



Almont Vineyard Church

Week 3 Summer Series: "The Sandals of Jesus – The Dream Father"

June 20, 2026

Opening Monologue

Welcome to the AVC App! Whether you've been with us for a while or you're joining us for the first time, we're so glad you're here.

This is the Sermon Section of the app. Here you'll find commentary, spiritual reflections, devotional questions, and more — all designed to help you engage with Sunday's message on a deeper level. As you read and reflect, we pray the Lord will give you fresh insight and fill you with His strength as you continue to grow in Him.

We are diving into week 3 this week. If you missed the sermon, here is the link <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Happy Father's Day, men of God!

There is a sad reality in America that upwards of 28% of children born have an absent father... that is roughly 1 in 4 children born. In fact, America ranks the worst in parenting compared to 130 countries (Pew Research).

I don't share this to shame anyone... it's just where we have evolved in our American culture. But I do want to ask the question — what has happened? Here is my Biblical response: "They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts." (Romans 1:25-26a)

"The Dream Father" What kind of father would you want?

Wouldn't you want a father who is a true defender, protector, and provider — not one who offers empty promises and leaves you with nothing but disappointment?

You want a father who loves you unconditionally, forgives you freely, and shows grace when you've wandered far from home. A father who teaches and corrects you with wisdom, disciplines you because he cares too much to let you destroy yourself, and walks with you through every dark valley.

You want a father who has your back — not a backstabber. One who doesn't just say "I love you," but proves it with his actions. He encourages you, speaks truth in love, never mocks or tears you down. When you fall, he lifts you up, dusts you off, and says, "I am here for you!"

The fact is, you may not have a father on this earth, or you may have one who has let you down with great pain.

This Sunday we are going to look to Jesus and how He is a father to the fatherless and a defender of the weak. Jesus is the Dream Father... we will unpack this Biblical truth this week. Come and be encouraged by God's Word.

In Christ,
Rev. Pastor Brad

To Listen to this week's Sermon: "Week 3 Summer Series: The Sandals of Jesus/ The Dream Father" Go to the Sermon tab here in our APP or use the links to our website or YouTube Channel where you can also listen to our Sermons:

Web: <https://www.almontvineyardchurch.org/media>

You Tube: <https://www.youtube.com/@almontvineyardchurch>

Key Sermon Text

Romans 1:25-26 <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans%201%3A25-26&version=NIV>

Luke 15:14-27

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2015%3A14-27%20&version=NIV>

A Father to the Fatherless

Every one of our stories in life is a little bit different. We have all come from different backgrounds and family of origins. Some of you have had great parents, or a mother or a father only, while others have had fathers and/or mothers that have dealt great pain to you over the years of your lives. This is a sad reality of living in a fallen world. No parent, no matter how good they may be, can satisfy all of our hopes and dreams.

No matter your situation or where you have come from, I have some great news for you... Hear the word of the Lord:

Psalm 68:3-6a But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful. Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds — his name is the Lord — and rejoice before him. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families...

God is a father to the fatherless and a defender of widows in His holy dwelling (Psalm 68:5). This divine care is a defining characteristic of God's character throughout Scripture. In the ancient male-dominated society, those without male representation—especially orphans and widows—were at a great disadvantage, often left on society's margins with no one to secure their rights or basic needs. God assumes the responsibility that earthly kings and leaders so often failed to fulfill, stepping in as the compassionate protector of the vulnerable.

This protection is not passive. The desolate entrust themselves to God, who has been the defender of the orphan (Psalm 10:14). He hears the desire of the humble, strengthens their hearts, and comes to their aid (Psalm 10:17–18). The Lord guards the sojourner, upholds the orphan and the widow, but brings the way of the wicked to ruin (Psalm 146:9). Even when father and mother abandon you, the Lord will take you in (Psalm 27:10).

Our Father in heaven is a father to the fatherless, and He is your defender when no one will take their stand against the enemies of this world. The Lord will never leave you nor forsake you, and you can count on Him

when humanity walks away. Your loving Father in heaven will be standing on the road of life to give you His warm embrace.

Jesus embodies this fatherhood directly. He promises His disciples, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18)—claiming the very role of protector and father that God assumes throughout the Old Testament. Through Jesus, the fatherless are no longer abandoned but adopted into God’s family with full inheritance rights and belonging.

