

The Prodigal Son

2026-03-08 – Luke 15:11-32



As the poor, the hungry, and the weeping came to Jesus, the religious leaders of the day were bitter that Jesus received them. They did not understand that the kingdom of God is for all who come to the king in humility. Join us this week as Pastor Ashton brings us a message from Luke 15 and shows us how our king responds to those who repent.

Good morning, everyone. We are in for a treat this morning. Our youth have gotten to hear Pastor Ashton teach every Thursday night since he started and every Sunday morning during second service. But this is the first time for most of you, and I think first time for all of us—except maybe this front row here—that we get to see him in person. And so we are very blessed this morning to have Pastor Ashton. And so I'm going to pray and then he will jump in.

Father in heaven, we thank you for this day. Lord, we thank you for Pastor Ashton and for your call on this man's life. We pray, Lord, as he has spent this week meditating on your word, we pray, Lord, that from his mouth will come just mighty words for this congregation. We praise you for the way he is leading the youth and the families of our church, and we pray this morning that you would guide his words as he leads all of us together. We praise you, Lord, for the work of your spirit in his life and for his gifts. And we praise you that we get to be edified then. We pray you would give us eyes to see and ears to hear as we listen to his words. We pray all this in the glorious name of your son, Jesus. Amen.

Thank you, Pastor Matt. Very kind. Don't know if I'm deserving, but I did want to start—since first opportunity to speak to all of you—just to thank you. Thank you very much for the hospitality, the support, the prayers, the encouragement, all that you've shown Brynn and I just over these past few months. It's been an extremely big blessing to us. Would you please pray with me?

Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, I just pray that you would be honored in this time. Lord, please give me your words to speak. Please help me to expound on your word faithfully, Lord, that this would just be a blessing to all of us, including myself, Lord, as we delve into your gracious character, your call upon our lives, and you would help us to trust you more. Lord, I just pray you would bless this time, bless this week, and we pray this in your son's holy and precious name. Amen.

Well, as many of you know, Brynn and I recently moved from Dallas, Texas. And I got to say, the weather change has been as extreme as you probably would expect. But we have had a couple of nice days. And as I've been thinking about our time in Dallas, I've been thinking about a Hebrew class I took in one of my final semesters. During this time, we'd had a couple semesters of learning the basic grammar, vocabulary, and things. And during this class, we were going through the

entire book of Jonah. Now, I know for a lot of you, the book of Jonah is very special. And this time was very special for me as well. I spent a whole semester—only four chapters—but really going in deep into the text, learning about what God is communicating through his story, through Jonah, through the giant fish—a story many of us have heard since childhood.

And as I'm going through this story, two big impressions were left on me as I was leaving, as I think about this class afterward. The first one being just how patient **God** is. He's patient with the people of Nineveh. Their sin was so wicked. If you go into a study—and that's not our text for today—but if you go into the things that they were doing, it is astounding the patience of God that he did not wipe them off the earth immediately, but rather he gave them an opportunity to repent, to turn from their evil, and to turn to him instead. But **God** is also gracious to Jonah. Jonah, the disobedient prophet who fled from the Lord, and then when he was swallowed by the great fish and was spat back on shore, he reluctantly did what God asked. But then, even after preaching a message of repentance to the people of Nineveh, afterward, he's complaining to God, saying, yeah, you did exactly what I thought you would do. This is unfair.

And this really brings me to my second major impression from the book of Jonah, which is how frustrating of a character is Jonah? I mean, many of the characters we see in Scripture are those who don't know God, don't understand God, and do all these wicked things. But Jonah, he says it there in chapter 4, he says, **"I know you are a gracious and compassionate God"** (Jonah 4:2, paraphrased), and that is the reason I don't want you to save my enemies. Because I know if I preach this message of repentance and they respond faithfully, you will withhold judgment. How frustrating is that—to know the grace of God and to intentionally choose to withhold it?

