

## PREREADING

### PARABLE

## “The Prodigal Son” from the King James Bible

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The **King James Bible** was published in England in 1611 during the reign of King James I. This work was a translation into English done by forty-seven scholars who used both previous translations and texts in the original ancient languages in which the Bible was written. The poetic King James translation had a profound effect on the English language. Words and quotations from the King James Bible, familiar from Sunday services and from Bible reading, became interwoven in the speech of everyday life.

### ABOUT THE SELECTION

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**Background: Genre.** A **parable** is a very brief story told to teach a moral lesson. “**The Prodigal Son**” is one of several parables found in the New Testament of the Bible told by Jesus to answer questions posed to him and to serve as a guide to moral behavior.

**Background: Technique.** An **allusion** is a reference in a literary work to some other part of a culture with which readers are expected to be familiar. The Bible has had a profound effect on Western culture. The stories and teachings of the Bible are part of the tradition of Western Europe. People are expected to know them, and writers often refer to them and use them in their works. As a result, a knowledge of the Bible is helpful in understanding the classics of Western literature.

## READER'S JOURNAL

If suddenly you had a lot of money to spend, what would you do with it? Think about the way in which you would spend your money and what that says about your personal values. Write about this in your journal.

# "The Prodigal Son"

FROM THE KING JAMES BIBLE

Then drew near unto him all the publicans<sup>2</sup> and sinners for to hear him.

2 And the Pharisees<sup>3</sup> and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.

3 And he spake this parable unto them, saying,

4 What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

5 And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

6 And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

7 I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth,<sup>4</sup> more than over ninety and

nine just persons, which need no repentance.

8 Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

9 And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me for I have found the piece which I had lost.

10 Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion

1. **Prodigal.** Extravagant; characterized by wasteful expenditure

2. **publicans.** Collectors of revenue in ancient Judea

3. **Pharisees.** Members of an ancient Jewish party or fellowship

4. **repenteth.** Repents, feels sorry for sins

What would a person do if a sheep or a piece of silver were lost? What would happen when the sheep or the silver was found? What would cause a similar reaction in heaven?

WORDS FOR EVERYDAY USE: dil • i • gent • ly (dil'ə jənt lē) *adv.*, carefully and steadily

of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want.

15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16 And he would fain<sup>5</sup> have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of the hired servants.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion and ran, and fell on his neck and kissed him.

21 And the son said unto him Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.

26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and entreated him.

29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found. ■

*What does the younger son do with his money?*

*How does the older son react?*

*What explanation does the father give for his actions?*

5. fain. Gladly

WORDS FOR EVERYDAY USE:

ri • ot • ous (rī'ət əs) *adj.*, without restraint; dissolute

fam • ine (fam'in) *n.*, widespread shortage of food

com • pas • sion (kəm pash'ən) *n.*, sympathy; pity

en • treat (en trēt') *vt.*, implore; beg

trans • gress (trans gres') *vt.*, break a commandment; sin

## Responding to the Selection

Have you ever forgiven someone for a wrong that he or she committed? What had the other person done? How did forgiving the other person make you feel? Why? Put yourself in the father's place. How would you have reacted when the son returned? Discuss these questions with your classmates.

## Reviewing the Selection

### RECALLING

1. What does the younger son request at the beginning?
2. How does the younger son spend his money?
3. Why does the younger son decide to return home?
4. How is the younger son greeted when he returns home? What is his father's reaction? What is his brother's reaction?

### INTERPRETING

5. Do you consider what the younger son does at the beginning of the parable usual or unusual for a young person to do? Give reasons to support your opinion.
6. Why is "The Prodigal Son" an appropriate name for the parable?
7. Do you think it takes courage for the son to return home?
8. How would you describe each of the three characters—the prodigal son, the father, and the elder son? What is the relationship of the father to each of his sons? What role does the elder son play in the parable?

### SYNTHESIZING

9. What lesson does the parable teach?
10. How is this parable different from works in other genres you have studied in this unit?

## Understanding Literature (Questions for Discussion)

1. **Symbol.** A symbol is a thing that stands for or represents itself and something else. In this parable, the father and the prodigal son are symbols. Use your knowledge of Christian beliefs and the information in the text to tell who the father and son represent. (If you need help, you can look in the King James Bible, in Luke 15, where the context provides an explanation.)

2. **Foil.** A foil is a character whose attributes, or characteristics, contrast with and therefore throw into relief the attributes of another character. What are the differences between the younger son and the elder son? How does the inclusion of the elder son affect your reactions to the younger son?

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## Responding in Writing

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**Persuasive Writing.** Do you think the prodigal son has truly reformed or will he go back to his old ways if he gets a chance? Form an opinion. Then support that opinion in a one- or two-paragraph essay.

**Prewriting Suggestion:** Make a pro and con chart to gather information on which to base your opinion. List the following statement at the top of your paper: "The prodigal son has truly reformed." Then list facts that support (pro) and that contradict (con) that statement. See the Language Arts Survey, 1.22, "Pro and Con Charts."

## PROJECT

**Debate.** Use your writing from Responding in Writing as the basis for a class debate about the prodigal son.

