

Option 1 – Going Prodigal
(appropriate for High School Graduates)
Michael R. Daily October 2016

Other youth bible studies by Michael Daily available at: <http://gciweb.org/2011/04/youth-bible-study-materials-michael-r-daily/>

ref #1: Carol Barnier, Engaging Today's Prodigal, Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2012.
ref #2: Richard A. Burr, Praying Your Prodigal Home, Wing Spread Publishers, 2003.

Once graduated from High School you have begun your adult life. Things are going to change for you.

(1 Corinthians 3:11)

When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

You are on your own. The authority of your parents over you (and their protection) is disappearing. Your childhood training has been completed. Now, its time to find out who the real you is. You have some very important decisions to make that will have impacts on the rest of your life. Choose wisely.

Young adults emerging from a "Christian" childhood typically end up doing one of three things:

- 1) They "go prodigal"
- 2) They become lukewarm Christians
- 3) They become wholehearted Christians.

Revelation 3:15-17

'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. ¹⁶ So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. ¹⁷ Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

As people make their decisions some will choose to reject God and live for themselves (cold). Some will choose to live for God (hot), and some will become lukewarm. Being lukewarm is the worst because these are people who are self-deceived. They go to church every Sunday and they really believe that they are doing great spiritually. But they are not and they can't tell.

Matthew 13:20-23

The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. ²² And the one on whom seed was sown among the thorns, this is the man who hears the word, and the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. ²³ And the one on whom seed was sown on the good soil, this is the man who hears the word and understands it; who indeed bears fruit and brings forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty."

This same pattern of 3 shows up again. The first person falls away from God as soon as it becomes inconvenient (cold). The second person becomes unfruitful because of their focus on the world system and money and, as a result, they become lukewarm. In addition to thinking they are doing great another characteristic of the lukewarm is, no fruit. They don't teach the Bible, they don't share the Gospel, and they have no fruit. The third person believes God's Word and acts on it and, as a result, he bears fruit (hot).

We will start by studying the path of the Prodigal – the person who has chosen to be cold toward God. Its important to understand what is going on with prodigals and what they are going to go through because we all have prodigals in our lives. We need to know what's going on so we can properly pray for them and help them. Also, we are all tempted at one time or another to consider becoming a prodigal. Understanding this area will help us make the right decision when this temptation comes along.

The Path of the Prodigal

Once the constraints of parental authority are gone and the Christian culture becomes optional, the real person emerges. Some young adults will choose to throw off the constraints of parental and church expectations and run to the arms of their true loves – the desires of their eyes and the impulses of their heart.

“There are two kinds of people: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, ‘All right, then, have it your way.’” – C.S. Lewis

Luke 15:11-17

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!’

The path of the Prodigal starts out being fun. Complete freedom to do whatever your flesh desires. But God has set things up so that eventually the fun ends and every prodigal experiences pain and loss and dishonor.

There are two reasons for this:

1) God’s ways are always best and He will demonstrate that in order that He not be mocked.

Galatians 6:7-8

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will 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.

2) He is trying to get their attention so that they will repent and turn back to Him. The only way to do this is to inflict enough pain and loss in their lives that they will come to their senses and repent. The prodigal son had to come to a point of severe and sustained hunger before he would come to his senses and repent.

Psalms 83:13-16

O my God, make them like the whirling dust, Like chaff before the wind. ¹⁴ Like fire that burns the forest And like a flame that sets the mountains on fire, ¹⁵ So pursue them with Your tempest And terrify them with Your storm. ¹⁶ Fill their faces with dishonor, That they may seek Your name, O LORD.

This is an interesting prayer for a prodigal. God, chase them down and terrify them with storms. Fill their faces with dishonor. But the motivation is to cause them to repent and seek God. In order to get a prodigal to come to true repentance requires one thing – pain. Physical pain and emotional/social pain. It is the only way to bring them to their senses.

Jeremiah 31:18-20

“I have surely heard Ephraim grieving, ‘You have chastised me, and I was chastised, Like an untrained calf; Bring me back that I may be restored, For You are the LORD my God. ‘For after I turned back, I repented; And after I was instructed, I smote on my thigh; I was ashamed and also humiliated Because I bore the reproach of my youth.’ ²⁰ “Is Ephraim My dear son? Is he a delightful child? Indeed, as often as I have spoken against him, I certainly *still* remember him; Therefore My heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him,” declares the LORD.

Note that the prodigal will experience shame, humiliation, disgrace, and dishonor in addition to pain and loss.

Chastise: *to inflict punishment on, as by whipping*

Reproach: *a cause of blame, discredit, or disgrace*

But notice God's attitude toward the repenting prodigal. He is always ready to forgive and accept those who are truly repentant.

Ecclesiastes 11:9-10

Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things. ¹⁰ So, remove grief and anger from your heart and put away pain from your body, because childhood and the prime of life are fleeting.