Yet before we judge Jonah too harshly—and we can judge him, he did some very lousy things—but before we judge him too harshly, it might be worth us spending some time in self-reflection. We have the same command from God. Christ said it himself, **"Go and preach the gospel to all the nations"** (Matthew 28:19, paraphrased). But as we look at the history of the church the past 2,000 years, we can see many periods in which the church has not done so faithfully. We talk about the time of the Reformation in which the Catholic view of justification was all askew. God's grace was not preached. But even today—because again, that might be shifting blame—even today, are we always faithful to God's command to share his grace to all the nations? And not just foreign nations, but including our neighbors, our co-workers, our enemies, our friends.

And I think there might be a few reasons why we do this. They seem like excuses, ways of getting out of it. Maybe it's fatalism. It might be the view, "well, that person, they're so resistant, so stubborn, there's no way that God can save them." Maybe it's complacency, "well, I just, I don't really know if it's worth sharing the grace of God with others. I have other things to do. It's not

really that important for me right now.” Maybe it's stubbornness. “That person has hurt me in deep ways. So sure, maybe my pastor can go and share the gospel with them, or maybe someone else, a street preacher, someone on the internet, someone else can do it, but that is not a task for me.”

Whatever the excuse that we might use—and we all use them at times—to not share God's grace with others, these aren't true excuses. The command of God remains the same. And I think one of the reasons why we find ourselves in this place that we aren't sharing the grace of God with others is we're treasuring the wrong things. After all, what did Christ say? He said, **“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”** (Matthew 6:21). And then he said, **“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”** (Matthew 12:34, paraphrased). And it's not just words, but it's actions. What is in your heart will affect your actions.

Do you properly value the gracious character of God?

So our question for this morning is, **do you value properly the gracious character of God?** Because whether you value the gracious character of God, whether you treasure him and his grace, will affect your actions, will affect whether you are willing to share that grace with others, including those who are your enemies.

Now this morning we're going to be looking at a story of two brothers, both of whom underestimate the grace of their father in different ways as we'll go into the story, but they don't understand his gracious character. And because of that, because of the ways their misunderstanding plays out, their stories go a little bit differently. So if you have your Bibles, if you please turn with me to Luke chapter 15, we'll be beginning with verse 11. Luke chapter 15, beginning with verse 11.

Now to set a little bit of context, earlier in chapter 15, Christ is addressing a specific situation that has been raised to him. Over the past few weeks, we've been covering different stories in the book of Luke, and frequently it's Christ speaking to the multitudes, to all these groups of people, to sinners, to Pharisees, to followers. And here we see at the beginning of chapter 15, one specific group coming to him, wanting to hear from him. It's tax collectors and sinners. Now, if you know about the history of Israel during this period, the tax collectors were not well-liked. These were those who have sided with Rome, who are now imposing excessive taxes on their own people, sometimes even skimming the top. These were not well-liked people, and they were sinning greatly.

And the Pharisees and the scribes, as we see here in chapter 15, take notice of this, and they see an opportunity. They don't believe in Christ, they don't believe he's the Messiah, and so they see

this as an attack against him. Why would the Messiah spend time eating, serving those who do not obey God? They dishonor him. They don't follow the law. They have betrayed our nation. Why would the Messiah do this? He is supposed to be our king.

So Christ responds to these arguments with three parables. And we will be looking at the third one of this trio, but all three are communicating similar points about the grace of God. And in today's story, which is commonly known as the parable of the prodigal son, we will see the true meaning of God's grace and how misunderstanding can take form.

Do you properly value the gracious character of God?

He also said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.' So he distributed the assets to them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country, where he squandered his estate in foolish living. After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he had nothing. Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything.

Luke 15:11-16 CSB

So we're in Luke chapter 15, beginning with verse 11, we're going to read until verse 16, which will go in the next slide as well. *He also said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate I have coming to me.' So he distributed the assets to them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered together all he had and traveled to a distant country where he squandered his estate in foolish living. After he had spent everything, a severe famine struck the country and he had nothing. Then he went to work for one of the citizens of that country who sent him into the fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything."* (Luke 15:11–16).

Now, the story begins by describing this family of three: a father and two sons. The younger son goes to his father and says, "Hey Dad, I know an inheritance is coming, so can I get that now?" A couple of points about that first. According to Deuteronomy chapter 21, assuming that these are the only two sons—no daughters, no dowries, anything like that—this younger son could expect one-third of his father's property. So it's not a majority of his father's wealth, but it's a very sizable portion of it—one-third of his father's wealth. He wants it now.

