

The Prodigal - 1 of 2

by David Ravenhill

David Ravenhill's sermon explores the parable of the Prodigal Son, emphasizing the importance of valuing lost souls over material possessions and critiquing the Pharisees' attitudes towards sinners.

Duration: 1:16:51

Scripture: Psalm 62:10, Matthew 6:33, Luke 10:19-20, Luke 15:4-32

Topics: "Gods Mercy", "Family Values"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the parable of the prodigal son from Luke chapter 15. He emphasizes the character of the father in the story, highlighting his wealth, generosity, compassion, forgiveness, and love. The speaker also discusses the responsibility of fathers to provide for their children, as stated in the Bible. He then delves into the story of the younger son who asks for his share of the inheritance and squanders it in loose living. The sermon encourages listeners to examine their own values and reminds them of God's mercy and grace.

Transcript

Well, good evening. Let's pray, shall we? Father, we thank you again for your presence. Thank you, Lord, for your Word.

Lord, just open our minds, open our understanding. Father, we ask that again this would be God-breathed tonight. Lord, even as your Word was first delivered, inspire it all over again.

Bring it to life in each one of us, Lord. Father, you said your Word is for reproof, for correction, for training. Lord, reprove us where we need to be reproved.

Correct us, Lord, where we need to be corrected. Train us. Lord, have your way, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Turn, if you will, to Luke chapter 15, and I want us to look at possibly the best known story in the Bible, the longest parable that Jesus ever gave. It's an entire chapter, 32 verses.

It is one single parable, although different expositors have divided it into three sections. At least you know the latter part of the parable. It's the story of the prodigal son.

But the Bible says he told them this parable. It's not three parables, it's one parable. It's a rebuttal, if you like, a reproof, a correction to the scribes and the Pharisees because of their attitude towards what Jesus

was doing.

What Jesus was doing was he was making a beeline to sinners. That's basically what the word means there. It says, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

I looked up that word receives. It means to make a motion towards and to cherish. Interesting.

In other words, sinners were irresistible to Jesus. What a beautiful picture. He loved sinners.

In fact, the Bible says he was a friend of publicans and sinners, not friendly. We're taught to be friendly. You go into some establishment, the bank, and you know, if they know you by name, how are you, Mr. Ravenhill? Good to see you again.

You know, have a nice day. That's good customer relations, customer service, but they're not a friend. Jesus was a friend of publicans and sinners.

And it says in verse one, now the tax gatherers and sinners were coming near to listen to him. These were what William Barclay refers to as the men of the land or the people of the land, people that were despised by the religious community. And the scribes and the Pharisees in verse two stood there grumbling.

They were irate. They were upset with the man who called himself the son of God, this man who dared to refer to himself as the son of God that he would associate with sinners. Tax gatherers were Jews that had sold themselves out to Rome to gather taxes.

They gathered taxes for a profit. They were the IRS of the day. We all love the IRS, don't we? But these were despised because Israel was to be the head and not the tail.

They were to be above and not beneath. They were to lend but not borrow. And here they are under the servitude of the Romans, which was a terrible thing for the Jews to admit that they were in bondage and servitude, let alone to have some of their fellow men side with the Romans and go around and collect taxes.

Sinners were just simply non-practicing Jews, of course, as were tax gatherers, and we would call them backslidden Christians, I guess. They, you know, never showed up in the temple. They never paid tithes.

They just had nothing to do with God. And yet those were the people that Jesus loved. And he makes a beeline towards them.

He sat down with them. He ate with them. He ministered to them.

He demonstrated the love of God towards them, and the religious community just stood there a little, I mean, bristling, angry that this man again would dare to associate with sinners. And so that's the background to this particular parable. And so he told them a parable saying.

Now let me give you a little bit of a background about the Pharisees because the Pharisees, according to most expositors, sprung up around the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. And they came into being as a godly group of individuals, a movement that saw the nation of Israel mingling with the nations and learning their practices, all the intermarriage that was going on, the carnality, the corruption, the mixture. And they began to separate themselves.

In fact, that's what the word Pharisee means. It means separated. They were the holiness crowd of their day, at least when they began.

And they started off as a movement that sought to please God, but ended up as a movement that provoked God. Amazing, isn't it? Let me say that again. They started off as a movement to please God and ended up as a movement to provoke God.

They started off with a love relationship and ended up with a legal relationship. They started off with passion and ended up again just with performance and ritual and so on and so forth. I mean, there was a change that took place over the years.

And the Bible warns us, Jesus even warns us, about the eleven of the Pharisees. In other words, it's possible for you and I to become Pharisaical, to love our, to lose our passion, to lose our relationship with God, to end up in ritual, routine, just a sort of religiosity, if you like. They were people that loved to be referred to in the marketplace by titles, rabbi, master, teacher, so on, apostle, prophet.

No, sorry, that crept in there. They loved the utmost seats in the synagogue. They liked recognition.

They liked to, you know, be sitting there. In fact, the Bible says the Pharisees loved the utmost seats in the synagogue, nothing to do with the front row. But they liked, you know, they liked the special places, a special recognition, and so on.

They loved to pray, but not because they desired fellowship or communion with the Lord, but to be seen by men. They stood there on the street corner, rain or shine, you know, praying away piously, and everybody would walk by and say, you know, every time I go to get my latte, that guy is outside of Starbucks. I mean, I've seen him every single day this week and every day last week.

I mean, he is always on that corner. What an incredibly godly man. I mean, it doesn't matter what's going, that man, you know, but he loved to hear that.

That was why he stood there. That was the only reason he stood there, because he loved to hear people walk by and say, boy, he's still there, you know, he prays there every single day, you know, whatever. They loved to memorize scripture, not because they had a hunger for the word of God, but because they could display their knowledge.

They had phylacteries, as they call them, little leather pouches, and they would roll up the scriptures, I guess, that they memorized, and the more that they had, you know, they looked like an old English sheepdog, you know, you can barely see through there, or like a fly fisherman with all these corks and these flies, you know, but I mean, they walked down the street with these things, and the more you had, of course, the more spiritual you were. I've memorized more scriptures than you, you know, and so, you know, that was a sign of their spirituality. They wore it outwardly, but they loved to do that.

