

Steps Toward Sin
Luke 15:11-20

Think with me as we begin our study of these scriptures given here in Luke chapter 15 . . . is the common saying of our day that, “bad things happen to good people”, a real truism. Are the happenings of this life mostly just random occurrences that “just happen”, or do those occurrences instead have an intentional cause that brings them about.

Here today, we'll be studying about a young man that made some really bad decisions for his life, and as we will see, the choices that he made were self-centered and intentional.

And as we know from other places in these scriptures, wrong choices like the ones this young man made are almost always guided by the nature of the person making them, a sinful nature that abides deeply within a person's heart and soul.

And to make matters even more difficult for this young man, we know from other places in these scriptures that sin itself is not static. It's not just an occurrence that takes place within our behavior. But rather, sin is actually the “cause” of our sinful behavior. Oddly, sin seems to have its own initiative resident within it.

And yes, I know that those words may sound like a strange thing to say, but our Lord gives some credence to that concept with His words of warning that He gave to Cain there in the Book of Genesis.

As Cain was about to go out and murder his brother, the Lord gave him a special warning saying,

⁶ . . . Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? ⁷ If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.” (Genesis 4:6-7)

Did you note the strange implication being made in those words. And no, I don't understand them well, but it does seem that God is saying that “sin” has a form of existence that is able to “desire” to have control over us, and that we

have a responsibility to “master” its control, else sin will take control over us. With Cain, sin was a “predator” crouching behind his door and Cain is its prey.

Again, yes, those are strange words, but they are the words of our Lord and therefore absolutely true.

And yes, this same “cause and effect” is true for each one of us. The sin that is present within the world, present within our own flesh and present within the devil is truly a predator. And dear friends, you and I and this young man in this parable are sin’s prey. And here, the Lord gives us a special look at how sinful desires will lead a person to do all the wrong things. Listen, beginning here in verse 11 of Luke chapter 15, Jesus said,

¹¹ . . . “There was a man who had two sons.

¹² And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them.

¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his possessions with prodigal living.

¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs 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 more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!

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

¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”

²⁰ And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. (Luke 15:11-20)

Here in the words of this simple parable, Jesus describes for us a young man whose character is filled with arrogance and pride and whose sinful behavior led him step by step down a pathway of sin where he should not have gone, a pathway that had consequences that he was not able to bear.

We in today's generation make the mistake of thinking that this sort of prideful rebellious behavior is particular to our modern times, but not so. From these words we can see that this kind of sinful misbehavior is common to every generation.

And here in this parable, God presents this young man's character to us without any excuse for his sinful behavior. Here, the young man is described as being prodigal. Verse 13, "He squandered his possessions with prodigal living."

My dictionary describes a "prodigal" as being a person that is "given to extravagant expenditure, spending money or other things without necessity, recklessly or viciously profuse, lavish, wasteful, not frugal or economical."

God wanted us to clearly understand this young man's heart and his conduct, so that we could see ourselves more clearly in the "mirror of the young man's behavior".

Unlike as in our modern culture where we attempt to provide excusing reasons for our bad conduct, blaming it on broken families, abandonment, abuse, being poor, and on and on. That is not done here with these words of Jesus.

Here, we aren't told what kind of growing up years this young man experienced. We are given only the simple facts of his bad behavior.

May I take a moment and address this, and say again that in today's culture, we really do try to find some kind of excusing reason for most all of the behaviors that control our lives. And yes, those things, like broken families, abandonment, abuse and being poor, do contribute to the making up of our character, but these scriptures are clear. Those things are never the real "cause" and never an "excuse" for wrongful behavior.

As we said a moment ago, the real "cause" that makes for a poor character and sinful behavior can be traced back to one thing and one thing alone, one origin, and that origin is "sin", sin that begins deep within our souls and works its way up to the surface and into the circumstances of daily life. As the words given in the Book of James express it,

¹⁴ . . . each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)

Those words of truth are for all generations in all of time, beginning with the very first people to be born on the earth. Adam and Eve were tempted and deceived and gave into their sinful desires in exactly the same way that this young man did it, and in exactly the same way that you and I do it.

