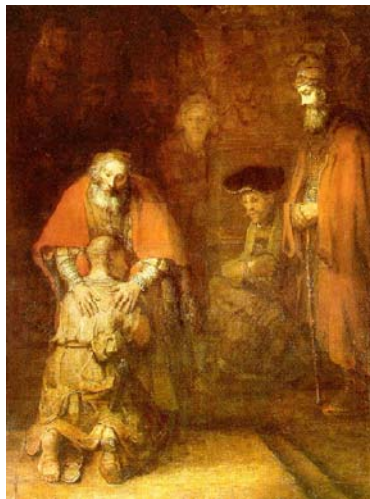


Prodigal "THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RETURNED"

A JOURNEY OF FREEDOM, HOPE, AND TRANSFORMATION



APPRENTICE GUIDE

DALE POLLARD

BARON MILLER & J. MICHAEL MATKIN

RICHARD MYERS, EDITOR



NAME _____

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Dale Pollard, Baron Miller, J. Michael Matkin

Richard Myers, Editor

Bellingham, WA

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Note:

For information on how to be trained to start and coordinate a Prodigal Men’s Ministry group in your local church, contact Dr. Dale Pollard at Prodigal Men’s Ministry Central in Bellingham, WA. 360-671-0081 or e-mail at pollardo@openaccess.org.



Welcome to Prodigal

Welcome to Prodigal Men's Ministry. On behalf of the over two hundred-+ men who have been part of this ministry since it started in 1995, and on behalf of the leadership of this group, we welcome you into "**The Fellowship of the Returned**". Prodigal has proven over the years to be a gift from the Lord to all who apply themselves to the work of formation, and who dedicate themselves to relationships with new friends and brothers in Jesus.

This is no small challenge. A nine-month commitment for men seems a bit long at first glance. Yet we've seen that this time goes very quickly and that it takes at least that long to learn to trust one another and to believe that the Lord is **actually transforming** our lives.

If you dedicate yourself to the Lord's leading, we are convinced that you can be freed from any hindrance in relation to your family, your church, or God. We know that becoming a man of **Integrity** means patience and surrender, that becoming a man of **Intensity** means risk and adventure and commitment, and that becoming a man of **Intention** means renewed passion, vision, prayer, and a listening heart.

Transformation is a word we use a lot in this ministry. It is the Lord's work, not just changing men but literally transforming men into Jesus' likeness day by day. **This is not a ministry of perfection**, it is a ministry of honesty and of acceptance and purpose. Prodigal is for all men. It's especially for those whom life and circumstances have weighed down and who until now have chosen to deal with this weight by isolating themselves. It is also a place where, before a holy God, we attack and destroy addictions and idols in our lives. . It is a place of hope and of healing, where we share dreams visions and passions.

In the **Apprentice** phase you will be asked to complete Four Objectives and to commit to meeting for at least nine months. We've designed the Objectives to give each person an avenue of accountability with our struggles and bring to light that which weighs us down. Your small group is where much of your work and many of your relationships will focus. We hope that in our meal time together, in the singing we share, and in the teachings we give, a growing sense of adventure and wonder and hope will build to overflowing in your hearts and minds.

In the **Journeyman** phase you will complete Objectives Five through Eight. At the beginning of the second phase the Lord's work in your

life will be apparent if there is an attitude of daily surrender to his will. By the end of the Journeyman phase you could be a maturing leader, praying and living life in community and with passion. But we all need to take this one phase at a time.

The final phase is the **Craftsman** (Leadership) phase. When you enter into this part of the journey, you will plunge deep into Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, concentrating on the Beatitudes, as well as His words of compassion as described in the Parable of Good Samaritan. The **Craftsman** phase focuses on prayer and service within community, growing more and more into Jesus' image. A central element to the Craftsman journey is the participation in a two-year cycle of monthly reflections named **Coracles**. These monthly reflections are avenues of prayer, spiritual formation and community building not only for Prodigal but for your family as well. Being immersed in these reflections tie us into a rhythm of life and a connection to a larger and more in-depth vision of Jesus and community that will enhance and shape the specific Prodigal ministry as a weekly place of rest and Sabbath.

Our story is the story of the **Prodigal Son**. This majestic parable (a story with a point or two) is a story of the kingdom of God. Jesus tells us what this kingdom is like; this kingdom that he proclaims has begun in his life and ultimately in his death and resurrection. We will immerse ourselves in this story. We believe this parable is your story and all of our stories.