The Bible says they were lovers of money. They had a love for money, and you can read that, I think it's in the next chapter there, where Jesus is saying you cannot serve God and mammon. Verse 14, the Pharisees who were lovers of money, and what do we know about the love of money? The root of all evil.

So it tells you something about how these people lost their way. They started off well, but here they are now, supposedly God's representatives, and if there's one thing Jesus did not want his father being represented by, it was these particular crowd. In fact, some of the harshest language that Jesus gave, he

gave to the religious community.

Isn't that right? That was the ones, listen, if you guys are going to represent me, let me get it, let me tell the crowd right now, this is not the type of people that represent the father, you know. My father is not like that. That's basically what this parable is about, and so he begins by, well, let me go back for a moment, because you might find this interesting.

I did some research years ago, and I've yet to find a book again, and people have said, where did you get that? But believe me, I did read this in a book, that there were varying degrees of Phariseeism, you know, almost like the Masonic order, you know, 33 degrees. They didn't have quite that many, but there were about seven levels, and the most severe, or the most spiritual, supposedly, were referred to as the bloody Pharisees. They were referred to as the bloody Pharisees for the simple reason that they went around with their heads down, and the reason they went around with their heads down, because they were, they took this idea of being separated so seriously that they may lust after some woman, or covet somebody's possessions, or whatever, and so not to lust, and not to, you know, covet something, they would go like, you know, walk around like this.

Consequently, they're always bumping into things, and falling over, stumbling, and so on, and so they were known literally as the bloody Pharisees, at least I'm giving you what one expositor said, but that's how fanatical they were, but they had certainly lost their way, you know, the love of God had certainly waxed cold over the years, and so Jesus is addressing them, because he sees, again, what is going on. Here they are, again, bristling with anger at the fact that he receives sinners, and that's what they said, this man receives sinners. He makes a motion towards them.

He loves them. He cherishes them. He makes a beeline, as the way I would put it, towards sinners.

Not only that, he eats with them. I mean, he literally sits down and fellowships with these, that we would consider the scum of the earth. The people of the land is what William Barclay refers to them as, and so Jesus begins, and he begins by dealing with priorities.

What man among you, if he had a hundred sheep, and then to give the women equal opportunity, in verse 8, what woman among you, if she has ten coins, and she loses one, and so the whole thing is here, is based here on your value system, wrong values, and he says, you know, listen you guys, referring to the scribes and pharisees, if you lost one sheep, you would search until you find it. That's the value that you put on a sheep. I like what he says, you search until.

In other words, there's no sort of statute of limitations here. There's no, well, we gave up. You know, how many of you know, every year we lose people on these climbing expeditions up in Washington State, and up where the mountains are, and so on, and somebody will go out, and a blizzard condition will come on Mount Rainier, one of those mountains we used to live up there, and a search party will be sent out, and as the days go by, the search diminishes.

We're calling off the search now. It's been three days. There's no possible way that these people could remain alive under these conditions, and so on, and so forth, and then finally, the search is given up.

Jesus said, that's not the case. You search until. You don't give up, and so he commends them, in one sense, for the determination, the diligence, the persistence, the fact that they are so committed to one lost sheep.

Why? Because one lost sheep represents value to them. This lost sheep, again, can bring money. It is worth something, monetarily.

In other words, and the same thing, of course, with the woman. She loses the piece of coin. They were more concerned about the temporal things, than they were about the eternal things.

They were more concerned about the natural things, than they were the spiritual things, and it's easy, isn't it, to have a wrong sense of value. Esau had wrong values. He sold his birth right, for the moment's satisfaction, and gratification of a bowl of chili.

Nothing about the chili today, ladies, but you know, that red stuff. Give me some of that red stuff. I mean, he loved chili, I guess, and you know, that's, listen, I'm willing to sell everything that I have coming to me, spiritually, in order to get something that will satisfy my temporal needs, and how often, again, we do the same thing.

I had just started looking into this parable, and it's been a parable that, for the last couple of months, has really, sort of, reached out, and got a hold of me. There's times when you get a hold of the Word of God. There's other times, when the Word of God gets a hold of you, and I'll come to the essence of what I want to say in a minute, but I was flying to Malaysia, and had a stopover in Japan, not to speak, but to change planes, and I was sitting with my briefcase, and I realized that, you know, I should take a picture of what it was like, and so I reached in my bag for my camera, and I was absolutely positive that I put it in there.

In fact, I remember specifically the compartment where I put it, and I put it down into the bottom of a particular compartment, and so on, and I ransacked my bag. I mean, I went through it three times. I went through every single compartment, then I went back.

I took some books out, and different things. I could not find that camera, and I was becoming, you know, more and more, sort of, infuriated with the fact that somebody had the audacity to reach into my bag somewhere, whether it was when I was flying, you know, to get to Japan, maybe in the middle of the night, or something, or, you know, while I was sleeping, somebody reached up and taken this camera. You know, I was trying to imagine.

I remember leaving my bag just momentarily in the Dallas airport to get a cup of tea in the airport lounge, and came back, and, you know, there was gentlemen sitting around, and I thought, you know, surely somebody couldn't have opened my bag and taken my camera. Absolutely convinced that I had it with me, and finally got to Singapore, and I called my wife, and one of the first things I said to her, apart from, you know, I've arrived safe, and so on, was, guess what? I've lost my camera, and it was a camera the kids had, you know, put some money together to buy me for Christmas, and the thing was virtually brand new, and she said, darling, you left it here, and I could not believe it. You know, I was a doubting Thomas.

I had to put my finger, I said, are you sure? She said, yeah, I just put it in the drawer. I said, does it have eye case on it? She said, I think so. I said, go get it.

You know, I said, open it up. She said, yeah, it says eye case on it. I said, open it up.

Does it say Canon on it? Yes. You know, I mean, I had to know, and that night, God said to me, listen, you put way too much value on something I don't value. You know, I thought, how could I get so upset about something that has no real eternal value to it, and this is what Jesus is saying here.

Your values, you will search until when it comes to a sheep, but you can care less about a lost sheep of the house of Israel that stands just a few feet away from you. You bristle with anger to think that God would be concerned about a lost individual, and yet you guys will search, it doesn't matter, and you will rejoice when you find it. I mean, that's the wrong value system.

The thing that makes you happy is getting back something that has monetary value. You'll call your friends. You'll have a barbecue.

You'll celebrate. You'll get all excited about this. In fact, according to William Barclay, and again, I'm just, you know, he's great on background material.

