

PRAY -

- Encounter with the one true God of the universe.
- We leave this place celebrating what God has done in our life
- We can't help but live that out in the world around you.

Thank you worship team. For those that don't know, leading worship today was the high school worship team. They lead worship during our high school youth group on Sunday nights. They were nervous and excited to lead today, and they did a fantastic job. Go ahead and take a seat, if you haven't already.

My name is Dustyn Vanzant, I'm the student pastor here at Heritage. It's my great privilege to hang out with students pretty much every day of my life. If you are a middle or high school student who hasn't found community with other students, we'd love for you to join in with us. We have a summer and fall schedule at connect central, it would be great if you could join us this summer.

ROOMS

If you got here this morning expecting to put your kids into the Children's wing, you may have found out that hard way that it's Family Month. First, let me say, I know for some of us that poses some added challenges during the service. Maybe a little distraction. Even a little frustration. That is certainly understandable, let me encourage you to figure out a rhythm this month for your family. As a church we value spaces that get the family interacting together, learning the same lessons, engaging God in similar ways. We want our kids seeing parents and other adults worshipping. Our biggest desire is that our kids and students would feel a deep sense that this is their church too. They have an equal standing on the journey toward God as any one of the adults. Kids this is your church too! So sing, pray, read, listen, dance, and whatever else seems appropriate here at Heritage this month. We are so glad you're here! And remember, parents and kids you are always welcome in this room. It's not just a July thing, but every week, feel free to join in the worship service whenever you'd like.

That said, you can mark your calendars for August when we'll be back to our typical children and students weekend classes. Kids up to fifth grade move up and start classes on August 4th and 5th. Middle School students start August 18th and 19th and high school classes start September 8th and 9th. In order to make that all work we need you! We need caring, loving adults that are willing to teach our younger generation about Jesus.

BOAT STAND

This week kicks off our church-wide VBS (**VBS SLIDE**). Tomorrow we'll have 300 kids, students and adults running around the building, teaching kids about Jesus, singing worship songs, running fun games, and working toward a goal of raising money for a reading program at the Bridge. We also have high school students making it into a week of serving and community called Leader Week, where we'll learn what it means to be a leader and re-focus our lives on stepping out in faith.

I really look forward to the opportunities I get to stand up here and open God's word together with my church. It's weird I haven't been up here since November, and I feel like so much has happened. One of the big reasons for being unavailable to speak, is that we had a baby born in December (**BABY PIC**). Yeah the little one, that's her, Leilyn was born on December 22 and our lives have been in a constant state of crazy. It's been incredible getting to know this little person and see her grow right before our eyes.

There were moments, early in our marriage, where we weren't sure we'd be in this spot, with two little beauties to take care of. I remember when we were newly married, people asking us the questions about having kids. You know the questions, "when are you having kids?" "How many are you having?" "when are you going to start having kids." Etc. Our response, every time, almost like we'd rehearsed it, was always, "we'll be happy with however many God gives us and whenever He chooses to give them to us." That response got the questions off our backs, plus it had the added benefit

of making us seem super spiritual. The problem with that response, I don't really think we stopped to think if we really believed that. We had this naive expectation that all of this baby stuff would just be easy. Deep down, we had our minds and hearts set on a big family, starting whenever we decided it was 'time'. Unfortunately we've had lots of difficulties creating the family we envisioned. The fact is, we wanted more than what God would bless us with, and that's led us into bitterness and anger at times. When we said we'd take whatever God gave us we never imagined it would be less than our expectations.

God not reaching my expectations, puts me in a dangerous place. Outside I can seem super spiritual, like I have everything put together, but on the inside, just underneath the surface, I question whether God truly loves me. What I've come to realize in this situation is that **I long for a blessing that always seems withheld.**

I Long for a blessing that always seems withheld.

I think many of us in this room, if we dug a little deeper below the surface would come face to face with the realization that you too long for a blessing that always seems withheld.

Some of you had your own expectations of family planning. You expected more kids, you expected less kids, you expected kids at a different time in life, you didn't expect raising a family would be so hard, you expected more help from your spouse. You too long for blessings that always seem withheld.

