

Chapter 17: The Prodigal Parents of the 21st Century and Beyond

Life Application Verses:

Luke 11: 15-32. ¹¹ And He said, "A man had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. ¹³ And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. ¹⁴ Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving *anything* to him. ¹⁷ But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'" ²⁰ So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly 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 fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate. ²⁵ "Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' ²⁸ But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and *began* pleading with him. ²⁹ But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and *yet* you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; ³⁰ but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.' ³¹ And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was* lost and has been found.'"

The Life Application Verses should give overwhelming pause to every mother and father who has experienced the event that was described, yet only in God's Grace and Mercy 'joy comes in the morning.' While it is heart-breaking and true that not every prodigal story ends in 'joy comes in the morning', Christian parents **MUST** follow Proverbs 22: 6 (KJV): "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." When we train up a child in the Ways and Knowledge of God, I believe that God will Honor this work in the lives of our children and that our Prodigal Children are significantly more likely to 'return home.' We should **NEVER** stop praying for and loving our children (and family), whether they are safely in their beds dreaming of cookies and milk (texting if they are older kids) or whether

our young children/people have become rebellious and ‘Prodigalized-By-Mindless-World-Secularism (PBMWS).’ To address our faithful love during the depths of the prodigal child syndrome (PBMWS), there’s a book by the late Ruth Bell Graham, Billy Graham’s late and precious wife, titled: *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them*¹. On the very first page of the book, it includes a short letter from Franklin Graham, President of the *Billy Graham Evangelistic Association*. In this letter he writes:

When I wandered from the Lord as a young man, she experienced firsthand the pain of loving a prodigal. During that difficult time, the encouraging words found in this book brought her a special peace as they drew her to trust more fully in God to work in my life. It is my prayer that *Prodigals and Those Who Love Them* will bless you—or someone you know—during the long wait for a lost loved one to come back home (Graham, 1999, p.1).

Franklin Graham also wrote a book about his prodigal days, *Rebel With A Cause*, and on the back cover of the book, one of the signature comments referred to Franklin as a ‘wayward teenager.’ The crux of the book was that although he was the son of one of the most noted modern day evangelists of all time, he still had a rebellious nature—a prodigal son mentality. Did he ‘return home’ as it was provided by God in Proverbs 22: 6? Visit the web site of the *Billy Graham Evangelistic Association* and your answer will be readily available (<http://www.billygraham.org/>). (e.g., what is Franklin Graham doing now?)

While this chapter offers The Life Application Verses in terms of our prodigal children, the main focus in this chapter is on the parents of our society. By discussing the issues of the Prodigal Parent, I am specifically addressing the Prodigal Child. I recently attended a *Leadership Montgomery* training session, *Criminal Justice Day*, in which we heard from the Chief of the Montgomery Police Department, FBI, U.S. Marshall, DEA, Sheriff’s Office, and the Alabama State Troopers. In these discussions, there was talk about the various types of crimes—but also, about what can be done to stem these trends. Invariably, the discussion included the parental influence on our young children and youth/adults—which ***requires*** intervention at an early age. The psychologist at the session suggested that by about the 6th grade, these young minds form what they will carry with them for the rest of their lives. Oh, their outcomes might be shaped by sundry things, but

¹ Graham, R. (1999). *Prodigals and those who love them*. Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI.

the one thing that stood out was something that I had heard from a minister in Rota, Spain, in 1978: “The Law of Available Spaces.” In other words, if parents don’t teach or train their children when they are young, those ‘empty spaces’ **WILL** be filled—the only question that remains is **WHAT** will those young minds be filled with?: Ergo, prodigal parenting—meaning, parents shape their children’s outlook and approach to life.

Before I go any further, let me tell you what I see on a regular basis when I am out in the community (this applies to our world, not just in my ‘little domain of life’). I get in line to pay for something at WalMart, *or any other place for that matter*. IN line, there is a mother or father with some children in the ages of 7, 10, 12 or so. The children are inquisitive as children should normally be, so they pick up items to look and marvel at them. Well, when I take my granddaughter to these places, and she does this, I lovingly mention to her that she should be careful, look at the item, and return it to the shelf. You know, I try to teach her responsibility, ownership, and how to conduct herself in a public forum. What I see, and I am not being accusatory—that is for God and God alone—but, I see so many parents speak to their children as if they are an enemy of the family. The words are harsh, threatening, and brutal. Their tone of voice is as if the children have committed some heinous crime and need immediate punishment. The parent will grab the child’s arm as if to twist it into submission. When I see this, I am **NOT** shocked that many children are “prodigalized-by-their-environment (PBTE).” But I know this for an absolute fact: God saw every action of that parent; He heard every word that parent spoke; He knows the intents and hidden motives of the heart; and, He will surely not let the matter rest without His Holy intervention—I just believe that our God will move in ways that we don’t see to deal with our sinful natures. He is not unaware of these offensive events against children! I simply cannot accept that God is idle while so many children suffer (Physically, Mentally, Socially, and Spiritually) at the hands of Prodigal Parents. However, there are two sides to the Prodigal Parent coin: 1) unsaved parents; 2) saved parents.

