

Ten Steps to Keep Your Life in the Right Direction

Introduction

Greetings! To this edition of *“My Thoughts with Dale Van De Bogart.”* We welcome our faithful watchers and if this is the first time watching, all notes are in PDF, and located on our website, vdbm.org. Click on My Thoughts Video Series, scroll down on the page to choose the series, and download our notes.

In this week’s segment, *“Ten Steps to Keep Your Life in the Right Direction.”* I will discuss steps to keep your life heading in the right direction. If life is not going in the right direction, these steps will help get back on course. We will be using *“The Parable of the Prodigal Son”* in the Gospel of Luke 15:11-24. It is just the first part of Jesus’ parable, but very important and powerful message. I will break it down into two parts, *“five steps your heading in the wrong direction”* (v. 11-16), and *“five steps to getting yourself back on track”* (v. 17-24).

The Joy of Returning to Oneself

The word *“Prodigal”* is used as an adjective or a noun describing a person who spends money or resources freely and recklessly. Another meaning is having or giving material things on a lavish scale. Other words used in place of prodigal are wasteful, extravagant, or reckless. The biblical definition is practically the same as the secular dictionary, but there is a difference. God has never been wasteful, extravagant, or reckless. He is in every way perfectly the opposite as generous, offers a shower of blessings, and provides in abundance.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe once called this *“The Parable of the Loving Father,”* because it emphasizes God’s grace more than the son’s sins. If you read this parable closely, the father did not go out of his way to seek his son. Still, it was the son’s memory of his father that brought him to repentance and forgiveness (Romans 2:4). Not only will we learn the ten ways to keep our life in a forward direction, but we will learn rebellion, rejoicing, and repentance.

Passage Text - Luke 15:11-24

¹¹ Then He said: A certain man has two sons.

¹² And the younger of them said to his father; “Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.” So, he divided to them his livelihood.

¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together journeyed to a far country and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.

¹⁴ But when he had spent all there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want.

¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into the fields to feed swine.

¹⁶ As he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,

¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."

²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

²¹ And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son."

²² But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.

²³ and bring the fatted calf here and kill it and let us eat and be merry.

²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." And they began to be merry.

Five Steps Your Heading in the Wrong Direction

Let me set it up for everyone these first five steps dealing with life heading in the wrong direction. So, here is this man's son, the younger of the two, demanded he receive his inheritance (v. 12). According to Jewish Law, a father, if he wishes to do so, can divide up his estate with the oldest son getting a larger portion due to his birthright. The rest of his children will get what is left over

1. He Left

By asking for his portion of the inheritance, he was telling his father, "I wish you were dead." Packing up his belongings, taking his portion of the inheritance, and leaving probably was his plan from the start. The son showed arrogant disregard for his father's authority as head of the family. He wanted to live his life his way, be his own master, and not put up with the rules in his father's home. His ticket out of the house and away from his father, was money, so the son "***took the money and ran.***"

It should remind us of when Jesus warned two disputing brothers in Luke 12:15. He told them, **“Take heed and beware of covetousness.”** We head in the direction of trouble when we value our earthly possessions more than people. Covetous people are never satisfied no matter how much they acquire in their lives. They live with a dissatisfied heart, which leads to a disappointed life.

2. Reckless Living

Off the son went to a **“far country.”** The son wanted his freedom away from his father and older brother. In the two parables before this one, the sheep and coin were lost due to foolishness and carelessness. The son was lost due to willfulness.

Most of us have heard the phrase, “The grass is not always greener on the other side.” So, when he got far away from his family, he started living recklessly. Squandering his money on lavish living. More than likely, hanging out with people who only care about you because you have the finances to support them. We call them, “fair-weather friends.” His reckless or wild living and the freedom he obtained from his father and older brother were part of his plan. This type of living leads into the third step ...

3. Lost Sight of God

Living this reckless lifestyle only lasts so long. These new friends were only hanging around because he had plenty of money. He flaunted it around and was being noticed. Spend it on the old cliché of **“wine, women, and song.”** He took his eyes off of God and that opened the door for satan to walk in and spew his lies and deceit. Eventually, he lost sight of God.

The inheritance would only sustain him for some time, then the money ran out. As the money ran out, so did his friends. On top of that, a severe famine swept the land, and he had no money to buy food. Now he is starving, no money, and where are his friends now? So, what he must do leads to step four ...

4. Lose Your Dignity

He became so desperate and starving, that he did what he would not have done for his father, go to work. The son worked for a “citizen of that country,” (v. 15) and sent him to the fields to feed the pigs. In the Jewish culture of that time, they did not have anything to do with pigs as they were considered unclean animals.

Pigs could not be eaten or used for sacrifices, and they could not touch a pig due to fear of defilement. To even feed a pig was also considered a great humiliation. This step shows the Lord’s way of emphasizing what sin does in the lives of those who choose not to walk in the direction God has for them.

5. Depending on the World

As he was feeding the pigs, he also had the desire to eat the same food as the pigs. It was degrading beyond belief. The food the pigs were eating was pods. They are seeds from a carob tree and grow around the Mediterranean Sea.

So, my question is, “**Where** are his so-called friends now and why don’t they help him in his time of need.” I can probably answer my question, nowhere. Worldly friends only last when they can get what they want from you. When it runs out, they are long gone, and nowhere to be found.