Some of you have been working diligently in the same job for years and no one notices the great work you put in. You've expected a place to move up in the company, and yet a promotion seems to always be elusive. You've been longing for a blessing that always seems withheld.

You've been single, more than you've been in a relationship with someone. You worked hard in college, got a good job and expected this relationship

thing would happen naturally, but it hasn't. Serious relationships just haven't worked out. You've been longing for a blessing that always seems withheld.

You're staying up late trying to cram all the information into your head for the final exam. You've done all the homework, all the practices and even found extra problems to work on online. Everyone else seems to pass this class, but it's been just so demanding for you. You never expected it to be this hard. You've been longing for a blessing that always seems withheld.

You worked your way through college, and got the loans just like everybody else, cause that's what you were told to do. Now you're in the workforce and your student loans are the anchor that holds you down from enjoying this stage of life. You expected the mobility that a degree promised you in the beginning, but you're now saddled with debt and no idea how to get out of it. You've been longing for a blessing that always seems withheld.

You've been working a job for as long as you can remember. Most of your friends and the people around you have been able to retire and enjoy a break from the daily grind. But somehow, for you, retirement seems like it's impossible. Nothing has worked out like you had expected it would, and now you've got no choice but to work until you can't work any longer. You've been longing for a blessing that always seems withheld.

Your whole life you've been going through the motions. Doing the next right thing hoping something clicks inside you and you find your purpose. Your reason from living. But nothing has directed you toward the purpose you crave. You seem on top of things, but inside, you know the expectations you had, haven't been met. You've been longing for a blessing that always seems withheld.

I think if we were truly honest with ourselves, and the world around us, many of us feel we expected more out of ourselves, out of our spouses, out of our families, and probably most of all, out of God. We've been longing for a blessing that always seems withheld.

There's a series of stories Jesus tells in the Bible in Luke 15 that we'll be walking through today. About a group of people who had expectations of blessing that seemed like they were being withheld. I'd like for us to walk through this passage together. If you have a Bible feel free to start turning to Luke chapter 15, if you don't have a Bible, the passage will be listed on the screen as well. While you turn there, today I wanted to do something a little different with the message. During my preparation leading up to today, I've been discussing this passage with one of my graduated seniors. I gave him commentaries and books to read, messages to listen to, blog posts to scan through and I don't feel like he should miss out on sharing our discussions. Andrew Scherer just graduated in May from Westerville North, and is getting ready to attend Taylor University in the Fall. I've asked Andrew to help me walk through this passage today. So Andrew come on up here.

D - Thank you Andrew for coming up here. I know it can be a little nerve-racking coming up here on stage.

A - Well I appreciate the opportunity to open this passage up with you today, and yeah, just a little nerve-racking.

D - So we're going to do something that there isn't a lot of examples of, we're to try and go through a passage together, and not make this awkward. Luckily it's a passage pretty much everyone knows, and loves. It's a series of three stories about lost things, culminating in the Prodigal Son.

A - Yeah, I mean throughout history the story of the Prodigal Son became a widespread inspiration to countless artists. Rembrandt painted a picture of the prodigal son, Shakespeare wrote multiple plays based off of it, Christian or not this story is known worldwide.

D - In modern times some of our greatest musicians have written songs about it. Rolling Stones, Hank Williams, Kid Rock, Iron Maiden and Onerepublic all have prodigal son songs.

A-Uhm...modern times dustyn? I've never heard of any of those groups. What generation did you say you were a part of again?

D - No matter how you've heard the story of the Prodigal Son, you know it's one of the most beloved stories in the Bible and the longest story Jesus told.

A- And we decided to tackle all three of the stories together as a whole, instead of just the prodigal son on it's own because as we read them, each one seems to build on each other.

D - Well let's get started in Luke chapter 15. We get a little background on why Jesus is sharing these stories, verse one says this:

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

You know how Jesus rolls, Jesus goes around teaching throughout the area and intentionally spending time with the people no one likes. This causes issues among those who expected more focused time with Jesus. These Pharisees were morally upright Bible followers. They didn't spend time with these people, because they know they shouldn't, so seeing Jesus hang with others really confused them.

A - Imagine Jesus present day, and instead of hanging out around the church or with any of us, he spent the majority of his time eating and drinking with alcoholics, gang members, felons, homeless people, smelly people, foreigners, and bullies.

