



Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." So to them he addressed this parable. Then he said, "A man had two sons, and the younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of your estate that should come to me.' So, the father divided the property between them. After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation. When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine. And he longed to eat his fill of the pods on which the swine fed, but nobody gave him any. Coming to his senses he thought, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food to eat, but here am I, dying from hunger. I shall get up and go to my father and I shall say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as you would treat one of your hired workers."' So he got up and went back to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him. His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But his father ordered his servants, 'Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.' Then the celebration began. Now the older son had been out in the field and, on his way back, as he neared the house, he heard the sound of music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what this might mean. The servant said to him, 'Your brother has returned and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' He became angry, and when he refused to enter the house, his father came out and pleaded with him. He said to his father in reply, 'Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.' He said to him, 'My son, you are here with me always; everything I have is yours. But now we must celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been

found."

Introductory Prayer: Lord, though I cannot see you with my eyes, I believe you are present to me now, in my innermost being, and that you know me far better than I know myself. I also know that you love me much more than I love my own self. Thank you for loving and watching over me, though I don't deserve your love. In return, I offer you my sorrow for my sins and my hope to love you more each day.

Petition: Jesus, guide me to a complete rejection of sin in my life.

1. Love: The Double-Edged Sword - Place yourself in the father's shoes. He loves his sons, sacrifices himself for them, and has tremendous hope and fatherly pride in them. He intensely wants them to be happy and seeks what's best for them. Above all, he wants them to respond to his love for them with the same generosity, the same intensity of self-giving. There is nothing more painful for a lover than unanswered, ignored or scorned love. Imagine how much God loves us: he sends his only begotten Son into the world, to become man—with all the limitations and suffering this entails—to die on a cross, in our place, because of our sins.

2. Forgetting to Count Your Blessings: The minute the son begins to think about himself and turn his attention away from the father's love is the minute he begins to have problems that will lead to spiritual and material bankruptcy. Asking for his inheritance was tantamount to wishing his father's death, since an inheritance is bestowed only after the death of one's parents. How many times have I asked God to die by choosing my own will over his? Self-centeredness leads to ingratitude: forgetting that I have received everything from God through no merit of my own and that it will all return to him. Self-centeredness also leads to trying to find happiness anywhere except the one place it truly is found: God.

3. A Rude Awakening: Anytime we turn away from the love and grace of God and turn to sin, we lose our senses and leave God for a "distant country." God's will is our home, even if on the surface it may seem unpleasant. Sin blinds the intellect and weakens the will. Its every moment is a point of departure. But—every saint has a past and every sinner has a future. We can turn back to God right now. He is with us right here, right

now, pouring out his grace. He ardently longs for us to respond to him, just as the father in the parable must have longed for the return of his son. I can stand up. I can return to my Father. I can bury my past in Christ. I can go to him for forgiveness.

Conversation with Christ: Heavenly Father, I clearly see the many times I have said “No” to you and chosen myself. I give thanks for having such a patient and forgiving father as you. I am sorry for my lack of love for you. Now I reject sin once more and turn back to you, confident of your mercy and forgiveness.

Resolution: I will say a heartfelt act of contrition, relishing God's love and mercy for me.