

## The Fear of God = Fearlessness

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### Luke 15:11-24 Small Group Questions

- Read and Pray
  - **2 Audience members:**
    - Those who hoped to receive God's approval - tax collectors and sinners
    - Those who thought they deserved God's approval - Pharisees

**Opening Question: Which audience member would describe your current life best: tax collector or pharisee? Why? If neither, was there a time in your life you struggled not to be either audience member?**

- [1] Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. [2] And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”
- The question being answered in this section of scripture through Christ’s three parables is this question: “Who will God receive into his presence?” This begs a second question: “Who should approach God without fear?”
- Jesus told three parables to help them understand their position with Him.
  - The Parable of the Lost Sheep - We belong to the flock, therefore we are loved and sought after. - The Son’s voice and role.
  - The Parable of the Lost Coin - We have been given as payment to the Redeemer, therefore we are valued and sought after. - The Holy Spirit’s voice and role.
  - The Parable of the Lost Son - We bear the name of our Father, therefore we are forgiven and received. - The Father’s voice and role.

**Question: Which of these three parables most ministers to your heart right now and why?**

- The parable of the prodigal son showed the fathers willingness to offer forgiveness.
  - This parable drew together both the audience of the Pharisees and the audience of the sinners.

- **This parable begs the question "Who is the real prodigal?".**
  - Thematic Similarities:
    - One that is lost and found.
    - One that seeks after the one that is Lost.
    - The invitation to rejoice.
  - [11] **And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. [12] 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. [13] 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. [14] And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. [15] So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. [16] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.**
  - [17] **“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! [18] I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. [19] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ [20] 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. [21] 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.’ [22] 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. [23] And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. [24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. (ESV)**

**Discussion: talk about each action or gift given to the returning son from the father. What is significant about each gift or action that helps you better appreciate our relationship with our Heavenly Father.**

- Son 1
  - Like the lost sheep the 1st son wandered but was returned and received.
  - Like the lost coin the 1st son was celebrated upon return.

- **The kiss - still a welcomed son**
- **The robe - still a prized son**
- **The ring - still a name bearing son**
- **The shoes - still more than a servant**
- **The calf - now a celebrated son**
- **This son ultimately feared life without His father more than the fear of admitting his own pride and failure.**
  - Remember a few weeks ago we discussed the concept of the fear of one thing giving us courage to overcome the fear of another.
  - This is the reality of true repentance. You can't truly repent and restore your relationship with our Heavenly Father, and hold on to pride and denial of your sin at the same time. You have to long for closeness in your heavenly relationship more than the temporal earthly relationship with your sin.
- **Like both of the other parables, people are invited to rejoice**, but this parable brings a major theme into view as the Son # 2 refuses to take part in the celebration. This detail allows us to see who Jesus is really speaking too in these parables.
- **[25] "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. [26] And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. [27] 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.' [28] But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, [29] 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. [30] But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' [31] And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. [32] It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" (ESV)**
  - **Son # 2, the real prodigal by definition of spiritual division.**
    - **Self-righteous yet still loved.**

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- Those of us who have been able to peel ourselves away from legalism need to be compassionate with those who are still trying to sort this whole thing out!
- **He had a greater fear or respect for his own accomplishments than he did for the mercy and love of his father.**
- A heart of judgmental legalism robs us of the joy of God's work of redemption in others. This attitude constantly looks for reasons to separate rather than celebrate.
  - Legalism vs Love
    - Legalism asks "what am I against?", love asks "What am I for?"
    - Legalism asks "Where am I right and you are wrong?", love asks "Where might you be right and I might be wrong?"
    - Legalism asks "What are my reasons to disavow and demonize you?", love asks "Are there any issues upon which we can draw together in discussion?"
    - Legalism looks like pride while love looks like humility.

**Question: do you ever struggle with loving those who either promote legalism or battle legalism? How do you exemplify the gospel towards them? How do you preach the gospel to yourself?**

- **This parable allows us to see the true heart of love of our heavenly Father, who not only pursues the repentant sinner, but also the unrepentant and self righteous pharisee.**
- **Application: A healthy fear of God that promotes a fearlessness in this world begins with a healthy understanding of God's love for me, because His perfect love casts out my unhealthy fears.**
  - God will never love you any more or less than he loves you right now.
  - If you have all the love of the creator of this universe, than what do you have to fear in this world. Rom 8:31-If God is for us then who can stand against us!

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- Os Guinness states in his book *The Call*: “What brings us home is not our discovery of the way home but the call of the Father who has been waiting there for us all along, whose presence there makes home, *home*”<sup>1</sup>
- I want to make an appeal to you my brothers and sisters this morning that the reason many fear God is because we have put the fear of God into them by how we act and react. I would like to make the case with you this morning that one of the most important things we can do as believers is to properly represent God’s love, especially with our families.
- **Let’s Review what we have discussed thus far.**
  - **The Parable of the Lost Sheep - We belong to the flock, therefore we are loved and sought after.**
    - We see a picture of Jesus in this parable.
  - **The Parable of the Lost Coin - We have been given as payment to the Redeemer, therefore for are valued and sought after.**
    - We see a picture of the Holy Spirit in this parable.
  - **The Parable of the Lost Son - We bear the name of our Father, therefore we are forgiven and received.**
    - We see a picture of God the Father in this parable.
  - **The parable of the prodigal son showed the fathers willingness to offer forgiveness.**
    - **This parable drew together both the audience of the Pharisees and the audience of the sinners.**
- **Application: A healthy fear of God that promotes a fearlessness in this world begins with a healthy understanding of God's love for me, because His perfect love casts out my unhealthy fears.**
  - **I John 4:17-18 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.**

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<sup>1</sup> Os Guinness, *The Call*. (Thomas Nelson, Grand Rapids, 2018) 14

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- It is stirring to see that the father of the lost son never gave up, he never gave way to bitterness and anger, he never threw away his hope, he never closed the door of his heart, and he never quit loving his son. He longed for and looked for and was ready for his son's return. What a beautiful parenting model for all of us. Now here's what you need to understand; the father in the story is the heavenly Father and the lost son is every one of us. Like our children, we are lost apart from God's rescue; like our children, we are susceptible to temptation; like our children, we are a danger to ourselves; like our children, we need the patient grace of our heavenly Father. If all you had to deal with is the occasional bad behavior of your children, if all you had to do was regulate and control that behavior.<sup>2</sup>
- God will never love you any more or less than he loves you right now. This is the kind of love we need to communicate to others as well, especially our families.

**Question: how does the parable of the Prodigal influence how we confess our sins?**

**Question: how does the parable of the Prodigal influence how pastors should shepherd the church?**

**Question: how does the parable of the Prodigal influence how we parent our children?**

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<sup>2</sup> Paul David Tripp, *14 Gospel Principles that Will Radically Change Your Children*.