

# Prodigal: The principle of excess baggage

## *How God Calls Men to Repent... And Why*

*By Man in the Mirror Vice President Brett Clemmer*

*Luke 15, 2 Corinthians 7:10*

Good morning! Hey, it's summertime with a vengeance! I tell people that in Orlando we have two seasons, paradise and hell, and hell is just beginning. Welcome to the humidity!

Pat sends his greetings, he's working on a project right now and getting ready to go on vacation, so he asked me if I would come and share with you guys this morning, and I'm excited to do that! Pat's been doing a series called *How God Makes Men*, as you all know, and there's actually a book coming out here in a couple months based on it, and that's part of what he's working on right now. We were talking about what I was going to do this morning, and he said just do something in the theme of the current series. Have you ever gotten a CD with a bonus track? This will be your bonus track for *How God Makes Men*. Pat's been talking about real characters from the Bible, but today I'm going to talk about a parable that Jesus told, maybe his best known parable, the parable of the lost son.

My son and I a few months ago went to a movie at the mall in Altamonte Springs, and we drove in the back way by Crane's Roost. Standing there right beside the road, there was a young man in his mid to late twenties, and he looked kind of like me actually. He had jeans on, an un-tucked shirt, and he was standing there on the corner with a Bible in his hand, and he was preaching away at the top of his lungs! I could hear him through the window and over the radio and AC, so I rolled the window down hear him better. My son is like, "Dad, what are you doing?" I said, "Listening to this guy, he's preaching." So my son said, "Why?" He's in the middle of a parking lot basically; it was just kind of a weird thing. Have you ever been to New York city where you can walk down the side walk sometimes and there'll be a guy there on a milk crate and he'll just be standing there preaching; a street preacher? What will he say? Well, he'll start saying, "Repent! For the kingdom of God is at hand! Repent!" You hear that word over and over again. "Repent! Repent!" These guys have gotten such a reputation that I think a lot of the times we hear the word repent and we think of some sort of crazy eyed guy standing on the side of the road yelling at us. So we lose sight of what it really means to repent. That's what we're going to talk about today, we're going to talk about repentance and we're going to look at it from the stand point of the prodigal son.

What really is repentance? What does it mean to repent? I remember when I was a kid and Billy Graham came to town. I was living outside of Boston, and they were using Nickerson Field, the Boston University Football Field and my church got real involved in providing counselors for when people came up for it. I remember Billy Graham preaching the gospel message, and he was just amazing! I actually got to go last year again with my son to Charlotte to the Billy Graham museum there, and I watched the tapes there of Billy Graham preaching and it just brought me right back there to high school when I watched him up on stage. I remember when he would talk about repenting; he would talk about what that means. He would say your life is headed this way, and when you repent, you turn and head the other way, and that's what repenting is all about. It's about turning away from one way of doing something and turning to another way of doing something. So really if you think about it, we repent all the time! I repent daily of my lack of time management skills. Sometimes I have to repent of Sportscenter on ESPN! You know, I really

don't need to watch it that much, it's just the same stories over and over again! I might repent of driving too fast...right to the officer.

So repenting, because of the street preacher or Billy Graham thing, we think it's some sort of lofty thing, but it's not. It's a very simple thing, a very healthy thing, but it's a very difficult thing. Repenting is very difficult, and we can see that in this story. If you have your Bibles, turn to Luke 15 and let's read this incredibly well known parable. Let me read it to you:

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.

"Meanwhile, 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 and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

"The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

"My son, 'the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

May God add understanding to the reading of his word, let's pray.

Father we are excited and eager to hear your word. I'm honored, Lord, that these men would come out on Friday morning and make the sacrifice to be here just so that they could come together as brothers to speak into each other's lives and hear what you have to say to them. Father I pray that you would send your Holy Spirit into this room this morning, that you would speak to us, challenge us, and call us to yourself for your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