He said the Jews had a saying, and the saying was this. Let me read it to you. There is joy in heaven over one sinner who God obliterates.

That's what he said was a well-known saying amongst the Jews that God loves to just sort of, you know, execute sinners, and that's why Jesus said there's more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents in this parable, and so he takes again that saying, and he says you have no understanding of God's value system. Your value system is so twisted, so distorted, and so he's seeking here to, you know, put a mirror in front of them, show them their hypocrisy. Your values are wrong.

You rejoice. You'll go to extreme lengths, you ladies. You'll sweep the house.

You'll open every cupboard and so on, trying to find a piece of jewelry, and when you find it, you'll celebrate, but you have no compassion whatsoever when it comes to lust, and I realize that even in the church, we can have wrong values. We have more compassion for the unborn than the unsaved. That's going to hurt somebody, and I despise, like every one of us, I trust any thought of abortion, but there's something about that helpless little child that tugs at our heartstring, but when it comes to a lost soul, we have no compassion whatsoever.

The average Christian, somebody sent me an email recently, the average Christian has sung 20,000 songs, listened to 4,000 sermons, and led zero people to Christ. Let me say that again. We've sung 20,000 songs, the average Christian listened to 4,000 sermons and led zero people to Christ, our value system, yet we spend multiplied millions of dollars every year in the Christian community to protest outside abortion clinics and so on and so forth, and what if that child eventually, even if we do save that child, and 80 years later, that child goes to hell, what have we really saved? Nothing.

It's the lost soul that has value to God, and I'm not suggesting that we give up, you know, doing some of the things we're doing, I'm just saying it's so easy, isn't it, to have our value systems wrong. We can see an individual, and we couldn't care less about the individual, but something about that little baby within the womb that sort of tugs at our heartstrings, it's more of a natural compassion than a godly compassion, because if it was a godly compassion, we'd be after every soul. Rescue the perishing, care for the dying.

Jesus now goes into the part of the parable that I want to get into, and he says to them, a certain man had two sons, verse 11. The younger son said to his father, give me the share of the estate that befalls me, and he divided his wealth between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together, went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living.

When he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need, and he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and you know the story, and the problem

is, you know the story. You see, we are so familiar with this story, even if you have only been recently saved, it's one of those stories that seemingly is possibly the best known story in the Bible. In fact, Spurgeon referred to this as the pearl of all the parables.

Somebody else said this is the gospel within the gospel, and it's certainly out of all the parables that Jesus told, this is the best known parable, and the best known story in the word of God, and it's one of those stories that you just can't, you know, take a sort of a Kodak snapshot of. It would take an entire mural to sort of reveal. There's no one particular thing.

It's just so sort of pungent and pregnant with the meaning, but the problem is, because we know it so well, we get stuck in a rut. You know, if you take the same road over and over and over and over again, unless it's a concrete road, but, you know, typical road, you're going to get in a rut, and the car will automatically go along because there's a groove there that's being formed by a continual, you know, running over that same ground, and I think the same thing is true about this particular story. We've heard it over and over and over and over and over again, and so we make certain assumptions, and I want to, at least I hope, give you some fresh insight.

At least God has been speaking to me, and I think this is especially relevant, as I'll share in a few moments, but, you know, we take this young man, and he is a typical Dobson strong-willed child. Isn't that right? This is the kid that, you know, he's dressed in gothic. You know, he's got body piercing all over.

He's covered in tattoos. He's, you know, ever since he was a little kid, he's been drinking gallons of Ritalin. You know, he's the ADD child.

He's, you know, he's just, you know, he's just, you know, insubordinate, strong-willed, headstrong, stubborn, you know, can't wait to sort of sow his wild oats. I mean, that's the picture we have, right? And then, so it's no wonder, you know, that this kid went off the rails. I mean, we could see it coming.

We could see it even as he got up. His rebellion, his anger, you know, his all, I mean, that's the way we see this kid, and so it's no wonder when he comes of age, hey, dad, give me water, you know, and off he goes. Well, let me, let me build a case for you, and the best exposition of the Word of God is the Word of God itself.

So let's, let me begin, and let's skip the young boy for a moment, and let's look at the father. The father in the story is wealthy. Not only is he wealthy, he's generous, he's compassionate, he's loving, he's forgiving, he's merciful, all those things.

I mean, he is a typical picture, or at least it typifies the father, the ultimate father, God the father. A God who is merciful, a God who is kind, compassionate, forgiving, loving, all of those things are brought out in this particular story, and the Bible says there is a responsibility that fathers have, and that responsibility of any father, according to the Word of God, certainly as a believer is, that he is to lay aside for his children. The Bible says it is not the responsibility of children to put money aside for their parents, it's the responsibility of parents to put money aside for their children.

And we have cases of that, Proverbs 13, a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children. A good man, not a bad man, a good man, and of course God is the ultimate good man in that sense, and it's his responsibility to pass on the inheritance, not only to his children, his grandchildren, and so on. The verse that I quoted before that is 2 Corinthians 12, verse 14, children ought not to lay up for the parents,

but the parents for the children.

Job 42, we have Job giving away his inheritance to his daughters while he was still alive, and then he lived another 140 years after that. We have Abraham who gave all that he had to Isaac while he was alive. I've heard people preach on this and take in the traditional view, and they've said this, what the prodigal son basically said to his dad was, dad I wish you were dead.

I don't believe that. I believe that he understood the nature of a good father. The father's responsibility was to set money aside, to set, you know, things aside for the well-being of the child, and it was a common occurrence, at least according to some of the expositions that I looked up, or expositors I looked up, they said that it was common in this particular culture to give your inheritance while you were alive.

And so here he is, a good father, and he is setting aside things for his family's future well-being. I can well imagine, and it's my conviction, and I'm just, you know, I can't prove that, but I believe that the younger son was daddy's boy. I think he was Joseph, the equivalent of Joseph in the Old Testament, you know.

Dad sort of doted on him, and I think he came home from school one day, maybe 10 or 12 years of age, and dad says, hey, you know, saddle up the donkeys. Why dad, what are we doing? I want to show you something. There's a twinkle in the father's eye, and he takes his boy over the hills, and he points down to the valley, and he says, son, I want you to know something.

