

The God Who Pursues Us – Our Prodigal Father

6/17/18 – Pastor Randy

Luke 15:20-24 (NLT)

“So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’

“But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.

15: 28-32

“The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends.’³⁰ Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’

“His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’”

Two weeks ago we focused our attention on the lessons we need to learn from the younger son in this story. Last Sunday we focused on the lessons we can learn from the attitude and actions of the older son. Today, as we conclude this series we will turn our attention to the father in the story.

For those who have not been with us the past two weeks, and to refresh the memory of those who were, Jesus had been eating with a group of Jews who had a reputation for being “sinners”. They were not living as faithful followers of the law of God. They were blatant violators of the covenant. They were rebels and they didn’t deny it. These “sinners” were “coming close” to Jesus so they could hear what Jesus had to say. Jesus demonstrated that He valued them by welcoming them, receiving them, and eating with them.

In response to this situation the religious leaders who were present began to grumble and complain about Jesus behavior. Why would he defile himself, eating with sinners, if he was really a “man of God”?

The God Who Pursues Us – Our Prodigal Father

6/17/18 – Pastor Randy

Jesus responded to their complaint by telling three consecutive parables. The first was about a lost sheep. He said, “Which of you, if you had 100 sheep and lost one, would not leave the 99 and go after the one that was lost? And when you find it you will carry it home with excitement? And when you arrive home you will call your friends together for a party so they can rejoice with you because you recovered your lost sheep.” That is the parable. Then Jesus explained the meaning. He said, “In the same way, ***there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God*** than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!”

Then Jesus told them a second parable. He said, “Imagine a woman lost one of 10 valuable coins that she owned. What will she do? I'll tell you what she will do! She will turn that house upside down until she finds it. When she does she will call all her friends over for a party to celebrate the recovery of her lost coin. Like with the parable of the lost sheep, Jesus explained His point. He said, “In the same way, ***there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.***”

In these two parables Jesus was revealing to them the heart of God the Father. It is in the Father's heart to recover and reclaim His rebel children and that is exactly what He sent Jesus to do. It would have been the mission of the religious leaders as well if they truly possessed the heart of the Father!

Jesus followed up these two parables with the parable of the prodigal son. This parable is about a father with two sons. The youngest of these sons demanded his inheritance - the share of his father's property that would have come to him when he died - right now. He sold the property, took the money, and moved far away. He squandered his father's money by living a wild, corrupt, immoral lifestyle. When he ended up with nothing and no one he came to his senses. With heavy conviction over his sin he decided to return home and plead for mercy. He couldn't imagine His father taking him back as a son. In his mind he could only hope for the opportunity to be allowed back into his father's house as a hired servant. So he headed home. But while he was still a long way off his father saw him coming and ran to

The God Who Pursues Us – Our Prodigal Father

6/17/18 – Pastor Randy

him, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son confessed his sin and then he said this, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son." That is what the son said. The next line is so important. "BUT his father said to his servants, "Quick, bring the best robe, get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet and prepare a feast with the best meat!" The father's offering of a robe, a ring, sandals, and a feast, communicated more powerfully than any words ever could, "You.Are.My.Son" He didn't deserve it, but that is what God's grace does; it grants us a status we don't deserve.

The older brother heard about the lavish feast but refused to go in and join the celebration because he was jealous that his prodigal brother, who squandered the families' resources, was being treated so well. He had a reason to be angry at his brother's rebellious behavior, but he also had a reason to be glad with his father that his brother had come home. Unfortunately, he felt the former but not the latter. The father who pursued his younger rebellious son, also pursued his jealous hard hearted older son. He left the banquet, pleading with his older son to come in. He said, "Look, my dear son." A more literal translation of the Greek would simply have the father saying, "Look, child". The NLT translates it my dear son because the word used here for child is generally a term of endearment. In his anger, jealousy, and bitterness, the older brother did not address his father as such. Jesus depicts the father as reinforcing the relationship! I am your father and you are my son!! He was not intimidated by his son's anger. Neither was he personally provoked by it.

He firmly, yet lovingly corrected his older son and told him how it was. This a great lesson for dads today! Be calm, yet strong and steady in the face of your child's intense emotions.

Jesus told these parables in response to the complaint by the Pharisees that he was seeking the company of sinners and showing them acceptance by eating with them. His three parables painted three pictures, vividly communicating that he was acting in concert with God the Father. These parables not only expose their hearts for being far from the Father but they were also a challenge to them, inviting them to be the shepherds they were

The God Who Pursues Us – Our Prodigal Father

6/17/18 – Pastor Randy

called to be and to join Jesus in His mission of pursuing sinners. They didn't know their Father and because of that they didn't understand His ways. They were well acquainted with prodigal sons, but not with The Prodigal Father.

The word prodigal can be used positively or negatively. If you look up the word online you will find a couple of definitions for this adjective. The first is:

"Spending money or resources freely and recklessly"

The adjective has been used in this sense historically as a descriptive for the younger son's extremely wasteful, corrupt spending of his father's resources. In this case the spending of those resources constituted a squandering of those resources. But the younger son was not the only one in this story who can be described as prodigal.

