

Walking Free Newsletter – March 2016

There is a little prodigal in all of us (Luke 15:11-32)

Have you ever squandered anything? It may be spending your money on something lavish and foolish? It may be spending money on the pokies or horses or expensive hotel rooms.

But it could have been a missed opportunity where you botched up an interview for a job or you failed to do what you promised to do. It may have been a date with the favourite school girl or boy in the school.

Squander: to waste (something, especially money or time) in a reckless and foolish manner;

to allow (an opportunity) to pass or be lost. This is at the heart of the term: prodigal.

The Prodigal Son, well known parable from Luke, is about people who squandered money, opportunities and relationships.

Jesus is addressing the Pharisees who are not impressed with the crowd that is hanging around with Jesus. In the eyes of the Pharisees the tax collectors and sinners were the not desirables of the community. Their lives were a mess. They were a mess and they were not the right people to be associated with.

What gave them more angst was these undesirables were given permission by Jesus to come back to God and start again. These are the people that you would not associate with because you will be polluted by them. They were the “have nots” and Jesus was teaching that God welcomes them into His Kingdom and they can become the “haves” in God’s sight.

Now before we get too critical of the Pharisees, we need to remember that some of this attitude can creep into us. What is your reaction when you pass someone on the street who is poor and asking for money? What is your attitude when you come into contact with people who are different in colour, race or who use blunt language or even swear every second word?

Do we snub them, look down our noses to them, walk by on the other side! Jesus is addressing these attitudes and more in the Pharisees who see Jesus mixing not with the A list but the Z list! But they are also squandering the opportunity to meet the Messiah. They see Jesus as the upstart: The messer uppereer not the Messiah.

They are squandering the opportunity to meet their God. They are so hung up about themselves and how they view Jesus that they waste their opportunity to meet God in a way that millions could only wish for.

Brothers and sisters, it is easy to waste these opportunities that are given where we can meet God and enjoy His presence. We go about our busy lives and squander the God moments that are presented to us. It is only when we look back and reflect that we say “Stupido!”. Another opportunity squandered to encounter and experience Jesus. He was right under our noses but we were so focused on ourselves and our problems that we missed the moment.

Is that you, squandering your God moments because you are too preoccupied with yourself. God forbid if we squander what he gives to us freely.

Let us return to our parable and see who else squanders what they have been given freely.

Jesus continued: 'There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.' " (15:11-12)

The three characters are introduced at once: a man with two sons -- a common enough occurrence. What was very uncommon was the youngest's request to inherit his share of the estate prior to his father's death -- and the father's willingness to grant his request.

The father is depicted as a wealthy farmer, with servants and lands, so that his sons would have enjoyed privileged status in the community. But the youngest isn't satisfied with his lot. He wants everything that will be his, and he wants it now. Inheritance laws in Israel were designed to favour the older son, giving him a double share (probably with the purpose of keeping a family's land holdings together and preserving the family farm intact; Numbers 27:8-11; 36:7-9; Deuteronomy 21:17). If there were four sons, the older son would receive two shares, with each of the other three sons one share apiece. Typically, the older son would be the executor and assume the role as family head after his father's death. Sometimes an older son would decide not to split up the family holdings between the brothers (Luke 12:13).

The younger son's share of the estate may have been partly in land, but the phrase "got together all he had" indicates that he sold what he need to and turned his share into portable capital. The Greek word, *sunago*, here has the sense "turn into cash"

With lots of money in his pocket, the younger son sets out on a journey to a far-away land -- far away from his father, far away from his older brother, and far away from any sense of responsibility and moral restraint. So long as his father is alive, he has a responsibility to support his father with his share of the family wealth, but he ignores this and spends it all on himself.

He squanders his money. His situation goes from bad to worse. He ends up feeding pigs.

He squanders not just his inheritance but also he injures his relationship with his father and

brother.

Perhaps you've been this low and hopeless. Perhaps you know how it feels. The one advantage of this position is that there is no direction to go but up.

It's amazing how complex issues can suddenly become crystal clear. The man compares his own condition with that of his father's hired servants. He is starving and they have food to spare. And he is probably aware that the famine doesn't extend to his home area. He begins to compose a confession to say to his father.

You know, of course, how hard this is for him. It is his father and his father's way of life that he is rebelling against. He has snubbed his nose at his legal and moral obligations to his father. He has asked for his inheritance so he doesn't have to grovel to anyone. He went away rich and affluent, but must now come home with his tail between his legs. The very person he was so conflicted with he must now apologize to. There is no other way. How difficult this must be! How humbling!

