



ST ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL

LENT

MEDITATIONS

2022

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PRELUDE

SIGNIFICANCE OF LENT

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Significance of Lent

LENT is a period of 40 days in the Christian calendar, which Christians traditionally set aside as a period of preparation for Easter. It begins on a Wednesday, called Ash Wednesday and ends just before Easter. **This year, Lent begins on Wednesday, 2 March and ends on Thursday, 14 April.**

Why 40 days? The reason for the 40-day observance is to commemorate the 40 days that Jesus spent fasting in the wilderness before beginning His public ministry, during which time He endured temptation by Satan (see Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13). To emulate His example, Lent is a period of prayer and fasting. Although not required anywhere in the Scriptures, this season has nevertheless become a custom, practised by Christians worldwide, for most of the last two thousand years.

The focus of Lent has always been three-fold:

- A time to prepare new converts for baptism through scheduled classes and instruction.
- A time for Christians to review their lives and renew their commitment to the Lord.
- A time for backsliders to be restored to the faith.

In every case, it is a time of serious, disciplined self-examination; a time spent in earnest prayer and repentance before the Cross of Christ.

Lent then helps us to experience in part the Passion (suffering) of Jesus. We face up to our humanity during Lent: we learn that sin still indwells us, that we still carry darkness within, and we mourn over the weaknesses that are still evident in our lives. But we look forward to Easter, where we rejoice in the Light of God who came into the world and set us free!

Season of Soul-Searching



In this season we come before God humbled, declaring, 'Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the Cross I cling'; imploring, 'Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner.'

We acknowledge our total inadequacy before God, strip ourselves bare of all pretense to righteousness and come before Him in dust and ashes.

We empty ourselves of pride, of our rationalizations that prevent us from seeing ourselves as needy creatures, of our perfectionist tendencies that blind us to the beam in our own eyes, while picking at the specks in others.

And through prayer we seek to open ourselves up before God and hear anew His call, 'Come to Me!'

Season of Returning to the Father



This is the call that we want to answer in this season... to return to the Father... and especially, to hear His Father heart for us again.

In Lent, it is traditional to '**give up**' something(s) that we do a lot of and that we find pleasure in. This 'giving up' is done as a discipline, as a reminder of Christ's sufferings and as an act of sorrow over our sin.

The most common thing is to fast during Lent. Many will fast from food. Some fast from television, shopping, gaming etc... anything that most relates to a sin that is especially clingy for them. But whether you fast or not, remember that you please God most when you repent of your sins and are renewed, and that is what counts most with Lent.

Note however that Lent is not all about giving up things. It is also about **adding good things** into our lives or to other people's lives – the kind of things that follow on what Jesus asks of us.

So we can:

- Do acts of kindness for people
- Have extended times of bible reading and prayers
- Study and meditate over one or two scripture passages for an extended period

The Franciscans use the term 'detachment' to describe this process. It means to have less of what normally 'clutters' our lives, so that there is more room for God inside.

Suggestions for the use of this Prayer Guide

The Lent meditation for this year focuses on the **'FATHER HEART OF GOD'**.

The series of meditations and prayers that follow is inspired by the book 'RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON – a Story of Homecoming' by Henri J.M. Nouwen.

Within these pages are questions for introspection, personal responses for you to journal down, songs and prayers of penitence and consecration for you to rebuild your altar to the Lord.

- Take your time going through this guide. It is designed as a journey for your soul. You may wish to pause and linger at different junctures in the journey, to allow the Holy Spirit to do a deeper work within you. Or you may wish to revisit the contents after your initial reading, to ponder them further with the Lord.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you.
- Do not rush through. It will be beneficial if you set aside unhurried time.

*O come into the King's chambers
And worship before His throne
O come into the King's chambers
And His glory shall be known
O come into His holy presence
And magnify His name
O come into the King's chambers
You will never be the same.*

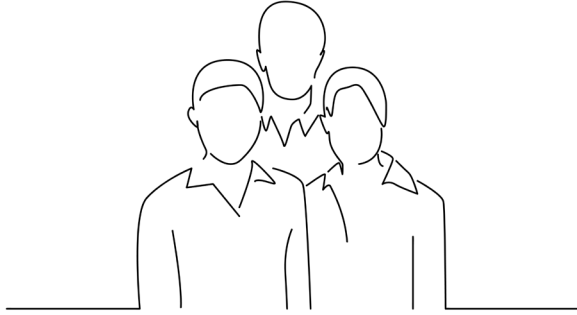
'Do not be hasty to go from his presence.'
(Eccl 8:3a)

RETURN TO THE FATHER

THE FATHER HEART OF GOD



THE STORY OF TWO SONS AND THEIR FATHER



There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, “Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me.” So the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.