### **Prodigal: The Principle of Excess Baggage**

So we're going to talk about repentance, and we're going to talk about it in the context of this story. What I want to talk to you about is the principle of excess baggage. Anybody carry excess baggage around? If you go on a trip with your wife, you definitely have excess baggage. I hope no women watch this tape! But we go through life and accumulate baggage. We accumulate things that sort of hang on into our lives, usually unhealthy things. Maybe it's the consequences of actions that we have taken. Maybe it's unhealthy attitudes. Go back a little farther, maybe it's life experiences, things that we have no responsibility for at all, and yet they cling to us. I'm frightened in one sense today because in 2008, the last year we have statistics for, 40% of all babies were born to unwed mothers. That means, fast forward eighteen years, we're going to have a whole generation of young men and women who are going to grow up, and they're going to have a different experience than would be the ideal experience. Most of those kids born into those households are going to grow up without a dad. That's got to give you excess baggage. That's got to affect you, and I don't think anything affects our relationship to God as much as our relationship with our Father because when we experience our relationship with God, we experience our relationship with our heavenly father. And if the only experience you have of being fathered is a horrible, negative, or absent experience, how can you possibly look at God and say, "Oh, great! You're my dad!" What if that's really not that great of a thing? So we may carry around that baggage.

Sometimes we have sin in our lives that we put in the past and say you know what the past is the past, I'm just going to leave that back there, and press forward. I'm not going to think about that anymore. Sometimes it can even be in the present, where like the prodigal son we start relying on our own best thinking. We think it's the right thing to do, we reason it out and rationalize it, and the next thing we know, we're out in the field taking care of someone else's livestock wishing we could have the livestock's food, because we can't figure out how to feed ourselves. These are all ways we have excess baggage.

Repenting is the key to getting rid of that excess baggage. Let's look at how that works. What we're going to do is we're going to talk about the call to repentance, how God calls us to repentance, what the cost of repentance is, and then finally we'll talk about the celebration of repentance.

### **The Call**

So how does God call us to repentance? Well, the biggest thing he does is he lets us suffer the consequences of our own actions. Have you ever noticed that? You make decisions and you have to live with them. God very easily could come in and remove consequences, you could just go through life and not have to worry about things while God smoothed them over, but that's not how God works. God set the world up to work in a way that brings us to him.

Sometimes he'll take everything away. You'll be like that prodigal son, you'll be out there and realize that you've lost everything, you've lost your health, you've lost your finances, and you've lost your

family. You get down to rock bottom and God's like, are you ready yet? Because I didn't go anywhere. That's sometimes the way God calls us to repent.

You know Pat likes to talk about how sometimes God will let you choke on life. He'll give you everything you want, more than you ever thought you could have, until you turn around one day and you realize that you can't breathe! Because you are a slave to your accomplishments, you are a slave to the reputation they have created that's not real, you are a slave to people that are relying on you, and you're choking, you're drowning. And it's those times, in those ways, that God calls us to repentance, and this is when that excess baggage becomes so heavy and so daunting that we come to the end of ourselves.

### **The Cost**

If you look behind the curtain of all of those different scenarios, what's at the base level of those things? Sin. Because we don't want God's best for ourselves, we want our best for ourselves. We don't want to rely on the truth that God gives us, instead we want to make up our own truth, create our own world, be self-sufficient and self-reliant. So we focus on our own abilities and our perspectives, our own world view, and we end up choking, penniless, relationship-less. It's those times that we realize that we have to wait to die, or turn away from those things. When you get to that point, you would think that we would just go, oh all right, I'll just turn away from that. It'll be easy. But here's the thing, repentance comes at a cost. Because when you repent, you have to be honest. When you repent, you have to really look at how you got to where you are and you have to be willing to repudiate that. When you repent, you have to be willing to say, "I am not God, God is God." And you have to be willing to abandon, in some senses, control.

Sometimes you think that this is the problem, and you're like Shrek. Remember the movie Shrek? He said ogres are like onions, lots of layers. Sin is like ogres, there's layers to it. You look at what's going on in your life and you say, well I'm just going to stop this. I'm just going to stop looking at porn on the internet. I'm just going to stop, and that's how I'll repent. I hate to tell you, but that's just the surface. You peel that away and maybe underneath that you find other things that are going on. You find real dissatisfaction in your marriage. All right, I'll just fix my marriage. I'll just go to a weekend marriage retreat, that'll solve it! I'll fix that and I won't look at porn anymore. Then you look at why your marriage isn't working, and you peel that layer back, and you realize I'm not invested in my marriage, I'm invested in my job. All right, I've got to fix that, then you peel that layer back, and you peel and peel and you get all the way down to the kernel and you find this incredibly painful, horrible, thing in your life. Maybe it's the fact that your Dad was never home because he was working all the time. Maybe you watched the way that his world didn't revolve around his relationship with God and his family, it revolved around his own desire to accumulate wealth, status or reputation. And it was at your expense! And that's painful! But you know if you're really going to repent, that's what it takes. It takes peeling the layers back.