Also, this practice of asking for an early inheritance is not entirely unique in the story, but it does carry with similar implications to the way it does today. Now, not necessarily, but usually if you ask for an early inheritance, what you're communicating is, you might as well be dead to me. I

mean, after all, all you have to offer me is your property, the inheritance I'm going to get from you. I don't want this relationship. I just want your money.

And we begin to see here in the younger son's thinking—and we'll see it in the older son as well—is a very transactional way of his relationship with his father. Where he's looking to earn something from his father, to get money from him, but he doesn't want the relationship. He just wants what he can get from his father.

So the son goes. The son goes to a distant nation, assuming a Gentile nation, and he goes and he spends all of his money on foolish living. We'll see here later in the story that much of his money was spent on prostitution, living a life of sin, of wastefulness, and he finds himself penniless. So what does he do? Because you have to have money to eat, to have a place to live. He hires himself out to a Gentile farmer. And what does he do for the farmer? He tends their pigs.

Now I want you to remember, who is Jesus' audience here? He's speaking to an audience of predominantly or maybe exclusively Jewish people. So imagine how shameful that is. First, this son has dishonored his father, he's disgraced his family, he's gone and lived in sinful ways, but now he's even hiring himself to a Gentile, to do Gentile work in a Gentile land, and he even is craving the food that the Gentiles eat. This son is in a disgraceful position.

At this point in the story, maybe you will pity him for how terrible his life is, but not too much. He has made certain decisions and it's led him to a point of misery. But then we get to verse 17 and we see the son begin to realize the position that he's in, the foolishness of it.

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When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food, and here I am dying of hunger! I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers."'

Luke 15:17-19 CSB

In verse 17, it says, "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired workers have more than enough food? And here I am dying of hunger! I'll get up, go to my father, and say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired workers.'" (Luke 15:17–19).

Now here we see the son have a moment of realization. He realizes just how silly this all is. After all, here he is barely surviving, starving, wanting to eat pig slop, and he remembers the servants that his father has. Well, these individuals work for his dad and they have enough to eat, maybe

not living in luxury or anything, but they have enough to eat. Maybe he should go to his dad and ask for a job.

Now, in this, we see a confession as well. Him recognizing that he has sinned against his father, he has sinned against God. And there are good and bad parts about this. It may seem just good, the humility of the son, but there's a bad part as well. So first things first, the son is demonstrating a great realization of his own sin, and that is good. He understands that he has sinned greatly. He sinned against God, against his father. His sin is great, and he knows it.

But the other side of it that isn't so good is he doesn't understand the gracious character of his father. He assumes maybe his dad will be nice enough to give him a job, but after that it's going to be a transactional relationship again. Okay, I'll work for him and he'll give me the food I need. So he's not my dad, he's just my boss. I'll earn my wages, eat the food that I need to survive, and that will be the extent of our relationship.

So then, as we get to verse 20, we see that this expectation that the son has—that my dad might be nice enough, but I'm not expecting much from him—quickly changes.

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So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.'

Luke 15:20-21 CSB

Going to verse 20, it says, ***“So he got up and went to his father. But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son.’***

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But the father told his servants, 'Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let's celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' So they began to celebrate.

Luke 15:22-24 CSB

But the father told his servants, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it. Let’s celebrate with a feast,

because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! So they began to celebrate.” (Luke 15:20–24).

We see the grace of the father here in multiple ways. So the son is coming. He has this rehearsed confession. We can imagine him saying over and over, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight,” over and over saying it. And as he comes, he arrives inside of his father's house. And then the unexpected happens because custom would dictate that the son would come to father, not father to son. It's a proper show of respect, but the father runs to him. And not only does the father run to him, you might get to this point in the story like, oh, he's going to start beating him with a stick. No, he runs to him and embraces him. He kisses him.

And so the son begins this rehearsed confession, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight.” And the father interrupts him. He's says to the servants, we need to celebrate. Prepare a feast, kill the fattened calf. We need to celebrate. My son is back!