When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled himself with the husks the pigs were eating, but no one would let him have them. Then he came to his senses and said, “How

many of my father’s hired men have all the food they want and more, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired men.” So he left the place and went to his father.

While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. Then his son said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the

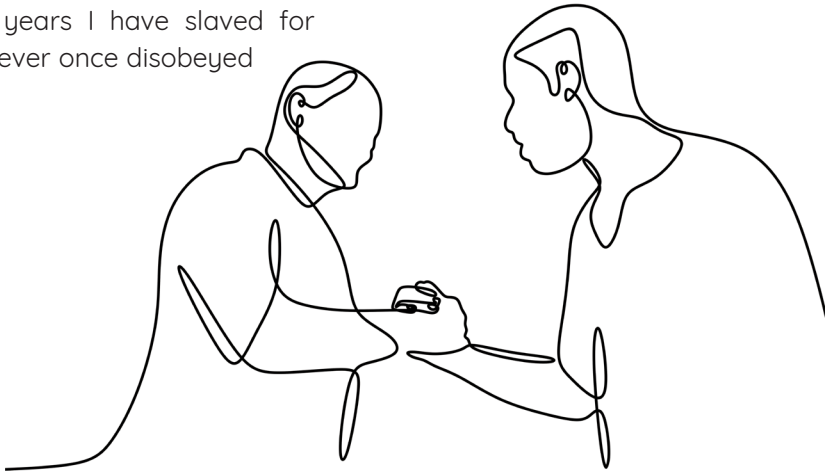
calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. The servant told him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got back safe and sound.’ He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; but he retorted to his father, ‘All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed

any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property – he and his loose women – you kill the calf we had been fattening.’

The father said, ‘My son, you are with me always, and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.’

(Luke 15:11-32, The New Jerusalem Bible)



RETURN TO THE FATHER

REDISCOVER THE FATHER'S HEART



THE YOUNGER SON AND HIS WANTON WAYWARDNESS

*There was a man who had two sons.
The younger one said to his father,
“Father, let me have the share of the estate that will come to me.”
So the father divided the property between them.
A few days later, the younger son got together
everything he had and left for a distant country.*

The evangelist Luke records this story of Jesus so simply and matter-of-factly that it is difficult to realise fully that what is happening here is an unheard-of event: hurtful, offensive and in radical contradiction to the most revered tradition of the time.¹ Kenneth Bailey in his explanation of this story writes:²

For over fifteen years I have been asking people of all walks of life from Morocco to India and from Turkey to the Sudan about the implications of a son's request for his inheritance while the father is still living. The answer has always been emphatically the same... the conversation runs as follows:

*Has anyone ever made
such a request?
Never!
Could anyone ever make
such a request?
Impossible!
If anyone ever did,
what would happen?
His father would beat him
of course!
Why?
The request means –
he wants his father to die.*

¹Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son – A Story of Homecoming* (NY: Doubleday, 1994), 35.

²Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 161-162.

Moreover, this son had demanded not only for the division of the inheritance, but also for the right to dispose of his part. *“After signing over his possessions to his son, the father still has the right to live off the proceeds... as long as he is alive. Here the younger son gets, and thus is assumed to have demanded, disposition to which, even more explicitly, he has no right until the death of his father. The implication of ‘Father, I cannot wait for you to die’ underlies both requests.”*³

The son’s leaving is therefore, a much more offensive act than it seems at first reading. It is a heartless rejection of the Father and the home in which he was born and nurtured; a break with the most precious tradition carefully upheld by the larger community of which he is a part of. His leaving ‘for a distant country’ indicates much more than the desire of a young man to see more of the world. It speaks of a drastic cutting loose from the way of living, thinking and acting that has been handed down to him from

generation to generation as a sacred legacy. More than disrespect, it is betrayal of the treasured values of family and community. The ‘distant country’ is the world in which everything considered holy at home is disregarded.⁴

As he turned his steps towards the call of the ‘distant country’, he turned a deaf ear to the voice of the Father. And the voices of the ‘distant country’ grew louder, full of promises and very seductive.