D - I mean, Jesus is sitting there eating with tax collectors. Do you realize who these people were? In many people's eyes these were the worst of the worst. They sold themselves out for a government that oppressed and tortured the Jewish nation. These men stole extra money from those around them and lived frivolous lives among their neighbors and friends. How would you respond to someone like that? -

A - In many ways, it's not hard to imagine an outrageous response like the Pharisees had. Jesus, knowing this, chose to lose face countless times because of the people he chose to spend his time around, and he did it over and over again. -

D - These Pharisees were so worried about their reputation, they rarely reached out to anyone outside their group. They retreated into their holy facade and spent time on their own attempts at winning God's approval.

A - So in response, Jesus began sharing these parables. The first one starting at verse 3 reads:

3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous person who do not need to repent.

So Jesus tells the story of a shepherd with a flock of 100 sheep and a single one of them happens to wander off. This shepherd goes off searching, leaving the entire rest of his flock behind with no one to watch them, to find the one lost sheep. And when he finally finds it, he's so overjoyed and relieved at finding that sheep, that he comes home and calls

everyone he knows together to celebrate with him, but more so, to feel the joy the shepherd already has

D - Then Jesus ends the first parable in verse 7 and addresses the crowd explaining why He told it. God, is our shepherd, and rejoices over those He brings back after they were far away and lost. God isn't impressed by our supposed perfection and lack of need for repentance, He's impressed by people who know they need repentance and do it.

A - It's easy to look at this story and wonder why is this one sheep so important to the shepherd? He has 99 other sheep to take care of still, what's the value in one little sheep? Doesn't the risk outweigh the reward? But God says that each sheep is so highly valued that he'll leave behind all the rest to come find the one.

D - Now Jesus doesn't leave the stories right there. In some ways this seems fairly straight forward. The sinners and tax collectors are important to Him. However, Jesus, pressed forward and tells another parable immediately following the first, starting in verse 8. Read with me:

8 “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Jesus' second parable turns the audience to a woman who has lost a coin. She apparently had ten silver coins, and somehow loses one of them. She immediately cleans the whole house and and tears it apart looking for this coin she has lost. Eventually she finds the coin and throws a party with her friends, this coin she lost has been found and that's worth celebrating!

A - Now, say you lost something, wouldn't you immediately sit down and figure out the last 10 places I was. You'd think of the last place you were

sure you had the item, and then sprint straight there and start walking through everything you did until you realized it was gone. I have a lot of practice using this method with my mom's debit card for example. Let's just say I've misplaced it more than once.

D - Imagine ripping through the couch cushions, moving the furniture and sweeping underneath. Looking in every nook and cranny of the car. -

A - Dustyn we're talking about a debit card here, not your wedding bands.

D - Thanks for that...Andrew... I'll have you know, I am on wedding band number six, only one marriage, and I know exactly where it is... it is safely placed in our safe at home. Now her lost item isn't a wedding band or a debit card, but for this woman, in this moment, the one coin is important. She had nine coins, but finding the tenth was of utmost importance. -

A - Seemingly, this story Jesus presents has the same meaning as the first one, that God rejoices and invites everyone to rejoice over any lost person who is found. In our own ways, we can all relate to that relief, peace, and joy at finding what we lost returned. Yet in comparison to his first story, the coin doesn't seem very far away. The woman knew that the coin had to be in her home, but for the shepherd, he knew that he'd have to go on a journey far away to find the sheep that wandered off. One was lost at home, and one was lost in the far country.

D - These two parables build Jesus' response to a climax, the story of the lost son. Jesus tells one of His most well known parables starting in verse 11, let's read how Jesus sets this story up.

11 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

Jesus begins His story about a father with two sons. One son, the younger of the two, comes to the father asking for his inheritance early. The Father, because of his love for the son, gives the son his share of the inheritance.

A - These two verses hold a much bigger picture than it seems at a glance. For a Jewish son to ask his father while he was alive for his inheritance would be to tell his dad he would prefer if he was dead. The Pharisees, who knew the law beginning to end, would've expected a completely different response. A Jewish father could've dragged his son out of the house, disowned him on the spot, or worse, have him put to death. Yet in his boundless love the father divided up all he had, and allowed his son to abandon the family in pursuit of everything he ever wanted.