Scripture Citations

Psalm 68:3-6a; Psalm 68:5; Psalm 10:14; Psalm 10:17-18; Psalm 146:9; Psalm 27:10; John 14:18.

Rev. Brad Standfest & Logos Bible

Coming Home

In Luke 15 we read a powerful parable from the mouth of Christ himself. A son who completely rebelled against his father. The lust of the world got a hold of his mind and in great disrespect, he asked for his inheritance early. Who would give him such a thing but the father who willingly gives him his portion. Then the son goes off, living wildly, sleeping with women and living the party life, resulting in a total moral collapse. He finds himself homeless after he squandered everything away. He doesn’t have anything to eat and longs to eat the pigs’ food. How low can you go? After coming to his senses, he realizes he made a great mistake and he returned to the father. The father welcomes him with open arms and does not ridicule him, mock him, shame him, or tell him everything that he has ever done wrong in his life. No, he loves him right where he’s at—on the road of life, on the road home.

When readers encounter the prodigal’s father, they naturally think of God the Father in the Godhead. However, the Father reveals himself through the Son—the Son’s words and deeds all speak of his Father. Jesus said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,” and the father in this parable demonstrates the seeking, securing, and saving love shown by God in Jesus Christ to lost sinners.

So Christ isn’t simply the father in the story—rather, Christ embodies and reveals the father’s character. In Christ we see God’s seeking love: just as the shepherd seeks the lost sheep and the woman the lost coin, in Christ God seeks lost sinners, whether lost in misery like the younger son or lost in self-righteousness like the older son.

More profoundly, Christ demonstrates the securing love of God—he not only sought sinners but bought them, his whole mission being to ransom them. On the cross, he was cast out of the Father’s house to take the reproach of prodigals upon himself, allowing them to return to the Father’s house. He was willing to take the sin, shame, and wretchedness of sinners upon himself to give them acceptance, pardon, and the garments of salvation.

On the prodigal’s return, his father symbolizes God in Jesus Christ who, as Father, welcomes the child back, radiating unbelievable forgiveness and special care. He accepts the child with great love and blessing, showing the full and abundant love of the Father. This compassion flows from Christ’s very nature and mission.

[Sources: 1-3]

Snapshot of the Biblical Theme: The Lord as Father to the Fatherless, Defender of Widows and Aliens Throughout Scripture, God reveals Himself as the ultimate protector and provider for the most vulnerable members of society—the fatherless (orphans), widows, and aliens (foreigners or strangers). This theme underscores God’s justice, compassion, and covenant faithfulness. He does not merely observe their plight but actively defends their cause, provides for their needs, and calls His people to reflect His heart by doing the same. This portrayal highlights that true religion and righteousness involve caring for the marginalized, as God Himself sets the standard.

Old Testament Foundations

The Old Testament repeatedly emphasizes God’s special concern for these groups, often listing them together as those without natural earthly advocates.

- **Psalm 68:5 declares:** “A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.” This verse portrays God not as a distant ruler but as a personal Father who steps into the role abandoned by others, offering security and family to the lonely.¹⁰
- **Deuteronomy 10:18 states:** “He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.” Here, God’s love is practical and tangible—He executes justice and meets physical needs. This command flows into an exhortation for Israel to imitate Him, remembering their own history as foreigners in Egypt.

Other key passages reinforce this:

- **Exodus 22:22-23:** “Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry.”
- **Psalm 146:9:** “The Lord watches over the foreigner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.”
- **Isaiah 1:17:** “Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.”

These texts reveal a God who hears the cries of the vulnerable, upholds justice on their behalf, and judges those who oppress them. Caring for the fatherless, widows, and aliens was woven into Israel’s laws (e.g., gleaning rights, tithes, and justice systems), reflecting God’s character as holy and compassionate.

Transition to the New Testament: Jesus Christ Fulfilling the Father’s Role

In the New Testament, this theme reaches its fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who perfectly reveals and embodies the Father’s heart (John 14:9). Jesus not only teaches about God’s care but lives it out, demonstrating that the Kingdom of God belongs to those who care for the “least of these.”