There is a second definition you will find for the word prodigal:

"Having or giving something on a lavish scale."

In this story the prodigal son lavishly squandered his father's resources, but the father earned himself the title of "prodigal father" in that he spared no expense in his celebrating his sons return with a prodigal feast.

The prodigal son was **selfishly lavish** in the manner in which he **rebelled**, but his father was **selflessly lavish** in the manner in which he **restored** his son.

This is a beautiful example of Paul's statement in Romans when he said: *"But as people sinned more and more, God's wonderful grace became more abundant."*

I am going to wrap this message up by posing two questions, providing the answers to those questions, and then adding some application for our dads.

Question 1: Why Did Jesus Pursue Sinners? Why Does God Pursue Us?

Jesus made it very clear:

In Luke 5 Jesus received the same complaint from the religious leaders that he was defiling himself as a "man of God" because he ate with sinners. His response was, "Healthy people don't need a doctor; it's sick people who do! I haven't come to call the righteous; **I'm calling sinners to repentance.**"

The God Who Pursues Us – Our Prodigal Father

6/17/18 – Pastor Randy

In Jesus' first two parables in Luke 15 He emphasized the goal of his outreach. His explanation of the meaning of the parable of the lost sheep was:

"In the same way, **there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents** and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away!"

His explanation of the meaning of the parable of the lost coin was:

"In the same way, **there is joy in the presence of God's angels when even one sinner repents.**"

Jesus wasn't calling them to condone their sin. He was calling them to repentance. Repentance is first a change of mind and heart, attitudes and affections, that results in a change of behavior.

Answer 1: Jesus' mission was to reach sinners, and he shows us that they haven't been reached until they have repented.

Question 2: How Did Jesus "Reach" Sinners to Repentance? That is a great question with important implications for how we fulfill our mission to do the same. Jesus ate with them. He spent time with them. He was willing to enter their world, establishing their value as persons without approving of their sin. The Pharisees viewed sinners as "defiled people". Their approach was "repentance first, then presence. Once you repent, then we can talk. **Jesus viewed "presence as the path to repentance."**

Jesus shows us a model that prioritizes relationships above rules. There is a popular saying used by those of us who counsel parents. "Rules without relationship leads to rebellion." Jesus demonstrated that rules in the context of relationship leads to repentance. This does not mean that rules within the context of relationship always leads to repentance. Its just more effective.

Answer 2: Jesus did not shy away from confronting and correcting sin but he did it from a position of *sitting down with broken sinners* rather than *talking down to broken sinners*.

Father's, you need to remember this! Your children don't just need your rules! They need your presence. **They need affirmation, acceptance, affection and accountability.** If you try and provide accountability without the others you

The God Who Pursues Us – Our Prodigal Father

6/17/18 – Pastor Randy

might achieve outward compliance, but not heartfelt obedience. The prodigal son's father would not take his son back into his house as a hired servant. Our Father God does not want you simply under his authority. Angels were created to be mere servants. We were created in his image to be His sons and daughters! That's why he pursues us!

On the other hand, you have not fulfilled your responsibility as a father if you only offer them acceptance, affirmation, and affection without accountability. You are called to exercise authority in your house. The son who wanted to live immorally had to leave his father's house. He rebelled against his father's authority was manifest by his leaving home. When he came back home he came back to willingly submit to his father's authority.

Our Prodigal God is not a passive Father. Fathers, we cannot afford to be passive fathers. God is a loving and merciful father, but not a weak father. The author of Hebrews expressed God's loving authority this way: *"If God doesn't discipline you as he does all of his children, it means that you are illegitimate and are not really his children at all...God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. Hebrews 12:8,10 (NLT)*

Most, if not all teenagers, complain that their parents are too strict, but I have never had a conversation with adult males where I have heard anyone brag about how lenient his father was. No one ever says fondly, "My dad was great! He let us do whatever we wanted!" I have heard plenty of adult men say proudly, "My dad didn't let us get away with any nonsense!"

Fathers, you need to exercise authority over your children. You need to keep them accountable for their behavior. But you need to do it from a position of relational closeness. As our kids get older they tend to move away from us. Don't let them move too far. Pursue the relationship! Be present! When needed, get in their face. Be assertive, not aggressive!

Our God is the God Who pursued us and continues to pursue us. We are called to possess his heart and follow the model he has set before us,

The God Who Pursues Us – Our Prodigal Father

6/17/18 – Pastor Randy

pursuing those who need Him. He is pursuing some of you today through this message.

We are going to close this service with a song. It's called Reckless Love by Cory Asbury. It beautifully and powerfully expresses the truth about our prodigal father. Listen to these words:

Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me
You have been so, so good to me
Before I took a breath, You breathed Your life in me
You have been so, so kind to me

Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine
I couldn't earn it, and I don't deserve it, still, You give Yourself away
Oh, the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God, yeah

When I was Your foe, still Your love fought for me
You have been so, so good to me
When I felt no worth, You paid it all for me
You have been so, so kind to me

There's no shadow You won't light up
Mountain You won't climb up
Coming after me
There's no wall You won't kick down
Lie You won't tear down
Coming after me

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