

# Breaking Free: *Prodigal Hope*

Helping Parents Love, Pray, and Trust God  
When Their Children Walk Away

HURT  
REAL.

HOPE  
STILL REAL.

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FAITH  
FOR  
THE  
JOURNEY.

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SAME  
CHILD.  
—  
A DIFFERENT  
CHAPTER.  
—  
GOD IS STILL  
WRITING.

By His Grace to His servant

*Scott*

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**Breaking Free: Prodigal Hope**

# Helping Parents Love, Pray, and Trust God When Their Children Walk Away

## Introduction: You Were Never Meant to Walk This Alone

There are few pains in life greater than watching someone you love walk away from the life you hoped and prayed they would have. When that person is your son or daughter, the pain can reach places in your heart that are difficult to explain. You may find yourself asking questions you never thought you would have to ask. *Where did I go wrong? What could I have done differently? Should I call again? Should I help? Should I stop helping? Should I say something? Should I say nothing? What do I do now?*

Sometimes the situation involves a child who has walked away from God. Sometimes it involves addiction, destructive relationships, rebellion, criminal behavior, poor decisions, anger, or a lifestyle that is bringing tremendous pain to the family. Sometimes the child is young, and sometimes they are grown. But regardless of the circumstances, one thing remains the same: **a parent can love their child deeply and still feel completely helpless about the choices that child is making.**

That is where **Breaking Free: Prodigal Hope** begins.

This program is not designed to teach you how to control your child, manipulate circumstances, or find the perfect words that will make them come home. It is not a formula for guaranteeing that a prodigal will return. Only God can change a heart, and every person has the ability to make their own choices.

This program is about something we can address: **you.**

While you cannot control their journey, you can allow God to work in yours.

You can learn how to love without enabling. You can establish boundaries without becoming bitter. You can pray without trying to tell God exactly how He must answer. You can forgive without pretending that what happened did not hurt. You can release control without releasing love. And you can continue walking with Jesus even when someone you love is walking in another direction.

That is why this program is also about **healing.**

Parents of prodigals can become wounded in ways they don't always recognize. Fear can become constant. Shame can become heavy. Anger can quietly grow. Guilt can become a companion. Some parents become consumed with trying to fix everything, while others become emotionally exhausted and simply shut down. Marriages can suffer. Other children in the home can feel forgotten. And sometimes the parent becomes so focused on the person who walked away that they slowly lose sight of the God who is still right beside them.

You were never meant to carry this alone.

One of the most important parts of this program is the **community we build together**. There is something powerful about sitting in a room with people who don't need you to explain every emotion because they already understand. They know what it feels like to wait for a phone call. They know what it feels like to wonder where their child is. They know the tension between wanting to help and knowing that helping can sometimes make things worse. They know what it means to pray when there seems to be no visible change.

Here, we don't have to pretend.

We can be honest.

We can grieve together. We can pray together. We can encourage one another. We can learn from one another. We can celebrate small victories. We can talk about boundaries without shame. We can talk about enabling without condemnation. And we can remind one another that our identity is not determined by the choices our children make.

The Bible gives us a beautiful picture of this in Luke 15. Jesus tells us about a son who leaves his father's house and wastes what he has been given. But the story is not only about the son. It reveals something about the **Father's heart**.

The father remained ready to receive his son when he returned.

That gives us hope—but it also gives us perspective. We are not God. We cannot make someone come to their senses. We cannot force repentance. We cannot manufacture transformation. But we can remain faithful to Christ, keep our hearts open to restoration, establish healthy boundaries, and entrust our loved ones to the One who loves them even more than we do.

Over the coming lessons, we will walk through ten foundational principles that can help us navigate this journey:

1. **You Cannot Control Their Choices**
2. **Love Is Not the Same as Rescue**
3. **Boundaries Are Not Rejection**
4. **Stop Trying to Play God**
5. **The Parent Has a Heart That Needs Healing Too**
6. **Pray Without Trying to Manipulate God**
7. **Don't Let Their Journey Destroy Yours**
8. **Keep the Door Open Without Leaving the Door Unlocked**
9. **The Father Is Still Watching**
10. **Hope Without Demanding an Outcome**

These principles are not about giving up on your child. They are about learning how to **love your child without losing yourself, your family, your peace, or your relationship with Jesus**.

There may be days when you feel strong and days when you don't. There may be moments when you see progress and moments when you feel like nothing is changing. That's why we need one another.

We need a place where parents can come out of isolation and into community.

We need a place where broken hearts can begin to heal.

We need a place where truth can be spoken with grace.

We need a place where parents can learn that surrender is not giving up—it is placing what we cannot control into the hands of the One who can.

And most of all, we need to remember this:

**Your child's story is not finished—but neither is yours.**

While you wait, God still has work to do in you.

He wants to restore your peace, strengthen your faith, heal your wounds, renew your hope, and teach you how to love from a place of freedom rather than fear.