D - I look at this story, and in these couple verses I'm stunned. I couldn't imagine my child coming to me and telling me I'm better off dead to them than alive. That would absolutely crush me. And then, in the midst of his own pain, the father shows incredible love and affirms his sons request. He liquidates his assets and gives his son his inheritance early. -

A - So then the story continues on in verse 13:

13 “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there he squandered his wealth in wild living. 14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country , who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

So life didn't end up exactly the way the son probably imagined it. He tried everything the world had to offer him, but when the going got rough none of it was able to save him. He ends up with no money and with no friends to rescue him, hires himself out to feed pigs. In fact, he's so hungry that pig slop is looking pretty good right about now. **(PIG SLOP PICTURE)**

D - So appetizing, right? Obviously pigs are gross. They're generally dirty animals. And for a Jew, this was absolutely the lowest of the low. It's at this moment that the youngest son comes to his senses and begins to think. And we see in verse 17, he says:

17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ 20 So he got up and went to his father.

In a moment of clarity this son ‘comes to his senses’ and goes home. This isn’t all about forgiveness, mind you, but a big portion of this change is because he knows the treatment there is far better than what he’s got now. He remembers the farm hands and the servants had far better accommodations than anything he can get at this point.

A - This is a very risky play for the son. He chooses all his words carefully to get the best response he can. He knows he’s burnt the bridge of the father-son relationship, so he just hopes that his dad will at least allow him to be a servant.

D - The son begins the journey home, probably rehearsing his words as he walks. Worried about the outcome. How is dad going to react? Things weren’t left in a healthy spot before. So he walks. Verse 20 says,

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. 21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a

ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Imagine one of those moments where you've built it up in your mind, you know how this is going to play out. You're hoping for the best, but you just know the worst could happen. The son walks up the road and the father sees him far off. The father leaves the house and sprints toward the son. The son braces for the father to smack him around, yell at him and tell him to leave, but instead the miraculous happens. The father throws his arms around his necks and kisses him. The son can barely get his rehearsed lines out before the father places the best clothes on his boy. The family ring and it's signet is placed on his finger so the community knows whose son he is. And the father declares "today we party! My son has returned!" -

A - At hearing such words, I think everybody listening to Jesus would've been dumbfounded. Nobody, especially the Pharisees would've expected such extreme grace. The father would have nothing from the son except his immediate re-entrance into the family. And it seems that all's well that ends well, right?

D - I think the hearers of these parables expected this story to end here. The other two parables ended when the lost sheep and coin were found, here the lost son is back. Thematically this story should end on this climatic high point right? What else is there to say?

A - Exactly! With his third story, Jesus has definitely shown that God is a gracious and loving father who searches for and accepts anyone who comes home. But the story doesn't actually end there. This whole time the other older son has been hanging in the background and Jesus decides to bring him out to play. Up to this point we know literally nothing about him until Jesus says in verse 25:

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ 28 The older brother became angry and refused to go in.

So here we have the other son. He stayed at home this whole time, and is out working hard in the fields, when suddenly, he hears “God’s Great Dance Floor” blaring out from the house with the pounding of a hundred feet jumping up and down. He draws closer and calls over one of the servants on the fringes of the celebration to figure out what’s up. He’s given the run down of his brother’s return and the lavishly extravagant reception he received from their father, and he’s having none of it, but we don’t quite know why.

D - The older brother’s refusal to enter the house brought the attention of the father. And it says in verse 28:

So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

The father left the party, went out to the older son, and begged him to enter the party. To celebrate with the household the return of his brother. The older brother couldn’t do it. He couldn’t let down his guard and enter into the house. The bitterness towards his younger brother for the humiliation to the family, was too much to bear. The older brother expected praise for his efforts around the house. He expected unique and unconditional love from the father. More than anything he couldn’t understand the grace the father showed his younger brother. The older brother expected a blessing that seemed withheld from him.