Do you properly value the gracious character of God?

- Humbly repent/confess with expectation, not presumption

And the point of this section of the parable, we see it with the son through positive and negative examples, is to **repent or confess with expectation, not presumption**. See, we see the son here recognize the reality of his sin, but he doesn't understand the character of his father. So when he comes to him asking for this transactional business relationship, he doesn't understand his father's grace that he will accept him back to sonship.

But what we see up there is presumption. I want you to imagine: what would it look like for the son to return presumptuously? Maybe the son would come to his father and say, "Hey, Dad, listen, I've been living in this other country. I'm currently tending pigs for this Gentile. I don't think we want the neighbors to find out about this. Why don't you say, you let me come back home, we'll sweep this under the rug, and we can move on? This is no big deal, Dad."

I think we can imagine that the response would be just a little bit different. It's presumptuous. It's knowing his Father is gracious, but it's not recognizing the reality of his sin.

When we talk about the implication for our lives, we are to **humbly repent or confess with expectation**. That means recognizing the reality of our sin. The Son recognizes His. Recognizing that we have sinned against God, we have sinned against others. And that carries with it an eternal debt, something that we cannot pay on our own. Our sin is great and we must realize it.

But on the other side of that, where we have humility in repentance and confession, is expectation, is knowing the gracious character of God, knowing what he has done for us. **But while**

we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). He hasn't left us hanging, even though we deserve it, but he came to earth, God in flesh, and died on a cross for our sins.

Humbly repent or confess with expectation, not presumption. We do not take the grace of God for granted, believing that, well, you know, he'll forgive me, so it's totally okay. Really, what I did wasn't that bad. But nor should we sit where this younger son is, where we don't understand the gracious character of God, where we approach him and say, "Hey, if I just do X & Y, maybe we'll be okay enough. I mean, I won't be your son or daughter, but maybe we can connect a little bit."

Humbly repent or confess with expectation, not presumption. Now, in this application point, you see two different commands that are given, and that is intentional. They don't mean exactly the same thing. When we look at the New Testament, the term repent or repentance is usually applied to unbelievers. They're called to repent and be baptized, repent and believe in Christ. There are some exceptions to this, but generally the term refers to the turning away from a life of sin. The book of Hebrews describes it as dead works, which have no value at all. That is the life we once led.

But at the moment of faith, when we repent—and this is the work of God, even in repentance—it is not just humans being convinced that, "Oh, I'm bad enough, God is good enough, so let me turn away." It is a work of God. But in this, we see a turning toward God in faith.

Now, when we look at Christians, and we can use the term repent at times, really the more common word in the New Testament is confess. To confess our sins to God, to one another, not just to priests, but to other brothers and sisters in Christ. To reveal the fact that we are sinners. We see this in the book of 1 John, chapter 1, verse 9: ***"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"*** (1 John 1:9).

And John there is writing to believers, not unbelievers. We are called to confess our sins because, if we treat our relationship with God as, "Well, I know he's gracious and I kind of repented. I'm doing most of the right things," we downplay the reality of our sin. We are mistaken.

Now that isn't to say that the Christian life should be marked by persistent sin. But in the occasions that we do sin in our thoughts and our words and our actions, we should confess them to God. In other places in the scripture, we see we should confess it to others as well.

Do you properly value the gracious character of God?

Now his older son was in the field; as he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant. 'Your brother is here,'

he told him, 'and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

Luke 15:25-27 CSB

Now this brings us to verse 25. We'll begin to shift characters. We talked a lot about the younger brother, but what about the older brother? Where is he in all of this? Verse 25 begins, ***"Now his older son was in the field, so he came near to the house. He heard, as he came near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he summoned one of the servants, questioning what these things meant. 'Your brother is here,' he told him, 'and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'"*** (Luke 15:25–27).

So here we have the older brother. Now, this brother is hard at work—he's in the field. You can imagine him tending, maybe plowing the field, doing whatever he is supposed to do. All of a sudden, he hears a commotion in the house, so he goes to investigate. He calls one of the servants and asks, "Hey, what is the deal? Why is there a celebration going on?" The servant here says, "Your brother has returned. He's back. He's alive. He's found."