You know how many times we've talked about that valley there, that if it ever comes up for sale, wouldn't it be an incredible addition to the homestead, and so on. Well, son, I want you to know I bought it this week, and the little boy says, really, dad, why? Son, one day, I want you to have it. I want to begin now to invest in your future.

I want you to have a head start that I never had. I want you to be able to have that one day, and even now, I want you to begin to work with me. I'm going to train you up how to, you know, look after the cattle, and how to look after the sheep, and you're going to begin working with me, and so on.

Let's face it, that was the way things were back 50 or 60 years ago. If somebody was a blacksmith, their son became a blacksmith. It was John Brown and Sons blacksmith shop, you know, Fred John's Bakery and Sons.

You know, they took over the father's trade. They learned the tricks of the trade, and so on, and generation after generation were bakers, wheelwrights, and so on and so forth, and many of our names, even in this country, you know, the right. Oh, my grandfather was, you know, made wheels for carriages, and so on, and a smith.

Most of those were some sort of, you know, had a trade. They were blacksmiths, or goldsmiths, or whatever it is, and the names still linger on, and so I can see this father again telling the boy, listen, you know, we want to begin to plow down the valley there. See the river that runs through, that would make a great place for crops, and you see that little mound over there.

He says, I envision one day, son, when you get a little bit older, you're going to want to get married, and I think you and the missus, you know, you could build a house there. I want to have you as close as possible, and so on. I can see the father investing for the son's future, and the son growing up knowing that his father was setting things aside, putting things in order, that one day it was going to be his, and I think the father put his arm around that boy, and he says, you know, son, you have not because you ask

not.

I want you to know that every good and perfect gift I'm willing to give you, whatever you need is, you know, I want to bless you. I want to give you whatever you want. Now we come to the young boy.

The young son, as he began to grow, was not content with what he had. He knew that there was more. He knew that the father had more for him.

He knew that there was the father's blessing. He'd heard the father saying many, many times, again, whatever you ask for, I'll give you, you know, whatever you ask in my name. Son, eye has not seen, ear has not heard, it hasn't even entered into the heart of man, all that I prepared for you.

Son, every promise is yea and amen in Christ. And this boy grew up, you know, learning from his father, ask of me, I'll give you the heathen for your inheritance. Ask of me rain in the time of the latter rain, and I'll give you rain.

Ask. This kid was taught, the father said, listen, you have not because you ask not, so ask. And so he comes to a place where he says, I know the father has things in store that he has set aside with my name on it, so to speak.

There is an inheritance that I have, a spiritual inheritance that is mine, and all I have to do is go after it. What we would say in, at least in Pensacola terminology, more, Lord, more, Lord. Now, isn't it amazing that we preach entire messages around individuals that asked, and we admire them for asking.

Jacob, I will not let you go until you bless me. We admire that, we admire that tenacity, we admire that, that zeal, that fervor. You know, God, I know there's a blessing, and I want that blessing, and I will not let you go until you bless me.

We take men like Jabez, you know, the prayer of Jabez, bless me, enlarge my borders, put your hand upon me. God, there is more, and I want that. We look at Caleb, 80 years of age, but when he was 40 years of age, he went into the promised land, and he saw something that he never forgot for 40 years.

He tasted something, he touched something, and he goes to Joshua as an 80-year-old man, and he says, listen, now that we're crossing over and possessing land, I want that mountain. See, I'd have wanted the valley at 80 years of age. He says, give me that mountain.

He went after it. In other words, there was something in his spirit, he says that God has an inheritance, and I am going after that inheritance. The Father has set things aside for my benefit, and I want those things.

Call unto me, and I will answer you. The Bible says, Moses, show me your glory, Lord. Lord, there's more.

If your presence doesn't go with us, we're not going. So God says, my presence will go. Okay, now that I've got your presence, I want to see your glory.

I mean, there was always this pressing on. Paul, I press on, not that I've already attained, but there's more. I know that there's more, and we admire those guys, don't we? And yet, when it comes to this young man asking, you know, we just slap him over the wrist, and we say, oh, we make a big deal of the fact that he asked the Father.

In fact, we talk about, you know, he asked, but when he came back, he said, make me, and we make a big issue of that, and there may be some truth to that, but listen, don't belittle asking. God taught us all the way through the Word of God, you don't even know what I've prepared for you. I can never imagine or see, the mind cannot comprehend the things that I have prepared for those that love me, and all you've got to do is ask.

Again, every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father. God is a giver, isn't that right? He gives, he gives. Paul on Mars Hill, the one thing he said, you guys are religious, you know, you observe also, I want to tell you about the God that you worship and you don't know, because they had a statute to the unknown God, and the one thing Paul says, this God gives, he gives life.

All the other gods demanded, you had to appease them, you had to bring your bowls of rice, your sacrifices, and so on and so forth. He says that this God that you don't even know about, he is a giver, and we know that he's a giver. Ask of me.

Again, if any man lack wisdom, ask, ask, ask. We're told all the way through, knock, seek, ask, and you shall find. Be persistent.

God has got something, and so here the youngest son to me represents a man that he's hungry for God, a man that he's not satisfied with what he's attained to, he knows that there's more. Let's go to the older brother. The older brother to me represents the older generation, he's content, he's indifferent, passive, you know, just complacent, he is a poor role model.

He knows that the father has got things set aside, he knows that the father is an inheritance for him, but he never asks for it, and to me it represents an older generation, and by older I'm not talking about age, but the old wineskin that never press into God, never go after God, they're not praying for revival, they're not praying for their city, they just want to play church, they're just happy to be in the father's house, but there's no desire for anything more. There's no sort of J-Bez thing, you know, I want more, I want enlargement, I want to increase, I want to lengthen my cords, I want to strengthen my stakes, and so on. No, I'm just happy the way I am, leave me alone, don't bother me.

There's sort of a lukewarm Laodicean sort of a crowd, and the younger brother doesn't get any inspiration, he doesn't see a role model, he doesn't see an older brother who says, listen, let me set the spiritual, you know, temperature in this house here, and let's let some, this is how you go after God. He doesn't see the older brother seeking God and praying and waiting on God, pressing into God, he doesn't see that hunger and that passion, but he goes after it. Now, what's the purpose of an inheritance? According to Paul, Romans chapter 1, verse 11, Paul says, I long to see you that I may impart to you a spiritual gift to the end that you may be established.

