

What a mess!

Nothing can mess up your lifestyle like dying. Just ask a guy who died last year in the **West Midlands**. Some of you might be asking how you can ask a dead guy anything. Well, his being dead didn't stop **Birmingham Council** from sending him a letter. "**Your council tax benefits will be stopped effective March 2010 because we received notice that you passed away,**" the letter to the dead guy said. It ended, "**May God bless you.**" Despite the nice touch at the end, the letter made it sound as if the decision to stop the **council tax benefits** was final. But this is not to say that the public agency was cold. The department offered the dead guy hope for the future. "**You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances,**" the letter said.

At first, the brother of the dead guy, read the letter and said he was disgusted. Later he found it funny. He called it "**living proof of how screwed up the system is.**" The **Birmingham city council managing director** said it's not her system that's screwed up. She said the form letter was generated by a computer system. And the "**May God bless you**"? That was added by a caseworker, she said, to soften the statement.

Sometimes we find ourselves in situations which seem screwed up because we see our circumstances as a mess. I want to talk about a familiar story today, one we've heard many times over the years, the story of the '**Prodigal Son**' but I want try and look at it from a different angle.

Luke 15:11 "There once was a man who had two sons". The older son worked hard and obeyed all that his father told him to do. The younger son liked to play and have fun. He wasn't interested in working. **Was this a happy family?** Well there's nothing in the text to suggest otherwise.

But anyway one day, the younger son went to his father and said. Dad when you go your going to leave a ton of cash. **Luke 15:12 "Give me my half now!"** The father was shocked! Now you and I would be thinking what a mess this is. My youngest is leaving home **but why? Isn't he happy at home anymore? Is there something going on in his life that I don't know about?**

And we would start to put ourselves on a guilt trip and begin to think, well maybe I shouldn't have shouted at him the other day when he wouldn't do what I asked! Maybe I should have allowed him to stay up to ten instead of sending him to bed at nine thirty. Maybe I should have bought him those Reebok trainers instead of those Nike ones.

We put ourselves through all sorts of guilt trips and think that maybe the reason they are leaving is because of us. Listen **did Aaron the father of Nadab and Abihu put himself on a guilt trip and stop serving the Lord because of his son's sinful behavior?** No **Did Eli the father of Hophni and Phinehas put himself on a guilt trip and stop serving the Lord because of his son's sinful behavior?** No

Yes their parents were hurt because of their children's decisions but they kept on serving God. And if your kids go off the path in their lives then you shouldn't either, you should keep on serving the Lord.

Whatever your child's reasons for wanting to leave unless they are blatantly obvious like abuse of some sort, then maybe you should let them go. Notice the Father in the story doesn't put himself on a guilt trip, he simply says in, **Luke 15:12 "OK, it's your Choice"**.

We would panic and think this is a mess but the Father says, '**Ok, It's your choice.**' We would be giving them a lecture about how difficult life is and how hard it is to live out there in the world without your family, but the Father simply says, '**Ok, It's your choice.**' We would be saying, **where are you going? Where are you going to live?** Be careful with your money, be sensible! But the Father simply says, '**Ok, It's your choice.**'

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Luke 15:13 "The younger son gathered all he had, and set off for a far away country". Luke 15:13 "There he wasted his money on parties and wild living". What a mess, he's got 'himself' into and I say 'himself' because it was his choice to go. He left the comfort of his own home, the comfy bed, the good food and love of his Father with loads of money and wasted it all on partying and wild living, what a mess.

And don't we do that sometimes? Don't we get ourselves into a mess simply because we decide to leave God and your church family? Because let me tell you loved ones things don't get any easier when you leave God and your church family.

In fact guess what happened next to the son who left his Father? Luke 15:14 "Famine!" Things are just going from bad to worse for the son, especially when he ran out of money. He ended up with the worst job ever! Luke 15:15 "He had spent all he had, so he went and got a job feeding pigs!" What a mess, the lowest of lowest jobs, working in a pig pen and starving.

That's what happens when you think you can go it alone. That's what happened when you leave God and your church family. You end up in a mess, sometimes physically but always spiritually. But it doesn't have to end that way loved ones you just like the son can return to the Father at anytime. Luke 15:17 "Finally, he came to his senses!" Luke 15:17 "My father's hired men have food to spare and here I am starving".

I will return to my father and say to him. Luke 15:18+19 "I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men". With his repentance speech prepared in his mind and his heart broken to the point of total humility, he headed home to his father.

Oh I'm sure he's carrying a whole load of guilt and shame. I'm sure he's totally sorry for his actions and possibly even thinking to himself, what a mess I've created and got myself into. I bet my family will hate me especially my Father for what I've done. I've let everyone down; oh I'm sure the guilt trip would have been immense. But loved ones despite all those feelings and emotions he kept on going.

After all where else can he go to? He can't go back because there's nothing there; he can't go somewhere else because he has no money left. He realised what Peter realised when he said in John 6:68 "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." He realised he can always turn back to the Father.

Luke 15:20 "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with love for him". Luke 15:20 "He ran to his son, threw his arms around him, and kissed him". Luke 15:21 "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you". Luke 15:21 "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." Luke 15:22 "Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate." Luke 15:24 "For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

Wait a minute! I thought this was a mess from the moment I left home? I left to go and party in the world and now my father is throwing a party in my honour? No wonder Paul writes in Romans 8:38+39 "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord".