So welcome to **Breaking Free: Prodigal Hope**.

This is a place to breathe again.

This is a place to be honest.

This is a place to heal.

And this is a place where, together, we learn how to place our children—and ourselves—back into the faithful hands of God.

## TEN FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

### 1. You Cannot Control Their Choices

One of the hardest truths for a parent to accept is that love cannot control another person's decisions. You can teach, encourage, pray, speak truth, and make yourself available, but ultimately your son or daughter must choose the direction of their own life. Trying to control those choices will eventually leave you exhausted, frustrated, and often discouraged. Freedom begins when you recognize what belongs to you and what belongs to them—and place what you cannot control into God's hands.

## **2. Love Is Not the Same as Rescue**

A parent's natural response is often to protect their child from pain and consequences. But there are times when rescuing someone from the consequences of their choices actually prevents them from recognizing the seriousness of those choices. Biblical love does not mean continually removing every obstacle from someone's path. Sometimes real love means allowing consequences to do what our words cannot. We can love deeply without constantly fixing, covering, paying, explaining, or rescuing.

## **3. Boundaries Are Not Rejection**

Healthy boundaries are not a declaration that you no longer love your child. They are a way of protecting what God has entrusted to you while making it clear what behavior you will and will not participate in. You can say, "I love you," while also saying, "I cannot allow this behavior in my home." Boundaries are not about punishment or revenge. They are about bringing clarity into relationships that have become unhealthy and allowing love to exist without enabling destruction.

## **4. Stop Trying to Play God**

Sometimes a parent's greatest struggle is believing they must somehow make everything right. We worry, strategize, call, investigate, intervene, and replay every conversation in our minds. But there is only one Savior, and we are not Him. God never asked us to carry the responsibility of changing another person's heart. Surrender means recognizing our limitations and trusting God's ability to work where we cannot. When we stop trying to be God in our child's life, we become free to simply be the parent God called us to be.

## **5. The Parent Has a Heart That Needs Healing Too**

When a child walks away, the parent can become so focused on the child's condition that they forget their own heart is hurting. There may be grief, guilt, anger, disappointment, fear, shame, or even resentment. Those emotions need to be brought into the presence of God rather than hidden behind a strong appearance. Your child's struggles do not mean you must remain emotionally broken. God wants to minister to you too. Healing the parent is not abandoning the child; it is allowing God to restore the person who has been carrying the weight.

## **6. Pray Without Trying to Manipulate God**

Prayer is not a tool for controlling God or demanding the outcome we want. It is where we bring our deepest fears and desires before Him and learn to trust His wisdom. We can pray specifically for our children, pray for protection, pray for conviction, pray for godly relationships, and pray for opportunities for truth to reach their hearts. But we must also surrender our timetable and our preferred method. Faith says, “God, I want this—but more than I want my answer, I want Your will.”

## **7. Don't Let Their Journey Destroy Yours**

It is possible to become so consumed with a prodigal that the parent's own relationship with God begins to suffer. Your child's choices do not give you permission to abandon your marriage, neglect your other children, isolate yourself, or stop pursuing the calling God has placed on your life. You can hurt for someone and still have joy. You can pray for someone and still live your life. You can wait for someone without putting your entire life on hold. Keep walking with Jesus. Your faithfulness matters, even while someone you love is finding their way.

## **8. Keep the Door Open Without Leaving the Door Unlocked**

There is a difference between being available and being unprotected. A parent can leave the door of relationship open without allowing destructive behavior to enter the home. “You are always welcome to talk to me” does not have to mean “you can treat me any way you want.” Love can remain accessible while boundaries remain firm. The goal is not to build a wall around your heart, but neither is it to leave your heart completely unguarded. Wisdom teaches us how to remain connected without surrendering healthy boundaries.

## **9. The Father Is Still Watching**

Luke 15 gives us one of the most beautiful pictures of a parent's heart in Scripture. The father did not stop being a father when his son left. He did not stop loving him, and when the son finally returned, the father was ready to receive him. We cannot use this story as a guarantee about when or whether someone will return, but we can see the Father's heart of mercy, patience, and readiness for restoration. While we wait, we can remember that God sees what we cannot see. He knows where our children are, what they are experiencing, and what is happening in their hearts.

## **10. Hope Without Demanding an Outcome**

Christian hope is not the belief that God must give us the exact ending we have imagined. Hope is confidence in who God is even when we do not know how the story will unfold. We can believe God for restoration without making restoration our condition for trusting Him. We can continue praying, loving, and believing while releasing the outcome to God. Our ultimate hope is not simply that our child comes home—it is that God remains faithful through every chapter, and that He continues transforming our hearts as we trust Him.