His apology includes four essential points:

1. He confesses sin against God -- expressed in Jewish fashion as "against heaven" -- for his moral failures and sinful lifestyle.
2. He confesses sin against his father for squandering property that legally and morally should have been conserved to support his father.
3. He renounces any legal claim to sonship. Though he is a son by birth, his father would need to use his older brother's resources to support him, since his father has already divided the property. He recognizes that he has no legal claim to the rights of sonship.
4. He asks to be hired as a servant at the estate. While his father no longer legally owns

the estate, he is still running it, and will do so as long as he is physically able.

The Prodigal has worked out what he will say and how he should say it. When we have to eat crow, rehearsing exactly what we need to say is important. So many apologies are not apologies at all; they are half-measures designed to admit some culpability but keep one's dignity and pride intact. To his credit, the Prodigal Son works out a full apology and in so doing gets back in the black.

The other person who squandered his opportunity was the older son. The older son is out in the field, far at the corner of the estate where he hadn't heard the goings-on. He is ever dutiful, ever working in the fields as he ought. When he gets to the house the party is well underway. The musicians are playing and the household is dancing. The fatted calf has been slaughtered and is cooking, sending delicious fragrances into the air. There is laughter and noise and rejoicing. That is what the older brother hears.

Now the older brother starts to cause a scene. From outside the house the brother's angry shouts can be heard over the music. People start to gather at the windows to see what is going on. The older brother is spouting off angrily and absolutely refusing to go into the celebration. "It isn't fair! It isn't just! And I won't be party to it," he shouts. "My brother deserves to be run out of town on a rail, not hailed as a conquering hero.. Oh, no. It isn't right! You'll never find me celebrating his return. No, not me!"

The father hears the ruckus and goes out to reason with his older son and get him to join in the celebration, yet the son remains adamant.

"But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' " (15:29-30)

The elder son is being sarcastic now and gives his father a piece of his mind. "I've been 'slaving' for you all these years," he says, using the Greek word *douleuo*, "to act or conduct oneself as one in total service to another, 'perform the duties of a slave, serve, obey.'" [3] He could have used a milder word *diakoneo*, "to serve," but he uses the stronger word that refers directly to

slavery. He is angry, and exaggerates as you and I sometimes do (our spouses say) when we are angry. Jesus has created a very convincing character as the older brother in this story.

The older son goes on to contrast his obedience with his brother's disobedience. He reeks of sarcastic self-pity: "Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends." The young goat is contrasted with the fattened calf. The younger son has squandered the father's estate and been immoral with prostitutes.

"It isn't fair!" I can hear the older son yelling. "It isn't fair!"

The older brother is complaining that his father never even gave him a young goat to feast with, much less a fattened calf. I'm sure the reason isn't found in the father's stinginess, but that it didn't occur to the son to ask. James tells us, "You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures" (James 4:2-3).

In his anger, bitterness and jealousy and his pride, he squanders the opportunity to rejoice. He had not lost anything. He had gained a brother and the joy of his father. But in his anger, bitterness and jealousy; in his idea of justice and fairness he squandered everything that was important and thus put him on the outside; rejoicing in his own self-righteousness.

For many of us we can identify with the older son. We have not done anything wrong; been good with our money; worked hard for the church and for God. Yet we don't seem to be appreciated.

We don't have a rags to riches story; a Damascus Road experience. We have kept our noses clean and yet God seems to bless the other guys and not me. We feel sorry for the older brother but don't. He has had everything but squanders the most important thing: his relationship with his Dad and brother.

I think the reason that we are sometimes angry is that we haven't taken the initiative to get to know our Father, to ask for his best blessings, and to enjoy his bounty. We may be in the

church harness labouring diligently as teachers and leaders and workers, but we don't enjoy it. Somehow, we have forgotten how to party with the Father. Our religion, like the Pharisees', has been reduced to joyless duty.

The one who does not squander is the father. "But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." (15:32)

The Father takes every opportunity to rejoice over those who were lost; who come to their senses and returns to Him. God our Father is ready to show abundant mercy. The younger son deserves nothing, but the father heaps upon him the accoutrements of sonship. It's not due to merit but to mercy.

A mother once approached Napoleon seeking a pardon for her son. The emperor replied that the young man had committed a certain offense twice and justice demanded death.

"But I don't ask for justice," the mother explained. "I plead for mercy."

"But your son does not deserve mercy," Napoleon replied.

"Sir," the woman cried, "it would not be mercy if he deserved it, and mercy is all I ask for."

"Well, then," the emperor said, "I will have mercy." And he spared the woman's son.

