

# *Finding Hope for Your Prodigal*

BY DAVID JEREMIAH

No one needs hope more than prodigals and those who love them. Sooner or later each of us experience having a loved one who capsizes on the river of life. If we aren't careful, in our attempt to help them, we can go under with them. We all have prodigals. The word *prodigal* literally means "being wasteful or extravagant," but in popular usage it's come to identify someone we love who turns away from the Lord or engages in self-destructive behavior that causes us alarm.

Our prodigals may not be our children. You may have a prodigal husband, a prodigal wife, a prodigal parent, a prodigal brother or sister, or a prodigal friend. We're all broken people, and at one time or another we all cause pain to those who love us. It is important to remember that we are all prodigals whom the Lord longs to reach.

Nevertheless, when we have a prodigal of our own, it can affect us very deeply. Sometimes it affects us too deeply and we become codependent. We allow the struggles of another person to steal our joy and peace in the Lord; and our own well-being somehow becomes connected with theirs. One dysfunctional family member can unsettle a home in deeply disturbing ways, and one loved one in crisis can present a massive challenge to our own faith.

Jesus knows the pain of all this. In fact, our fallen and hopeless condition drove Him to the cross to die for our sins. Since we're all prodigals, Jesus died to give us all hope. It's important we don't give up on ourselves, on others, or on Him, because the power of our Lord's death and resurrection can accomplish far more than we can ever ask or imagine. The Son of Man came to seek and to save those who are lost, and that includes your prodigal.

If you are anxious about someone you love, I understand. I know the dark cloud that can settle down in our hearts like a sinister, unyielding fog. But let me give you some suggestions for breathing fresh oxygen into your soul.

## **Realize This Is God's Work**

First, realize the task of reclamation and recovery is primarily God's work. He's more concerned for that troubled person than you are. He sent Jesus to die for that loved one, so remember that you are not alone in your concern. Cast your cares on the Lord and let Him do the work. If you have a child,

## • A R T I C L E •

---

grandchild, spouse, brother, sister, or loved one that is a prodigal, remember to distinguish between what you can do and what God alone can do.

Do not try and do what only God can do. We cannot assume responsibility for the decisions or attitudes of another person, and when we try too hard to change them, we often make things worse. We cannot do God's part. We can only do our part and wait patiently on God for the rest; and very often, the tide begins to turn when we realize that heart-work is God's work.

### **Acknowledge the Spiritual Battle**

When a loved one is in crisis, it's a spiritual battle, but Jesus is interceding in ways that far exceed our own petitions. Romans 8:34 says, "It is Christ who ... is even at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us." And Hebrews 7:25 says, "He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."

If you've ever gotten through a crisis, recovered from a failure, or overcome a period of prolonged temptation, it's because of your Intercessor in the heavens. He is there pleading on your behalf before the very throne of God.

Satan attacks us in ways we don't fully understand, but Jesus prays for us by name—the battle belongs to the Lord.

### **Take Care of Yourself**

Throughout this difficult process, it's important to take care of yourself. The Bible says, "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers ..." (Acts 20:28). Notice the order of that verse—we must take care of ourselves or we'll not be able to effectively care for those who need us. Sometimes we have to establish boundaries for our own protection, because if we don't take care of ourselves we'll soon be of no help to others.

Your joy and peace in life isn't dependent on your loved one but on your Lord. We have to remind ourselves of that, and sometimes that requires a circle of good friends or counselors around us. But it's terribly important to stay healthy when your loved one is not; to stay stable when your loved one is unstable; and to stay steady when your loved one is erratic. The only way to do that is to have your soul firmly anchored to the rock of the hope of Christ.

## Love Unconditionally

During this process of praying and trusting, we must also love unconditionally. In Luke 15, the prodigal's father loved his son when he defiantly left his home and when he returned home in humility. The father's love never changed.

Loving someone doesn't mean we agree with his or her behavior. Unconditional love doesn't require bailing our prodigals out of their problems, or putting up with behavior that damages yourself or others. Sometimes it means setting boundaries or refusing to enable a loved one to continue a sinful course with your support. So even when we draw lines and maintain healthy principles, it should be done lovingly and prayerfully; and at some point the prodigal will respond to your unconditional love.

Don't give up on your prodigal. Sometimes we simply have to "let go and let God." Accept the fact that this is His work. Acknowledge the spiritual nature of the battle and remember that Jesus is praying too. Take care of yourself, embrace the most hopeful attitude in any given circumstance, pray earnestly, love unconditionally, discover reasons to be thankful, and trust the Lord to work His marvelous will in every circumstance in life.

Our foundation that we rely on is our hope in God. In the parables in Luke 15, everything that was lost was found. We, too, have been found. Praise God for our Savior who came to seek and to save those the lost.