Jesus explicitly promises not to abandon His followers to vulnerability: John 14:18 – “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” Through the Holy Spirit and His abiding presence, Christ becomes the Father to the fatherless for all who believe.

We see Jesus fulfilling this role through His ministry:

- He showed compassion to widows, such as raising the only son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), restoring hope and provision to her.
- He defended the marginalized and taught parables like the persistent widow (Luke 18:1-8), illustrating God's justice on behalf of the oppressed.
- In His teachings on judgment (Matthew 25:31-46), Jesus identifies so closely with the hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, and imprisoned that caring for them is equated with serving Him directly.
- James 1:27 echoes the OT theme in NT terms: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

Ultimately, through His death and resurrection, Jesus secures eternal adoption for believers: "To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). In Christ, the fatherless find a heavenly Father, widows find a Bridegroom who will never leave them, and aliens (Gentiles included in the covenant) are brought near to God's family (Ephesians 2:11-19).

Reflection and Application

This biblical theme calls us to mirror God's character. Just as the Lord is Father to the fatherless and defender of the vulnerable, Jesus invites us to participate in His mission—through practical care, advocacy, justice, and gospel proclamation. In a broken world full of loss and displacement, we rest in the assurance that our compassionate God sees, defends, and adopts. May we, empowered by the Spirit, extend the same fatherly love we have received in Christ to those around us.

Citations

Old Testament

Deuteronomy 10:18, Exodus 22:22-23, Isaiah 1:17, Psalm 68:5, Psalm 146:9

New Testament

Ephesians 2:11-19, James 1:27, John 1:12, John 14:9, John 14:18, Luke 7:11-17, Luke 18:1-8, Matthew 25:31-46
Version

All Scripture references are from The Holy Bible

Commentary, Spiritual Applications, and Theological Reflections

Psalm 68:

Our Victorious God – Father to the Fatherless and Defender of the Vulnerable

Psalm 68 is a powerful song of praise that celebrates God's mighty acts throughout Israel's history. Traditionally used in Jewish worship during the Festival of Weeks, it draws from Moses' words in Numbers 10:35 whenever the ark of the covenant was carried forward. It likely echoes the joy David expressed as the ark finally made its journey to Mount Zion (2 Samuel 6:12–19). The psalm moves from God scattering His enemies to His tender care for the vulnerable, painting a picture of a God who is both powerful King and compassionate Father.

God Arises and His Enemies Scatter (verses 1–3)

The psalm opens with a bold prayer and declaration: May God rise up and scatter His enemies like smoke in the wind or wax melting before a fire. The wicked cannot stand in His presence. But for the righteous, God's coming brings great joy—they are glad, they rejoice, and they sing with happy hearts. This reminds us that while sin and rebellion lead to destruction, those who trust in God have nothing to fear. His holiness brings judgment on evil but safety and celebration for His people.

Praise for God's Protection of the Defenseless (verses 4–6)

God's people are invited to sing praises to Him who rides on the clouds—using powerful storm imagery that shows His unmatched strength. This is no distant or harsh God. He is personally concerned for those who have no one else to protect them. In the ancient world, orphans (the fatherless) and widows were extremely vulnerable without a male family member to provide for them or defend their rights. God steps into that gap: "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling" (Psalm 68:5).

He sets the lonely in families, frees prisoners so they can return home, and provides for those on the margins of society. This care flows from His holy presence—whether from heaven or His chosen dwelling among His people. But those who stubbornly rebel against Him end up in a dry, barren place. God's compassion is for those who humbly depend on Him.

God's Faithfulness Through History (verses 7–35)

The psalm then recounts God's saving work in condensed, vivid strokes. He led His people out of Egypt through the wilderness (verses 7–10), bringing them into the Promised Land with refreshing rain and victory over enemy kings (verses 11–14). Women had the joyful role of announcing these victories with song and dance. The ark's arrival at Mount Zion (verses 15–19) celebrates God choosing to dwell among His people. Victory includes both rescue and judgment (verses 20–23), and the psalm describes joyful processions of worship (verses 24–27). It closes with a prayer for God to subdue opposing nations and a call for all peoples to praise Him (verses 28–35). Throughout, every victory is seen as an act of salvation.