The prodigal follows the impulses of their hearts and the desires of their eyes. At first it feels like freedom but note that the end result is grief, anger, and physical pain.

Grief: *a cause of deep sadness*

God will continue to inflict pain, loss, humiliation, shame, disgrace, and sadness on the prodigal over time in order to bring them to repentance. Different people repent at different stages but the stages ratchet up in effect as the years go by. But His purpose is to save them from the destruction of the path of sin they have chosen. He is not mad at them. His motivation is love. He has a number of tools that He uses.

Here are some of the common ones:

Proverbs 5:22

For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the LORD, And He watches all his paths. ²² His own iniquities will capture the wicked, And he will be held with the cords of his sin.

God gives people over to what they seek and their sin exacts its toll on them. Sin is destructive.

Proverbs 17:11

A rebellious man seeks only evil, So a cruel messenger will be sent against him.

God will use cruel messengers and merciless officials to inflict their toll. These are often people in authority in the life of the prodigal. In the parable of the prodigal son, note that "no one was giving anything to him". There was no mercy or compassion from those around him, only cruel indifference.

II Peter 3:9

The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.

Because of God' patience this may go on for many years.

Proverbs 29:1

A man who hardens *his* neck after much reproof Will suddenly be broken beyond remedy.

If the prodigal continues in sin the next level of penalty is a permanent loss of some type in part of their life. In the parable of the prodigal son what permanent loss did he experience? The loss of his inheritance. As a result he most likely had to work until he died since he had no inheritance to draw on in his old age.

Psalms 89:30-32, 45

"If his sons forsake My law And do not walk in My judgments, ³¹ If they violate My statutes And do not keep My commandments, ³² Then I will punish their transgression with the rod And their iniquity with stripes....⁴⁵ You have shortened the days of his youth; You have covered him with shame.

If the prodigal still continues in their sin the result will often be a shortening of their lives.

In some cases, the prodigal is not only walking away from God but is also dishonoring their parents. This brings its own consequences.

(Deuteronomy 27:16)

'Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'

(Ephesians 6:2-3)

HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER (which is the first commandment with a promise),³ SO THAT IT MAY BE WELL WITH YOU, AND THAT YOU MAY LIVE LONG ON THE EARTH.

Proverbs 30:17

The eye that mocks a father And scorns a mother, The ravens of the valley will pick it out, And the young eagles will eat it (i.e. the person is dead and not buried)

Left unchecked and unrepentant such a prodigal will eventually end up physically dying as a result of their sin.

Psalms 106:19-23

They made a calf in Horeb And worshiped a molten image.²⁰ Thus they exchanged their glory For the image of an ox that eats grass.²¹ They forgot God their Savior, Who had done great things in Egypt,²² Wonders in the land of Ham And awesome things by the Red Sea.²³ Therefore He said that He would destroy them, Had not Moses His chosen one stood in the breach before Him, To turn away His wrath from destroying them.

(Ezekiel 18:23)

Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord God, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?

With much prayer by those who love them, the prodigals can be saved from an early death but will experience pain, suffering, permanent loss, and humiliation. Prayer for prodigals, combined with the consequences of taking such a path, are very effective at bringing prodigals to repentance. We don't need to badger them or preach to them or try to make them feel bad. God will take care of all of that. Our job is to pray faithfully for them fully expecting them to repent and return to God at some point.

Why Honor Parents?

One of the reasons God commands us to honor our parents is because without them you would not have the skills to be successful in life (skills we don't even know we have because we take them for granted) and without parents, who would be faithful to pray the prodigals back from an early death and to repentance?

In 1944 the US Government passed the GI Bill (the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944) to help soldiers returning from World War 2 go to college. These men had been trained by the military and knew exactly how to dress, wear their hair, respond appropriately to those in authority, and effectively carry out orders. While they were in college their military skills were hidden. They looked and acted as undisciplined as any of the other students.

But when it was time to graduate and companies came to campus to do hiring interviews, things changed. Without even thinking about it, the men trained by the military cut their hair, dressed and acted professionally, and had a tremendous advantage over the other students who didn't really know what to do.

In the same way, we benefit from all the skills our parents built into us that we are not even aware we have. Because of our parents we have these skills, but its up to us to decide if, when, and for what purposes we will use them.

Do's and Don'ts with Prodigals

You can't rescue them by making them a project. There is nothing you can say that will make a difference. Nevertheless you want to maintain a connection with them that can be a bridge back to the faith for them when they are ready. Prodigals are completely self-absorbed. They are not trying to push your buttons and they are not interested in how much what they are doing hurts you. They are not even thinking about you!

What will turn them around won't be anything you say or do. It will be because God, in answer to your prayers for them, changes their hearts and works the circumstances of their lives to draw them back to Himself.

(John 16:8-11)

And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; ⁹ concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; ¹⁰ and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; ¹¹ and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.

Convict: to convince of error or sinfulness

(John 6:44)

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day

The word used for draw means to drag something that is resisting, like fish in a net. Your prayers for the prodigal can result in God drawing them to Himself, even as they struggle to resist!