And it is sort of interesting when you go through this story: the older brother here never refers to the younger as his brother. He'll say to his father, "your son," but he never says, "my brother." In this, also through his words and actions going forward, we see an unwillingness to accept his brother back—an unwillingness to show grace to his brother who has repented, who has returned. The older brother won't have anything to do with him.

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Then he became angry and didn't want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. But he replied to his father, 'Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders, yet you never gave me a goat so that I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.'

Luke 15:28-30 CSB

And we'll continue on to verse 28, going to 30. ***Then he became angry and didn't want to go in. So his father came out and pleaded with him. But he replied to his father, "Look, I have been slaving many years for you, and I have never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me a goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him."*** (Luke 15:28–30).

Now, there are several key points to this section. First one: the brother refuses to go in, and this will play into the next section as well. But the brother refuses to go in. He's in the field, he's

around his father's house, but he won't come into the house. Now, remember, this is a parable. So, what are the real-life implications of this? Jesus's primary audience are the Pharisees and the Scribes—these religious leaders who are outwardly obedient. They're following the law in outward forms; they're around God, they participate in the sacrificial system, they study the scriptures, they are in the nation of Israel—they're around God and his people, but they do not come into his kingdom.

A second really important point: remember the transactional relationship these brothers have with their father. What we see here is that this son goes to his father and says, "Hey, listen, I have been working hard for you. I've never disobeyed you." And maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration, but he's saying, "Hey, I've been obedient to you, and you haven't even given me a goat so I can celebrate with my friends. But here, this son who's done all these wicked things comes back, and suddenly we're killing the fattened calf—the prized cow—for us to eat. What is going on here?"

Now, a couple of things about what he says: "I've been working so hard, I've been slaving for you, and I haven't even received a young goat." Notice he says, "celebrate with my friends." It might be overreading to see what he means by that—in terms of why celebrate with your friends, why not celebrate with your family. Maybe there's a sense of pride in that. But, at the very least, we do see a strong sense of pride in how he views obedience as a means to self-interest, as a way of getting things for himself.

Remember the real-life implications of this parable: the Pharisees viewed the law of God, and obedience to it, as a means of material blessing. So, if you were rich in this life, it meant you were faithful. If you weren't rich, or if you were sick, it meant you weren't faithful—it meant you sinned in some way. Think of the blind man: his father, his mother, his grandparents sinned. This is the viewpoint of this group of people. They believed that obedience to God meant material blessing.

So the son here seems to just be making a comparison. "Well, I've done all these things, and I haven't even received a goat. My brother has done all these bad things, and you've given him a calf." It seems like just a comparison, and it is, but we also see here a pride, that his obedience is driven by self-interest, that he wants to gain something by doing these outward acts of obedience.

And what he finds here is that this outward obedience that is driven by self-interest is no obedience at all. It is going through the motions. All it is acting a part.

Do you properly value the gracious character of God?

- Humbly repent/confess with expectation, not presumption
- Abandon "obedience" that is driven by self-interest

And this brings us to our application from the section by negative example. To abandon “obedience” that is driven by self-interest. And of course “obedience” in quotes because it is not true obedience at all. All it is going through the motions, playing a part.

Now, first and foremost, God wants a broken and contrite heart. We saw that with the younger brother. He desires that above sacrifice, above outward obedience. Now, let me be clear. When you come to faith in Christ, your outward obedience will change. Your actions will change. Your life will look different. Faith in Christ will change your thoughts, your decisions, your actions.

But let's not put the cart before the horse. Remember, what does God want first and foremost? A broken and a contrite heart. So when we go about these acts of obedience that are not true obedience, and we desire to gain something from it, our heart is not for the Lord. We do not trust in Him, believe in Him, truly love Him. Really, we're just going through the motions trying to get something out of it.

And unfortunately, this is in many ways, the spirit of the age among many who call themselves Christians, a desire to earn something material by their faith. In all our steps to move away from works righteousness, to reformation period, different things, we keep finding ourselves drifting back to the same confusion that the older brother has, where he knows his father is gracious and kind, but he doesn't recognize his own sin.