The New Testament picks up this psalm powerfully. When Paul quotes verse 18 in Ephesians 4:8, he points to Jesus as the conquering, ascending King who gives gifts to His church. The same victorious God who led Israel is now revealed fully in Christ.

Applying Psalm 68 to Our Lives Today

This psalm calls us to remember God's past faithfulness as fuel for present worship and future hope. Just as Israel looked back on the exodus, wilderness, and conquest, we remember what God has done in our lives and in salvation history through Jesus. In our church services today, this is like singing songs of testimony, sharing stories of God's deliverance during prayer times, or celebrating baptisms and communion as reminders of His rescue.

Most importantly, God's heart for the vulnerable challenges us directly. In a world still full of orphans, widows, single parents, immigrants, prisoners, and lonely people, we are called to reflect His character. As James 1:27 reminds us, pure religion includes looking after orphans and widows in their distress. Churches can live this out through foster care support, food pantries, prison ministry, welcoming newcomers, and practical generosity.

When you feel fatherless, abandoned, or without support, Psalm 68 assures you: God Himself is your Father and Defender. He scatters what threatens you, sets you in His family, and rides with you through every desert. Let this truth lead you to joyful praise—and to action on behalf of others who need His care.

[Sources: 4-6]

Luke 15: 11-32

JESUS TELLS THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SON / 15:11–32

The previous two parables—the one of lost sheep and the lost coin—build up to the climax, the parable of the lost son, a parable that is unique to Luke. Through the parable of the lost son, Jesus presents a vivid illustration of God and his mercy for repentant sinners.

The parable describes the passion of a caring father for his runaway son. Day after day, the father had been scanning the horizons for any sign of his lost son. Although in the first century a father would typically wait until a son showed some sign of respect before addressing him, here the father threw all social conventions aside. He couldn't wait to see his son. He started walking toward him. With open arms, he embraced his son, pulling him tightly to himself.

God is like this loving father. He wants to welcome sinners back home with open arms. This parable is a picture of God's grace. Thank him for showing that type of compassion to you.

15:11–12 To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. The younger son told his father, ‘I want my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die.’ So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.” Jesus continued with another parable to illustrate the point further—that God rejoices when lost sinners repent and find forgiveness. A man had two sons, the younger of whom wanted his share of his father's estate (inheritance). This would have been one-third of the total estate, with the older son receiving two-thirds, a double portion of the other as prescribed by the law (Deuteronomy 21:17). In most cases the son would have received this at his father's death, although fathers sometimes chose to divide up their inheritance early and retire from managing their estates. What is unusual is that the younger son initiated the division of the estate. This showed arrogant disregard for his father's authority as head of the family.

15:13–14 “A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and took a trip to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money on wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve.” Within just a few days, the younger son was on his way—indicating that this had been his plan when he had asked for his inheritance in the first place. He packed all his belongings and got as far away from his family as possible, traveling to a distant land. The listeners would have understood that the young man had traveled outside Jewish territory, since he later ended up with pigs (15:15–16)—animals Jews did not own because they were considered unclean. The young man apparently had wanted to live his own way, be his own master, get out from under the rules of his home and his father. Money was his ticket out, so he took it and ran.

In this distant land, he wasted all his money on wild living. Apparently this “wild” life and the freedom he thought went with it had also been part of his plan. So he lived on the wild side for a while, spending freely on whatever he chose. But then his money ran out. The inheritance, whatever amount it was, sustained him for a

time, but it was not an endless supply. It dried up, and then, to make matters worse, a great famine swept over the land and the boy did not even have money for food.

15:15–16 “So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.” The young man became so desperate that he went and hired himself out to work for a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. According to Moses’ law, pigs were unclean animals (Leviticus 11:2–8; Deuteronomy 14:8). This meant that pigs could not be eaten or used for sacrifices. To protect themselves from defilement, Jews would not even touch pigs. For a Jew to stoop to feeding pigs would have been a great humiliation, and for this young man to desire to eat food that the pigs had touched was to be degraded beyond belief. The pods were the seeds of the carob tree, which grows around the Mediterranean Sea. That no one gave him anything shows that he was neglected and insignificant; he had truly sunk to the depths.