³ Ibid., 164.

⁴ Nouwen, 36.




AN HONEST LOOK AT MYSELF

Do I discern
‘the younger son’
in myself, in the subtle
rejection of the values
of my own Christian
heritage?
Consider in the light
of the following:

- Chastity
- Temperance
- Contentment
- Humility
- Charity
- Honesty
- Integrity
- Faithfulness
- Submission
- Forgiveness
- Respect
- Kingdom priorities

THOUGHTS:



Have I been entertaining the voices of the ‘distant country’?

Voices that say:

- Enjoy freedom! It’s too boring, stifling and restrictive being a Christian.
- The Christian race is too tough. Be realistic. You are not up to it. Give it up.
- You are missing out a lot on life. Take a hold of it before it is too late.
- Aren’t you weary of caring for others? Forget it. Meet your own needs.
- Love is not a totally free gift. Prove that you are worthy of being loved.
- Prove that you are worth something – be successful, popular, powerful.
- The Church is full of hypocrites. People out there are more real.
- You need a break from God and the Church.

THOUGHTS:



HEAR THE VOICE OF TRUTH

“There is a way that *seems* right to a man,
But its end is the way to death.”

(Proverbs 14:12)

“Do not love the world or the things in the world.

If anyone loves the world,

the love of the Father is not in him.

For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and

the desires of the eyes, and pride of life –

is not from the Father but is from the world.

And the world is passing away along with its desires,

but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

(1 John 2:15-17)

Further Readings:

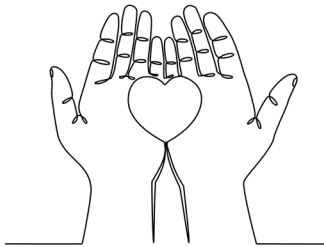
Proverbs 2:1-22; Jeremiah 17:5-8.

REFLECTIONS:

BE TRANSPARENT BEFORE THE FATHER

*“A broken spirit and a contrite heart,
You will not despise,
You will not despise.
You desire truth in the inward parts,
A broken spirit and a contrite heart.*

*Lord, my heart is prone to wander,
Prone to leave the God I love.
Here’s my heart,
Lord, take and seal it.
Seal it for Your courts above.”⁵*



- Ask for HIS searchlight to be turned on your inward parts.
- Confess any rebellious thought or way.
- Pray for HIS forgiveness.
- Ask for help to turn away from the deceptive voices of temptation, lies and deception.
- Thank Him for keeping HIS hand upon you.

⁵Song by Marty J. Nystrom.

THE YOUNGER SON - HIS HOME-COMING



*He squandered his money on a life of debauchery.
When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe
famine, and now he began to feel the pinch so he hired himself
out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to
feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled himself with
the husks the pigs were eating, but no one would let him have
them. Then he came to his senses and said,
'How many of my father's hired men have all the food they
want and more, and here am I dying of hunger!
I will leave this place and go to my father and say:
Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you;
I no longer deserve to be called your son;
treat me as one of your hired men.'
So he left the place and went to his father.*



It was a sad awakening... after losing everything: money, health, honour, self-respect, reputation... The glitter, glamour, promises and revelry of the 'distant country' were nothing but sawdust, leaving a bitter after-taste in the mouth and deep emptiness within.

Dispossessed of everything, stripped of pride and dignity, rejected by friends and co-workers, destitute, he 'came to his senses' and remembered his father... Perhaps he heard a vaguely familiar voice urging him, 'Go home... You don't belong here. You have stayed here long enough... Turn back... Return to your father.'

What made him decide to return? Was it genuine repentance of his callous treatment of his father and his shameful acts of debauchery in the 'distant country'? Or just an act of survival, a matter of contingency... he had no other way?

Whatever the reason, he nevertheless applied **his will** to make a decision. He decided to turn away from the pathway of death. He decided to place his trust in his father and hope for a second chance... a fresh beginning.

This young man was very realistic. He did not hope for much. He did not hope that things would be the same for him again. He did not hope that he would be given the privileges he once had.

Notice his soliloquy... he only hoped to be taken back with minimal punishment and be allowed to survive on the condition of hard labour, as he threw himself on his father's mercy.

