

## An Accurate Picture

Gallup polls from 2017. Do you believe in God? Which comes closest to describing you? Where would you place yourself on that scale? How would you answer those questions? High? Low? Probably exists, but have doubts? *Depends on the day & the situation?* Belief vacillates. It goes up and down. We can struggle w/wild swings in our belief level based on our circumstances.

We can praise God on Sunday and be 100% convinced God exists and then life, deadlines, conflicts & pressure hits and we wonder where God is on Monday! “God, where are you today?” *What would we say then?*

The Bible (Only 47% inspired word of God) is clear that *Belief* in God is essential, not optional if we want forgiveness and ultimately eternal life in heaven. I deserve hell, but I hope I go to heaven”. “Bob – I hope I go to a better place”. Romans 10:9 *If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

This confession is more than just mentally acknowledging this is true; it’s placing our trust, or belief, in Jesus b/c of the cross and his resurrection. It’s surrendering my way to His way for my life.

How can we better deal with doubt & unbelief? How can we grow in our belief, or trust, of God?

### A STRONGER BELIEF IN GOD BEGINS WITH AN ACCURATE PICTURE OF GOD

How do you view God? Whether you’re a follower of Jesus or not, I believe we ALL have a picture in our mind of what we think God is like. What do you “see” when you hear me say “God”?

**Pictures: Angry father, frustrated father, done with you father, Shrek, playful father, caring father, Genie, dad hugging daughter.**

A parable is simply a story with a deeper (or sometimes hidden) meaning and It is to convey a *concept to be understood* and/or a principle to be put into practice.

Jesus was speaking a language that all Jews could understand, b/c in the Jewish culture back then, things were explained in word pictures. Word pictures placed emphasis on the attitudes, concepts and characteristics for the listeners.

Parables required the listeners to be self-critical and put themselves in the appropriate place in the story. Who are the listeners?

Luke 15:1 (NIV) **Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.**

An Accurate Picture of THE Father Always Includes an Invitation into the Presence of THE Father. God is personal. He cares for the masses & the individual.

Luke 15:2 (NIV) <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

*Who are the Pharisees?* Religious leaders who studied & obeyed the scripture and insisted that all Jews should observe the 600-plus laws in the Torah (first 5 books of the O.T. - Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy) which they memorized word for word.

*Who were the teachers of the law?* Scribes who were professionally trained to develop, teach and apply the OT law. They went beyond interpretation of Scripture, however, and added many man-made traditions to what God had said. The traditions eventually became more important than the law itself.

\*Pharisees didn't complain that Jesus is teaching sinners. Condemned him eating with them. Socializing with them. Pharisees were *exclusive*. They thought it was inconsistent with the dignity of someone so knowledgeable in the Scriptures to “eat with sinners.”

*But, Jesus was Intentionally Inclusive in Seeking and Loving the Lost.* He valued relationships over rituals.

Jewish culture in Biblical days was a shame/honor driven society.

Luke 15: 11 – 12 (NIV) Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

2/3 for the older son (Jewish Culture), 1/3 for the younger son.

Luke 15:13 (NIV) Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

In a blink of an eye he blows 1/3 of what it took his father a lifetime to earn.

Luke 15:14 (NIV) After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

Luke 15:15 (NIV) So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

This Jewish son sells himself as a slave to a Gentile and finds himself feeding pigs.

Luke 15:16 (NIV) He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

Sin redefines our desires and **NEVER** in a *positive direction*.

Luke 15:17 (NIV) “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!’

Through the Eyes of a Lion - Levi Lusko: “After you get through the candy coating of sin, all sin has to offer is heartbreak, bitterness and regret.”

This is where we see both the accurate and inaccurate view that the son has of his father play-out in his decision making. Accurate: My father takes care of his servants. He is a good man.

Luke 15:18 (NIV) **I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.**

Accurate: "I messed up. I own it. I have sinned against God and you."

Luke 15:19 (NIV) **I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.'**

Inaccurate: "I am not worthy". The God who created everything and needs nothing, pursues you. Don't let anyone sell you less worth than that!" *Louie Giglio*

Inaccurate: I have blown it too bad. Messed up beyond my father's grace limit. He won't let me back in the house or the family. I am fresh out of chances.

Luke 15:20 (NIV) **So he got up and went to his father. 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.**

*The Father was looking for his son.* Why do we have an **inaccurate picture** that after we have messed up, made mistakes, sinned & ran away to a "distant country", God is just waiting for us to return w/arms crossed? Scowl on his face. Finger wagging. Angry and ready to let you have it.