In other words, he says, I have a gift, and we don't know what that gift was, at least I don't, but he says, you know, if I could come and impart that gift to you, it would establish you. And that's an inheritance, it establishes us, we don't have to struggle, we don't, you know, somebody gives us money and we're able to put a down payment on our house instead of rent, and we get a jump start, somebody, you know, helps us get set up in business or something, and we think, boy, my dad and my uncle, he was such a blessing to me when I was 20 years old, instead of having to flip burgers at McDonald's, you know, he gave me \$20,000, I was able to start my own business, and now I'm a multimillionaire or whatever, but, you know, it was that sort of head start, and that's what an inheritance is all about. And that's what Paul says spiritually.

Now, there's potential problems, of course, that come with inheritances. The greatest inheritance, natural inheritance, although it was spiritual as well, was when God gave the nation of Israel the promised land. He says, I have an inheritance, go in to your inheritance.

They were slaves, they didn't have a, you know, a thing that belonged to them. You know, God made up, just as they came out of Egypt, all the back wages by giving them favor with the women, and they were able to, you know, pretty well take all their jewelry with them, and sort of made up a little bit for that, but he says, listen, you will have houses and lands, vineyards and olive trees, houses loaded with good things. That was their inheritance.

God says, this is your inheritance. I've set this apart for you. It's going to establish you, get you on your feet.

You're going to have your own house, your own land, your own vineyard, your own olive trees, you're going to have wells, cisterns, and so on and so forth. That was the blessing, isn't that right? And then there was a fine print. Watch yourself.

After you get my blessing, watch yourself, lest you forget me. In other words, you get so enamored with the inheritance, you forget the one that gave you the inheritance. That was very, very clearly said to the nation of Israel over and over.

This is my inheritance. I do want to bless you. I do want to see you prosper.

I do want to see you make it, and I'm going to give you every possibility of, you know, going in and taking possession of land, but be careful. Be careful. I think that's why the psalmist says, give me neither riches nor poverty.

Either one can be a curse, he said. If I'm poor, I may have to revert to stealing. If I'm rich, she says, I'm going to forget all about you.

Give me neither riches nor poverty, lest when I am full, I deny you. In other words, I think you could interpret that, give me neither failure nor success. Success is the hardest thing to handle, because when I'm successful, I'm going to forget you.

That's what riches represent, not success. We measure success by riches in this country. And the psalmist says, listen, I know the dangers either way.

Give me, again, that sense of balance, if you like. Luke 10, we have the disciples, they said demons are subject to us. God gave them their inheritance.

He breathed on them and said, listen, let me give you a gift. And they got the gift of the Holy Spirit. Along with that, he says, I give you authority to tread upon the serpent, the scorpion, over all the power of the enemy.

Wow, that is quite a gift. But at the end of the day, they come back. Woo.

It was incredible. You know, we went down to the marketplace today and demons were coming out left, right and center. Boy, was it neat.

I've got, you know, we got blind man saw, you know, and they said, hey, watch it. Watch it. I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning.

Don't rejoice in this. Rejoice in my grace. Rejoice your names are written in the book of life.

Why did Satan fall? His power. I'll take my throne. I've got authority.

I've got power, but I'll usurp the throne of God. That same pride, that same arrogance, if you like, watch it, guys, because that's the very thing that caused Satan to fall. You better rejoice in the fact that I've chosen you.

I've washed you. I put your name in the book of life. Nothing to do with you.

That's a gift. Don't rejoice in that. You see, with the inheritance comes a danger.

Some fine print here. The father divides his inheritance. Notice it says in verse 12, and the youngest son said to his father, father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.

And he divided his wealth between them. The older son got two thirds more than the youngest son. According to the Old Testament, the firstborn was entitled to double the inheritance of the youngest son.

And yet he complains a little later on, we possibly won't get there, and I haven't really developed that so much, but he complains to the father, you never gave me anything. That I might be merry with my friends. His idea of a good time was not the father, but his friends.

And he accuses the father, you never gave me a lamb or a kid. He got double, but he never used it. And you know the fact is, there is that older generation, that old wine, the older wineskin, that they too had everything that you and I can have.

It was available, they just never asked for it. They never used the inheritance. They never pressed into God.

They never went after it. They were passive, indifferent again. But the youngest son gets what he wants.

Let me spiritualize it. He got the anointing that he wanted. He got the gifts that he wanted.

He got the ministry that he wanted. He got the music that he wanted. He got the signs, wonders, the miracles.

He got what he wanted. And maybe for a while, it was a genuine cry, I believe it was. I believe there's many a man of God that have started off well.

Seeking God, paying a price, fasting, praying, pressing into God, working themselves, not being lazy and indifferent, but really going after God. And God has enriched them with gifts and ministries and administrative gifts and preaching ability, teaching ability, gifts of healing, words of knowledge, and so on and so forth. And they went after it, so to speak.

They said, I know that there's more and I want more. I'm not content with this little bit here. I want more.

Father, you have an inheritance laid up for us again that eye has not seen and ear has not heard. And I want it. And I think when he got it, initially he went around doing good.

Maybe started off as a real humble, sincere, godly young man who went around with his gifts and he used those gifts to see people healed, people delivered. That's why he wanted to go in the ministry. He was moved with compassion.

He saw cripples and he said, God, there's got to be an answer. He saw people who abound and said, God, I want authority to break that bondage of that person's life. God, I see lost men and I want to know how to preach with an anointing that's going to break the yoke over their life and set captives free.

And for a while he went around doing good. He was in the father's house. And then it says this, and not many days later, interesting verse, not many, a little phrase and not many days later, not a few, but not many.

And I don't know how you fully interpret that, but it says he gathered everything together. Now, several expositors, and I'd come to this conclusion already, but several expositors said the best way that we can interpret that is this, that he liquidated his assets. In other words, he sold off the back 40.

He had an auction and got rid of the cattle. He got the sheep and took them to the local market and sold them. He auctioned off the barn and the, you know, some of the property that he had.

He took the oxen, the equivalent of a tractor and some of the implements and sold those. And it took a while, but after a while, he turned every gift that the father had given him into cash. And herein lies the beginning of his downfall.

He realized that what the father had given him could make money, that those gifts could earn him wealth. I can get paid big bucks. If I have a word of knowledge, I can fill any arena in America.