PAUSE AND REVIEW

**Can you identify with the plight and misery
of this younger son?**

- Perhaps you too have 'left home'. And you have been living in the 'distant country' for a long while but your family and friends do not know it. You have left the father in search of 'something more' – more freedom, more enjoyment, more happiness... Problem is: What you have found is bringing you much pain, confusion and great dilemma. And you have been crying out for peace...
- These words seem to sum up your restless pursuit:
"You have been looking for friends all your life... you have been craving for affection... you have been interested in thousands of things... you have been begging for attention, appreciation and affirmation..."⁶

But no human being would ever be able to give you the love that you crave for; no friendship; no intimate relationship; no community would ever be able to satisfy the deepest needs of your heart...

- Now at crossroads, what should you do?
Hear this invitation:

"I am offering you a choice:
life or death, blessing or curse.
Choose life. Come back!
Live in the love of your Father.
Obey His voice. Hold Fast to Him."⁷

⁶Nouwen, 22.

⁷Ibid., 50.

COME TO THE FATHER

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD:
though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red like crimson,
they shall become like wool.
If you are willing and obedient,
You shall eat the good of the land;
But if you refuse and rebel,
You shall be eaten by the sword;
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”
Isaiah 1:18-20

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping and with mourning;
and rend your hearts and not your garments.”
Return to the LORD your God,
for He is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding
in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.
Joel 2:12-13

Further Readings: Isaiah 43:18-19, 25; Psalm 103:8-14.

REFLECTIONS:

*“Come to the Father
Though your gift is small
Broken hearts, broken lives
He will take them all
The power of the Word
The power of His Blood
Everything was done
So you would come*

*Nothing you can do
Could make Him love you more
And nothing that you’ve done
Could make Him close the door
Because of His great love
He gave His only Son
Everything was done
So you would come.”⁸*

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

“Almighty and most merciful Father; I have erred, and strayed from your ways like the younger son. I have followed too much the devices and desires of my own heart. I have offended against your holy laws. I have left undone those things which I ought to have done; And I have done those things which I ought not to have done; there is no health in me. But O Lord, have mercy upon me, a miserable offender. Spare me, O God as I confess my faults. Restore me as I repent before you, according to your promises declared to mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord. And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that I may from now on, live a godly, righteous, and sober life, to the glory of your holy name. Amen”

⁸ Lyrics by Russell Fragar.

THE ELDER SON AND HIS BITTER RESENTMENT

Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. The servant told him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the calf we had been fattening because he has got back safe and sound.’ He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out and began to urge him to come in; but he retorted to his father, ‘All these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed any orders of yours, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property – he and his loose women – you kill the calf we had been fattening.’



Can you empathize with the anger
and unhappiness of the elder son?

Put yourself in his shoes...

You have lived a dutiful life – always obedient to those in authority: parents, teachers, bosses, pastors...

You have never run away from home, never wasted your time or money on sensual pursuits, never got yourself lost in ‘debauchery and drunkenness’.

Throughout your life, you have been responsible, traditional, homebound. You live to please your parents. And you worked very hard, so as to please them.

BUT here comes this ‘good-for-nothing’ of a brother who had ‘wished’ for your father’s death, broken your father’s heart, squandered your father’s hard-earned money, ruined your father’s name, dragged down the family’s reputation...

And he has the audacity to come home! And your father has actually, *unreservedly*, forgiven him!

Does he deserve mercy?

What right has he to return?

Why isn’t he driven away?

How can he be restored to sonship?

What if he lets the family down again?

You mean he has gotten off scot-free?

It is not fair! It is too easy!

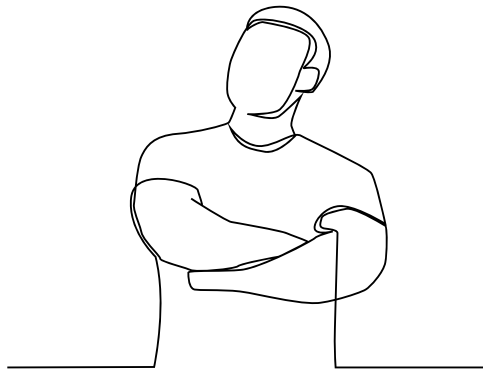
Where is the justice?