A - And the father recognizes his son's desire to be blessed for all his labor and hard work, responding in verse 31 by saying:

31 "My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

His dad tells him that from the start the son had access to everything the family owned. The enjoyment of any blessing from the father was an open gate for the older son to walk through at any time, because he has always loved the older son, and he didn't have to work for any part of that. Yet still, they had to stop and celebrate because the son he thought was lost to him, who could've been dead for all they knew, had returned home to him safe, and that warranted the greatest celebration the family could afford.

D - This story ends rather abruptly. We never know what happens to the older brother. Does he go into the house? Does he stay outside? Does the father return to the house? What happens?

Jesus uses this incredible story to demonstrate a son who is lost and far away to his family and has been brought back. But also to demonstrate a son who no one realized was lost as well. A son who stayed close to home, doing everything he was supposed to do. An older son who is lost and doesn't even know it. The parable of the lost son, is really the parable of the lost sons - Plural.

A - And both of them took bad paths. Author Timothy Keller said it best in his book "Prodigal God" (**PRODIGAL GOD BOOK SLIDE**) when he stated that Jesus looks at the path of the wayward, those who choose their own life and seek all the world has to offer, and he also looks at the path of the religious, who stay near to church and live as strict moralists, and Jesus condemns both of those ways as wrong. He says neither of them leads back to the father. In fact, in the story Jesus especially highlights that it may

be more dangerous for the religious people and the Pharisees who don't see how far away from the father's heart they really are. Jesus stands with neither of them. He demonstrates the third and only correct way back to the father lies at its core, in grace.

D - Thanks Andrew for sharing with us your thoughts on the passage, I know we could fill another hour or two with what we've discussed from this passage. I'm going to try and take these last few minutes and bring this to a close.

Two brothers, both of them lost...

You know I wonder what would have happened if the younger brother came home and instead of meeting the father first, what if he met his older brother. Clearly the brother was not impressed when his younger wayward brother came home, and surely it did not warrant a party. Should we really celebrate what the younger brother has done? He's shown a complete lack of morals, disrespected the family, crushed his father's heart and lost all the money he had received. If the older brother found him first, the younger brother would have left in shame because he wouldn't be welcome there.

Let me ask you, are we a church that welcomes the wayward sons? Or do they leave because they don't feel welcome? Have we met them along the side of the road before they met the father and did they miss out on the grace the Father would have shared with them. More and more people are leaving the Church in America today because they are encountering older brothers at the doors of the church and they are leaving without experiencing the Father's grace.

The simple and unfortunate truth is that we're all one of these brothers at certain times in life. For some of us in the room we lived as the younger brother. We got as far away from God as possible, and needed to hit rock bottom before we found our way back home. Maybe some of you are still in the process. We're so glad you're here and if there's anything we can do to help you get to the Father please let us know.

For others of us in the room, we've been living as the older brother for our whole lives. You were born in the church, did all the Sunday School. Learned all the verses. You chose to do what was right in most every situation. You chose yourself over others without thinking about the hurt it might cause. You think you are entitled to the best. You believe all the good things you've done somehow puts you in better standing than those around you. You've expected blessing from God that have always seemed withheld and you're not sure if God is as good as He says He is anymore, but you won't stray too far from the house.

Whether you are near or far, you are lost if this describes you.

But there's a third brother in our story today.

The third son of this passage is the one who is telling the story. When you and I were in our deepest state of lostness, Jesus, the Son of God went looking for us. The God of the universe, came down from heaven and became a human just like each of us. He had flesh and bone, he ate our food, and walked the roads of earth. The third son came searching for us and is pointing us back home, telling us all the Father is ready to give us extreme grace and how much he desires us to be with Him. He says simply come, broken-hearted and join the party, bring no works of your own. Be made a son again, and enjoy all the Father wants to give to you.

Today, this third son invites us all into the party. The question is, are you going to enter? The band is going to play one last song, Andrew mentioned the song earlier in the message. The song "God's Great Dance Floor" has been around for awhile, but the song truly sums up this party that God has invited us to join. So I'd like to invite anyone brave enough to join the party to stand up sing, shout and yes, even dance. God has an incredible dance floor and He busts a move whenever His children come home. Kids if you want a chance to come up on stage you are welcome to come up while they play this song. Come right up here and dance, because the Father says its time to celebrate.