If I can call names and addresses, if I can get a couple of songs together that hit the charts, I can, I can become pretty famous with my CD. I have a healing gift. If I'm known as a great preacher or a teacher, I can fly around the nation sharing my insights.

It's interesting, isn't it, that when I was a boy and that was a long time ago, turning 64 here in a couple of weeks. But when I was a boy, the law of sowing and reaping went something like this. He that sows to the flesh will from the flesh reap corruption.

That's the way I was raised on the law of sowing and reaping. The law of sowing and reaping has nothing to do with the flesh and the spirit today. We have an entire generation that has never heard the law of sowing and reaping in the context of God's word.

It is a way of prosperity. You sow into my ministry, you'll reap, right? Every television program, I don't care who it is, some of the great ones, some of the good ones, some of the bad ones, you can name them, they all end up with the law of sowing and reaping. We want to hear from you this week.

You're one of our covenant partners, you know, if you will sow into this ministry, God will bless you. Some say it nicely, some say it, you know, as a real scheme, but that whole principle has been turned into cash. You see, it's so subtle, isn't it? It's so easy.

I can use a principle in God's word that applies to the flesh and the spirit primarily, but I can use it to make money. You want to know what Jesus said about the law of sowing and reaping? Consider the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap. You don't hear that about the law of sowing and reaping.

Huh? I've never heard a tape series on that. Listen, Daddy will look after you. You know, when I was a kid, I never ever for even a split second worried about whether I was going to have clothes to wear or food to eat.

That was my dad's responsibility. Never even dreamed of it. Jesus said, listen, if I can clothe the birds of the air and look after the grass of the field and the lilies of the field and so on, you know, don't you think you have more value than a sparrow? Don't worry about those things.

Don't be anxious about those things. Birds don't sow and reap. Interesting, isn't it? Never heard anybody talk about it, but that's what Jesus said.

That's, that was his take on it. What went wrong with the, this young man? Let me give you what I feel God said to me. That when our demands from the Father exceed our demands for the Father, we're on the path to becoming a prodigal.

Let me say that again. When our demands from the Father exceed our demands for the Father, we're on the path to becoming a prodigal. See how subtle it is? It's not you that I want, Lord, but you can give me a ministry.

Again, when our ministry demands exceed the demands of the Master, we're on the path to becoming a prodigal. When the gifts become more of a desire than the giver, we're on the path to becoming a prodigal. In other words, some slowly, incrementally, over a period of time, we gain popularity.

We begin to get recognition for our gifting and our gifting then, we're able to, you know, I don't go to little churches anymore. Oh, I pastored. I sent once a invitation to a man that has been in my home.

I've had a meal with him or I should say he's had a meal with me. I thought I, at least I had some measure of understanding about him. My father was there.

He prayed for me. We talked and so on and so forth. And a couple of years later when I was pastoring, I asked him if he would come.

I got a response from his office, four page application form. I had to guarantee him X amount of dollars. I had to guarantee him X number of people, otherwise he would not come.

And I thought, is that the Father? The one that took time for a woman at the well, but also went to the 5,000, but when we can no longer go to the woman at the well, is there something, isn't there something wrong with our values again? But I can make money if I go to a big crowd. I can get more applause if I have a few thousand listening to me. I get greater recognition.

And then comes the whole thing of entitlement. It slowly creeps in. I'm worth more.

I need a better hotel. I need a better this, a better that. Listen, I'm a man of God.

I'm in demand. I've written books. I've got a bestseller.

I've got CDs out there and so on and so forth. No, I don't go to a little Palestine. Where's that? No, I'm serious here.

You see, it's such a subtle thing. It begins with a godly desire for more of God. God, I want that gift.

I want that anointing. I want this. God, I know that you have more for me.

I'm not satisfied with what I got. Lord, I'll fast. I'll pray.

I'm desperate for more of you. And then we get our inheritance. And not many days later, gradually, incrementally, somehow we lose.

I don't have time now because of my schedule to be with you, Dad. And we leave for the far country. Let me say something about the far country.

The far country is not measured by distance, but by desire. Jesus said to the scribes and Pharisees who stood, I imagine, just a matter of arm's length away, you honor me with your lips, but your heart is what? Far. Far from me.

They were in a far country and they stood beside him. You can be in the Father's house and be in a far country. That's the tragedy.

I honor him with the lips. I know the religious jargon and so on, but I've grown cold. The love of many, one of the signs of the last days, the love of many will wax cold.

I know I'm in a far country. I've drifted. I don't spend time with the Father anymore.

I've lost contact with the Father. I haven't spoken to the Father in weeks. My schedule won't permit it now.

I'm in demand. I'm crisscrossing the nation. I've got my jet.

I've got conferences. I'm going, going, going. It happens every single day of the week.

It's a gradual thing. It's just, again, these small increments where before we know it, we're in a far country. And eventually, he squanders his estate.

And when he had spent everything, he has a message now, but no anointing. He spent everything. Jesus, just a few chapters back there, Matthew chapter 25, warned us about the ten virgins.

They had no oil. The oil dries up. You've spent everything.

You know, we use the expression, I'm pretty well spent. At least we used to. It's a bit of an old-fashioned term, but, you know, how are you doing? Pretty spent.

He spent everything. There's no anointing on his ministry anymore. The accuracy of his prophetic word is not what it used to be.

You know, the new album that he's put out doesn't have the same anointing of the songs that the first one did. It's now become a sort of routine. He can write songs because he's, you know, he's learned to write them and so on, but it's not as good as the first album.

His second book is nowhere near as good as his first book. You know, when I first heard him minister, boy, he had some rich insight, but I didn't get much out of this conference. He spent everything.

And then he gets involved in loose living. In other words, he looks for satisfaction in the wrong places. My wife called me just literally two minutes before Joyce picked me up to tell me that a friend of ours in

Colorado Springs, an older lady up in her 70s, knows one of the staff at New Life Center.

And this afternoon in a private meeting with the leadership, Ted Haggard acknowledged that everything is true. He came clean. He's lied.

He's covered. I didn't do it. Now he's admitted to everything.

They're already looking for a new pastor. They said he will never again pastor in that church. He's lost everything.

Do you believe that he started off, you know, as the ADD child, a rebel, a strong-willed child, no desire for God? I don't. I believe he was a godly man. I believe he pressed into God.