Becoming part of this ministry is a high calling. At Prodigal, the Lord asks you to receive from him and to learn to protect and sacrifice for your brother, your family, and your church. This is a place for men to come out of isolation and purposelessness and follow the king of the universe, Jesus. Sure, this is hard work; what that's worthwhile in this life isn't? The result of this hard work is **brotherhood**, friends on this pilgrim journey bonded together in the struggle for what is right and pure and true. Participation in Prodigal is an honor and a privilege. You will be asked not only to receive but to give as you listen to the stories of your friends and pray together, participating in the **triumphs** of overcoming obstacles alongside others, led by our Lord.

Once again, welcome to an adventure into the very heart of our Triune God of Grace! With feasting, with fellowship, and with fortitude we ask the Holy Spirit to guide us as we traverse the wilderness and the waters of this journey together. This Parable is a story of **resurrection**, of **hope**, and of **celebration**. **It is your story too!**

Soli Deo Gloria

Prodigal
"THE FELLOWSHIP
OF THE RETURNED"



Introduction Materials



Vision/Mission

Our passion and commitment is to enable men, through the transforming power of the Gospel, to live in freedom, obedience and holiness within the context of spiritual friendships and community involvement.

Purpose

Our goal is for every man to experience a journey of repentance, hope, and joy in the forgiving and loving heart of God the Father. The Father creates in us new lives of purity and purpose, dedicated to loving service within the family, church, workplace, and community.

Values

Our conviction is that all men desire authentic relationships and purpose, purity of heart and conduct, and Sabbath rest and peace with our Triune God of Grace. We help develop this conviction through three core values:

- 1) **Integrity:** In honesty and humility, every man can be a consistent witness, true to his values and beliefs and a resource and mentor for others.
- 2) **Intensity:** With a growing passion to see Jesus formed in himself and all people, every man can trust the Holy Spirit to gift him and assist him in discovering and outlining the Lord's true priorities in his life.
- 3) **Intention:** With a dedicated and resolute purpose, every man can pursue the redemptive goals of discipleship in every area of life, vocation, and community.

Statement of Faith

We at Prodigal Believe In:

*God, the Father, who creates and sustains us;
Jesus Christ, the Son who redeems and rules us;
and the Holy Spirit who guides us personally
and professionally through God's inspired Word,
the Bible, our infallible guide of faith and conduct,
and through the fellowship of the Christian Church.*

Format & Expectations

Prodigal Regular & Summer Sessions

- **Regular Prodigal Season:** Beginning of October to the end of May
- **Summer Prodigal Season:** Beginning of June to end of September

Prodigal Regular Session Format

6:15 – 7:00	Meal time
7:00 – 7:30	Devotion/praise & worship
7:35 – 7:40	Announcements/break
7:40 – 8:00	Teaching
8:00 – 9:00	Small groups

Expectations for Participation

- Confidentiality
- No judgmental attitudes
- Everyone participates
- Make group times a priority
- Show up on time
- End on time
- Complete assignments on time
- Let your group leaders know of an absence
- Help create an atmosphere of honesty, prayer, and respect

- Contribute to group meal and cleanup responsibilities
- Practice mercy, patience, and love
- Contact fellow small group members outside of group time

Goals for Each Individual

- Growth in Jesus
- Spiritual depth
- Following Jesus in all we do
- Power to overcome obstacles
- Friendships
- Service and passion

Suggested Donation

- \$90.00 per person/per year
- We turn no one away for lack of money

Prodigal Summer Session Format

6:15pm	Start the BBQing
7:00pm	Eats/treats and greetings
7:15pm	Gather and worship
7:30pm	Singing and prayer
7:45pm	Teaching and small group interaction
8:30pm	Prayer and ending

Prodigal Small Group Participants

An ideal small group in Prodigal has 4-6 participants, one leader, and one co-leader to assist. The leader's job is not so much to "lead" as to facilitate the group process. Prayer is the root of this process. The purpose of Prodigal small groups is to make a safe (confidential) place for you to share and pray for what is going on in your lives. For the group to be successful, some boundaries must be in place. These boundaries are:

- Confidentiality
- Beginning and ending on time
- Minimizing cross talk
- Keeping to task (prayer) and keeping to purpose (personal issues)

When you uphold these boundaries, you help establish an orderly small group framework. Prodigal small groups usually operate for one hour, from 8:00pm to 9:00pm. The material you discuss and pray over in the small groups should be directly related (as much as possible) to the teaching of the evening. As men come together for worship and teaching, we call on the Lord to reveal to us, "great and mighty things which we do not know." (Jer. 33:3) As these revelations occur, our small group is the place where we do business with the Lord. It is where we share what God is telling us and how it affects us, then begin to pray for ourselves while the others in the group silently intercede.