Seen from this perspective, the elder son’s grievance and complaint appear reasonable, even valid. We can sympathize, even empathize with him.

But the human heart is complex. Who can know the heart? It is out of the abundance of the heart, as the mouth speaks, that we catch a glimpse of what goes on in a person's heart. And so... from the outburst of the elder son, we catch a glimpse of what is in his heart and we see the darkness that is within.

It is a darkness of resentment... over obedience and duty which have become burdensome, and service which has become slavery. Outwardly, everything is fine. He is respected, admired, praised by many, held up as a model son... doing all the things a good son is supposed to do. But inwardly, he is locked in resentment – unhappy and 'unfree'. Though at home, he too had wandered away from the father, 'lost' in judgementalism and criticism... comparison and rivalry... self-pity and complaint... self-righteousness and prejudice... bitterness and jealousy...

When confronted by his father's joy at the return of his younger brother, this hidden darkness erupts within him. And there becomes visible, a resentful, proud, unkind, selfish person, one that had been deeply hidden all these years, although it had been growing stronger and more powerful within.



LISTEN TO OUR TRUE ELDER BROTHER

He (Jesus) also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:

“Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee standing by himself, prayed thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” Luke 18:9-14.

THOUGHTS:

LOOK INTO THE MIRROR

- Do I feel that I never receive what is due to me?
- Do I complain about being neglected, forgotten, taken for granted?
- Do I compare myself with others and pride myself on being a better person?
- Do I strive for position, recognition, power?
- Do I find myself continually murmuring, whining, grumbling, lamenting and griping over things?
- Do I find myself either silently or openly finding fault or condemning others?
- Do I feel angry that a fallen brother/sister is received quickly back into fellowship, when I believe that the discipline should have been harsher?
- Do I feel that he/she should leave and not disgrace the Church's name further?
- Do I feel trapped by my church responsibilities and am increasingly feeling joyless and unfree?
- Have I become a Pharisee?

THOUGHTS:

A HUMBLE PLEA⁹

*“O God, who can discern his errors?
Search me, O God, and know my heart,
Try me and know my thoughts.
See if there be any offensive way in me,
Forgive my hidden faults.*

*Keep me from wilful sins,
may they not rule over me.
Then will I be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.*

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.*

*Let the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer.”*

Amen.

⁹Psalm 139, 51, 19.

THE WAITING FATHER AND HIS EXTRAVAGANT LOVE

While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him. Then his son said, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we will celebrate by having a feast, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

... his father came out and began to urge him to come in... The father said, 'My son, you are with me always, and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found.'

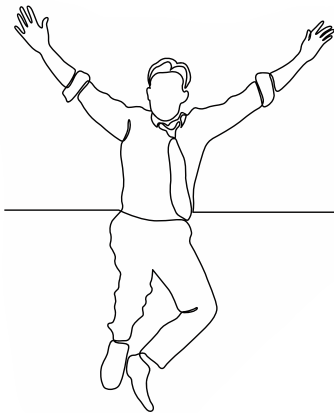


The father loves both his sons. This story that Jesus told highlights the heart-warming fact that the father goes out to both of them. Not only did he run to welcome the younger wayward son, but he comes out also to meet the elder, dutiful son and to urge him to come in. There is no partiality with the father. He recognises both their uniqueness. He loves both equally.

His love gives perfect freedom. It does not possess, does not force, does not constrain, does not push, does not pull... It offers the freedom to reject that love or to love in return. That freedom includes the possibility of his children leaving home, going to a 'distant country' and losing everything. His heart knows the pain of such a choice but his freeing love will not permit him to prevent it. And so he grieves over his 'lost' children, even as he waits in hope for their return, with his arms readily outstretched to welcome them home...

Thus, when the erring son comes home, the father is overjoyed! Notice in this story how he pre-empted his son's begging with spontaneous forgiveness; how he puts aside his pleas as completely irrelevant, in the light of the joy at his return. There is no need for questions or recriminations, because the

father knows the tremendous suffering of the one who has chosen to leave home, the oceans of tears he must have shed in anguish and agony. And his father-heart is filled with tender compassion for this son, who has brought upon himself such untold misery.



Such is the love of God, our heavenly Father.
How can we grasp such immense, unconditional,
undeserving love?