I believe he paid a price. I believe that God gave him gifts. He became more and more and more popular.

Great name recognition. But I guarantee you somewhere, his devotional life and the time spent with the father diminished. Guarantee it.

And he ended up, as this young man ended up, it says that not only did he spoil, squander his possessions, but he attaches himself. Verse 15, he went and attached himself to a citizen. Why? Because a severe famine arose in the country.

Let me just talk about famines for a minute. We need to be careful during times of famine. It's an interesting study in the Word of God.

I did it years ago. I've lost all my notes now. I'd have to do it all over again.

But what happened during times of famine? Abraham, during a time of famine, rather than trusting God, went down into Egypt. And every night on the news, we hear about the end result. He picked up Hagar and the rest is history.

Naomi and Abimelech, during the time of famine, decided to leave the place of bread, the place of praise, Bethlehem, Judah. They went into the land of Moab. Their two sons died.

They lost everything. Naomi comes back bitter in spirit, dangerous during times of famine. What do we do during times of famine? So easy, isn't it, to sort of backslide when God isn't moving? Instead of pressing into God and saying, God, I've got to get an answer, we take the easy way out.

We go down into Egypt. Nothing's happening in the church. I'm not going to go now.

I'm going to drop out. I'm not going to go to a prayer meeting anymore. We never get anywhere.

Wednesday night meetings have become a bit of a bore. I'd rather stay at home. And before we know it, you know, we've got our Wednesday night program.

We begin to feed off the world, begin to drive our satisfaction from the world. And so he squandered his estate in loose living. You say, well, that's not me.

Sixty-five percent of promise keepers said they viewed pornography as recently as last week. That's loose living. You see, this story is way more relevant than you and I realize.

We've got this guy, you know, sort of tarred and feathered with a judge, the jury, the executor. We see him as a strong-willed rebel and so on. I don't believe that's necessarily the way it happened.

I believe this was a good kid that could not handle what God gave him. And he allowed it to go to his head. He turned it into money.

He ended up, again, gradually feeding off the flesh and the world round about him rather than the father. Sixty-five percent of promise keepers. These are men that make up the average congregation.

Over half of the men in your church, pastor, are struggling with sexual addiction. And according to Oprah Winfrey, the largest consumers of pornography in America are women and not men. So just in case you women think that doesn't apply to me.

At least Oprah, even though she lives with a boyfriend and she's a whore in that sense, as far as God's word is concerned, at least she was honest. And she said the women read or watch the soap operas and they read the romance novels. And they feed on that whole romantic realm.

And she at least had the guts to call it pornography. It may be different than what men get turned on to, but they live in the fantasy realm. If this man were my husband, you know, and so on and so forth.

Loose living. See how easy it is? And then he's down to his last penny. And I can imagine him walking into a bar of some sort or some sort of joint.

And he's down to the last couple of coins. He doesn't have enough to get himself a meal. And he's standing there.

And some guy looks him up and down and says, Hey, guy, I'll give you a job if you'll become my sex partner. You say, where'd you get that from? The word that is used there, he joined himself to a citizen is the word to join yourself to a harlot. It means to glue.

Is it possible? I say it is. Look at Ted Haggard. Joined himself.

He is so desperate. Okay, if you give me a job, you can use me and abuse me and so on. Well, the story doesn't end there.

Thank God. He comes to his senses. And he begins to think about the father's house.

He begins to realize all that he's lost as a way that seems right to a man but the end thereof is the way of death. We need to understand the world has absolutely nothing to offer you. I don't care how great the enticements are the allurements and so on.

You know, the way thereof is the way of death. It is a young man in Proverbs that takes the path to the prostitutes house. Oh, and she flatters him with her lips and she's all made up and she says, you know, I've just I'm religious.

I just offered my sacrifices this morning. She says, come the man of the house. He's gone on a long journey.

He's taking a bag of money. In other words, nobody will find out. You don't have to worry about my husband coming home.

He's gone for weeks. I mean, he took money with him. He, you know, you'll never get found out.

And he does not know it will cost him his life. Many, many are those that have been slain there by many. Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Baker, Ted Haggard, just to name those that we know.

I know many men that I've worked with men that had incredible giftings, far better giftings than I have in that sense. Greater personality, greater ability to, you know, more rounded. Many are those that have been slain.

But he comes to the place where he realizes he's blown it. And he says, I've sinned. And the path to restoration is an honest cry, an honest confession.

Not I didn't do it. I've never done that. I said to my wife when that first that news broke, I said, there's something wrong with this story.

You don't have some sort of code name, if you only did it once. Oh, I bought drugs, but I never use them. You don't you don't have a code name if you just if it was just a one time casual.

No, he's, you know, he was buying drugs. And he denied it. And even CNN has repeated, of course, they don't know this latest news, I guess, unless it's broken by now.

But they said he lied. He said he didn't know that man, and he had nothing to do with him. Now he acknowledges, well, I didn't know him.

And I did buy drugs. But that's all but I didn't take the drugs. You see, that's not repentance.

Repentance is listen, I said, it's not the repentance of Saul, who Samuel said, Listen, I hear the bleeding of the sheep, God told me, you were supposed to annihilate or destroy the Amalekites and spare none of them. And he says, I know I've sinned, I've sinned, but honor me before the people. Don't let you know, don't let the word leak out.

Yeah, I've done it. I'll tell you about it. But you know, don't keep me, you know, keep my reputation intact.

Now, it's got to be listen, I've sinned against heaven and in your sight as the psalmist says, Hosea says, return unto the Lord and take with you words. And I think in his mind, he says, Listen, I've got to take with me words. And so he takes with him words.

And he says, I'm going to get up, I'm going to go back to the Father. I'm going to say, Father, I've sinned against heaven in your sight, I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me as one of your hired servants.

And he got up and he came to his father. Again, it is a restoration of relationships. He came to his father, doesn't come back to the farm, so to speak, doesn't come back and say, Hey, have you got a little bit of money left? No.

Comes back to the father. Father, I've sinned. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him.

What an amazing statement. We don't know, of course, how far how long he was away from home, whether it was a matter of months, or maybe a couple of years. But you know, you can change a lot.

In a matter of months, you can change a lot in a matter of years. This man went out, you know, driving his new car with his gold chain and his, you know, Vuitton baggage in the back. I mean, he was a rich kid.