And you will note there in the Book of Genesis that God did not excuse Adam and Eve simply because someone else, the devil, had influenced them. No, God held Adam and Eve individually accountable and responsible for their own behavior. And He does the same with every other person . . . with you and me.

Those words in James 1, confirm that it is our own desires that lure us into temptation.

Those words again from James 1,

¹⁴ . . . each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

¹⁵ Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. (James 1:14-15)

Note also here in these words, that there is a progression towards sin, steps in a downward spiral, steps, that if taken, will lead to a final outcome of "death", sometimes physical death, but always and especially "spiritual" death, eternal death in the miseries of hell.

Those steps are given very clearly in the Book of Romans chapter 1 as God describes for us the "steps toward reprobation". There, speaking about men and women who make the deliberate choice to not follow the ways and the leading of our Lord, we are told that as a person deliberately chooses to make sinful choices, God goes ahead and "gives them over" to that sinful behavior.

And there are a whole litany of sinful behaviors described for us there in Romans chapter 1, but let me just pick up beginning in verse 28, here describing a step by step progression towards becoming completely depraved and reprobate. Listen! (verse 28)

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a (reprobate) mind to do what ought not to be done.

²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness,

malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips,

³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents,

³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

³² Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but (also) give approval to (others) who practice them. (Romans 1:28-32)

Now, while we don't know all the sinful misconduct the young man in this parable did while he wasted away all of His inheritance with his prodigal living, most likely he didn't do all of these things mentioned here in this passage in Romans 1. But he surely did some of them. And they would have been destructive to his soul.

And again, please do note those words given there in Romans 1, verse 28 where we are told that when and as a person refuses to hear the warnings from our Lord and takes their steps into sin, God will give them over to the next steps and the next and the next,

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do what ought not to be done. (Romans 1:28)

And folks, do we not often find ourselves venturing down some of these very steps into sin? And do we not often see some of these very steps being taken by the people all around us now in our modern day? And sadly, do we not often see these steps being taken by some of our most beloved of family members and friends.

But thanks be to God, He does not want that to ever be our final outcome. Within each step of our progression into sin, our Lord gives us opportunity to turn from our sin. It's part of His provision of grace. Listen to the words of 1 Corinthians 10!

¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Oh dear Christian, if we will only be willing to listen and to hear His pleading voice, our Lord will be faithful to give us warnings and opportunities to turn from the next steps of sin that we are about to take.

He loves us and if we are willing to accept His Grace, He will reach into our downward spiral, catch hold of us and save us.

And that was so with this young man in this parable. As we look more closely into his behavior, note carefully the individual steps that it took to carry him into his lost condition. Verse 11 . . .

¹¹ . . . "There was a man who had two sons.

¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his possessions with prodigal living.

¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs 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 more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! (Luke 15:11-17)

Here, we have a young man who seems to have had a good family and a good upbringing. By mentioning that His father provided food for the "hired men" showed a generosity in the father's heart that was not common.

Again, we can't know it for sure, but in the absence of being told, let's assume that all had gone well within this family. And I believe that God may have presented it that way so as to say that this particular young man was without any reason or excuse for his misbehavior.

Note first, that as he sought to get what he wanted, his words were not a request, but were a demand, and actually, an "arrogant" demand.

The bible commentator, Matthew Henry, in describing what the young man did, commented that he . . .

. . . said to his father, proudly and pertly, "Father, give me", he didn't say father please give me, but he made an arrogant demand, "give me the portion of goods that falls to me; not so much as you think fit to allot to me, but that which is rightfully due to me."

The commentator, Matthew Henry noted further that,

It is bad, and the beginning of worse, when men look upon God's gifts as debts. "Give me the portion, all my part, that falls to me;" not, "Try me with a little, and see how I can manage that, and accordingly trust me with more;" but "Give me all that is mine."