One songwriter expresses this sentiment well... ¹⁰

*The love of God is greater far
than tongue or pen can ever tell,
It goes beyond the highest star
and reaches to the lowest hell;
The guilty pair bowed down with care,
God gave His Son to win;
His erring child He reconciled
and pardoned from his sin.*

*O love of God,
How rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure
the saints' and angels' song.*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill
and were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill
and every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole
though stretched from sky to sky.*

¹⁰Lyrics by Frederick Martin Lehman, 1917.



This story is not just about the father's heart towards the wayward son who has gone astray. It also reveals the father's heart towards the 'wayward' son who has never left home.

In the joy of reunion with the younger son, the father does not ignore and brush aside the anger and resentment of the elder son. His heart goes out to him. How he yearns for these brothers to be together, around the same table. How he wishes for them to experience that, different as they are, they belong to the same household and are children of the same father.

And so, the father goes out to the elder son. He is not loved less than his younger brother. He is never taken for granted. He is valued for his uniquely different character and personality. And the father seeks to win him back, so that he too, can enter the same joy that is rightfully his.

DO I KNOW MY FATHER'S LOVE?

- Can I say, without any doubt, that my heavenly Father loves me?
- Have I looked into my Father's eyes and discovered His joy at my home-coming?
- Do I believe that there is a real desire in him to be with me?
- How can I let myself be loved completely by my father?
- How do I enter into his joy?
- Am I dressed with his robe, ring and sandals?
- Do I believe that I am really special to him?

Commit these promises to memory

- Jeremiah 31:3
- Isaiah 49:15,16
- Isaiah 30:18
- Romans 8:38, 39

*"O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be."*¹¹

Be still. Think of the Father's love for you. Talk to Him.

¹¹ Extract of poem by George Matheson.

THE ROAD AHEAD

RECEIVE THE FATHER'S LOVE



THE ROAD AHEAD RECEIVE THE FATHER'S LOVE

The Father's love does not force itself on the beloved. Although He wants to heal us of all our inner darkness, we are still free to make our own choice to stay in the darkness or to step into the light of His love. God is there. His light is there. His forgiveness is there. His boundless love is there. What is so clear is that God is always there, always ready to give and forgive, absolutely independent of our response. God's love does not depend on our repentance or our inner or outer changes.

Whether we are the younger son or the elder son, God's only desire is to bring us home. Arthur Freeman writes:¹²

"The father loves each son and gives each the freedom to be what he can be, but he cannot give them freedom they will not take nor adequately understand. The father seems to realize, beyond the customs of his society, the need of his sons to be themselves. But he also knows their need for his love and a 'home'. How their stories will be completed is up to them. The fact that the parable is not completed makes it certain that the father's love is not dependent upon an appropriate completion of the story. The father's love is only dependent on himself and remains part of his character. As Shakespeare says in one of his sonnets: 'Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.'"

**We have to decide
how we will complete our own story.**

¹² Arthur Freeman, "The Parable of the Prodigal" unpublished manuscript, as quoted in Nouwen, 78.

ACTIVE RESTITUTION

In the parable, the younger son decides to return home. His motives may be unclear, even to himself. But he turns his steps, nevertheless, towards his father. As he encounters the overwhelming wave of his father's unconditional forgiveness, acceptance and love, one can only imagine the torrent of thoughts and emotions that must have swept over him.

As with many, the prime heartfelt response must have been one of *deep gratitude* for the father's limitless mercy. And gratitude seeks ways to express itself in active restitution and recompense for all wrong-doings.

Think of Zacchaeus in his deep gratitude, saying, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it four-fold.' (Luke 19:8)

Think of Peter, after being reinstated by the Lord: rising up to lead the Early Church and boldly declaring the Lord's name, never to deny it again, whatever the cost (Acts 4:9- 10,18-20).

Think of Paul, after his Damascus experience: a changed man, not disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19) ... pouring out his life as a drink offering to the Lord (2 Tim 4:6).

They were all forever grateful.



AS FOR ME

- How grateful am I for all the mercies that the Father has shown towards me?
- How have I given thanks?
- Are there debts yet to be settled?
- Are there wicked deeds to be repented of? Corrupt and dishonest practices?
- Have I stopped all acts of deceit? all illicit relationships?
- Have I turned away from all my sinful and addictive habits?
- Is there restitution to be made towards my loved ones and to others?
- Is there forgiveness to be asked from those whom I have hurt?