He went out a prince, he came back a pauper. He went out maybe full in the face and flushed with the energy of youth and so on. Well fed because in the father's house, there's plenty of bread.

But he's gone through a famine. He's skinny. He's gaunt.

He's been working with the pigs in the blazing sun. His face is all dark, tanned and his skin leathery. And he doesn't have any shoes on his feet because he's possibly had to hawk him off to get a meal.

His feet are blistered and bloody and he doesn't have the same gait or the same walk and he's been walking for miles and maybe he's dragging his feet and he's skinny and he's and the father still recognized him. That's amazing, isn't it? He's not the same kid that left. But dad said, that's my boy.

And the only time in the whole scriptures we have this picture of the father and he runs. Father runs. Couldn't wait.

He wraps his arm around that kid and he begins kissing and kissing and kissing and he says, dad, I've sinned. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. And he doesn't get out.

Make me one of your hired servants. I was asked a couple of years ago now to write a an endorsement for a book. The book was based around the life of Esther.

The film has just come out. And I read that book. It came to me late.

It was bound, but on the cover it said, this is a pre-published edition, not to be sold and so on. And I read that book several times. And the more I read that book, the more I could not agree with the author.

And all I could think of all the time, and this was before I prepared this message, but all I could think of was the prodigal son. You see, the whole premise of that book was this. You've got to prepare yourself to come in to the presence of the king.

And Esther, of course, was likened to the believer. And she was a believer, obviously, but she soaked in buttermilk. You know, she did the whole thing.

She spent hours and hours, months and months and months in preparation. And then when she did finally come into the presence of the king, she came in with fear and trembling. Listen, you guys have helped me.

You, you know, eunuchs appreciate all the help. And, you know, I hope we've chosen the right dress and, you know, and so on. I hope my hair's just right, but I may not be coming back.

I may perish today. And I said, you know, that's not the picture of my father. And I wrote to the author and I just said to him, I said, listen, I know I'm late in getting this to you, but I just can't write an endorsement for this because I said, I do not believe that Ahasuerus is a type of God in any way, shape or form.

He is a wicked, brutal ungodly, sinful king. And he does not represent my king, the king of kings. I didn't put it quite that language, but that was the gist of it.

And I said, I don't believe that we have to have a lifetime of labor for a moment of favor. That's not grace. And all I could think of is this poor kid reeking of the pig pen, his hair matted, stinking to high heaven.

And there's no preparation whatsoever other than I've sinned dad. And dad makes a beeline towards him and smothers him in kisses. And he wrote me back and he says, maybe one day I'll be able to write a book about God as a father.

I said to him, I said, you know, us that come from a holiness background, we never ever feel good enough. If only I'd fasted a few more days. If only I'd read my Bible a little bit longer and we can have that mentality, I've got to earn, earn acceptance.

And the acceptance is based on my performance, not your grace. And I said, that's not the gospel that I preach. The grace of God, amazing grace.

How sweet the sound that saves a wretch like me. I don't have to soak in buttermilk. I don't have to put on all the perfume and spend months and months and months hoping, hoping that I'll be good enough, but I may perish.

I may perish. The King may not approve of me. I want you to know you're accepted in the beloved.

The moment those words come out in sincerity and honesty, I've said, the father said to the slaves, verse 22, quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him quickly. Oh, not to listen. You better take him out to the slaves quarters there.

And, you know, maybe in a few months I'll talk to him. I'll watch him. I'll just, you know, keep my eye on him, see how he's doing, you know, again, a lifetime of labor for a moment of favor.

Now, quickly, one of the commentators that I read, I need to hurry. He said the word best robe can be translated first robe. Isn't that interesting? Give him back what he lost.

The first robe, the robe that he used to wear. That's restoration, isn't it? That's grace. That's forgiveness.

Give it back. The first robe. Wow.

You see, even I struggle with that sort of grace. Ted Haggard back in the ministry. Hey, no way.

Maybe if the sin I sinned really comes from the very depths of his being, it's possible. We've all sinned. We've all come short of the glory of God.

Is it possible that he could have the best robe? If he's really honest, David did. Abraham did. Many a man of God did.

Give him the best robe. I heard the traditional interpretation of this with a man that I had the privilege of knowing for a number of years, assembly guard pastor. And he ministered in the, again, the traditional view of this parable.

And he stressed again, the fact given the best robe. And I went up to him afterwards. And I said, you know, call him by name.

I'll call his name Fred. That's not his real name. I said, Fred, you know, you say that, but the fact is not everybody does get the best robe in your denomination.

He said, what do you mean? I said, if you're divorced in your denomination, you don't get the best robe. He looked at me and said, I'll have to think about that. You see, we have certain levels, don't we? Well, if

you've been divorced, you know, you can't function, you know, and I'm not in any way trying to belittle divorce.

Please don't misunderstand or misinterpret what I'm saying. You know, we have certain sins that aren't forgivable. Certain sins that we just forever hold that person at arm's length.

You know, you've blown it too bad that, you know, you can get a robe, but not the best robe. You can't function again. You can't hold office again.

You can't teach Sunday school again. You know, bring the best robe, the first robe. Put a ring on his finger or on his hand, and the ring there was not simply a piece of jewelry, an ornament.

The ring was the credit card of the day. The ring had the seal, the crest of the father's house, and they would go to the merchant and there would be a tablet there of wax, and he would press on that and it would leave again what we would call a signature today. Charge everything to this account.

Today, it would be the equivalent of, listen, give him back the credit card, give him back the full authority to use my name. That's restoration. Or not, listen, don't give him the credit card.

You know, let's keep an eye on him for a while. Now, give him the ring, and then put shoes on his feet. You see, slaves didn't wear shoes.

Look, I'm no longer worthy to be, you know, no, put shoes on his feet. The old Negro spirituals, I don't know if we call them Negro spirituals anymore or what, but black spirituals, but you know what I mean. When I get to heaven, I'm gonna put on my shoes.

Gonna walk all over God's heaven. You see, they didn't have shoes. They were slaves, but they understood something about the grace of God.

Things are gonna change when I get to heaven. My master may not make it to heaven, but when I get to heaven, first thing I'm gonna get, and I'm gonna, you know, gonna walk all over God's heaven. Restoration.

Grace of God. And then bring the fatty calf and kill it.

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