Folks, this young man arrogantly assumed that his father owed him something, here, a portion of the family inheritance. Sadly, it is also very common to hear the same arrogance coming out of the mouths of today's young people.

And even as they grow older, their arrogance seems only to increase. In hope, we want their demand to be "give me the opportunity to find a good job". But too often it is instead just "give me money, give me welfare, give me food stamps, give me healthcare". And the demands never seem to stop, never asking or appealing, but always demanding.

An exact picture of this kind of arrogant demanding is being seen daily in our news media in the demonstrations that are taking place in the streets of some of our major cities. Men and women, unwilling to go home and humbly go to work in regular jobs, instead they stand up defiantly and demand that the good things of life be "given" to them, that wealth be taken forcibly from the wealthy and redistributed to them.

As for this young man, this prodigal in this parable, the commentator, Matthew Henry continues by saying,

And why did he desire to have his portion in his own hands? Was it that he might apply himself to business, and trade with it, and so make it more? No, he had no thought of that. But he was (instead) weary of his father's authority, of the discipline of his father's family, and he wanted freedom from it.

And he was proud of himself, and had a great conceit of his own sufficiency. He thought that if he had his portion in his own hands he could manage it better than his father did.

Folks let's pause for a moment and consider just how very disrespectful and uncaring this young man was. The inheritance that he was demanding from his father is usually only given after the father had died. And by demanding the inheritance now, this young man was treating his father as if his father was already dead. How unloving and uncaring can a son be!

The corruption and the reprobation that had developed within this young man's soul was so very clear and evident. And his arrogance and pride were leading him to the next step and the next step of reprobation.

And as we can see from this young man's plight, God's word is true when He said,

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.
(Galatians 6:7-8)

Oh dear Christian, while it may sound odd to hear, difficult and painful consequences for our behavior are often a form of grace from our Lord. The reaping of those consequences from the sinful seeds that we have sown are intended for our benefit, to turn us away from sin and to reclaim our souls from their downward spiral.

And there is a deeper truth that needs to be well understood and accepted about every form of suffering, whether that suffering be because of obvious sins on our part, or the suffering comes from the hand of God to grow us in our relationship with Him as He did with the Old Servant Job. Sufferings and consequences are useful tools of Grace in the Hands of our loving Lord.

Listen again to what took place as this young man sowed to the benefit of his own flesh only to reap corruption and then suffering. Verse 13 of this parable,

¹³ Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.

¹⁴ And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country,

who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

¹⁶ And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. (Luke 15:13-16)

This young man surely did reap what he had sown.

But again, thanks be to God, our Lord does not want us to perish in our sin. Within each step of our progression into sin, God gives us opportunity to turn from it. It is part of His provision of grace.

He loves us and if we are willing to accept His Grace, He will reach into our downward spiral, catch hold of us and save us.

And that was so with this young man in this parable. God graciously allowed the misery brought on by the young man's behavior to work repentance into his soul. Those words in verse 17,

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

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

¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" (Luke 15:17-19)

"Praise be to God for repentance!"

Folks, as we have been saying over the recent weeks of this study in the Book of Luke, the grace of our Lord truly is amazing. "Grace", the unmerited and undeserved free gift of love that comes out from the heart of God and is poured freely upon our lives each day is one of the most profound mysteries that God bestows upon us.

Interwoven within what seems to be a random stream of unconnected choices on our part is God's grace working tirelessly to bring good and pleasant blessings to our souls.

And that is especially so as God's grace begins to work within our hearts, our souls, and our consciences, revealing to us the actual cause of the sufferings that we are experiencing, convicting us that it is "sin", "our sin" that is causing

our sufferings. And further, that the only remedy for the sin that we are experiencing is repentance. "Repentance"!

And that is what we see taking place within the heart of this young man. And that is what brought him to make this "new choice". Listen!

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

¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" (Luke 15:18-19)

May we stop on this good note and the Lord willing we'll pick back up again next week, when we will look further at the young man's repentance and what the outcome of his repentance brought.

Pray with me.