Obedience that is not driven by self-interest desires to give our hearts to the Lord. That is why we must recognize our sin, realize that we have sinned greatly against God. He is gracious, kind, and loving. But if we lose sight of our sin, it becomes very easy to be wrapped up in this false obedience driven by self-interest.

Do you properly value the gracious character of God?

‘Son,’ he said to him, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

Luke 15:31-32 CSB

This now brings us to our final two verses of the section. Beginning with verse 31, the father is now speaking. ***Son, he said to him, “You are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”*** (Luke 15:31–32).

Now, this section begins with this phrase, and it's worth explaining a bit for a second. He says, "You are always with me, and everything I have is yours." Now, remember Jesus' audience—the

Pharisees. It might be easy for us to think Jesus is saying to them, "Well, you've been with God, you're in the kingdom of God, everything is all right, everything I have is yours. Things are all right between us." But that's not what he's saying.

Remember how this older son was in the field around his father's house, but he wouldn't come in. The Pharisees, similarly, have been around God. They've been with Him in terms of location, in terms of social conditions. But they haven't come in. And why haven't they come in? Because they haven't repented of their sin, of their self-righteousness, of their self-interest. They haven't come into the father's house.

But next, the father says, "We had to celebrate and rejoice." It's really interesting—when you look at the Greek, it literally says, "It is necessary to celebrate and rejoice." We see this as the natural response to a sinner repenting: to rejoice.

What is the older brother's response? Well, it's anger. He's furious. "My father showed grace to him. How could he do this?" The natural response of the father is to rejoice.

Now, at this point in the story, we usually focus on the three main characters, and that's right—they are the three main characters: the father, the older son, and the younger son. But there is a fourth character with a speaking role in this section, and he was in the previous section. When we look at a parable, we can understand that there are certain characters in the story who represent real-life people or groups.

The father represents God, and of course, this is a parable. This is a human. It's not one-to-one, but he does represent something about God to help us understand God better. The older brother are the Pharisees and Scribes. The younger brother are the sinners and tax collectors.

But who is the fourth character in the story? Well, it's the servant—or rather, the group of servants. We saw them speak just a moment ago, echoing the Father, saying that, "Yes, we had to celebrate and rejoice. It's necessary." This is our natural response.

Now I mentioned earlier that this parable of the prodigal son is situated among a trio. It's the last one. When we look at the second one, we see an interesting phrase about how the angels of God rejoice over sinners repenting. If even one sinner repents, the angels are clapping and cheering. That's their natural response.

Now again, in this story, the servant is not the focus. The angels of God are not the focus, but it is an interesting point. That as we look at these servants, their response is not anger like the older son, but it is to rejoice and follow their master's commands.

Unlike the older son who responds with fury, with questioning, with thinking his way is the right way, these servants simply obey. And for us, we have a similar command. What is our natural response to seeing the grace of God shown to sinners who repent? What is our natural response? Is it anger? Is it confusion? Is it thinking our way is the right way? Or is it rejoicing?

Do you properly value the gracious character of God?

- Humbly repent/confess with expectation, not presumption
- Abandon “obedience” that is driven by self-interest
- Share in the joy of our Father

We're called to share in the joy of our father. These servants share in the joy of their father by doing as he commanded and rejoicing with him. Now this doesn't mean, as we share in the joy of our Father, that we need to throw a banquet necessarily every time someone comes to faith in Christ, someone is baptized, we can, but that's not really what it means. It means living a joyful life, life that is derived from the joy of our Father. It means sharing his joy.

Remember back to the beginning, we talked about how we had this command to declare the gospel of grace to all the nations, and how we often do not value God's gracious character properly. Well, this is what it looks like to value his gracious character properly. It means to share in his joy, to see things how he sees them. That while, yes, he hates sin, and we should hate sin also, when a sinner repents and God shows them grace, we should seek to do likewise.

It's not just about parties and feasts, but it's about us following the will of the Father for us to be aligned. We follow his lead. We follow his commands. We share in the joy of our father.

