



When God Is Your Father | Luke 15:11-32

Lee Cummings | 10.25.26

Small Group Guide

Overview

This message explores what Jesus reveals about the nature of God through the parable commonly known as the Prodigal Son. The central argument of this sermon is that the true subject of the parable is not the wayward son but the father himself, and that God's deepest desire is not merely to be known as Creator, Judge, or Savior, but as Father. We will examine how our earthly experiences of fatherhood can distort our view of God, and how healing that image changes everything.

Key Takeaways

- The parable in Luke 15 is better understood as the parable of the heavenly Father, because its primary revelation is who God is, not what the son did.
 - God has always been a Father. Fatherhood is not something God does; it is the essence of who he is within the Trinity.
 - Both sons in the parable represent forms of rebellion: one open and visible, one hidden behind religious performance. Both need the father's restoration.
 - Earthly experiences of fatherlessness, abandonment, abuse, or emotional unavailability create filters that distort how we see God.
 - God does not wait for us to clean ourselves up before running to us. He moves toward us the moment we move toward him.
 - Knowing God as Father is not a one-time event but a journey of healing and revelation that transforms every area of life.
-

Icebreaker

Go around the group and share one word that comes to mind when you hear the word "father." Do not explain it yet, just say the word. After everyone has shared, take note of the range of responses. You will return to this at the end of the session.

Discussion Questions

Section 1: Who Is the Star of the Parable?

1. Pastor Lee argued that this parable should be called the parable of the heavenly Father rather than the parable of the prodigal son. Do you agree with that reframing? Why or why not?
2. In Luke 15:20, the father sees his son while he is still a long way off, feels compassion, and runs to him. What does the father's posture in that moment tell us about God's disposition toward people who have wandered?
3. Pastor Lee said that God is not just a creator, a judge, or a forgiver, but that fatherhood is the very essence of who God is. How does that idea sit with you? Does it feel natural or difficult to relate to God that way?

Section 2: The Two Sons

4. Pastor Lee described two types of rebellion: the younger son who left the house openly, and the older son who stayed but remained emotionally distant from the father. Which of these two postures do you find yourself more naturally drawn toward, and why?
5. The older son said in Luke 15:29 that he had served faithfully for years yet felt unrewarded. The father responded that everything he had was already his son's. Have you ever found yourself working hard for God in order to earn acceptance you already have? What did that season feel like?
6. Pastor Lee observed that the older son was physically close to the father but emotionally far from him. Is it possible to be deeply involved in church life and still be emotionally distant from God as Father? What might that look like in practice?

Section 3: Broken Images of the Father

7. Pastor Lee shared that our earthly fathers are meant to provide four things: provision, protection, affirmation, and direction. Thinking honestly about your own upbringing, which of these four did you receive well, and which were missing or damaged?

8. Pastor Lee said, "You can't be a father until you're a son." What do you think he meant by that? How does being secure in your identity as a child of God affect your ability to give and receive love in other relationships?
9. Romans 8:15 describes a spirit of adoption through which we cry out "Abba, Father," a term of deep intimacy and trust. What would it look like practically to relate to God with that level of closeness? What gets in the way for you personally?

Section 4: Healing and Inheritance

10. Pastor Lee described a moment at age 12 when God broke through and said, "Lee, I am your father." Have you ever had a moment, large or small, where you felt God communicate his fatherly love to you personally? What was that like?
11. Pastor Lee said that when we truly begin to know God as Father, it changes how we read the Bible, how we work, how we walk in authority, and how we view our identity. In which of these areas do you most need that kind of transformation right now?
12. Pastor Lee mentioned that he made a deliberate decision before having children to do the hard work of healing so that his kids would walk in blessing rather than a generational curse. What patterns, wounds, or broken images might God be inviting you to address so that those around you can benefit?

Practical Applications

Choose one or more of the following to practice individually before the group meets again.

- 1. Audit your image of God.** Set aside 20 to 30 minutes this week to journal honestly. Write down the words and feelings that come to mind when you think of God as Father. Then compare that list to what Luke 15:11-32 actually shows about the father in the parable. Where are the gaps? Bring your reflections to the group next week.
- 2. Read Romans 8:14-17 slowly and repeatedly.** Read this passage each morning for the next week. Rather than reading it for information, read it as a message addressed personally to you from your Father. Notice what emotions surface and write them down.
- 3. Pray with new language.** If your default prayer language tends to be formal or transactional, try beginning each prayer this week with "Abba" or "Father" and pausing for a moment of silence before saying anything else. Practice the posture of a child approaching a parent rather than an employee approaching a manager.
- 4. Have an honest conversation.** Identify one person in your life, a spouse, a close friend, a mentor, or a counselor, with whom you can honestly discuss the ways your earthly father experience has shaped your view of God. Ask them to pray with you specifically about healing in that area.

5. Consider the generational dimension. If you are a parent or in a position of influence over younger people, write down one specific way you can model the father's posture from Luke 15 this week. That might mean initiating reconciliation, offering affirmation without conditions, or simply being present and emotionally available.

Closing Reflection

Return to the icebreaker word you shared at the beginning of the session. Has anything shifted in how you think about that word after tonight's discussion? Share briefly with the group.

Close by reading Luke 15:31-32 together as a group, noting that the father's final words in the parable are an invitation, not a verdict. The father does not drag the older son inside. He comes out to him and appeals to him. In the same way, God is not forcing his way into your life. He is standing at the door and calling.

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting group members to pray silently or aloud, addressing God specifically as Father. Encourage honesty. If someone finds that language difficult, that difficulty itself is worth bringing to God in prayer.

