

## The Parable of The Compassionate Father - Pete Greig

- How about beginning the new term with communion in your group?

### Luke 15v11-24

This story has inspired artists, annoyed legalists, rattled cages of religion and has brought hope to peoples whose lives are broken and messy. For example: Rembrandt; [File:Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn - Return of the Prodigal Son - Google Art Project.jpg](#). and Charlie Mackesy; <https://www.charliemackesy.com/sculptures>

This story is really about The Father c/f Peter Burton's message last week:

### The Father: A picture of our Heavenly Father God

- He was effectively 'wished dead' by his son. V12 Culturally unacceptable even in our day.
- More shocking - he gives the son what he requests. V12 and divvies his whole life's hard work up into two.
- He is looking for his son to return and saw him even when he was a long way off V20 and ran to him. This was very undignified for someone in Jesus' culture to do - they wore long robes which involved pulling them up to run and getting hot and sweaty. God is undignified for us - think of Jesus naked on the cross. Jesus' hearers would have been shocked.
- Such is his compassion that he embraces his son - who is not only physically filthy, but religiously unclean because he has been tending to pigs. This would have also been profoundly shocking to his audience.
- His son has no sandals - like servants - The Father refuses his request to return as a servant by clothing him in the best robe and giving him sandals - thus making him equal with the family members.
- He says 'bring a ring' this was effectively the credit card of the day and signified trust in his son.

### The Son: A picture of our shame

- Is he really repentant so much as hungry? V17 says he came to his senses! There was no 'sorry'.
- He rehearses his 'coming home speech' but isn't allowed to finish it before his Father acts. V21
- He was the very picture of shame. Starving; Unkempt; Unclean and stinking; He had done everything that was most repugnant to the Jewish people of the day so he had failed in his faith.

### **For Reflection in Collective:**

God's response to us is Compassion, not an automaton of love. You can't fit God in a test tube. He's pulsing, loving, colourful, creative, joyful, life-giving, forgiving, gracious, beautiful Being, and is obsessed with you! He says, "I trust you, I'm proud of you. Let's throw a party!" **How would being sure of this transform our lives?**

Rom 5v8 *God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

While we were physically, mentally, and spiritually unhygienic God threw his arms around us and kissed us. Yes, repentance is vital but notice that the son hasn't yet apologised to his Father. Grace is more powerful than sin. God is relational rather than transactional. The person is always more important than the principle. God does not regret choosing you. Whatever we feel about ourselves, God loves us.

1 Sam 12v22 *For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own.* We are not a disappointment to God - he believes in us! **Do we sometimes feel that we are a disappointment to God or have done something that means he couldn't love us?**

There is always more grace in God than sin in you. Nothing you've said or done, nothing you could say or do that will separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. It's not about your performance, He is never disillusioned about you because He has no illusions of you. He is a God of grace, restoration and reconciliation. Raniero Cantalamessa says that God's love is the answer to all the "whys" in the Bible. The single message is: The Father loves you! This will change our lives. See Rom 8v15-17. **How would this affect the way we look at others who have 'fallen from Grace'?**

### **For Personal Reflection:**

What does shame look like for me? What's hooked into my heart? What's the worst in me?