And guys', maybe living with your parents isn't that bad after all. Maybe all those rules and boundaries in your house are for your benefit. Maybe being told off is a good thing because it shows that your parents actually do care and love you.

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Because let me tell you guys there are children out there who would do anything to be cared for and loved. Oh on the surface some kids look like they are having a great time and allowed to do whatever they want and stay out to whatever time they want. But when they get older they will realise that all they ever really wanted in life was to be cared for and loved.

When life gets tough you will soon discover that your friends are only your friends because you're doing what they are doing. You will soon discover that when times get tough and I mean really tough, you will know who your true friends are.

I'm sure the son had loads of friends when he first left home with all that money but **where were they when he needed them the most?** Not one friend came up to him and said, **'come and stay at my house and I will feed you.'** Not one of them said, **'I know you will be sinning working with pigs, so I will offer you a job'.**

And I can tell you for sure the minute you suggest you don't want to do what they are doing; you will lose them as your friends. **Why?** Well not because you don't want to do what they are doing anymore but because a true friend would never be so selfish to think about themselves all the time.

The Father is waiting loved ones, with open arms filled with love, waiting for you to come to Him. Oh I'm sure there will be some people that won't be happy because you want to come back to the Father, just like the older brother.

Luke 15:27+28 "The older brother was angry and refused to join the party. "All these years I've worked for you. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends." Not so happy families now, is it?

But loved ones it doesn't matter what anyone else says because the Father always has the last word. **Luke 15:32 "Look, my son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. But we celebrate this happy day because your brother was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found!"**

Loved ones, the younger son thought his life was a mess. The older brother thought this whole thing was a mess. But the reality is that it was a mess to everyone except to the Father. **Do you see what I'm getting at here?** When we think our lives are in a mess and there's no way out, God says otherwise. When it looks like everything is falling apart all around us, God says not in my eyes they aren't. In other words we need to look at life through God's eyes.

Tough times which seem like a mess need faith. **Romans 8:28 "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose".**

Loved ones, your child being seriously ill, doesn't mean you totally rely on stress and worry to help the situation, it means you need to totally rely on faith to help with the situation. Your child leaving home doesn't mean you totally rely on long lectures to help the situation, it means you need to totally rely on faith to help with the situation.

Your husband leaving you for someone else doesn't mean you totally rely on lawyers to help the situation, it means you need to totally rely on faith to help with the situation. Your wife cheating on her husband doesn't mean you totally rely on your friends to help the situation, it means you need to totally rely on faith to help with the situation.

Your child involved in drugs doesn't mean you totally rely on the police to help the situation, it means you need to totally rely on faith to help with the situation. Your child being picked up by the police for being drunk doesn't mean you totally rely on your family to help the situation, it

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means you need you totally rely on faith to help with the situation. Your child involved with the wrong people doesn't mean you totally rely on their families to help the situation, it means you need you totally rely on faith to help with the situation.

You remember the story of Jairus the Jewish synagogue leader whose daughter was dying? In **Mark 5** Jesus is on his way to see her but is distracted by a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years. After she was healed by just touching Jesus garments, some messengers came to Jesus and said that Jairus' daughter had died and Jesus simply said in **Mark 5:30** "don't be afraid, just believe". And as we know he went to Jairus' house, found his daughter dead but spoke to her and raised her from the dead.

You see loved ones, when things look like they are a mess, **don't be afraid, just believe**. When the disciples saw the Jews trying to kill Jesus time and time again, they must have thought this is a mess, Jesus says to them, '**don't be afraid, just believe**'. When Jesus was in Gethsemane and the Jewish leaders came with Judas to arrest Him, the disciples must have thought this is a mess, Jesus says to them, '**don't be afraid, just believe**'.

When Jesus was being flogged the disciples must have thought this is a mess, Jesus says to them, '**don't be afraid, just believe**'. When the crowd was asked who they wanted released and they demanded Barabbas, the disciples must have thought what a mess, Jesus says to them, '**don't be afraid, just believe**'.

When Jesus was crucified and died on the cross, the disciples must have thought what a mess, Jesus says to them, '**don't be afraid, just believe**'. When Jesus lay in the tomb, one day, two days later, they must have thought, what a mess, Jesus says to them, '**don't be afraid, just believe**'.

You see loved ones our circumstances may seem like a mess to us simply because we don't see or fully understand the big picture. Everything which Jesus said and done didn't make any sense to the disciples until the third day.

On the third day it all makes sense, it was never a mess in God's eyes but a part of God's plan. **1 Corinthians 15:3+4** "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures."

Now it all makes sense, now I understand why all these things happened, now I believe. And it's the same with everything which happens in life, no matter how difficult it is. **Hebrews 11:1** "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen". In other words, **don't be afraid, just believe**. You may not fully understand why people do the things they do or agree with the choices they make, just believe. We may not fully understand why our loved ones suffer and do crazy things, just believe. Believe that God is on the case and no matter what happens, "know that for those who love God all things work together for good".

Loved ones, just as the father in this story loved his sons, God, our Heavenly Father, loves His children. Even when we disappoint him and stray from what he has taught us, his love remains strong and he longs for our return. There is no end to our Heavenly Father's love!

If you're a Christian this morning and you're heading away from God and His family then please know God and His family are awaiting your return with open arms and love. If you're not a Christian this morning then please know that you too can cause heaven to have a party by coming to God.

Luke 15:10 says, "I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents." Jesus says to you, '**don't be afraid, just believe**'.