

PRAYERS
for
PARENTS
of
PRODIGALS

LINDA S. CLARE



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Introduction

I never thought I'd be a parent to one prodigal child—much less three of them. I grew up middle-class with one sister, and although I was a teensy bit rebellious in my teens, Sis and I were largely compliant. We did our chores, went to school, and excelled in extracurricular activities. I was the brainiac and my sister was the athlete. Perfect.

Maybe that's why God blessed me with one daughter and three stubborn and strong-willed boys. To say I had no clue about raising sons is an understatement. When the boys each veered off into the addiction that runs rampant through both my family and my husband's family, we were flummoxed. Our middle son's meth addiction began, unbeknownst to us, around sixth or seventh grade. The other two boys followed with drug experimentation, finally settling on alcohol as their drug of choice.

Over many years, we've tried everything: keeping our family intact, despite soaring divorce rates; taking our children to

church and Scout activities; giving the boys tough love and bringing them to legal venues, treatment centers, and 12-step meetings. We've cried a lot.

So far, nothing has worked. I have prayed harder, begged God more often, promised and bribed, set boundaries, and even called the police when necessary. But they are still stuck.

Years later, I've finally learned that they never thought they'd grow up to be addicts either. Addiction is not just a poor choice, but also a cruel brain disease—one that sucks the life out of both addicts and those who love them. Recovery is really hard, but it's not impossible. We've had periods of sobriety followed by many relapses. The hardest part is staying hopeful in the midst of the storm called "addiction."

Of course, parents of prodigals deal with much more than addiction. Whether it's gender-identity-based or one of a host of other hot-button morality issues, we parents all end up in the same place with the same two needs: We all need to have hope that our kids will come back to us. And to keep that hope alive, we all need something to lean on.

The only thing keeping *me* going is Jesus. Time after time, his love, comfort, and mercies have saved me from giving up hope. I've learned not to count on being delivered *out* of this nightmare—only carried through it. God loves my prodigals more than I do, and Jesus carries me when I can't go on. When circumstances go from bad to worse, and crisis scrambles my brain, a short "SOS" prayer is the best I can do.

I pray your prodigal has already looked over his or her shoulder and is heading back home today. If not, don't give

up. You are not alone. God's love for each of us cannot be broken. He is always with us, and we can be there for each other.

If your life is like mine—one step forward and three steps back—I hope these short prayers will help you reconnect to God's divine love. If you recognize yourself in these scenarios, cry with me. If you've done dumb things, too, laugh. But don't *ever* give up.

Take care of yourself, parent. Keep hoping, keep praying, keep loving. Many other parents walk this difficult path with you. Jesus is always there, slogging along beside us, helping us keep hope alive. May God bless you—and your prodigals too.



I

Heartbreak

The first time your parental heart breaks because of a prodigal's behavior, you know you'll never be the same. But you'll probably never again feel as gobsmacked as the first time your child wanders. Gradually your heart papers over the hurt and hope rekindles. Until your prodigal crushes you again. And again.

One minute you're walking in sunlight, the next falling into a deep well. How do you keep hoping when all seems lost? Love for your child holds your heart together like duct tape. But when your heart breaks for the millionth time, you need something bigger. Someone bigger. To reclaim lost hope, we can grab God's hand, find comfort in Jesus, and obey the Spirit's promptings—even when our prodigal still seems far away.



Broken Heart, Broken Parent

*He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds.*

PSALM 147:3

Dear Lord, I can't imagine *not* loving my child—even though she's all grown up. My love runs deep, swift, and wide, but watching my child following the wrong path cuts straight through my heart, breaking it again and again. Oh, how it hurts to watch my prodigal suffer and struggle and yet still not turn back to what is right. I feel trapped inside a bad dream, with no one to turn to for comfort. It's as if my child is broken, and I feel broken too.

Lord, just as you are our heavenly Father, you know that I still love my child—whether my prodigal's waywardness is about relationships or drugs or gambling or something even worse. You know how deep the hurt goes, Lord, and how my heart's been shattered into a million pieces. Gather me under your wings. When I cry, wrap your loving arms around me. Fill me with gratitude at the knowledge that you specialize in mending broken lives. Let me always remember that you alone have the perfect answers to heal broken prodigals—and broken parents too.

I Feel So Alone

*This is why I weep
and my eyes overflow with tears.
No one is near to comfort me,
no one to restore my spirit.*

LAMENTATIONS 1:16

Lord, I feel so alone. My prodigal's behavior breaks my heart again and again. Just when I think the situation can't get worse—it does. The hurt is crippling me, but when others ask me how I'm doing, I often lie and say I'm fine. Truth is, I really don't want even friends or family to know how messy my life has become. What if people gossip or look down on us? What if they shun us? Times like these, I feel abandoned, alone.

When it feels like I'm flying solo, help me remember your promises, Lord God. The Israelites of old felt alone, too, wandering through the desert, but you sustained them with manna. You guided them by day and by night, all the way to the Promised Land. People don't always understand tough situations like weeping for a prodigal, but you do. Your compassion is a healing balm. When I feel alone, let me reach for your hand and hold on tight. Let me stand tall on your rock of compassion as you lovingly wipe away all my tears.

Holy Laughter

*Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.*

LUKE 6:21

There's nothing funny about my prodigal's behavior, Lord. I've trained up my kid in the way she should go, but still she heads in the opposite direction. I've worried, begged, shouted, and cajoled my child into turning her life around, but she laughs and says my nose turns red when I'm angry. I've talked myself blue in the face, but my prodigal still has a bad attitude.