I talk to guys that are in marriages that are really struggling. Often times they've got to peel the layers back, and recognize it was their own sin or their wife and their sin early in their marriage, or before their marriage. If they're really willing to address the root cause of what they are going through, it's stuff that happened well before they were married. I've talked to couple after couple that the consequences of sexual activity before they were married don't manifest themselves in their marriage until ten, fifteen, even twenty-five years later! Can you imagine a sin sitting there and festering, because you never confess it, you never ask for forgiveness, you never deal with it? Can you imagine what happens to it when it's below ground and covered up? It takes root! It sends out tendrils, and goes into every other

area of your life. And that's why repentance is so hard! Because you've got to peel back the layers, you've got to pay the price and go down to the root cause of what's going on. You've got to be willing to look at God and say, "This is my sin. You've got to help me. I can't handle this. This is painful, this is agonizing!" The only way you get there is to admit you are powerless without God's grace. You have to admit that in your own best thinking you always come to the end of yourself. You have to trust!

If you look back at verse 17 it says when he came to his senses he said, "How many of father's hired men have food to spare? And here I am starving to death!" He comes to that realization! And then he says, "I will set out and go back to my father." Guys, a lot of the times that's what we need to do, we need to set out and go back to our father. Whether we've been away for a little while, or been away for a long while, and you know the longer you've been away the harder it is to go back. So we just need to be willing to go back to our father. But why would you go back to a father you don't trust? So one of the key elements of this story is that the father is trustworthy. **The father's love is bigger than the son's sin.** He says I have sinned against heaven and against you, so he knows he's going to have to go back to his dad and say I've done you wrong. I know I lived within my rights; I took what you gave me. He doesn't say in verse 12 and 13 that he divided his property grudgingly and gave it to him. He said all right, you want your half, here you go. God will do that if you go to him and ask for things that maybe aren't the best thing, that's grace sometimes. God will just go, All right. You want it? Here you go. I'm really sorry that this is about to happen to you, but here you go." And we come back to him because we trust him.

Remember those old AAMCO commercials? "You can pay me now, or you can pay me later." You hear that sound in your engine? You need to bring it in to AAMCO, because you can pay me now or you can pay me later. When we have sin in our lives, it's the same thing. We can repent now, or we can pay for it later, but the longer it goes, the longer it takes root, the more it sends those tendrils into our lives. The great thing is that the father never changes. If that son had taken a week, a month, a year, ten years to come back, the father would have still been there, he would have still been waiting for him. And we can trust in that with our heavenly Father as well.

2 Corinthians 7:10 gives us a great picture of what repentance looks like and what the value of it is. When Paul is talking to the Corinthians and he's basically talking to them about a previous letter he sent, and it was probably 1 Corinthians. He's basically saying, "Hey I chastised you in my last letter and you repented. You responded to it and you're innocent again." Just like the son was fully restored, and he says:

2 Corinthians 7:10: Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret...

So we have to examine our sin and Godly sorrow leads to repentance which brings no regret, but look at what he says at the end of the verse:

... but worldly sorrow brings death.

What's that mean? That repentance is honestly going to God and saying, "I've sinned and I want to turn away from that and trust your grace and your love for me." But worldly sorrow is when you won't turn to God, when you keep trying to do it on your own. It's hopeless sorrow, it's sort of "blaming everybody else" sorrow. Paul says that doesn't lead anywhere, you don't get anything out of that. So it's not enough just to say I've done the wrong thing, or this is bad for my life, because worldly sorrow isn't repentance. Worldly sorrow is just sort of putting your head down and keeping going. But true

repentance is turning away from your sin and turning towards God. That's the cost of it; we have to leave it behind.