But he also rejoices over those who are not lost but are a part of the fold who don't squander what the Father has given them. He wants to shower his blessings upon those 'who stay at home' but you will not be blessed if you adopt the attitude of the older son who lived in his self-righteousness not his righteousness.

A rich man was in the habit of giving his wife an expensive piece of jewellery every year on her birthday. One year he might phone the jeweler and say, "Send me your finest pearl necklace, along with your bill." Or, "Send me your finest diamond pendant, along with your bill." Or the finest emerald bracelet or ruby ring. Each time, the jeweller did as the rich man asked, dispatching a messenger to the rich man's mansion to deliver the jewellery piece in a box along with his bill.

But every year the rich man would play a game with the jeweller. He would send the messenger back to the jeweller along with the original box, a note, and a check. The check was always written in the amount of several thousand dollars less than the price on the jeweller's bill. The note would say, "Sir, I like the jewellery piece, but I do not like the price. If you will accept the enclosed check for a reduced amount, then please return the jewellery box with the seal unbroken."

For years the jeweller put up with the rich man's game, accepting the reduced check, and returning the box with the seal unbroken. He still made a profit on the jewellery, even if it was a lower profit than he liked—and at least he was able to keep the rich man's trade year after year. In time, however, the jeweller began to tire of this charade.

Finally the day came when the rich man placed an order for a lavish diamond necklace, and the jeweller decided he would not get clipped again. As usual, the jeweller sent the necklace in a box, along with his bill. Again, as usual, the box was returned with a reduced check for payment and a note.

Enough was enough! The jeweller refused the check, kept the box, and sent the messenger away in disgust. When he opened the box to reclaim the necklace, he found that the necklace had been removed. In its place was a check for the entire amount of the jeweller's bill.

For years, the rich man had been sending the entire asking price of each jewellery piece—hidden inside the sealed jewellery box. In all that time, the jeweller had accepted thousands of dollars less than he could have received—because he didn't open the box and look inside.

We can squander God's blessings by not opening God's box given to us and looking inside.

Walking Free: Our ministry with broken people continues with new clients ringing up and we are doing 20 odd ministries per month. We continue to see God moving and working. One client says that she leaves our place totally different as something heavy has been lifted off her. We prayed through a house and the owner's sense and feel the difference. We continue to praise God for his healing presence transforming people's lives.

Toowoomba Team: Hal, Debbie and Stephanie are seeing great results as they are praying for their clients. They have only a few ministries per month but God seems to give them very challenging clients.

Seminars: We had 24 people attend the teaching seminar "*Unlocking the Power of the Blood of Jesus*". There were four sessions: the OT meaning and use of the Blood in the sacrifices; the 7 ways that Jesus shed his blood at Easter and the effect for healing that this had for us: What does the blood achieve for us in our relationships: What does it mean to plead the blood of Jesus? The people again found the teaching uplifting and renewing and given a greater appreciation of the blood of Jesus shed for them.

If you would like a copy of the talks, please email me and put a donation into our account, please? If you are a regular sponsor, I would be happy to email this to you for free. On the same basis, you are welcome to have a copy of the talks from other seminars. Just email me: john@walkingfree.com.au

Our next seminar in April will be *Uncovering Abuse in the life of the Church*.

.Finances: Jamie Webb, our treasurer, has resigned from this position. He has been with us from the beginning in 2007. We are very grateful for his help. We are now praying for a person to be our treasurer.

We are looking for more sponsors to support the healing and teaching work of Jesus through Walking Free. No matter how small the donation, we welcome new donors. Remember that each donation to the gift fund is tax deductible. If you would like to become a sponsor, it is a matter of a one off or regular donation to the following:

Walking Free Renewing Ministries Gift Fund

BSB 084-961 ACC 82-215-5845.

Use your name if you would like a tax receipt at the end of the financial year.

Praise God for His provision.

- **Thank God for the blessings that he gives to you each day. Pray that you do not squander these blessing or miss them.**
- **Thank God for His healing power released in the prayers of our teams and in the client's lives.**
- **Pray for a new treasurer for Walking Free.**

- **Pray for team in Adelaide who pray for the ministry: □ Margaret, Lesley, Diana, Ann, Dianne and Julie**
- **Please pray for team at Toowoomba: Hal and Debbie, Stephanie, Charmaine and Craig.**

Family Life continues to be a blessing as we see our children grow in parenthood and the support they give to each other.

Pray for Naomi, Jonathan and Jennifer; Jess; David and Maddy and Elijah.

India: Pray for Pastor Devadas, Pastor CH and Rev Sambabu and their ministry amongst Hindu people. Pray for finances to be release to support families and orphans.

Kenya: Pray for Pastor Isaac as he teaches and trains people for the work of ministry.