THOUGHTS:

LET GOD'S WORD STRENGTHEN YOUR WILL

“Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.” Matthew 3:8

READ ALSO: Ephesians 5:1-21; Colossians 3:5-10; Romans 13:7-14.

REFLECTIONS:

SONG OF CONSECRATION¹³

*Take my life and let it be,
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee
Take my moments and my days
Let them flow in ceaseless praise
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee
Swift and beautiful for Thee.*

*Take my voice and let me sing
Always, only, for my King
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee
Filled with messages from Thee.*

*Take my will and make it Thine
It shall be no longer mine
Take my heart – it is Thine own
It shall be Thy royal throne
It shall be Thy royal throne.*

*Take my love my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store
Take myself and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee
Ever, only, all for Thee.*

¹³Song lyrics by Francis R. Havergal, 1874.

MEANINGFUL RECONCILIATION

Take a look at the elder brother as he observes with displeasure the moving scene of reunion between his younger brother and his father. The envy, insecurity and critical spirit keep him frozen, so that he cannot enter into the joy of that precious moment. But the father waits to welcome him in... What will his decision be? If you can recognize the 'elder brother' in you, what will your decision be?

BE RECONCILED WITH THE FATHER

- Let go of your grievance against the father: that you are not as favoured as others.
- Believe that the father loves you as much as your younger brother.
- Trust that he values your uniqueness and does not compare you with any other.
- Do not stand aloof. Come back to his embrace and hear his love for you.
- Stop proving that you are worthy of his love.
- Receive his unconditional acceptance.
- Spend time – get to know him better.

*Take me aside with you
Teach me to walk with you
Bring me to the place where Your Spirit moves.*

*Help me find my destiny
Who I am, What I do
Let me know and understand
That I am loved as your child.*

*Take me aside with you
Teach me to walk with you
Bring me to the place where Your Spirit moves.*

Listen to His heart for you. What is He saying?

BE RECONCILED WITHIN YOURSELF

- Cease striving. Be content (1 Tim 6:6).
- Cease comparing. Rejoice with others (Rom 12:15).
- Cease fault-finding (Mt 7:1-5)
- Cease murmuring, whining, grumbling, complaining (1Thess 5:18)
- Let go of anger and bitterness. Forgive (Eph 4:32).
- Let go of prejudice and judgementalism (Gal 3:28; James 4:12).
- Do not call 'unclean' what God has declared 'clean' (Acts 11:9).
- Do not be overcome with evil. Overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21).

THOUGHTS:



PRAY

*"Lord, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change
courage to change the things I can
And the wisdom to know the difference."*¹⁴
Amen.

¹⁴Prayer of Serenity by Reinhold Niebuhr (1951).

BE RECONCILED WITH YOUR BROTHER

Model after Jesus, our TRUE Elder Brother.

He counsels:

“But I say to you
that everyone who is angry with his brother
will be liable to judgement;
whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council;
and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.
So if you are offering your gift at the altar
and there remember that your brother has something against you,
leave your gift there before the altar and go.
First be reconciled to your brother,
and then come and offer your gift.”

Matthew 5:22-24

THINK

- Is there someone whom you cannot forgive?
Someone whom you are still angry with?
 - In prayer, release that person(s) from your anger and unforgiveness.
 - Do something positive that will bring blessing and peace:
a phone call to make? a gift that you can give?
a meal that can heal a broken relationship?
- Is there someone whom you are still prejudiced against?
 - In prayer, release that person(s) from your judgement.
 - Ask God to give you His perspective of this person.
 - Bless him/her with the Lord's love, joy, peace...

PRAY

*Make me a channel of your peace
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.*

*Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness, ever joy.*

*Oh Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul.*

*Make me a channel of your peace
It is in pardoning, that we are pardoned
In giving to all men, that we receive
And in dying, that we're born to eternal life.*

(Prayer of St Francis)



THE ROAD AHEAD

REPRESENT THE FATHER'S LOVE
TO THE WORLD

BECOMING LIKE THE FATHER

What is the father like?

Our journey so far as shown us his father-heart

– a heart UNLIMITED IN LOVE...

LIMITLESS IN MERCY.

We are to be like Him.

“... that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good,

and sends rain on the just and on the unjust...

