
CBC WEEKLY RESOURCES



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SEPTEMBER 28, 2025
COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH
3645 Cashiers Rd, Highlands, NC 28741

I. SERMON RECAP

In this sermon, Pastor Thomas stands in for Pastor Gary to discuss the profound parable of the Prodigal Son, using insights from Henry Nouwen's book, "The Return of the Prodigal Son," and Rembrandt's painting of the same name. Pastor Thomas encourages the congregation to see themselves in the parable, which features a loving father and his two distinct sons, the younger being wayward and the older being self-righteous. The sermon challenges listeners to reevaluate how they might identify with the younger son's waywardness or the older son's self-righteousness, emphasizing that these are not defining identities, but rather conditions that we all may experience at times.

Pastor Thomas draws upon his personal experiences to illustrate the journey from being a prodigal, who once walked a lost path, to embracing his identity as a child of God. He reflects on the human condition marked by pride and self-centeredness and discusses how encountering Christian friends helped redirect his life. Embracing the disruptions caused by his grandchildren's presence, he humorously shares how these interactions have taught him patience, sacrifice, and unconditional love. Connecting with the notion of divine grace, he posits that identifying oneself solely as a prodigal or an older brother is shortsighted; rather, our identity lies in being beloved children of God.

In the final portion of the sermon, Pastor Thomas touches on Rembrandt's depiction of the parable, inviting the congregation to step beyond the roles of observers in their faith or distant servants, into a warm embrace with God. He emphasizes that divine forgiveness and love are inclusive and transformative, urging those who feel isolated or in despair to seek reconciliation and a deeper connection with God. Pastor Thomas concludes with a heartfelt prayer, asking God to help the congregation not only receive His gifts of grace, mercy, and forgiveness but also to share these blessings generously with others, actively participating in the kingdom of God.

Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Parable of the Prodigal Son

The sermon introduces the parable of the Prodigal Son and its connection to Rembrandt's painting.

Chapter 2: The Younger Son and the Nature of Prodigals

This chapter explores the character of the younger son and challenges our understanding of what it means to be a prodigal.

Chapter 3: The Older Son and Self-Righteousness

This section delves into the character of the older son and the dangers of self-righteousness.

Chapter 4: The Father's Love and Our Transformation

This chapter examines the father's unconditional love and how it can transform us.

Chapter 5: Invitation to Embrace God's Love

The sermon concludes with an invitation for all to embrace God's unconditional love.

II. STUDY GUIDE

Key Points:

- The prodigal condition is universal, applying to most, if not all, of us
- The older brother's self-righteousness can be as problematic as the younger's waywardness
- God's love is characterized by deep compassion, lavish celebration, and unconditional acceptance
- Believers are called to be stewards of God's gifts of love, forgiveness, and grace
- Our identity in Christ supersedes our roles as "prodigal" or "older brother"
- Perfection is not a prerequisite for a relationship with God

Key Scripture

Luke 15:11-32 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate. "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'")

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

1 John 3:1 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Other Relevant Scripture

Theme of transformation and becoming a new creation:

2 Corinthians 5:17

Concept of abiding in Christ:

John 15:4

Theme of denying oneself and following Christ:

Luke 9:23

Idea of being children of God:

Romans 8:14

Concept of God's unconditional love:

Romans 5:8

Theme of stewardship of God's gifts:

1 Peter 4:10

III. DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL

Day 1: The Father's Unconditional Love

Question: How might recognizing that 'perfection is not a prerequisite to my relationship with God' change someone's approach to faith, especially for those who feel unworthy?

Reading: Luke 15:11-24

Devotional: The parable of the Prodigal Son vividly illustrates God's unconditional love for us. Like the father in the story, God eagerly awaits our return, no matter how far we've strayed. Reflect on times when you've felt distant from God. Remember that His love for you never diminishes, even in your lowest moments. Just as the father ran to embrace his son, God's arms are always open wide for you.

Today, meditate on the depth of God's love and how it can transform your relationship with Him and others around you.

Day 2: Overcoming Self-Righteousness

Question: Pastor Thomas discusses the transformation that can occur when we shift from saying 'give me' to 'everything I have is yours' in our relationship with God. How might this shift change your approach to faith and life?

Reading: Luke 15:25-32

Devotional: The older brother's reaction in the parable reveals the danger of self-righteousness. It's easy to judge others or feel entitled based on our own perceived goodness. Reflect on areas in your life where you may be harboring a self-righteous attitude. How might this be hindering your relationships or your spiritual growth?

Ask God to soften your heart and help you see others through His eyes of compassion and grace. Practice extending forgiveness and understanding to someone you've recently been critical of.

