

Parenting Prodigals
A Grace-Filled Guide for Navigating the Journey
By: Melinda King

Who is a Prodigal?

A "prodigal" is a child who has strayed—morally, spiritually, or relationally—from the values, beliefs, or path their parents hoped for. This journey often includes rebellion, estrangement, substance use, abandonment of faith, or alternative lifestyles.

1. Understand the Role of the Parent

Not the Enforcer, but the Witness of Grace

- You're called to love, not control.
- Your job is to create an environment that reflects the heart of God: patient, kind, and full of grace.
- Let go of fixing and instead focus on faithful presence.

2. Guard Your Heart and Mind

Self-care is not selfish—it's survival.

- Pray, seek support, and attend counseling if needed.
- Grieve what you've lost honestly; denial delays healing.
- Don't define yourself by your child's choices.

3. Maintain Relationship Over Rules

Connection creates the bridge back home.

- Stay in touch, even if it's just occasional texts or birthday cards.
- Avoid sermons—listen more than you speak.
- Offer unconditional love, not unconditional approval.

4. Set Boundaries with Love

Healthy boundaries aren't walls—they're gates.

- Clarify what is and isn't acceptable behavior in your home.
- Don't enable destructive choices.
- Be clear, consistent, and kind when enforcing limits.

5. Be a Safe Place for Return

Welcome without shame.

- Run to them compassionately, like the father in the parable (Luke 15).
- Resist "I told you so."
- Let reconciliation be more about relationship than restitution.

6. Pray and Persevere

Faith doesn't always bring fast answers.

- God is still working in the waiting.
- Enlist others to pray with and for you.
- Trust that no one is ever beyond redemption.

Helpful Scriptures

- Luke 15:11-32 — The Parable of the Prodigal Son
- Romans 2:4 — "It is God's kindness that leads to repentance."
- Galatians 6:9 — "Do not grow weary in doing good..."
- Psalm 126:5 — "Those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy."

Recommended Resources

- *Loving a Prodigal* by Judy Douglass
- *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen
- *Prayers for Prodigals* by James Banks
- Support groups (church-based or ministries like Celebrate Recovery, FamilyLife)

Final Encouragement

You're not alone. You, I, and other parents walk this painful road, and many prodigals do come home, sometimes changed in the most beautiful ways. Keep loving, hoping, and praying.