You therefore must be perfect,

as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

Matthew 5:45, 48.

CHANGED ATTITUDES

As a forgiven and reconciled child of God, grow in the attitudes which Jesus, the perfect Son and true Elder Brother has taught: ¹⁵

- **Be poor in spirit**

Recognize and acknowledge your spiritual poverty before God.
Be humbly dependent upon Him.

- **Be as those who mourn**

Sorrow over your sins and the sins of the world, without putting up excuses for your wrong doings. Take personal responsibility over your own weaknesses.

- **Be meek**

Submit completely to the will of God. Have a true and honest estimate of yourself. It will make you see others differently.

- **Be hungry and thirsty for righteousness**

Seek always to please God alone and to do what is good in His sight.

- **Be merciful**

Have compassion on the needy – those in need of material help and those in need of your understanding and forgiveness.

- **Be pure in heart**

Be transparent and honest, with no hypocrisy or pretense before God and man.

- **Be peacemakers**

Do not tear down. Build up. Heal broken relationships.

- **Be steadfast despite persecution**

Remain unwavering in your faith, even though you are mocked and ridiculed. Do not retaliate.

¹⁵Matthew 5:1-11

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

What am I like in each of these areas?

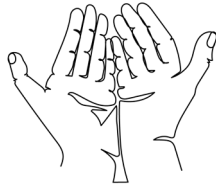
In the past year, have I changed in my attitudes and responses toward others?

Can I give without asking for anything in return, love without putting any conditions on my love?¹⁶

¹⁶Nouwen, 128.

SOMETHING YOU CAN DO

- Pray for forgiveness where there is hardness of heart over the Lord's teaching.
- Yield your will and temperament to the Holy Spirit's control. Co-operate with Him. Bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit.
- Ask for a significant change in your character that will make you a good and pleasing ambassador for the Father.



*“Lord, make me like you,
Please, make me like you.
You are a servant,
Make me one too.*

*O Lord, I am willing,
Do what you must do.
To make me like you, Lord
Please make me like you.”¹⁷*

¹⁷ Lyrics by Holly Day Singers.

SHOWING THE FATHER'S LOVE

“People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. They point each other to flashes of light here and there, and remind each other that they reveal the hidden presence of God. They discover that there are people who heal other’s wounds, forgive each other’s offenses, share their possessions, foster the spirit of community, celebrate the gifts they have received, and live in constant anticipation of the full manifestation of God’s glory.”¹⁸

Is this true of our community in SAC?

Do we, who know the light and love of God,
actively share His unconditional love and compassion
with a hurting world?

There’s our Jerusalem... our home... our parents,
brothers and sisters, in-laws, extended family...

There’s our Judea and Samaria... schools/workplaces...
our class/school mates, friends, colleagues, neighbours,
Church, community, Singapore...


There are the ends of the earth....

¹⁸Nouwen, 117.

PRAY

- Jesus said that the person who has been forgiven little, loves little (Luke 7:47). Conversely, the one who has been forgiven much loves much. Pray for the deep appreciation of God's love in our hearts to overflow to the people around us.
- Ask for creative ways of showing the Father's love. Make a commitment to pray for our unsaved loved ones, till they come to an understanding and acceptance of the love of God.
- Pray that God show you what else you can do for Him – in school/office, Church, community, Missions...

THOUGHTS:



TAKE MY HEALING TO THE NATIONS¹⁹

*I hear a young child crying
And see tears of unending pain
I've watched as war torn nations
Treated life with such disdain
My heart grieves to know
That these haven't come to understand
That I suffered for their sufferings
And died that they might live again.*

*Take my healing to the nations
Bind their broken hearts with love
Stretch my hand throughout creation
with this message of my love
That I came to bring light in their darkness
And bring joy where there once was pain
Take my healing to the nations
Bind their broken hearts with love.*

*For the fields are ready for harvest
And the labourers they're so few
Countless millions still that I want to fill
But the task isn't mine to do
I gave you my commandment
Go and preach good tidings of love
For I finished the work on Calvary
And their healing is already done.*

*So take my healing to the nations
Bind their broken heart with love
Stretch my hand throughout creation
with this message of my love
That I came to bring light in their darkness
And bring joy where there once was pain
Take my healing to the nations
Bind their broken heart with love*

¹⁹Song Album by Bob Fitts.

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