And if I think about it, Lord, maybe my attitude could use an adjustment too. In my concern, give me wisdom to judge with love. Prevent me from condemning my prodigal as I rail against her dangerous behaviors. Help me remember that mercy trumps judgment. Although my prodigal makes me cry now, help me keep hoping that I *will* laugh. Most of all, Lord, remind me not to take myself too seriously—the situation may not be funny, but my prodigal and I can both laugh at my bright red nose.

Birth Pangs of Joy

A woman giving birth has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

JOHN 16:21-22

Babies are your miracle, God. The day I met my child, I prayed for health and ten fingers and toes. Back then, I said all that mattered was that my baby be born healthy, and you granted my request. I fell in love with that child at first sight and told him how much God loved him too. As I prayed for my child to love you, I never once imagined him becoming a prodigal.

Now, years later, my precious prodigal's health is in real danger. Whether he has an addiction, mental health issues, or a host of other problems, my child's spiritual health is failing. And as I run after him, my own health—mental, physical, and emotional—suffers too. We *both* need your healing touch, Lord. Help us seek out help, whether it comes from the faith, medical, or psychological community. Snatch us away from the precipice of unhealthy living. Restore our health, Lord, and let us forget our grief as we press forward to joy.

Crisis

In a crisis, it's easy to develop tunnel vision. Fire escapes or disaster plans provide automatic responses when it's too chaotic to think. Whether you're a crier or more stoic as a parent of a prodigal, you can better keep a cool head during a crisis with a plan too.

Discuss a family plan of action for the next time a crisis arises—but do it when life is relatively calm. It's up to you whether to include your prodigal, but all other family members need a job they agree to do if “prodigal chaos” breaks out. Set a behavior threshold that automatically triggers a call to the police or medical services, such as threats of self-harm or physical violence to others. By deciding in advance how you will respond to a crisis, you may stay clearheaded enough to pray.

Through the Valley

*Weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning.*

PSALM 30:5

Nights are the hardest. After dark, worry and fear loom so much larger. So many times I've lain awake, worrying about my prodigal child. It doesn't matter if my baby is seven or seventy—when my child is wandering far from home, I fear the nightmare will never end. Will my prodigal ever again be the amazing person I once knew? I've cried so many tears, Lord. Right now, I admit that this situation looks as black as a starless night. I feel discouraged and abandoned.

Lord, help me remember that you will never leave me. When I cry out for help, you lean down and comfort me. When I'm scared to death, you whisper that you're right there beside me. Your light cuts through the thickest night, the blackest outlook, the worst heartache. How can I think I'm alone when you are there? I need you, God, more than ever. My heart aches for my prodigal, but it also longs for you, Lord. Fill me with a peace I can't really describe. Then, somehow, I can face another day. At dawn, let me be glad that, with you by my side, morning does come.

I Hate Reruns

*In this world you will have trouble.
But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

JOHN 16:33

Life with a prodigal seems to run in late-night cycles. Something terrible happens—he acts out, so I’m forced to call the police; I discover she’s been stealing things again; he calls me foul names—and all I can do is pray and beg you to get me through the night. Then life calms down. Promises are made. He’ll never do it again; she’ll get clean and stay sober; he is so very sorry. My prodigal shapes up—for a while. But it’s like watching the same awful television rerun again and again. We do a dance where we edge toward better times, only to slump back again. If my prodigal says or does anything that brings me hope, I start worrying when the other shoe will drop and the cycle will go bad again.

My prodigal relapses, gets clean, and relapses again—and frankly, Lord, so do I. Help us each examine the reasons why we are both stuck in our patterns. Why won’t she get help? Why can’t I stand by the consequences I’ve laid out for him? Lord, why *do* we break promises? I think for most of us, it’s fear. Fear of change, fear of the work it takes to turn from our old ways. Give both of us strength to overcome our fear of change. When crisis hits again, help us change the channel from sick rerun to new life in you.

No Doormats

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or
famine or nakedness or danger or sword?*

ROMANS 8:35

So many nights I've sat shaking, doubting I would live through another prodigal crisis. The pain of my prodigal's bad behavior and poor choices cuts so deep, I've been sure I wouldn't survive. My heart has tried to tear itself in two—one side hating the situation, the other still full of a mother's love. In error I've thought I had to choose between them, and my motherly love has won. But I don't want to be a doormat.

As I grow closer to you, Lord, I see that my unconditional love for my child doesn't mean I must unconditionally accept bad behaviors in order to keep loving him. Even though you hate sin, your love for me and my prodigal is unbreakable. I pray that I can remember, even in those horrible crisis moments, that I can still love my prodigal no matter what he does or says. But I don't have to accept his hurtful behaviors and choices. Lord, give me courage and wisdom to love my prodigal while standing strong for what's right. Help me remember that as you love me no matter what, I can love my prodigal without allowing him to wipe his feet on my heart.

Unbearable

Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD.

PSALM 130:1

Just when I think my prodigal's actions and choices can't get worse, they do. A lot worse. Times like this, I feel as if I'm stranded in a deep chasm, pinned between my parental love and the pain of the latest crisis. In the abyss, I've already exhausted every way I know to fix the situation: rescuing, minimizing, covering up, even outright lying. The only way I could go lower is if, heaven forbid, my prodigal died. With my arms wrapped tight around my middle, I moan and weep and wail. The pain is too much, Lord. I can't take it anymore.

Lord, help me see my way out of this dark canyon. When I'm hopeless, hear my cries from the deepest place in me. When I can't take any more, comfort me like a soothing, warm tea. Throw me a rope so I can start to climb out—a rope made of your love. As I climb, help me go easy on myself as my eyes again adjust to the light. Lord, help me cling to you. You're the only one who can give me the courage to bear the unbearable.