

The Father's Heart

Sermon Theme: God's love isn't a reward to be earned or a wage to be lost; it is the heartbeat of a Father who relentlessly pursues both the "rebel" and the "religious."

I. Icebreakers

- **The First Spark:** Can you describe the first time you truly felt loved or "seen" by someone?
- **The Wage Gap:** When is a time in your life (at work, school, or home) where you felt like you had to constantly "earn" your place or your worth?

II. Looking at the Word

Read Together: Luke 15:11–32

1. The Shocking Request (vv. 11-13) In ancient Jewish culture, asking for an inheritance early was effectively saying, "I wish you were dead."

- **How does the Father respond to this ultimate dishonor? What does this tell us about God's "patience with our impatience"?**

2. The Turning Point (vv. 14-20) The son "comes to himself" in a pigpen—a place of total degradation for a Jew.

- **Notice verse 20: The Father runs to him while he is still a "long way off." Given that it was considered undignified for an elderly man to run, what is the Father prioritizing over his own dignity?**
- **The son had a prepared speech (vv. 18-19). Why do you think the Father "interrupts" him with a kiss before he can finish it?**

3. The "Good" Son's Struggle (vv. 25-30) The older brother is angry. He uses the word *douleuo* (to serve as a slave) to describe his time at home.

- **The older brother stayed home, but was his heart any closer to the Father than his brother's was?**
- **How can "doing the right things" actually become a barrier to understanding God's grace?**

III. Deepening the Conversation

"We tend to think that if we change, God will love us; but if we let God love us, we will change." — Ken Shigematsu

- The "Sunday Morning Question": Do you honestly believe that God loves you right now, exactly as you are? Not the "future, better version" of you, but the *you* sitting in this chair?
- The Character of God: Look at Exodus 34:4-7. God describes Himself as *Rahum* (compassionate—like a parent's gut-level feeling for a child) and *Hanun* (gracious—an action of helping those in need). How does this Old Testament description bridge the gap to the Father in Luke 15?
- The Scale of Values: The sermon notes mention that "to be lost" is a condition worse than death. Have you ever felt "lost" while still being physically alive or even "spiritually active"?

IV. Living It Out

- For the "Younger Brother": If you are wallowing in a "pigpen" of shame or regret, what is stopping you from simply turning your face toward home today?
- For the "Older Brother": Is there someone in your life (a "tax collector" or "sinner") whose blessing or restoration you are currently resentful of? How can you learn to say "brother" again?

The Bottom Line: There is nothing you can do to make God love you any more; there is nothing you can do to make God love you any less.

V. Prayer Direction

- Adoration: Praise the Father for His "running" love that meets us before we even speak.
- Confession: Confess the ways we try to "earn" our way into the Father's house or "slav[e] away" without joy.
- Petition: Ask for the grace to see others through the Father's eyes—with a heart of reconciliation rather than a heart of comparison.