Why don't we want to leave it behind? Because sometimes we like it! Sometimes sin is fun! Sometimes we think sin is best left un-confronted. We think, if I just leave that sin over there and ignore it, it'll go away, it's not that bad. I knew a couple once who had sin in their marriage and it didn't look like anything, it just looked like a guy that played a lot of softball. His hobby had become more important than his marriage had. I realized it when I started to notice him missing more often. We went to church together and he starts to miss things. His family's there at this family event, but he's got a game tonight. Really? He's like a grown up! One time, that's not a big deal, but by the third and fourth time it happened I'm beginning to see a trend. Everyone is like, oh he's just playing a game that he likes. This is why repenting is so hard, because sometimes sin is just so hard. And it looks innocuous, but the cost of repentance means that sometimes you have to turn away from things that seem okay, that seem maybe even good. But if we're willing to peel back the layers and look at the core of what's going on, we see "I'm escaping my marriage, I'm escaping my responsibilities, I'm putting myself in front of my family." You have to peel back and find out what's really going on there. You can only do that with God's grace.

### The Celebration

So why would you repent then? It's so hard! Well, you repent because look at what happens when you repent! God is sitting there waiting for us to come back! This is the third parable in this chapter. If you look and go back to Luke 15, it talks about three things that were lost: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. The point of all three of these is that one lost sheep, one lost coin, one lost son, is the most valuable to him! Even when he had a perfectly good, well behaved son, the lost one is the one that brings God the most delight! The lost sheep is the one you go after, it's valuable! The lost coin is the one you'll turn your house inside out trying to find! Think about what that means for us! That means even though God has lots of good people, holier than us, better Christians than us, God doesn't look at us that way! He's looking for the lost ones! Why should you repent, why should you go through the trouble of peeling back the layers? Because there's going to be a party at the end, if you're willing to do the work of really peeling back the layers of the junk, confess it and humble yourself the way this son did. He said look, you can just make me one of the hired hands. And his dad said, are you kidding me? You're my son! I've been waiting for you! I've been longing for you! Come back to the family, you're reinstated! You're my son, I love you. And you know what? God is pursuing each of us in that same way. He wants us to come back just like that. That's the celebration!

So here's the Big Idea: Are you stuck? This is how you know you need to repent sometimes, because you're stuck. You're like, "My life is not working out right. I feel like I'm just spinning my wheels." You're stuck. Maybe you're a Christian and you've been a Christian for a long time and your devotional life is kind of stale, you don't feel like reading the Bible and church is kind of boring, and the guys at church are weird. Got any weird guys in your church? Well, that's your perspective, that's you looking through a foggy window because of the sin that we have in our lives. You want to get unstuck? Look for stuff to repent of. Trust me, you got it, I've got it, all the time. **You want to get unstuck? Repent.** Pay the price. I challenge you to be tough enough to peel back the layers of the junk that's in your life, and keep peeling it back and giving it to God until you can get to that core sin that's there, that you need to give him, and stop holding on for yourself. You need to let him forgive you for it so you can stop beating yourself up over it. Let him pull the roots out so it can stop tainting every other area of your life, areas that you don't even realize that it's doing. But you've got to do the work of accepting the grace. You can't do this

on your own, but there's a power waiting there to help you. The Holy Spirit is just aching to come and do the Father's work in your life and in your heart. So my challenge to you today is to accept that.

### **Closing Prayer**

Let's take a minute to pray. Maybe during these last few minutes you've been thinking about something in your life right now that you know you need to repent of. Pray this prayer silently in your heart with me:

Lord, you know this sin in my life. Maybe it's something little maybe it's something huge. Lord, I know that one little prayer on a Friday morning is not going to solve this, but I will take the first step back towards you today. Lord will you send your Holy Spirit into my life and into my heart? Give me the courage and the strength to offer this up to you. Father, forgive me of this and help me to forgive myself of this. Lord I want to remove this from my life. I want to pull the tendrils out so it can stop affecting my family, my kids, my relationships, my work, my church, and the way I look at the world. Lord, I'm willing to take that first step towards you today. Help me to keep walking towards you, help me to keep coming home. I'll be your son again.

Guys, if you've never gone back to the Father, if you've decided that you're going to follow Christ and really make him in charge of your life instead of yourself, I challenge you to ask God to take control of your life. Confess that you can't do it on your own and that you'd be willing to give up those sins that you cling to, and instead cling to the father who loves you like no earthly father could. Lord I lift these men up to you. I commit and commend them to you. I pray that you would send your spirit into each man's heart and mind, that you would draw us to yourself. Father there is sin in my life, there's so much sin and I pray for the courage to peel the layers back, to keep repenting and repenting and turning away from the things that pull me away from you. And I pray that for all of us today Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.