First, let me say something: it does not take a rocket-scientist to understand that what we teach our children will become who and what they are. If you doubt this, how is it that young children in countries around the world learn to speak in their native tongue

before they learn the formal language? Do small children learn ‘bad words’ from their *peers, even at the age of 4, 5, 6, or 7? Where did these peers learn this language?* From *their* peers, from *their* Prodigal Parents, and games, the Internet, and TV. Again, if we fail to give our children the very best we have to offer, what are we doing to these young, impressionable minds? These children will grow up with an outlook on life that has potential to do harm. I am not citing statistical absolutes here, only central tendencies.

Allow me a moment to discuss the unsaved Prodigal Parent. If you have children and you are not a true Born-again Christian, your Salvation is the HIGHEST PRIORITY in your entire life. If you are not rearing your children as God requires, who is being harmed? You, for one, because you are living apart from the Salvation and Will of God; the child, for the other, because you are not giving your children the God-fearing foundation to live a Godly life. Even in the absence of statistical p-value research and massive studies, if a child lives and matures apart from God’s teachings, how can they live what they don’t know? How can a child who is abused in words and deeds and never hearing the name of God, less the vain repetition of its use, become a believer in what they don’t know to believe in? It doesn’t take research and statistics to fathom the Truth in this matter. It takes a Bible and an open mind and heart! We, as parents, in the absence of God, commit and cause the sins of PBMWS and PBTE. Responsibility for our children’s mindset **starts** with us parents.

What about Christian parents? Oh, Lord, how can that be? As Christian parents, let us be the example that the world will see and follow. Let us be like the father in the Life Application Verses. Let us be so Heavenly Minded, Earthly Good, that our children will NEVER be treated as anything other than precious Gifts from a Holy God. Let us NEVER create a situation that causes our sons and daughters to be PBTE—and God forbid—PBMWS. Even as Christian parents, does this guarantee that our children will be model citizens and never make mistakes? I don’t think that needs to be answered, does it? But when you look at Luke 11: 15-32, Proverbs 22: 6, and God’s Word, Christian parents have to be mindful not to wander near the demarcation line between God’s model of parenting and becoming a Prodigal Parent. Are you thoroughly confused by now? Let me explain what I mean and thanks for letting me have a few moments of your time in the process.

I am not going to disparage any parent who is single and who is giving their all to raise children in the Ways of the Lord. Never should we do this—in fact, we as Christians should help those parents when and where we can. The same goes for a two parent family with children. What I **am** going to disparage here are those Christian parents who lose sight of the goal of God’s Second Most Precious Gift—Jesus Christ is the First Most Precious Gift—which is to bring up our children in the Ways of the Lord. You see, ‘prodigal parenting’ in this discussion is not about blatant disregard for God’s Holy Word; it is more about subtle things such as not spending time with our children, of which I have noted in other chapters. Spending time with our children includes reading Bible verses with them, Children’s story books on Bible characters, and talking to them about God and Jesus at every opportunity. It’s about nurturing them in their young lives so that they grow up with a ‘head full of God-Knowledge and an opportunity for a Heart full of God-Love.” We should give them every reason to ‘stay home’ and then go forth in the Love of God, but if they become a prodigal child, we must not give up on them—nor ever get Prayed-Up for them!

Just as Franklin Graham returned to what he learned when he was young, so there are many prodigal sons and daughters who do the same in the Love and Guidance of our Lord. Let me use one example: there is a situation at this writing in which a mother has prayed for a son for over 40 years, that he would receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. How long is 40 (FORTY) years? That’s four decades! She never stopped praying for his salvation. About 3 months ago (at this writing), this son repented of his prodigal ways (and please know that these prodigal ways cost these parents their life savings, tears and heartache; yet, they NEVER stopped Praying), confessed his sinful nature before God, and received Eternal Life. In the past 90 days or so, this son has gone through a transformation that the secular world ignores as anything other than foolishness! What I know and believe about this situation is that these parents lived, breathed, and practiced Proverbs 22: 6, and they were rewarded as in the story we read in Luke 11: 15-32. These parents were Heavenly Minded, spent time with their children, and they always sought to instruct their children in the Ways of God—to bring about Earthly Good outcomes in the life of this adult child (prodigal adult son).

Dear Christian Parents, Please find the time to be with your children as God intended. I know that many of you reading this will say to me, "I do that already." I am not making or passing any judgment in this discussion; I am simply asking you in the Name of our God and in Christ Jesus, to examine the quality and quantity time you spend with your children and to evaluate the outcomes that you desire for your Precious Gifts. I am also asking you to Pray for those families that do not know Jesus Christ and who take their children for granted and as a burden, not as Gifts from God. Here's why...

I believe that our world will be governed by those who are on this Earth now and in the future—and what they believe will govern their decisions! This means that, unless God intervenes or Calls Believers Out of this world, we will be here as our children and their children grow up and take the roles of leadership. If these children are the result of Prodigal Parents, what will these children do in the 21st Century and Beyond? Will they decide that abortions are okay and drugs should be legalized and ... you get the idea! Parents develop and shape the minds and hearts of children; children grow up; and, adults shape the world. I pray that if you read this material, and you have Prodigal Parent Tendencies, please talk to God in Christ about this matter and pray for your own family and for those parents who do not know or fear God. *I give you my word that I will do the same!*

A Question of Curiosity:

A prodigal child may become wayward even in the face of a Christian upbringing; but a child who is not under the tutelage of Proverbs 22: 6 is a prodigal child by parental design. And you say...