Confidentiality:

It is paramount to uphold confidentiality in a Prodigal small group. By not sharing any stories, no matter how ambiguous, with your wives, friends, roommates, or even other pastors, you protect your fellow group members, and yourself, from gossip. With this being said, there are appropriate times that your small group leader may need to breach confidentiality, but only if the safety of others is at risk. Also, be sure to sign the confidentiality statement. No group may proceed unless all participants have turned in their confidentiality statements to the small group leader and he has given them to the Prodigal Coordinator.

Beginning and Ending:

As we teach and model the concept of boundaries, one needed yet challenging boundary is to start and end the small group sessions on time. With men eager to share in a small group and receive prayer, the group must begin as close to eight o'clock as possible. Also, out of respect for our kids in childcare and wives at home, it is important to end on time and go home.

Task and Purpose:

During prayer time, the facilitator may begin by acknowledging what God is saying to the group member and then allowing the individual to pray to God himself for what is going on in his life. This is a time to confess sin and allow God to forgive you, as well as to acknowledge whatever else God is saying about character flaws, past hurts, current issues, and future direction.

This process of prayer is intensive, and the group may not pray for all group members each night. This is okay as not God may not stir all members to ask for prayer either. Whatever the case, the next week of ministry will begin with prayer for those over whom the group didn't pray the previous week. It is better to respect and model the group boundaries by finishing on time and not praying for everyone than it is to squeeze in some "quota" prayer time while checking the watch, hurrying the process merely to "take care of" everyone.

Also, limit your sharing to what is happening to you, not what is happening to ex-wives, parents, your boss, or rowdy teenager. It is important that you share about what is happening to you, not others.

Cross Talk:

Cross talk is a natural occurrence in any group, especially in the early stages of development. Prodigal men love to give advice, which is fine during fellowship over snacks. However, it is detrimental during the small group time. Remember, the task is prayer, not counseling, and the focus is the guy who is sharing, not any one person's remedy for fixing. All men must covenant to uphold the sanctity of the small group. In the beginning of the ministry year, the small group will devote some time to allow members to share more generally about themselves, allowing men to bond so that when the time comes the group is ready to "do business." If cross talk persists, your facilitator may intervene and redirect the group's focus, reminding the person that by cross talking, he is not listening to the man who is sharing and thus he is not respecting group boundaries. Hopefully, though, by addressing this issue in the early stage of group development, men will be respectful and listen well to one another.

Apprentice Phase Schedule

Sample Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Teacher
1		Welcome/Overview, Parable & Stories	
2		Youngest Son	
3		Oldest Son	
4		Father (Small Groups & Notebooks)	
5		Integrity, Intensity, Intention	
		Objective One: Powerlessness Action Plan, Group Covenant, Commitments	
6		Humility	
7		Addictions and Dependencies	
8		Temptation and Sin	
		<i>Happy Thanksgiving - No man without an invitation to a Feast!</i>	
9		Living the Surrendered Life: Total Submission	
10		Objective One: Workshop & Worship	
11		Objective Two: Promise The Journey of Powerlessness and Promise (Renew Commitment)	
		<i>Break – Merry Christmas! Optional meeting end of December</i>	
12		Value Statements	
13		God's Covenantal Love	
14		Hope and the Christian Life	
15		A Theology of Suffering	
16		Objective Two: Workshop & Worship	
17		Objective Three: Confession Confession 101	
18		Confession 102	

Week	Date	Topic	Teacher
19		Fun & Fellowship Night	
20		Anger 101	
21		Anger 102	
22		Living the Confessed Life	
23		Objective Three: Workshop & Worship	
24		Objective Four: Compassion Forgiveness	
25		Lamentation – Loss & Grief	
26		Community and Intercession	
27		Prayer and Listening	
28		Prayer and the Father's Touch - Healing	
29		Objective Four: Workshop & Worship	
30		Objective Review Night	
31		Extended Small Group Time	
32		<i>End of the Year Potluck, Worship, Communion and Blessing</i>	
		<i>Summer Session begins... runs through September</i>	