15:17–19 “When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired men have food enough to spare, and here I am, dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired man.” ’ ” When reality finally hit him, the son finally came to his senses. Sitting among pigs that were better fed than he was, he reflected on life back home. He realized that at home even the hired men have food enough to spare. With no money, no dignity, and, so he thought, no claim to sonship in his father’s household, he decided to go home to [his] father, confess his sin, and ask to be taken on as a hired man. At least there he would not go hungry.

While his motivation at first seems to have been his hunger, he could have saved his pride by never going back. He could have searched for a job as a hired hand anywhere (although his present experience showed him that not all hired hands were treated as well as those on his father’s estate). He could have avoided his older brother’s inevitable scorn over what he had done by staying away. Instead, this young man chose to go home. The key lies in the words that he planned to say to his father: “I have sinned against both heaven and you.” He wanted to tell his father he was sorry. He wanted to repent of his selfishness that had sent him away and spent all the money that his father had set aside for his future. Even if it meant living as a hired man in his own home, he would return there in order to say these things to his father.

15:20–21 “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’ ” The son returned home to his father, not knowing what to expect—the best he could anticipate was a cold shoulder, a halfhearted welcome, but in hopes of being hired to work for his father.

The father, however, seemed to have cast his eyes on the horizon many times since his son had left, hoping one day to see him returning. Finally, his father saw him coming even while he was far away. The father ran, embraced, and kissed his son. He was filled with love and compassion at the sight of his son who had come home. For the patriarch of the family to run was to lose all caution and dignity. The father went beyond normal forgiveness and showed incredible love. The son began to give his father the speech he had prepared (15:19), but he didn’t even get to the part about asking to be hired, for the father wanted to welcome his son back into his home with a grand celebration.

In the two preceding stories, the seeker actively looked for the sheep and the coin, which could not return by themselves. In this story, the father watched and waited. He was dealing with a human being with a will, but he was ready to greet his son if he returned. In the same way, God's love is constant and patient and welcoming. He will search and give people opportunities to respond, but he will not force them to come to him. Like the father in this story, God waits patiently for people to come to their senses.

This father's love and compassion picture the love God has always shown to his wayward people. The psalmist wrote:

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him. (Psalm 103:13 niv)

Jeremiah the prophet wrote: "So there is hope for your future," declares the Lord. "Your children will return to their own land. I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning: 'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God. After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.' Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him," declares the Lord. (Jeremiah 31:17–20 niv)

Clearly God's love reaches out to sinners who, repenting of their sin, run to him for forgiveness. They can be assured of a warm welcome from the one who has been watching for them to come.

15:22–24 "But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger, and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening in the pen. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began." The father immediately restored this destitute and humbled young man as his son, directing the servant to bring the finest robe (generally given to a guest of honor), a ring (signifying authority, as a son, not a servant), and sandals (only slaves and the very poor went barefoot). Then the calf that was being fattened up for the time when a special feast should be prepared was to be killed—the father could think of no more fitting celebration. His son had been as good as dead to him but now had returned to life. He had been lost but now was found. As the shepherd celebrated upon finding the lost sheep (15:6), and the woman upon finding her lost coin (15:9), so this father celebrated at "finding" his "lost" son.

15:25–27 "Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the calf we were fattening and has prepared a great feast. We are celebrating because of his safe return.' " The elder brother, according to tradition, would have received a double inheritance. He probably had continued to be under his father's authority, working on the estate. While he would inherit it, this would not take place until his father's death. So he was in the fields working, being responsible to do the work that he should do, patiently following the typical plan for passing on the family inheritance. But as the verses below indicate, he also may not have been content with his situation; he just had not acted upon his desires as his brother had.

Imagine this other brother's surprise at returning from a day of hard work to the sound of a grand celebration going on in the house. Naturally he wondered what was going on. The servant simply replied with the facts—

the wayward brother had returned, the calf had been killed, the feast had been prepared, and everyone was celebrating the brother's safe return.

15:28–30 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 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. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’ ”

At the report of the news, the older brother became angry and refused to go in to join the celebration. The father's response is contrasted with the older brother's. The father forgave because he was filled with love. The son refused to forgive because he was bitter about what he saw as injustice. The older son's resentment rendered him just as lost to the father's love as his younger brother had been.

