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RETURNING TO THE FATHER

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You do not have to apologize or pretend if Father’s Day or celebrating fathers feels complicated for you.

In my years of deliverance ministry and healing prayer, I’ve walked with many people for whom the word “father” evokes anxiety, grief, resistance, longing, suspicion, anguish, or even terror. For others, like myself, it stirs memories of warmth and safety because we grew up with a generous and loving father. Unfortunately, the latter is not the norm. It’s no wonder, then, that so many people struggle to connect with God as Father. Long before

we ever opened a Bible or attended Sunday School, we were already learning who we were through the presence—or absence—of our earthly fathers.

This early impact is part of what makes fatherhood so powerful. Fathers often become one of the first mirrors through which we learn who we are and whether we are safe in this world. When fatherhood is marked by love, steadiness, and presence, children grow up with a deep sense of worth, healthy boundaries, and an unshakable sense of belonging. It creates a rooted identity from which we can flourish.

When fathers are absent, inconsistent, harsh, or emotionally absent, the wounds can run deep. In some cases, those wounds come not only from absence but from experiences that were confusing, hurtful, or evil. Far too many grow up carrying abandonment, insecurity, fear, emotional distance, or the destructive conviction that love must be earned.

This is why so many people spend years loving Jesus deeply while finding it difficult to trust the Father's heart.

It's not just a 21st-century problem. I think this is why Jesus spent so much time revealing the heart of the Father through parables like the Prodigal Son, a story that still carries the same disarming, identity-restoring power it did when he first told it.

For those unfamiliar, a son approaches his father and demands his inheritance early, functionally telling his father that he's taking too long to die and leave him what he's owed. It is a rejection disguised as entitlement. Then he leaves for the far country, ready to test out the identity he's longed for.

At first, everything works. As long as the money flows, the version of himself he's chasing holds together. He's the party version of himself, the free, desirable version. But eventually the resources run out, and so does

the identity he built on them. What remains is a man no longer able to sustain the image he thought he'd become. He is broke, stripped of friends and pride alike.

In desperation, he takes the only job offered: caring for pigs. This is more than mere humiliation; it's intentional degradation of a Jew for whom pigs are defiling. With this comes a new identity: unclean.

It's here, in the lowest place, while his rumbling stomach considers the slop he's feeding the pigs, that something shifts. We are told he "comes to his senses." But even that moment is complicated. He still does not see himself clearly. Convinced his mistakes now define him, he heads home rehearsing a proposed new identity: servant. Not son—that identity seems too far gone to hope for. But a servant identity seems within reach, so he returns.

While he is still a long way off, the father sees him. This is one of the most transformative parts of the story, if we accept it. The father has been scanning the horizon ever since his son left, watching and waiting. And when he recognises his son, he does not wait for his son to come to him; he *runs* to him.

This dignified, wealthy, Middle Eastern man hikes up his tunic and runs bare-ankled to embrace his son.

Before his son can finish his speech, before any negotiation of worthiness, the father interrupts the entire framework the son has built in his mind. The son offers a lesser identity, but his father refuses it without hesitation. He publicly restores his son, clothing him, welcoming him, restoring authority and belonging in quick succession.

The father's actions clarify something true all along: *the son never stopped being a son.*

I think many believers still live somewhere in the middle of this story. We love God from afar, feeling more like employees than children. We assume our failures have permanently altered the way he sees us. We've carried

our shame-based identities for so long that we introduce ourselves by our wounds instead of our belovedness. Some of us are still sure we can make it in the “far off country.” Maybe a few of us are mucking around in the pig pen, envious of pigs. And yet, the invitation from the Father remains the same: return.

Return is not a demand for perfection or the erasure of past pain. It is the invitation to come back to the truth of who we have always been: sons and daughters of the Father. It’s an invitation to be held, known, and restored by a Father who never stopped watching for your return. For every place that shame, abuse, or lack has tried to write your identity, the Father speaks again with authority for all to hear: you are mine.

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Adjusted Bio: Cathy Colver Garland calls people out of fragmented identity and into the awareness that God is actively revealing himself in their stories and pursuing them for relationship. Through healing prayer and deliverance ministry, she guides people into restoration, freedom, and intimacy with God rooted in sonship rather than survival or performance. She is the co-author of *Revelationship: Transformative Intimacy With Christ* and the creator of the *KNOWN* devotional series. Connect with her at Revelationship.net.

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