Day 3: The Transformative Power of Grace

Question: How does the concept of our identity being 'in Christ' rather than in our failures or accomplishments impact your self-perception and relationship with God?

Reading: Ephesians 2:1-10

Devotional: God's grace is not just a concept, but a transformative power in our lives. Like the prodigal son, we are welcomed back not because of our own merit, but because of God's lavish love. Reflect on Paul's words about being saved by grace through faith.

How has God's grace changed you? In what areas of your life do you still need to fully embrace and live out this grace? Today, consciously extend grace to yourself and others, remembering that it's God's kindness that leads us to repentance and change.

Day 4: Finding Our True Identity in Christ

Question: The sermon touches on the mystery of Christ abiding in us. How do you understand and experience this concept in your daily life?

Reading: 1 John 3:1-3

Devotional: The sermon emphasized that our true identity is not in our failures or even our successes, but in being children of God. Meditate on what it means to be called a child of God.

How does this identity change your perspective on your worth and purpose? Consider areas where you've been defining yourself by other standards - success, appearance, relationships. Ask God to help you fully embrace your identity in Him and live from that place of security and love.

Day 5: Stewarding God's Gifts of Love and Grace

Question: How might viewing ourselves as stewards of God's gifts of compassion, forgiveness, and grace (rather than just recipients) change how we interact with others?

Reading: 1 Peter 4:7-11

Devotional: We've been entrusted with incredible gifts - God's love, grace, forgiveness, and mercy. These aren't meant to be hoarded but shared generously with others. Reflect on Peter's exhortation to be good stewards of God's grace.

How can you use the spiritual gifts and experiences God has given you to serve others? Consider one practical way you can extend God's love to someone today - perhaps through an act of kindness, a word of encouragement, or by offering forgiveness. Remember, as we give freely of what we've received, we participate in God's redemptive work in the world.

IV. SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

Small Group Guide: The Prodigal Son - A Fresh Perspective

Opening Prayer:

Key Takeaways:

1. The parable of the Prodigal Son illustrates God's unconditional love and forgiveness.
2. We can often identify with multiple characters in the story - the younger son, the older son, and even the father.
3. Our identity in Christ is more important than our past actions or attitudes.
4. We are called to be stewards of God's gifts of compassion, forgiveness, love, and grace.
5. Perfection is not a prerequisite for a relationship with God.

Discussion Questions:

1. Which character in the parable do you most identify with - the younger son, the older son, or the father? Why?
2. The sermon suggests that being a "prodigal" might be a universal condition. Do you agree? How have you experienced this in your own life?
3. How does the father's response to both sons demonstrate God's love and grace? How can we emulate this in our relationships?
4. Discuss the concept of "Holy disruptions" mentioned in the sermon. Have you experienced any such disruptions in your life? What did you learn from them?
5. The sermon emphasizes that we are not just recipients of God's gifts but also stewards. How can we better share God's compassion, forgiveness, and love with others?

6. Reflect on the statement: "Perfection is not a prerequisite to my relationship with God." How does this impact your view of your relationship with God?

7. Pastor Thomas mentions "three other faces" in the painting. Have you ever felt like an outsider looking in when it comes to faith? How can we help others feel included in God's family?

Practical Applications:

1. This week, practice identifying moments when you're behaving like the younger or older son. How can you shift your perspective to be more like the father?

2. Choose one of God's gifts (compassion, forgiveness, love, grace) and intentionally look for opportunities to share it with others this week.

3. If you've been feeling like an outsider in your faith journey, take a step towards connection - perhaps by sharing your feelings with a trusted friend or reaching out to a church leader.

4. Reflect on your identity in Christ. Write down three ways this identity is more significant than your past actions or current struggles.

5. Look for a "holy disruption" in your life. How might God be using this to teach you or grow your faith?

Closing Prayer:

V. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Here's what's upcoming in the life of your church family.

Wednesday, October 1st, marks the start of a new Wednesday night teaching on Navigating Hard Conversations Within Family Units. Pastor Joel will be teaching this, and it is a 4-week series.

Recovery Alive, a Christ-centered approach to the 12-step program of dealing with and overcoming addiction, also starts October 1st.

There is a tailgate party for youth and kids during this time.

Dinner is served at 5:00, and everything mentioned will follow.

The Father-Son retreat is coming up this week, October 3rd through 5th. It takes place at Whisper Mountain Camp. Grandads, this also includes you!

The Men's Super Awesome Sleepover Camp is coming up on October 17th and 18th.

The youth camp, also at Whisper Mountain, is November 14th through 16th. Be sure to get signed up for that if it interests you.

For any more information or to get involved email info@cbchighlands.com or call the church office (828) 526-4685.