So in this story, we have 3 main characters with fourth minor character. And the first, the main character of the story, is the Father. And this Father represents God. And what we see in this Father's actions is a grace that is far beyond what we would expect. What we would expect is the Father to cast the son away, because that is what he deserves. But the grace that he shows his son who comes to him in repentance isn't what we would expect.

And what we see here is that we are to humbly repent or confess with expectation, not presumption. To go to him and to know the reality of our sin, to not downplay it, not shuffle it aside, but to take it seriously. But at the same time as we come to him, we are not beating ourselves down thinking, well, maybe he'll hire me as one of his servants. Maybe he'll extend me a little bit of kindness, but rather we should know, should understand the gracious character of our father.

Then know that he is gracious. And how is he being gracious for us? Because as you're reading this story, it might be a point you recognize that, well, this father seemed to forgive his son pretty easily. Why can't God just do that? Why did Jesus have to come? There seems to be a lack of sacrifice for the son's sins. It's a parable. It's going to be limited. It's not going to cover all these aspects of theology.

But often the question is, well, why did God need to send his son? Why couldn't he just wipe our sin clean, looking kind of similar like this father? Rather, it's understanding not why did God do it, but thank God that he did do it, that he did send his son—Son, God in flesh—to the earth to live a perfect life, to serve those who didn't deserve it, to teach those who didn't deserve it, to die on a cross for those who didn't deserve it, so that we could be reconciled to God.

And for us to begin by properly valuing God's gracious character, we must first **humbly repent or confess with expectation, not presumption**. Do not take the grace of God for granted. We recognize the reality of our sin. We also have an expectation, knowing his gracious character.

Second, the older son gives a negative example of why we should **abandon obedience that is done out of self-interest**. If we treat our faith in the Lord as something by which we can gain material things, we misunderstand the kind of obedience that God desires. First and foremost, he desires a broken and contrite heart. He desires the heart of the younger son. And while he does change lives, while he does want external obedience, if we just have that external obedience, that going through the motions, like the older son, like the Pharisees, what we will find is a relationship with our father that is broken and looks a lot like his.

Finally, from the Father and the servants, we see we are to **share in the joy of our father**. Now, the father in the story is a good man, but he's just a man. Our Father, our true Father, has done far greater for us. He sent his Son, God in flesh, who did not consider equality with his Father as something to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he humbled himself, humbled himself by taking on the form of a man, taking on the form of a servant.

When we look at the Gospels, we see all these stories of Christ serving people, sinners, tax collectors, and yes, even these Pharisees, by telling them this parable, he is serving those who do not deserve it. He took on the form of a servant, and he humbled himself to the point of death. And not just any death, not death in his sleep, not something quick, but even death on a cross. The most shameful, humiliating death he could experience.

And what he accomplished on that cross—what he accomplished is an offer of grace that is given to each of us. And even those in this room who are believers know that reminders of that grace

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are key for our faith, because while repentance proper, turning away from a life of sin is no longer applicable for us, confession of sin is. And God shows us grace all the same, but not in presumption.

His offer of grace is given to each of us. And to share in the joy of our Father, he needs to take his gracious character seriously. He's recognizing sin. And it means following his will. When he says to go and to declare the gospel for all, before all people, we go and we do it. And in the times we know we should, when we're walking past someone and we feel the Spirit convicting us, knowing we should be speaking to that person, and we don't—those are the moments to still confess.

We share in the joy of our Father by following His commands, by following His will, by delighting in the things that He delights in.

Now, for some that may be in the room, much of this sermon may not seem to apply. After all, the first point was to **humbly repent with expectation**, but if you're not at that point, how can you abandon obedience? Obedience doesn't mean anything. Well, look at sharing the joy of our Father. Well, if you don't believe in Christ, you cannot share in His joy.

And if that is you here today, thank you. Glad that you're here. Know that offer of grace is given to you also. Know that this younger son whose sin was so great, grace was extended to him in his repentance. And in another world, the older son who was not recognizing his sin—if in a world he did, he came to his father in repentance, Lord, or father, but we would say Lord. I have sinned. I've been disobedient in my heart. I wanted to earn something by my obedience. If he had come to him, that grace would have been extended also.