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"America needs no words from me to see how your decision in Roe v. Wade has deformed a great nation. The so-called right to abortion has pitted mothers against their children and women against men. It has portrayed the greatest of gifts - a child - as a competitor, an intrusion, and an inconvenience." ~ *Mother Teresa* ~

I believe that if an angel were to wing his way from earth up to Heaven, and were to say that there was one poor, ragged boy, without father or mother, with no one to care for him and teach him the way of life; and if God were to ask who among them were willing to come down to this earth and live here for fifty years and lead that one to Jesus Christ, every angel in Heaven would volunteer to go. Even Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty, would say, "Let me leave my high and lofty position, and let me have the luxury of leading one soul to Jesus Christ." There is no greater honor than to be the instrument in God's hands of leading one person out of the kingdom of Satan into the glorious light of Heaven. ~ *Dwight L. Moody* ~

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My Prayer For You:

God of Heaven, before I would suggest to my Brothers and Sisters in Christ that they should reconsider whether they have been giving to their children all that these precious ones need, I examine my own heart and motives in the care of my own adult child and my granddaughter and grandson. There have been times that I have failed to do as I know that You would have me in all situations, and for this I ask forgiveness. I pray for my Brothers and Sisters in the care of their own children so that we as Believers and Children of God might govern our own children in the Love and Light of a Holy God. If we have prodigal tendencies, please show them to us in our walk with You so that we might not fail to nurture our children to the fullest extent within the Love of our God. I ask Oh Lord, that those parents who do not know You or who have never professed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, that You send them to those of us who Know You in Your Words and Love so that we might share Christ with them, and in turn, they might begin anew to nurture their children in the Light of Proverbs 22: 6: "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." May we as a people of Faith understand these precious words so that if we tend to stray as a prodigal in our service before our Children, we would remember them and turn from our sinful ways back to You so that we will be Faithful before You and Faithful in guiding our children in Your Holy Ways. Let us remember the prodigal son's return and the glorious homecoming from the Father. And for the Children of this world, my heart breaks to think of even one who knows not love. May we remember that they are a gift from You. For in the name of Christ Jesus, I pray. Amen.

Child Abuse Statistics & Facts²

Scope of the Child Abuse Issue

Children are suffering from a hidden epidemic of child abuse and neglect. It's a widespread war against our children that we have the power to stop, and understanding the issue is the first step. Just how bad is the issue of child abuse in the United States? Every year more than 3.6 million referrals are made to child protection agencies involving more than 6.6 million children (a referral can include multiple children). The United States has one of the worst records among industrialized nations – losing on average between four and seven children every day to child abuse and neglect. A report of child abuse is made every ten seconds. Yearly, referrals to state child protective services involve 6.6 million children, and around 3.2 million of those children are subject to an investigated report. In 2014, state agencies found an estimated 702,000 victims of child maltreatment, but that only tells part of the story. This would pack 10 modern football stadiums.

- See Table Below.

² <https://www.childhelp.org/child-abuse-statistics/>

Prevalence as reported by participants in landmark CDC/Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences study ³	
Category	Prevalence (%)
Physical Abuse	28.3
Sexual Abuse	20.7
Emotional Abuse	10.6
Physical Neglect	9.90
Emotional Neglect	14.8

Final Words:

Christian Parents, please know that I am not talking to you as if you are included in the mistreatment of your children. I am simply asking you and me to look at the time we invest in our children, even our grown children, and consider how important it is that we keep our relationships as solid as we possibly can. Particularly, our small children, as their futures are truly in our hands. There have been many times as I have been writing this book that I ask myself why something is like it is. I have Prayed over these topics, shed tears over them, and when I think of my daughter, son, and my grandchildren, I am a push-over when it comes to their happiness. But one thing I will not do: relinquish their lives to the enemy. Never will I give in to that. So, I, as many of you, Pray without ceasing! I pray when I think of them, see their beautiful pictures, hear their names, look at their toys, wake up in the middle of the night and their faces come to mind, and at every opportunity.

Why is there child abuse in our world? Jesus told us that in this world we would have troubles, but Oh My God in Heaven, our children??? The ones who can least defend themselves. Being a prodigal parent may not be about abuse by drawing blood, but it can be habitual oversight if we are not careful. It may be that our prodigal tendencies are not major events, but small minor events. Is any oversight where our children are concerned small? Do those precious little souls and tender hearts understand when we omit them in something? No, they do not. Oh they might have a fuzzy idea about what is going on until they begin to mature, but when they are young, let us Christians Brothers and Sisters be diligent in ALL our ways with our children. And, PRAY for the lost and their children, particularly those who bring up their children in the absence of the Love of Christ Jesus. Please *forgive me if I have offended anyone*.

³ <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/#1>