

## 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 "slave 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.