## **Conclusion: The Story Is Still Being Written**

If there is one truth we want you to carry with you as you walk through **Breaking Free: Prodigal Hope**, it is this: **you do not have to know how the story ends in order to trust the One who is holding it.**

You may have begun this journey believing that the greatest need was for your son or daughter to change. And certainly, we pray for that. We pray for repentance. We pray for freedom. We pray for healing, restoration, deliverance, and a return to God. We pray that those who have wandered will come to themselves, turn toward home, and discover that the grace of God has not disappeared.

But somewhere along this road, God may begin showing you something else.

**He is working in you while you are waiting for Him to work in them.**

The waiting does not have to be wasted.

God can use this season to teach you a deeper surrender than you have ever known. He can expose fear that has controlled you, guilt that has tormented you, anger that has hardened you, and expectations that have exhausted you. He can teach you the difference between loving and rescuing, between helping and enabling, between carrying someone's burden and trying to carry responsibility that belongs to them.

You may not be able to change your child's choices, but you can choose how you will walk through them.

You can choose faith over fear.

You can choose prayer over panic.

You can choose boundaries over enabling.

You can choose forgiveness over bitterness.

You can choose community over isolation.

You can choose surrender over control.

And you can choose to keep walking with Jesus even when you do not understand what He is doing.

There will still be difficult days. A phone call may shake you. A conversation may disappoint you. Something you thought was progress may suddenly seem to disappear. Old fears may return, and you may feel the temptation to step back into controlling, rescuing, fixing, or worrying.

When that happens, return to what you have learned.

You are the parent. **God is God.**

Your responsibility is faithfulness. The outcome belongs to Him.

“Casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.” — 1 Peter 5:7

Surrender does not mean you stop caring. It means you stop carrying what was never yours to carry.

You can still answer the phone. You can still say, “I love you.” You can still pray. You can still speak truth. You can still celebrate healthy steps. You can still leave room for reconciliation. But you do not have to finance destruction, tolerate abuse, cover consequences, live in constant crisis, or sacrifice the rest of your family in an attempt to save someone you were never capable of saving.

There is only one Savior.

His name is Jesus.

And that truth should bring relief, not defeat.

The father in Luke 15 loved his son, but he could not take the journey for him. There came a moment when the son himself “came to his senses” (Luke 15:17). The father could not manufacture that moment. He could only remain a father whose heart was prepared for restoration when that moment came.

There are places in your child’s heart that you cannot reach.

**But God can.**

There are conversations you cannot have.

God can send someone else.

There are circumstances you cannot arrange.

God is already there.

There are nights when you do not know where they are.

God does.

There are things happening inside them that you cannot see.

God sees.

And there are chapters of their story that have not yet been written.

So keep praying—but keep living.

Keep hoping—but keep healing.

Keep loving—but keep your boundaries.

Keep believing—but release your timetable.

Keep the door of your heart open—but do not allow chaos to take possession of your home.

And do not walk this road alone.

Stay connected to people who will pray with you, tell you the truth, encourage you when you are tired, and remind you of what is true when fear begins speaking louder than faith. There will be days when someone else may have to carry hope for you until you can carry it again.

“Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.” — Galatians 6:2

Perhaps one day you will see the answer you have prayed for. Perhaps there will be a knock at the door, a phone call, a moment of surrender, or a quiet confession: **“I need help.”**

If that day comes, receive it with gratitude, wisdom, grace, and truth.

But until then, your life is not suspended.

Your marriage still matters. Your other children still matter. Your health matters. Your calling matters. Your relationship with Jesus matters. The people God has placed around you matter. And **you matter to God apart from what your child chooses to do.**

Prodigal Hope is not pretending everything will turn out exactly as we want.

Prodigal Hope is looking into an uncertain tomorrow and saying:

**“God, I trust You with my child.  
I trust You with what I cannot see.  
I trust You with what I cannot change.  
I trust You with the outcome.  
And I trust You with me.”**

Your child’s story is still being written.

**And so is yours.**

Do not allow someone else’s wandering to make you wander from God.

Do not allow someone else’s bondage to put you into bondage.

Do not allow someone else’s choices to steal the life Christ has given you.

Love them.

Pray for them.

Bless them.

Speak truth when God gives you opportunity.

Establish boundaries when wisdom requires them.

Be ready for restoration.

And then place them again into the hands of the Father.

“Be still and know that I am God.” — Psalm 46:10

There comes a point when we have prayed all we know to pray, said all we know to say, and done everything God has asked us to do.

At that point, faith whispers:

**“Father, they are Yours.”**

And maybe that is where **Breaking Free: Prodigal Hope** ultimately leads us—not to having all the answers, but to finally knowing where to place the questions.

Into the faithful hands of God.

So walk forward.

Not without tears.

Not without concern.

Not without hope for the one you love.

But **without carrying what belongs to God.**

The Father is still watching.

The Father is still working.

The Father is still faithful.

And whatever tomorrow brings, **you do not have to walk into it alone.**