

Coming home

Notes on the Bible readings

- In a week focusing on the power of familial love, the parable of the prodigal son (or the forgiving father) draws into sharp focus the love God has for us as his children. People may identify with a different character: the younger son, the elder son, the father. Are we lost and looking for a way home, or seemingly faithful but questioning God's limitless desire to forgive? There is good news for everyone – the father goes out to both sons with his arms open wide – reaching out with love.

- God is the reconciler, and Paul reminds us that we are the reconciled (2 Corinthians 5.18). Through Christ's death on the cross, we have been freed from our sins and become a 'new creation'. In response, we are invited to live a new life as Christ's ambassadors and have been entrusted with a 'ministry of reconciliation'.

- The parable speaks overtly of God's response to our sin, but does not delve into our response to his love. We know that the younger son returns home, but we aren't told of his actions from that point on – does he change his ways, or ask for more money? Similarly, we don't know whether the elder son joins the feast, or remains on the outside looking in. Jesus is drawing a direct link between salvation and coming home to God. This is clearly something to celebrate, but how we respond is up to us.

Questions for reflection

- ▶ What feelings does this image convey to you?
- ▶ How would you celebrate a homecoming or reconciliation?
- ▶ How can we help people be reconciled with each other, and with God?



A prayer for forgiveness

Loving God, for the times when we have wandered from your way; for the times when we have chosen selfish priorities; for the times when we have disregarded you and rejected your love; for thoughts, words and actions that failed to show love – forgive us, and renew us, and welcome us home.

Keep a few moments of silence.

Thank you for welcoming us home, for forgiving us and celebrating our return.

Thank you for your love that seeks and restores. Amen.

A prayer for others

Gracious God, we pray that your reconciling love may bring harmony to our world. We pray for those caught up in conflicts between nations and states; for all who live in fear of the bullet or the bomb. May the leaders of the nations listen to each other, and commit themselves to peace.

We pray for those whose relationships have broken down. May your love bring reconciliation, your peace dissolve bitterness, and your grace disperse anger.

We bring to you homes that are filled with conflict, and pray for all who suffer from domestic violence and abuse. Bring healing to those who bear the scars of the ways they have been treated, and enable them to experience love.

We pray for all who seek to mediate, to bring reconciliation and peace, that they may have wisdom, patience and compassion.

We bring our prayer in the name of Christ, through whom all are reconciled to you, our God. Amen.

A personal prayer

Thank you, God, for loving me.

Forgive me, God, for turning away.

Thank you, God, for welcoming me back. Amen.

For reflection and comment linking this week's Bible reading to the news, current issues and events, go to www.rootsontheweb.com and click on PostScript.



Live your faith

Every time you enter your home this week, pray for a sense of God's presence dwelling with you, and give thanks for his welcoming embrace.