The story of the prodigal son is about a son coming home and another son refusing to accept him, show grace to him. And wherever you are today, whether in unbelief, whether it's starting with that moment of repentance, maybe you believe and you're further in your faith, you're at the point of sharing in the joy of our Father, know that the grace that he offers us is great and it is worthy to ponder.

Would you please pray with me?

Heavenly Father, Lord, we thank you, Lord. We just thank you for the opportunity for us to gather together, Lord, knowing that it is a blessing, knowing that not all have this liberty, the freedom to gather together as we are. Lord, I pray that this would be a blessing for each of us, myself included, Pastor Matt, Pastor Dan, everyone involved, Lord, just that it would be a blessing for us and that you would impress that on our hearts, knowing that your grace is great and your gracious character is truly worth valuing properly.

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Lord, I just pray for those who may be in this room, who do not know you, do not believe in you, Lord, that you would bring them to that place of repentance, knowing that it is your work. Lord, it is by your spirit that any of us are brought to repentance, Lord. But I pray that you would work on their hearts today.

And for those who do know you, Lord, who have sin unconfessed, I pray that your same spirit would impress on their hearts and to convict them and bring them to a place of confession to you and to their brothers and sisters.

Lord, I just pray that in our moments of fake, false obedience that is driven by self-interest, that you would convict us, you would help us to recognize those moments, realize that our faith is not a means by which we can gain things. Rather, our faith is honoring you, glorifying you.

Lord, and finally, please help us to share in your joy, and that your joy is great and is made possible by you sending your son to die for us. Lord, we thank you. We pray this all in your son's holy and precious name. Amen.

Praise God! I want to say thank you, everyone, for being here. Thank you, Pastor Ashton, for bringing us the Word. Thank you, Pastor Dan and the worship team for leading us well this morning. We're not quite done because we're all going to go down to the fellowship hall where our deaconesses have been working. We have a meal ready to go. But I'm going to pray here and we're going to count it as the prayer down there, okay? So when you go down there, you're—I think you're, unless the deaconess is down there, say differently—you're allowed to start getting your food, taking it to your table. It'll count as blessed, okay? So, well, let's bow our heads together.

Father in heaven, we thank you that you are a gracious father. We thank you that you have regard for the one who wanders and you have regard for the one who is bitter and near. We thank you Lord that wherever we stand today, if we turn to you, the image you want us to have is that you come running to us. We thank you Father that while we were still sinners you sent your son to a world of darkness. You sent your son to a world that loved darkness. Your son came and revealed the light. We thank you that through the work of your Holy Spirit we can come to know you. Our eyes can be opened to the truth of the gospel. We can turn to you because you have already turned to us.

We pray Lord that as we go that you would bless our time, our meal, our fellowship together. We praise you for how you've blessed this morning and Father we pray that you would just guide the rest of our day. We thank you that you have given us far more than we could have ever asked or imagined and we pray all of this in the holy and precious name of your son Jesus. Amen.



Digging Deeper – **The Prodigal Son** – Luke 15

1. What stood out to you from the sermon?
2. Have you ever lost something of great value? What did you do to try and find out? How did you celebrate once it was found?

Read Luke 15

3. What stands out to you as you read through the passage?
4. Who is the audience Jesus is talking to? Who are the three parables for?
5. What do we learn about the character of God in the first parable?
6. What do we learn about the character of God in the second parable?
7. What do we learn about the younger son at the start of the parable? How does he regard himself and his father?
8. How do the younger son's actions lead him to humility? How is his humility a sign of repentance?
9. How does the father respond to the younger son? What do we learn about the character of God from the father's actions?
10. What do we learn about the older son at the end of the parable? How does he regard himself and his father?
11. How do the older son's actions show his lack of humility? What does he need to do instead?
12. How does the father respond to the older son? What do we learn about the character of God from the father's response?
13. Are you more often like the younger son or older son? Is there a time in your life where it's been reversed?
14. Take some time as you close to pray for those you know of who may be prodigals right now. Pray also for those who may be older sons, hardened in their hearts. Pray also for each other and your prayer requests.