

...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembly together...but encouraging one another.
Heb 10:24-25

Share the teaching
Guard the sharing

Male Call

February 29, 2008—The Prodigal Son—Part IIIb—the Father (as me)

6:00 – 6:05	Coffee & Donuts Opening Prayer
6:05 – 7:00	<p>1) Reflections on the lost sons and the father</p> <p>2) Context of the parable—what is the precipitating event? a) Lk 15:1-3</p> <p>3) The Prodigal Son a) Luke 15:11-32</p> <p>4) Rembrandt's <i>The Return of the Prodigal Son</i> a) Nouwen's reflection on the painting</p> <p><i>When I first saw the detail of Rembrandt's Prodigal Son, a spiritual journey was set in motion that led me to write this book. As I now come to its conclusion, I discover how long a journey I have made.</i></p> <p><i>From the beginning, I was prepared to accept that not only the younger son, but also the elder son would reveal to me an important aspect of my spiritual journey. For a long time, the father remained "the other," the one who would receive me, forgive me, offer me a home, and give me peace and joy. The father was the place to return to, the goal of the journey, the final resting place. It was only gradually and often quite painfully that I came to realize that my spiritual journey would never be complete as long as the father remained an outsider.</i></p> <p><i>It dawned on me that even my best theological and spiritual formation had not been able to completely free me from a Father God who remained somewhat threatening and somewhat fearsome. All I had learned about the Father's love had not fully enabled me to let go of an authority above me who had power over me and would use it according to his will. Somehow, God's love for me was limited by my fear of God's power, and it seemed wise to keep a careful distance even though the desire for closeness was immense. I know that I share this experience with countless others. I have seen how the fear of becoming subject to God's revenge and punishment has paralyzed the mental and emotional lives of many people, independently of their age, religion, or life-style. This paralyzing fear of God is one of the great human tragedies.</i></p> <p><i>[The] final stage of the spiritual life is to so fully let go of all fear of the Father that it becomes possible to become fully like him. As long as the Father</i></p>

*evokes fear, he remains an outsider and cannot dwell within me.*¹

- 5) Our spiritual journey
 - a) Younger son
 - b) Older son
 - i) We easily identify with the sons. The real question is:
Are you interested in being like the father?²
 - c) The father
 - i) Our call to be a father
 - (1) 1Cor 13:11-13
 - (2) Mt 14:13-16
 - (3) Lk 6:32-36
 - (4) Jn 13:34
 - (5) Gal 2:21
 - (6) 1Pet 1:16
 - d) Some ways our religious and societal culture encourages us to remain as sons:
 - i) Faith of a child vs. love of a child
 - ii) Consumer culture
 - iii) Me-centered culture
- 6) Jesus' modeling:
 - a) Shows us how to be a perfect son: Jn 5:18-19
 - i) Father-centered
 - b) Shows us how to be a perfect father: Jn 14:9, 15:13
 - i) Other-centered
 - c) Shows us the total freedom in being a father and son from freely giving; one has nothing left to lose:
 - i) Jn 10:17-18

To claim for myself spiritual fatherhood and the authority of compassion that belongs to it, I have to let the rebellious younger son and the resentful elder son step up on the platform to receive the unconditional, forgiving love that the Father offers me, and to discover there the call to be home as my Father is home.
*Then both sons in me can be gradually transformed into the compassionate father.*³

I can only be a father if I let myself be a son who dwells in my Father's house and experiences the Father's love.
- 7) Three ways I can become a father
 - a) Grief
 - i) My sins, your sins, the world's sins pierce my heart; when I see them through God's eyes, I cannot help but cry out in grief and prayer
 - b) Forgiveness
 - i) Unconditional

¹ Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, 120-121.

² Ibid. 122.

³ Ibid. 133.

	<p>ii) Only possible when genuine grief is experienced iii) Often misunderstood; more to come in the coming weeks on this</p> <p>c) Generosity</p> <p>i) Hold nothing back ii) Mt 14:16-18 iii) Jn 15:13</p> <p>8) Questions for reflection:</p> <p>a) Do you have a view of the Father that keeps him outside? b) If you became a father today to the best of your ability, how would your relationships change? c) What would the world be like if everyone <i>received</i> compassion?</p>
7:00	Closing Prayer

Further reading:

- *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming*, Henri Nouwen
- *The Better Part*, Thomas Keating
- *Your God is Too Small*, J.P. Phillips