

# The Mercy Of God

God's love is greater than that of a mother for her child. God wishes to reach out to anyone who needs forgiveness.

The marathon gets its name from Marathon, a town in ancient Greece. In 490 BC a runner, Pheidippides, ran all the way from Marathon to Athens, the main city, to tell people of a great victory against the Persians, an enemy of Greece. The runner collapsed after gasping out the news.



The distance between heaven and earth cannot be measured. Yet, God crossed that distance to reach human beings, to become a human with us. Like the runner of ancient Greece, he came to bring good news. He came to bring victory over sin. He came to show us that nothing is greater than the mercy of God. He died a horrible death. But even death could not hold him. He rose from the dead. He is always with us.

*Jesus told a famous story about how God is like a merciful father.*

## The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

Jesus went on to say, "There was once a man who had two sons. The younger one said to him, 'Father, give me my share of the property now.' So the man divided his property between his two sons. After a few days the younger son sold his part of the property and left home with the money. He went to a country far away, where he wasted his money in reckless living. He spent everything he had. Then a severe famine spread over that country, and he was left without a thing. So he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to take care of the pigs. He wished he could fill himself with the bean pods the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything to eat. At last he came to his senses and said, 'All my father's hired workers have more than they can eat, and here I am about

to starve! I will get up and go to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired workers.' So he got up and started back to his father. He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms round his son, and kissed him. 'Father,' the son said, 'I have sinned against God and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.' But the father called his servants. 'Hurry!' he said. 'Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Then go and get the prize calf and kill it, and let us celebrate with a feast! For this son of mine was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now he has been found.' And so the feasting began."

YOU MAY know this parable quite well. However, you will understand it better if you consider some background details.

- *In Jewish families of that time, the father was in charge; he was the head of the family.*
- *Pigs are unclean animals in the Jewish religion.*
- *The younger son's request is a terrible insult. It's like saying, 'I can't wait until you die for my share of the property.'*

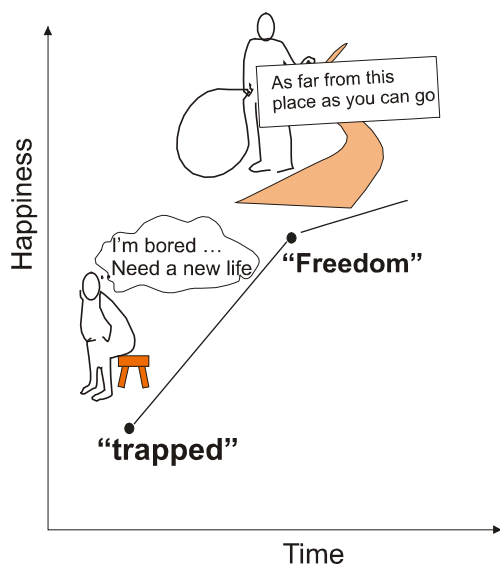
**PRODIGAL - wasteful**  
**RECKLESS - foolish, without thought**

## OLDER SON, JOEL, HOLDS PRESS CONFERENCE

- Q1 David from the Jerusalem Times: Why have you called this press conference?*
- Joel Well, you may know by now that my younger brother, Jacob, has come back after his years away. I wish to put it on record that I consider him no longer my brother.
- Q2 Rachel from the South Jordan News: You seem to hate Jacob – why?*
- Joel I do hate him. He had the nerve to ask for his share of the property. He gets it, sells it, goes away and wastes the money. Then he comes crawling back like a dog now he's penniless. Worst of all, my father throws a huge party for him, gives him the best of everything. The party's in full swing now if you care to listen.
- Q3 Ruth from the Jericho Mail: What do you think should happen to Jacob?*
- Joel After what he's done, he should be whipped like a dog and sent back to the pigs. He wanted to go away; let him stay away.
- Q4 (Ruth) Your father seems to disagree.*
- Joel My father's an old man; I really think he's gone soft in the head. Do you know, after Jacob left my father would wait for hours at the window watching the road. I thought he would accept it and get on with his life; but no, he was the same every day until this very day. Then he makes an idiot of himself and goes running out to meet that waster. Meanwhile, I have had to keep the farm and business going almost single handedly.
- Q5 Daniel from the Bethlehem Star: What do you plan to do now?*
- Joel I plan to resign from this family and start up on my own. I'll take my share of the property and see how father likes it. As far as I'm concerned, I have no father and brother any more. Thank you, no further questions.

### To do (individually or in pairs)

- 1 Imagine you were drawing a 'graph' of the younger son's ups and downs. Put in the key moments on your graph.



2

***“He was still a long way from home when his father saw him; his heart was filled with pity, and he ran, threw his arms round his son, and kissed him.”***

- i) Explain how the sentence above shows the love of the father for his son (aim to write five points).
- ii) What message about God did Jesus want the people to get in this story?

Some would say the older son was right to stay away from the party to welcome the younger son back.

Explain your opinion about this.