

## IS CHURCH A CONSUMER PRODUCT?

Dan White, Jr.

Consumerism turned the church into a service provider:

“I want good preaching.”

“I want amazing worship.”

“I want great kids’ programs.”

Would we go to church if it was just a bunch of ragamuffin Jesus-followers gathering around a table, trying to love God and love neighbors?

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Although it’s not stated in the text, it’s not hard to imagine that the father would likely know where his son was – may well have known about the horrid conditions his son was suffering in the pig pen. But, he did not go there. He did not send some much-needed cash to ease the suffering. He did not take any steps to lessen the miserable consequences the boy had reaped by his bad choices. Unfortunately, we see way too many parents these days that, by their actions, actually make it possible for the children to continue in open rebellion to the will of God.

**He did not forgive and restore his prodigal son until the son repented and sought his forgiveness.** It’s clear that he was willing to forgive. It’s obvious that he was eager to forgive. He made it easy for his wayward son to seek and receive forgiveness. But notice carefully that he did not forgive the prodigal until the young man *“came to himself,”* humbly returned, and asked for reconciliation. This is the pattern taught throughout the Scriptures, and we must follow it.

**He never gave up hope for his lost son.** As the son was nearing home, *“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.”* It has been noted that the father must have been constantly watching and always hoping that he would see his son on the horizon. No loving parent can give up hope for a child gone astray.

The father of the prodigal son serves as a great role model for us today. Of course, we believe he is a sort of shadow of our perfect Heavenly Father. Let us strive to be more like Him.

## “CALL ME MARA”

Bryan Matthew Dockens

Elimelech and Naomi were driven by famine from Judah to seek refuge in the land of Moab. While living as an expatriate among the Moabites, Naomi was widowed, and, eventually, she was bereft of her two sons Mahlon and Chilion (Ruth 1:1-5). Following this great upheaval in her life, the woman returned to her hometown where she was received gladly. *“It happened, when they had come to Bethlehem, that all the city was excited because of them; and the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’”* (Ruth 1:19). Despite the warm welcome, she was morose and replied, *“Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and Jehovah has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since Jehovah has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?”* (20-21). Her given name means “pleasant,” but she was dejected and insisted she be called “bitter” instead.

Readers unfamiliar with the book might think Ruth’s mother-in-law would be known as Mara thenceforth. Not so. In the very next verse, the narrator records, *“So Naomi returned”* (22), and thus she is referred to thirteen more times throughout the book (2:1, 2, 6, 22; 3:1; 4:3, 5, 9, 14, 16, 17). Never once did any character in the narrative refer to Naomi as Mara and neither did the inspired narrator.

With the cultural onset of so-called “transgenderism,” sadly confused or dangerously perverted persons will re-name themselves to reflect the identity claimed. The athlete Bruce Jenner claims to be a woman named Caitlyn and the actress Ellen Page calls herself a man named Elliot. Activists angrily accuse truth-tellers of “deadnaming,” but just as Naomi’s family, friends, and neighbors all understood she was being irrational and declined to participate in her delusion, so realists now need to firmly stand on facts and refuse to yield to ridiculous claims.

*“From the beginning of the creation, God made them ‘male and female’”* (Mark 10:6). Men are men. Women are women. God made it that way and there is nothing a person can do to change that.

New names assigned by the Lord are something altogether different. He renamed Abram Abraham (Genesis 17:5) and He renamed Simon Peter (Matthew 16:18). These names stuck because they originated with the source of all truth, God Himself (Isaiah 65:16). They are real, just as the name Christian is real (Acts 11:26; Isaiah 62:2).

**"WHAT MUST I DO  
TO BE SAVED?"**

**ACTS 16:30**

**LEARN THE GOSPEL**

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

**BELIEVE IN CHRIST**

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

**CONFESS CHRIST**

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

**REPENT OF SIN**

Acts 3:19; 17:30

**BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST**

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

**REMAIN STEADFAST**

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"THE ASSEMBLING OF  
OURSELVES TOGETHER"**

**HEBREWS 10:24-25**

**SUNDAY**

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

**WEDNESDAY**

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard  
Belén, New Mexico

**Seekers Welcome.  
Members Expected.**

**"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN  
ANY TRESPASS...  
RESTORE SUCH A ONE"**

**GALATIANS 6:1**

**CONFESS TRESPASSES**

James 5:16; 1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9

**REPENT OF SIN**

Acts 8:22

**PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS**

Acts 8:22

**REMAIN STEADFAST**

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN IS  
LIKE APPLES OF GOLD IN  
SETTINGS OF SILVER"**

**PROVERBS 25:11**

"Sometimes, you need a 'Stop Doing' list as badly as you do a 'To Do' list."

**"WHOLE COUNSEL"**

**ACTS 20:27**

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**THINGS THE FATHER OF THE PRODIGAL DID NOT DO**

Greg Gwin

There are many things to learn from the famous parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Each of the three characters in the parable – the prodigal, the father, and the elder brother – provides us with essential instruction in spiritual matters. Few Biblical texts have served as the basis for more or more powerful sermons and lessons.

Our emphasis here is on the father, and specifically on some of the things he did **not** do. Consider:

**He did not try to justify his son's sinful actions.** Many parents make this critical mistake. Even when their children have done horrible, devastating wrongs, some parents will make excuses for them. Some have even been known to change their position on basic moral issues if it so happens that their son or daughter has followed that sinful route. This, of course, only makes things worse.

**He did not continue a normal relationship with his erring son.** The reality was that their relationship had been severely altered, not by the father's choices, but rather by the son's. The father accepted this reality, as unpleasant as it was. There was nothing 'normal' in the family as long as this son continued in his sinful ways.

**He did not rush to bail his son out of the trouble he had gotten himself into, and he did not enable him to continue in his sinful lifestyle.**

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