Tough Love and The Prodigal Son
By Greggory Hruby

A few weeks back we learned about 'Loving the Unlovable'... How each of us have our own unique way of responding to situations to reclaim our dignity from others' hurtful words and actions... ... and... how God teaches us to Love well through self sacrifice and forgiveness as He loves us. We also learned that we too are unlovable at times due to our sinful nature and Scripture showed us how Jesus responds to the unlovable.... Ultimately, loving the sinner but rebuking the sin which is the model we are to follow in our everyday lives. Finally, we discovered that once we forgive ourselves as our Father in heaven has forgiven us we are freed to manifest God's Love to the lost through that same forgiveness...

I am sure most of you are familiar with the “Footprints in the Sand” poem... as I was browsing through some videos on sermonsplace.com I came across this cute little parody to that poem... ... It goes something like this:

“One night, I had a wondrous dream.
A set of prints on the sand was seen
The footprints of my precious Lord
Yet mine were not along the shore
But then a stranger print appeared
I asked the Lord, what have we here
This print is large and round and neat
But Lord it's just too big for feet
My child he said in somber tones
for miles I carried you alone
I challenged you to seek my face
Take up your cross and walk in grace
You disobeyed, you would not grow
You would not stand against the flow
your neck was stiff, your ears were shut
So there I dropped you on your butt!
Because in life there comes a time
When one must fight, when one must climb
When one must rise and take a stand
or leave ones butt print in the sand.”
Pure Divine Love is also tough Love as presented in this funny little poem. God never stops carrying us, yet through our struggles in life we tend to kick and rebel against God's will, until we become the cause for being dropped on our butt. We are the ones that choose to walk away from God's will and grace through rebellion...

There was this boy who rebelled even though his parents raised him with fair and loving discipline. His dad, in fact was a well-respected leader... When this boy reached high school age, his mom and dad sent him to a private Christian boarding school with the hopes that the moral and structured environment would have a positive impact on him. But, instead the boy had a negative impact on his classmates: breaking rules; smoking; and sneaking into town to drink. After high school his parents enrolled him in a Christian college. But again his drinking and fighting got him into trouble. The school finally kicked him out after he disappeared for several days with a co-ed... his mom and dad tried everything to straighten him out. They even sent him to a Middle East country to work with some missionary friends. The boy, now growing into a man did construction by day, and drank his private supply of scotch by night. He was the epitome of a prodigal son. You may have heard of his daddy – Billy Graham, the famous evangelist.

I know a lot of moms and dads who are brokenhearted by the problem of wayward kids. I even personally know of a person who was a prodigal son. Me. … Maybe you have a son or daughter who's gotten kicked out of school, or abusing drugs, or who has moved in with his or her girlfriend or boyfriend, or who has gotten pregnant out of wedlock... or even cut themselves off from the family. You don't know what to do and you've been keeping it to yourself because you feel like a failure as a parent.

One of the reasons that I told you about Billy Graham's son Franklin is because his mom and dad had good reason to keep their prodigal son a secret – but they didn't. In fact, in Franklin's autobiography, Rebel With a Cause, he tells about the time he needed some money from his dad... He rode over to his father's office on his motorcycle, tore up pants and long hair flapping in the wind... … and when he got there, Billy Graham was in a board meeting surrounded by important people. But when Dr. Graham learned that his son had arrived... … He invited him in and introduced him to each of the board members. Years later Franklin wrote: “I never forgot that feeling. My dad wasn't ashamed of me.” The other reason is because it has a joyful ending. Franklin is now a world-renowned evangelist as well as the president of Samaritan’s Purse, a Christian relief organization.

There may be a happy ending to the story of your prodigal child – if not for your child, at least for you!

Prodigal literally means wasteful. As illustrated in Franklin Graham's story, a prodigal son is one who throws away two times the resources, opportunities and moral standards. Please pull out your Bibles and turn to the book of Luke, chapter 15. We are going to break down the story of the prodigal son and reveal six Biblical
principles for dealing with a prodigal child. – READ verse 11-13

The younger son, in this story, was probably in his late teens. He was tired of living at home. He wanted his part of the family inheritance early so that he could move out on his own. The cultural context of the times was one where the estate wouldn't be broken up until the death of the father. So the younger son's request indicated that, as far as he was concerned, his dad was as good as dead... Great son, huh!... But, even though this request was out of the ordinary and way out of the social norm... the father obliged and gave the younger son what he wanted. After receiving his cut he ran off with it and squandered it. Look at verse 13, the word squandered. It comes from a verb that means, literally, to toss into the wind. That's what he did with his wealth. He wasted it. He threw it all away which is exactly how he got the title of Prodigal Son. Verse 13 also says that he blew it on wild living. If we look ahead to verse 30 we see that this included, among other things, prostitutes.

What do you do with a child like this?

