



## Living Like the Father

### Fourth Sunday in Lent

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Throughout my journey of faith, I have focused on this reading from Luke's Gospel and how the Father is an example of intense love and forgiveness. It has been a life-changing reflection point of how I can separate myself from God for a variety of reasons and behaviors; yet always return to this loving God.



This Lent I have been praying with a book by Henri J. M. Nouwen, **The Return of the Prodigal Son, A Story of Homecoming**. Father Nouwen invites us to look at the three characters in this Gospel story and to see ourselves reflected in each one.

Using the painting by Rembrandt of the same name, we are asked to view ourselves as the Father, whose love is unselfish and total. He accepts the request by the younger son to have his share of the inheritance and go off and have his own life. The Father misses his son and upon seeing him far off, runs to greet him. The Father puts a ring on his finger and asks that a banquet is prepared for a celebration. The Father does not ask questions about where or what the son has been about while absent from "home" nor does the Father dwell on the separation. The Father wants only to restore the relationship and to move forward.

***In my relationships how do I live out this graciousness with new and fresh eyes looking at people who might have hurt me?***

As a young adult, I identified with the character of the younger son. Putting myself in the center of situations, I easily lost perspective about what was going on. Judgments were made without all the information, and I ended up defending and rationalizing what I was doing. Wanting my choices to be the dominant ones, selfishness took over and separated me from God and the people of God.



## **How do I live out the awareness of being connected to others and the need to ask, receive and give forgiveness?**

At this stage of my journey, well into my adult years, I find the character of the older son someone with whom I can easily identify.

The older son was the one who followed the rules, did what was expected, cooperated and was “always faithful.” How angry and resentful this can make me when some are receiving “preferential treatment.” Filled with self-righteousness, how easily I can separate myself and become judgmental. I hear myself questioning: How come? What about ...? And, why is this happening?



Embracing the bitterness of the older son invites us to take a deeper look into our interior motivation: why do I do what I do? Does doing the “right thing” but with resentment and jealousy strengthen relationships; or instead, does it deepen distance from others? Standing aloof and merely observing does not foster inner freedom.

## **How do I accept the need to let go of judging and criticizing and embrace different ways of being free?**

*I hope that during this season of Lent we can explore how we are each of the characters in the parable and respond to the invitation in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 to accept our roles as ambassadors of Christ. This is how living like the Father of Luke’s Gospel is expressed.*