"The secret prayer chamber is a bloody battleground. Here violent and decisive battles are fought out. Here the fate of souls for time and eternity is determined, in quietude and solitude, without another soul as spectator or listener." – Ole Hallesby, *Prayer*, Augsburg Books, 1994, page 99.

(II Timothy 2:24-26)

The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, ²⁶ and they may come to their senses *and* escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

Our job is to pray for them, be patient when wronged, be gentle, and avoid arguments.

As God works in them in answer to our prayers the things He uses to bring them to their senses and to repentance will be similar to what He used with the prodigal son (i.e. my father's hired men have plenty to eat, but not me).

Things like (ref #1):

- 1) I saw the face of a happy young boy and I thought, "Why don't I smile like that?"
- 2) I could not buy a simple hamburger. I didn't have enough money. I finally said, "What have I come to?"
- 3) I saw a young woman on the subway with such perfect and beautiful hair. She moved her head and her hair caught the light and just shone. Mine had been neglected and unwashed for so long that I said, "I used to have hair like that. What has happened to me?"

Appendix: How You Can Help a Prodigal (ref #1)

- 1) Provide advice but don't badger. Advising is sharing a new idea with someone who might find the information helpful. Badgering is repeating our views over and over so they know how much we disapprove. Tell them something once, then never mention it again, unless they ask.
- 2) Prodigals don't always fully understand why they are doing what they are doing. Badgering them does not help. Instead let them know you care about them and value the relationship regardless of what they do so that they know there is a path back to faith if they change their mind.
- 3) If you are not "on their back" it gives God a chance to work in their life instead of them blaming their bad life on you being "on their back".
- 4) You need to protect yourself and others from the destruction of their actions but don't try to protect them.
- 5) We need to balance letting them "have it their way" and not shutting down the relationship so that they have a way to come back when they decide they want to. Once they find out the path they are on is not a good one, what then? Is there a relationship in place that enables them to comfortably reestablish contact? What can you do together that you both enjoy without having an argument? Be prepared to not respond negatively to prompts from them during these times.
- 6) Don't quote from the Bible. They have already rejected it. But you can use other information such as apologetics to show them the validity of a position. You are the only "Bible" they are reading.
- 7) Prompt them to share their position on things and to explain it without interruption. Focus on listening and understanding their position. Only after they have talked it out can you ask permission to share your position. If they say no, then don't.
- 8) Keep having an attitude of loving them no matter what. Kindness, respect, concern, lack of condemnation, asking questions. Be the Christian who can disagree with them 100% and still find them valuable and lovable.
- 9) When prodigals return they often do it slowly as they develop their own belief system. Don't expect too much too fast –take it slowly as they find their way back.

Appendix: Prodigals & Parenting

Prodigals are not a result of bad parenting. Parenting has an influence but does not result in control. Prodigals are prodigals for one reason only – they choose to be.

Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go, Even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs are sayings that, in general, are true but are not intended to be promises or formulas. Some are but some are not. For example, in Proverbs 15:1 a gentle answer does not always turn away wrath but it often does and is a best practice to follow.

Proverbs 15:1

A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger.

This verse describes what is most likely to happen in most situations but it does not prescribe what will always happen in all situations. Nevertheless, God wants us to put into practice giving a gentle answer rather than a harsh one because the results will be better for us in most cases – but not every case. The other person still has the freedom to respond with wrath, even if we do everything right!

Proverbs 22:6 falls into this same category. It is generally true but is not a prescriptive formula.

On the other hand Proverbs 14:31 prescribes an absolute

Proverbs 14:31

He who oppresses the poor taunts his Maker, But he who is gracious to the needy honors Him.

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Option 1 – Going Prodigal*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *1 Corinthians 3:11*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Revelation 3:15-17*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Matthew 13:20-23*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Option 1 – Going Prodigal*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Luke 15:11-17*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Galatians 6:7-8*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalms 83:13-16*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Option 1 – Going Prodigal*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Jeremiah 31:18-20*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Ecclesiastes 11:9-10*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Proverbs 5:22*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Option 1 – Going Prodigal*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Proverbs 17:11*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *II Peter 3:9*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Proverbs 29:1*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Option 1 – Going Prodigal*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalm 89:30-32 & 45*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Deuteronomy 27:16, Ephesians 6:2-3, Proverbs 30:17*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *Psalm 106:19-23, Ezekiel 18:23*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

QUIET TIMES ALONE WITH GOD

JEREMIAH 15:16

THEME: *Option 1 – Going Prodigal*

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *John 16:8-11*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *John 6:44*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?

PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION: *II Timothy 2:24-26*

How does this passage relate to the theme?

When I reflect on this passage, does it primarily convict, encourage or challenge me? Explain why:

How will I apply this passage to my life in the coming week and is there anything I can do today to make this passage a part of my Christian life?