attitude toward his son? How does this reflect on how God feels for you?
 - This season of Lent, where best do we see the love of the Father for runaways?
- Now let's talk about the older son:
 - Vote with your feet. If you think the older son is justified in his anger, stand on one side of the room, if you think he is in the wrong, stand on the other. Discuss with the other side why you think the way you do. If your opinion changes you can change sides of the room. *(Leader: Feel free to play devil's advocate.)*
 - What emotions does God want us to have in our hearts for each other? (cf. John 13:34; Ephesians 4:32)

Conclusion: *Here we want to wrap up the discussion, perhaps circling back to the “connecting question” above.*

Focus on yourself.

- Which son in the story do you relate to and why?
- How does it make you feel to know that God loves you no matter what you do?

Challenge for this week: choose one or all depending on what fits you best.

- Read Luke 15:11-32 with your family and discuss it with them.
- Think of someone you know who may be running from God. Don't say any names, but think of them to yourself. Take a moment to pray that they would turn back to God.

Hand out the prize for the best “runaway” story!