Because that's the way it seems to work in every other relationship we have. Friendships. Marriage. Work environment. Teenager w/Parents. This is what we've come to expect as normal, but God desires for us to experience a new normal.

### **WHEN YOU TURN TOWARD GOD, GOD RUNS TOWARD YOU**

"Ran to his son": In Jewish culture a dignified man who owned an estate would never run anywhere, period. Didn't happen. Ever. So, put yourself in the son's sandals. In your worst moment, a father who never runs, is running towards you. What are you thinking?

**Inaccurate picture:** "I've done it again. And again. And again. God doesn't want anything to do with me. I've disobeyed AGAIN and here comes the hammer. It's a come to Jesus meeting for me".

*Lindsey's scooter story in Pennsylvania.*

Not only did he run to his son, but he didn't run out of anger or frustration but rather, Love. **Accurate picture:** The father runs to us because He loves us. Kiss displayed that father's love to his son.

In this case, running to his son out of love for him had an even deeper meaning. Not only did he desire to restore the relationship, but the father run b/c he wants to save his son's life!

The Pharisees & Teachers of the Law would have known Dt. 21:18 – 21 b/c they had it memorized, word for word. A rebellious son, who refuses to listen and obey is to be forcibly taken to the town elders and stoned to death. The law says the son can't return b/c of what he had done, or he was to be killed.

Luke 15:21 (NIV) "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

**Inaccurate picture:** The depth of his Father's love. Does he deserve it? No. Is he worthy? Yes! The father doesn't even let him finish his well-rehearsed confession.

Luke 15:22 (NIV) "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.'

Robe was a sign of dignity, honor and sonship in the family. The RING was the signet ring of royalty. The Sandals a sign of being in the family, not a servant as servants didn't wear sandals.

All these represent what we receive through Jesus when we surrender our lives to his plan, not ours. His **ROBE** of Righteousness covers us! When God looks at us he doesn't see us as sinful, but he sees us as covered by the atoning blood of Jesus.

The **RING** represents being a part of the royal family. When you start a relationship with Jesus Eph. 1:5 tells us we are adopted. *God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.*

The **SANDALS** represent Eph. 6:15, *For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared.*

Luke 15:23 (NIV) **Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.**

The fattened calf was saved exclusively for special occasions only. Ex. Day of Atonement. This represented a rare occasion.

Luke 15:24 (NIV) **For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.**

**A STRONGER BELIEF IN GOD BEGINS WITH AN ACCURATE PICTURE OF GOD & an accurate picture of God always Includes an open Invitation to come into THE Father's presence.**

*Avoiding God because you made mistakes (sinned) is like avoiding a doctor because you got sick...you're running from the exact person you need. But if we carry an inaccurate view of God we will often go this route. We don't run to someone for the help we need if we don't trust and believe in them.*

**LEAN INTO THE LOVING EMBRACE OF THE FATHER**

When you come home to God, he wraps you in his love. No matter what we've done or how far we've run. That's an **accurate picture** of God.

**Picture:** Rembrandt's "Return of the Prodigal Son". The son had nothing to offer the Father. He simply owned his sin and came home, and he was forgiven and restored in an instant by his father. *So are we.*

Great picture of the complete contrast of a Relationship with God and Religion. God invites us & seeks after us) vs Religion (follow this to earn God's love & acceptance)

**Accurate Picture:** *When you turn toward God, God runs toward you.* When you come home to God, he wraps you in his love. Every time you and I come home, it is to a celebration, not condemnation. A stronger belief in God begins with an accurate picture of God. What's your picture of God today?

### Small Group Questions

1. What was the most impactful conversation you had in the last week and what was so meaningful about it?
2. When you were a child, how did you view God? How has that picture changed now that you are an adult?
3. Do you think an accurate picture of God is important in your life? Why or why not? What is some potential danger of an inaccurate picture of God?
4. Read Luke 15:11 – 24. Who is the audience Jesus is talking to? What are some characteristics of each group? Why does one group not like Jesus? Which group would you place yourself in? Why?
5. What inaccurate thoughts (or lies) did the younger son believe? What are some inaccurate thoughts the enemy continually tries to reinforce in your own life? How do you fight against them?
6. Reread Luke 15:20 – 24. How does the father respond when he sees his wayward son? Why is it significant that he runs to him? How does the father clearly demonstrate his love for his son? How would you describe the picture of the father in these verses?
7. Steve said, "when you turn toward God, God runs toward you". Do you believe that? Has there ever been a time you struggled to believe that? Share about it.
8. What one thing has stuck with you in this series so far? How can you practically apply it to your daily life?
9. Close in prayer. Ask God to reveal one person you can pray for this week and make an intentional effort to reach out to them and love on them.

