

SERMON NOTES

From *In Touch With Dr. Charles Stanley*



The Condition of the Heart

KEY PASSAGE: Luke 15:11-32 | SUPPORTING SCRIPTURES: Luke 15:1-10 | Hebrews 9:27

► SUMMARY

The condition of your heart determines the direction of your life.

This is a very important issue because there are really only two directions in life, and they go in opposite ways and lead to opposing destinies. You can either walk toward the Lord Jesus Christ into eternal life or away from Him into eternal death. And the determining factor is the state of your spirit.

► SERMON POINTS

In the parable of the prodigal son, the character descriptions could represent each of us. We could be living a sinful lifestyle like the younger brother, be self-righteous and unforgiving like the older brother, or have a merciful heart like the father in the parable.

This story is the last of three consecutive parables that Jesus spoke to the Pharisees in response to their grumbling against Him for His mercy toward sinners (Luke 15:1-2). Each one dealt with something that was lost—a sheep (vv. 3-7), a coin (vv. 8-10), and a son (vv. 11-32).

Since the Word of God is true, we can trust that the guidance and warnings He gives in this illustration of a lost son are accurate and should be heeded. If we head down the path this younger son chose, we can be certain that we too will meet a similar outcome even though we can't see it at the moment.

The Downward Steps of the Prodigal Son

- **Desire.** This young man's heart was filled with a desire for freedom. He had begun to view life in his father's house as restrictive; therefore, he asked his father for his share of the estate. Despite the fact that the inheritance was normally received after his death, this father complied with his son's request and gave him his portion of the estate.
- **Decision.** Shortly thereafter, the son decided to leave home to pursue his desires unhindered. One of Satan's goals is to convince us that having our own way and leaving God's restrictions behind is the beginning of real life.
- **Departure.** The son went away to a far country. For our purposes, we can consider a far country as anywhere we choose to go outside of God's will. It could be a block away or across the globe because it speaks of the condition of our heart, not the location of our bodies. The devil stirs up discontent by pointing out what we are missing. Then he paints us a picture of the good life that awaits us if we'll follow him. However, he always omits the end result of a life of sinful indulgence.

With plenty of money to fuel his desires, the young man sets off to enjoy the pleasures of sin. In a far country there would be no one to hold him accountable, so he could do whatever he pleased. But God sees everything and will one day hold each person accountable. "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment" (Heb. 9:27).

■ **Deception.** The Prodigal Son fell for the devil's lies without considering the consequences that would inevitably follow. He squandered all the money "with loose living" (Luke 15:13). Life looked good for the moment.

■ **Wandering.** The problem with living for our own pleasures is that the novelty soon wears thin. The enjoyment we once experienced diminishes as we discover that sin's satisfaction is temporary. In an attempt to regain the pleasure, we may wander from one experience to the next, only to discover that there is no lasting pleasure in sin.

■ **Wanting.** The young man soon found that not only was his satisfaction waning, but his funds were diminished. Following his desires had left him bankrupt and friendless. To make matters worse, a famine came to the land causing a scarcity of food. Satan never reveals the outcome of following his temptations because his goal is to destroy and ruin people. His path to pleasure is littered with broken homes, lives, and the bodies of those who believed him.

In desperation, the Prodigal Son hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country and found himself in the lowest place a Jewish man could end up—in a hog pen feeding pigs. He was so hungry even the pods he gave to the pigs started to look good to him. Sometimes it takes the direst of circumstances to open blinded eyes. No matter how many people may have warned him of the dangers of heading down this path, he couldn't see the foolishness of his choices until he came to the end of the road. That's when the young man came to his senses and thought, "How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!"

The path of pleasure, which eventually leads to desperation, has been taken by many people who've rejected the warnings given by family and friends. And like the Prodigal Son, they find themselves in figurative

pig pens today deprived of resources and dignity. How could something that looked so good in the beginning turn so bad? It's always that way when God is left out of the picture, and people walk away from Him. However, no matter how far someone has gone from the Lord and how deep he or she has fallen, God never stops loving and seeking the lost.

■ **Make a decision.** After coming to his senses, the Prodigal Son decided to go back to his father. Full of shame and guilt, he planned his confession and left for home. This is the only solution for anyone who wants to come home to God. The feelings of shame, guilt, and conviction are the result of the Holy Spirit's work as He draws each prodigal back to the heavenly Father. God is willing to forgive everyone who comes to Him in humble repentance, confessing their sin, relying on the blood of Christ for cleansing, receiving Him as Savior by faith, and surrendering themselves to Him as Lord.

Just as the Prodigal Son was welcomed home by his father, so God will welcome all who come to Him for salvation. There was no reluctance on the father's part to embrace and clothe his young son and celebrate his homecoming. And this is exactly how the Lord God welcomes all who come to Him, even those who have made a mess of their lives. There's nothing to lose and everything to gain.

► RESPONSE

- What is the condition of your heart today? One way to determine this is to examine the path you are taking. Are you drawing closer to God or running away from Him?
- Have you ever been reluctant to return to the Lord after a season of wandering because you were embarrassed or feared that you had made too big a mess of your life? How does the story of the prodigal son contradict that perception?

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