1. **Reject false guilt, confess true guilt.** I may be reading between the lines... But I would like to point out the observation that Jesus nowhere, in this story, blames the parents for the behavior of his prodigal son. What had the dad done wrong to produce a son like this? Evidently … nothing! If your a parent of a prodigal, reject false guilt.

2. **Exercise Tough Love.** Let me ask you a couple of questions about this part of the story. First, When the younger son wanted to take his money and spend it on wild living. What did the father do? He let the boy go and he didn't chase after his son. Now, you need to hear this... Listen... If the boy wanted to continue at home while engaging in wild living... his dad would have shown him the door. Mom's and dad's, we're not helping our prodigals by providing them with room and board while engaging in this kind of activity... we're enabling them. We're supporting their behavior by putting a roof over their head... We need to say, 'Change your behavior... or change your address. Second, when the younger son became so destitute that he was eating pig food, what did the father do? Nothing... He allowed the boy to experience the full consequences of his behavior. He refused to bail his son out... … and the consequences were pretty bad. … Why didn't the father intervene? Was it that he didn't know how bad off his son was? NO... This was a wise father.... He knew the score. He was allowing his son to experience the law of reaping what you sow. The Apostle Paul sums up this law in Galatians chapter 6 verses 6 and 8. “God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.” … … We reap what we sow. As such, we've got to allow our children to reap what they sow. If we keep bailing them out, if we keep taking their side against authority figures, if we keep protecting or sheltering them from the consequences of their behavior, they will never change. This is tough love at it's finest...

3. **Saturate your mind with God's Word.** This won't change your prodigal but it will change the way you
look at your situation. See, we all tend to look at bad circumstances, like having a prodigal child, as being out of control. Truth is, they are the ones out of control. Yet, they are NOT out of the control of a sovereign God. We may be sitting at home wringing our hands, moaning what can we do? But God is not... He is in control... How do we know that God is in control of our situation? The Bible says so... and if we turn to his word, our storm becomes much much calmer...

4. **Pray!** Looking back at verses 17-20 in the prodigal son parable an interesting transition occurs in verse 17. Up to this point we have been looking everything from an external perspective... … But, in these verses we are allowed to get a peek into the prodigals thoughts. Jesus does this very deliberately. He wants us to understand even though nothing has changed on the outside of the prodigals life, something has changed on the inside. … … He has come to his senses so to speak... In verse 17 he wants to go home. He has been humbled and is ready to repent. What brought about this change of heart? I think the pig pen had a little to do with it, but a lot of prodigals choose to stay in the pigpen. What makes this one different? The parable doesn't say, but if I had to guess... based on the rest of Scripture... I would think that this boy's parents were praying for him. Prayer is the only power that can cause someone else to change on the inside! Scripture is clear when it states that we are all engaged in a spiritual war... It's good vs. evil, in each and every one of our lives... and in the lives of our kids!

5. **Keep an Open Door.** Looking at verse 20, This dad saw his boy while he was still a long way off... How is that? It's because he had been praying for his son's return. The dad's response to his son's coming home is amazing! He ran to the boy, wrapped his arms around him and gave him a bear hug and covered him with kisses. The context of this is huge!!! In middle eastern culture a father would NEVER, ever embrace his wayward son in this way! In essence this dad is breaking all social norms of the time... It even gets better. The boy is given a new robe; a ring... he was now back in the family.... and a feast with a fattened calf... Meat was rarely consumed at meals in first century Palestine... it was reserved for religious holy days! What a welcome.... WHAT A DAD!

6. **As hard as it may be... Personally Move On.** The greatest thing you can do for your prodigal is to live the most Godly, wonderful, exciting, joy-filled, abundant Christian life as evidence of your relationship with Christ. Your life will testify to the fact that there is no happier life, no more fulfilling life than that one found in abiding with Jesus daily. … … In time, your prodigal will see Christ in you! What if your prodigal remains a prodigal? You have to get on with your own life... Do what God has called you to do. If your heart-broken about our child, which I truly would be... … God would want you to roll up your sleeves and get involved in youth ministry as a volunteer... Why not pour yourself into kids who are interested in following Christ? … … That is exactly what Mrs. Graham did while her son Franklin was sowing his wild oats. She started a Bible study for college students. Many of the young men and women she invested in were friends of her son!... Hey, if he wasn't going to respond, she put her time into those who would.
As a closing thought… … Some of you have prodigals, I… we would like to pray with you and for you… There are prayer cards in the pew's. Please place your child's name on the prayer card and drop them at the office and we will pray for them.

My friends, some of you may be prodigals yourselves as I was, both toward God and your parents… it's time you made peace with your parents and with God… Some of you have friends at school who are prodigals. Join us as we pray in silence for them.

(Allow a few minuets of silence for reflective prayer)

--- 28 to 30 min to present.