When you depend on the world, you get nothing but misery. No one gave him anything. It shows he was neglected and insignificant. He has truly sunk to the depths and is feeling broken. He thought he would find himself, but he only lost himself. When God is left out of our lives, enjoyment becomes enslavement.

Five Steps for Getting Yourself Back on Track

Those last five steps were pretty sad, and it can happen to anyone. All satan needs is an inch and he will extend it as far as he can. Just because we take wrong paths in our lives or make wrong decisions, it does not mean we can get back on the right track. The following are five steps we can take to get ourselves back on track.

1. Come to Your Senses

Another way I like to state this is to know you are broken and you feel your brokenness. If you start trusting God, He will heal your brokenness. So, here is this son, sitting with the pigs, and he starts to reflect on life back at home. He had no money and dignity, no claim to any sonship as he did in his father’s house. So, he decided to make the right decision and go home. As he was walking back to his father’s house, he chose to come to his senses by:

- Changing his mind about himself and his situation.
- Admitting he was a sinner.
- To repent for all the wrong decisions.

It is God’s goodness, not our badness, that leads us to repentance. Repentance (***metanoia***) in Greek means to have a “***change of mind.***” Had he not come to his senses and repented, he would have experienced nothing but regret and remorse. True repentance involves the person’s will and if repentance is truly the work of God in their lives (Acts 11:18), then the sinner will obey God and put saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Rejoicing

You probably asking, “How is rejoicing getting me back on track?” It has everything to do with getting back on track. Once you make that decision, you have to be smiling and happy. It is a part of rejoicing. Whenever you make a sound decision, don’t you feel a tremendous amount of joy? I know I do.

I am sure this young man was rejoicing and had some extra pep in his step while walking back to his father's house. No matter how he was going to be received, he was relieved knowing he was going home.

I can relate to this young man as it happened to me when I served in the Navy. I was stationed in Charleston, SC, and was up for orders. I wanted to go back to sea, so I was trying to receive orders to a ship out of Jacksonville, FL. My Detailer, who assigns duty stations, called me, and due to the many years of sea duty I accumulated, I would be given shore duty orders to Naval Medical Center, Oakland, CA. The command is approximately two hours northeast of my hometown.

I was worried because my Dad and I had a fallout a few years before receiving these orders. I called my Mom, and she told me I needed to be the bigger person and talk to my Dad. So, one evening, I called my Dad, and we talked about what happened. We put it aside and I told him I received orders to Oakland, CA. He was elated and best of all, I would be home for Christmas. So, rejoice! Praise God! He is a God of reconciliation in all relationships thanks to Jesus going to the cross.

3. Confess Your Sins

In this parable, the father ran to the son when he saw him from a distance. He was looking for the son to come home the whole time. He embraced and kissed him. The father was filled with love and compassion for his son came home. What the father did went beyond forgiveness and showed incredible love. The son starts with his prepared speech and confesses he "**sinned against heaven and in your sight**" (v. 21).

Remember back in verse 19, the son had a plan to tell his father to "**make me one of your hired servants.**" It is because he felt not worthy of being his son after the way he acted and left. Looking back at this verse, we see the main part is "**make me,**" not "**give me,**" like he did in the beginning. He was willing to be a servant and attempt to earn his father's forgiveness.

Forgiveness cannot be earned because no amount of good works can save us from our sins. When the son was in the "**far country,**" he was taught the meaning of misery. When he came back home, he learned the meaning of mercy.

4. Knowing You Are Restored

Let's take a look at the word "**restored.**" It is the act of returning something to its former condition. Making something new again. Restoration can also make situations better than their current state. It is what the father did when he welcomed his son back into the family. The ring he placed on his son's finger showed a sign of sonship, not servitude. The robe provided proof of acceptance. The feast was an act of showing joy and sharing it with others.

Let's look back at Jeremiah 31:31-34. God told Jeremiah He would establish a new covenant with His people. Not like the one He gave to Moses and the Israelites (v. 32). He also would not write

it on tablets of stone, but on their **“minds and hearts”** (v. 33). Most importantly, God will also restore us, and he will **“forgive their iniquity and their sin I will remember no more”** (v. 34). God’s purpose is to restore man’s right standing with Him (righteousness) by forgiving wickedness and remembering sins no more (Hebrews 8:12).

5. Receiving Salvation

What a wonderful gift from God and it cost us nothing. Free for the asking! Unfortunately, it cost God His only Son, but we benefit from the grace He showed to us. If God did not send Jesus to us, we would have not received salvation along with reconciliation, redemption, restoration, and forgiveness of our sins.

The son was not physically dead, but spiritually. When he came to his senses, he started on the path back to being spiritually alive. He was **“lost and now found!”** It is a spiritual experience of every sinner who comes to our Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

Conclusion

There is a time in all of our lives, we all were the prodigal son or daughter. We rebelled against our parents and thought we knew better than they did. We left home and said to ourselves, **“I will show them they are wrong, and I will be a success without them.”** As I mentioned in this segment, **“the grass is not always greener on the other side.”** Thanks to Jesus, we can get back on track, and head in the right direction for our lives. We can come home again, and His arms are wide open to welcome us back. God is a God of restoration, but there is only one way to come to the Father, and it is through the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen! Are you ready to come home?

I am Dale Van De Bogart and I fully agree on God’s Word!

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