Small Group Snack & Devotion Sign-Up

Sample Schedule

Week	Date	Devotion	Snack/Set-up/Clean-up
1		Leaders	Leaders
2		Leaders	Leaders
3		Leaders	Leaders
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
		<i>November 25th No meeting – Happy Thanksgiving!</i>	
9			
10			
11			
		<i>Christmas Break! Optional meeting end of December</i>	
12			
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18			
19		Fun and Fellowship Night	
20			

21			
22			
23			
24			
25			
26			
27			
28			
29			
30			
31			
32		<i>End of the Year Potluck, Worship, Communion and Blessing</i>	
		<i>Summer Session begins ... runs through September</i>	

Prodigal "THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RETURNED"



Beginning the Journey

INTEGRITY
INTENSITY
INTENTION

The Youngest Son

Read Luke 15:11-31

A Parable is a story. These stories are one of the most powerful ways that Jesus taught his disciples and others, and how he teaches us today. Some think that a parable is a story with only one main point, a very obvious one. The authors of this ministry have a different opinion. We believe that parables employ a whole range of themes that add to the richness of the story, and that more than one point is available in these stories. This is certainly true with the Parable of the Prodigal Son. You will become familiar with many themes with which the richness and the genius of this parable confront us, as well as the main characters of this story -- the youngest son, the oldest son, and the father. The next three teachings will begin to describe these three characters and how their stories sound very much like our own.

How old do you think the youngest son is in this story? Jesus never told us. He left that to the imagination of the hearer (for us, the readers). What is the relationship between the youngest son, the father and the older brother before the story begins? What was Jesus thinking when he started the story at this point in the life of the three characters? What is the context of the story? What is going on in the Gospel, the Biblical narrative at this point in Jesus' public ministry? As you begin to immerse yourself in this story and to ask some of these questions, you will, no doubt, have many more. This is part of what it means to engage your imagination in the story, not to make things up that are not there, but to engage more than just your mind. We need to engage our whole being into the stories of how God redeems his people.

Jesus weaves a magnificent tale, a story of breadth and of depth, challenging the religious status quo. He begins by describing the shocking opening scene of the youngest son asking his father for his share of the inheritance. This was a punishable act; an act of disrespect and shame toward the father and the whole village. After acquiring the money, the youngest spends all he has (hence the word *prodigal* which means *extravagant*, in this case in the context of spending). After hunger almost kills him, he is desperate and poor and contrives a confession to return to his father as a hired hand. He is at his wits' end, at the bottom.

The welcoming arms of the father surprise him, though. His father embraces him, clothes him, and celebrates his return with the whole village. It is grace the son doesn't expect, coming in ways that surprise and perhaps even shock him. The father returns to him the signet ring, showing that he has restored to him the status of a son in the

household. His father also gives him the best robe of protection and responsibility, as well as new sandals on his feet which signify that he is a freeman and not a bound servant or slave. The youngest is alive again in his father's eyes, for his son was as good as dead to him. The youngest is found when once it seemed that he was lost forever. He has returned to his father and home again, in the midst of celebration.

This is the best news for all people who find themselves like the youngest son, people who have wandered far into foreign lands to squander life on their own idols. The youngest son is the consummate "sinner." People have written songs, poems, and books about him. He is the character in this story with whom we most easily identify..

Some of the people around Jesus as he was telling this story were people that most of the religious leaders disdained as outcasts and 'sinners' (the lame, blind, lepers, prostitutes, women, Gentiles, etc...),. These people must have gasped for air. Jesus was saying that they were the younger son and that God loved, accepted, and embraced them. What hope this must have given them. What hope this gives us!

Below are some questions to get you started on your long journey into the heart of this story, this parable. This will be a wonderful adventure as the Lord reveals to you aspects of yourself that come to light as a direct result of reading, studying, and hearing this story. You will live in this story for at least this year and perhaps longer. It is the story of grace, of love, of hope, and of home. Welcome, men, into the "Fellowship of the Returned"!

Questions:

In what ways do you identify with the Younger Son in the parable?

What part of the journey are you on? Are you heading for the distant country, returning home, or somewhere in between?

Describe some ways that you have tried to manipulate confession and restoration. What is authentic confession?

What are you willing to do in order to change the patterns in your life that have led to walls between you and the Lord, your family, and your community of faith?

Read and re-read this story in the weeks to follow and pray for courage from the Holy Spirit to receive insight so you'll know how he wants you to change.

