



## The Prodigals

*Bless the Lord who crowns you with tender mercies (Psalm 103, NKJV).*

I'm the mother of a prodigal son, no relation to that single dad in Palestine who had two boys, Malachi and Bob. Bob, baby of the family, twists Dad's arm, slips on a backpack of cash, goes to a *faraway country*, blows the money and ends up on a pig farm. Malachi stays put, building up a herd of heifers and fatted calves. Bob returns with remorse and a big appetite. Dad kills a fatted calf, Malachi kills Bob and goes off to live in the land of Nod. Well, not exactly, but it could have turned out that way.

Carlton was a prodigal just out of high school. Refusing to live by house rules, he ran away, slept in his car and worked at Little Caesar's on the far side of town. Attending a social gathering three days later, a woman asked me about him.

Before I could finish a sentence, I started bawling so hard I had to excuse myself to the restroom. The next night I drove to Little Caesars, stepped in the side door and asked him to come home. He returned—no running to meet him, no celebration, no fatted calf. Some parables just don't work for mothers.

Within a year he had moved out to live with friends. Close by, albeit in a *faraway country*. I needed to get hold of him one afternoon. No answer. Finally, hours later after interrogating friends, I learned he was in the ICU.

Rushing to the hospital and down the hall, I told the woman at the counter I was looking for my son Carlton, choking tears as I asked how he was. She glared at me. I'll never forget her look of disgust. Her only words, "He was drunk." I found him lying on his back, strapped to the bed, tears running down both sides of his head, strapped down because he had tried to run away. I told him I loved him. He would be okay.

On another occasion, his girlfriend called the police, reporting that he was drinking and had been shoving and threatening her.

(Fortunately, she wasn't injured.) Police arrived and took him to jail. I learned of it from her the next morning. I was in my seminary office when she called. I had a class to teach in ten minutes.

We always started with prayer. I asked if there were any prayer requests. Hardly had I gotten the words out when the tears started falling. There I was, the teacher, weeping in front of twenty students. I pulled myself together enough to briefly tell them my son was in jail.

Students prayed for me that morning—for Carlton as well. The class would never be the same.

Two years ago, a sober Carlton walked his beautiful daughter down a garden pathway to be married to a fine young gentleman. A crisis

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in his life had motivated him to give up drinking and smoking cold-turkey. He regularly goes to his nearby AA.

Prior to that he had rescued a prodigal dog. She had run away and was in the middle of a five-lane heavily trafficked street in Grand Rapids. After getting her in his car and bringing her home, he searched online five days before finding the owner—five days of such tight bonding that he was choked up as he left to take her back.

When he arrived, she wouldn't get out of his car. The woman was furious. "*That dog,*" she muttered. "*That dog* keeps digging holes under the fence and running away."

Yes, she was a *bad doggie!* So bad, the woman ended up giving her to Carlton—since named Tank and since spoiled with love and tender mercies. And I'm crowned with tender mercies—joyful times together with a prodigal son and prodigal grand-dog. □

—Ruth Tucker