The older son was quite reasonable in his list of complaints. He reviewed his résumé, and argued from experience. The father could have consented, pacifying his older son with additional gifts and rewards. But relationships prosper on love, not on fairness. Love is the dynamic that sweeps “reasonable claims” into secondary concerns here. When relationships need love, we often must let fairness take a second seat.

While the resentment of this older brother is easy to understand, his volley of words reveals the same sort of self-righteousness that afflicted the religious leaders of Jesus' day. The key to understanding this story is found in the context of 15:1–2. The younger son stands for the tax collectors and sinners, the waiting father is God, and the older brother represents the religious leaders. The younger son had lived as a notorious sinner, so the brother wanted nothing to do with him. Yet the loving father, who had gone out to meet his younger son, also went out to plead with his elder one. Instead of humbly accepting his father's words, however, the older son let out a torrent of pent-up anger and frustration, describing that he had been slaving away for his father, never getting any special favors. He did not take a moment to understand that he would inherit everything that he was working for and that he was dearly loved by his father. He only felt angry that his father was celebrating “your son's” (not “my brother's”) return home. Why should there be a celebration for an irresponsible person, when the model son got nothing comparable?

The religious leaders, ever claiming how hard they “slaved” for God, were attempting to keep myriad rules and regulations, many of which God never even demanded. They had the Father's love but had chosen to reject it in favor of hard work and self-denial. So when God eagerly welcomed the sinful, common people into the kingdom, the religious leaders were refusing to join the celebration. But God rejoiced that these sinful people had come “home,” and he invited even these religious leaders to join the party. But they will retort with only anger and resentment that they who tried so hard should not get the party.

15:31–32 “His father said to him, ‘Look, dear son, you and I are very close, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’ ” The father spoke kindly to his overheated son; he explained that what the older son had been experiencing in the interim was far better than a one-day celebration. The older son had not been displaced as the firstborn—he had his relationship with his father (who obviously loved him very much), and he still had his inheritance. The younger son had squandered his and had gone through great suffering before coming to his senses. The wild life the younger son had sought had brought him only to ruin, and he returned home with no inheritance, humbled from having suffered some hard knocks. The older son needed to get his perspective, be grateful that he had not had to go through such pain, and celebrate this happy day of his

brother's safe return. The father repeated the words he had spoken to the servants—the younger son had been dead and was now alive; he had been lost and was found! The father got back his son; he wanted his elder son to rejoice at getting back his brother. This celebration was the right action to take—it was truly a joyful time in the life of this family.

Desperate sinners, notorious outcasts, difficult people—all have been offered salvation. God's people must not stand aside and above, but they must join in heaven's celebration when those who were lost have been found, when those who were "dead to sin [become] alive to God in Christ Jesus" (Romans 6:11 niv).

[Sources: 7]

Spiritual applications for our lives

The parable of the Lost Son (often called the Prodigal Son) is one of Jesus' most powerful pictures of God's mercy, grace, and the joy of repentance. It shows us the heart of the Father who eagerly welcomes wayward children home. Here are key spiritual applications we can draw for our daily lives today, drawn from the story and its timeless truths.

1. Come to Your Senses and Return Home

The younger son hit rock bottom—homeless, hungry, feeding pigs (unclean animals for a Jewish listener)—before he "came to his senses." He realized the foolishness of his rebellion and chose to return to his father, confessing, "I have sinned against heaven and you" (Luke 15:18, 1984 NIV).

Application: Many of us wander in "wild living," chasing freedom, pleasure, or independence from God and family. It often takes hardship, loss, or emptiness to wake us up. Don't wait until you're in the pigpen. Stop, reflect, and run back to the Father. True repentance means humbly admitting your sin and turning toward home. God is not waiting to shame you—He is scanning the horizon, ready to run toward you with open arms.

2. Admit Your Mistakes Fully and Accept Forgiveness

The son rehearsed his confession and offered to come back as a hired servant. But the father interrupted with grace, restoring him fully as a son.

Application: When you've hurt others or sinned against God, don't make excuses, blame circumstances, or apologize half-heartedly. Own it completely. And when forgiveness is offered—by God or people—receive it. Let go of guilt. Harboring shame or refusing grace blocks healing. As the father celebrated, God rejoices over every sinner who returns. Celebrate your own restoration and move forward.

3. Plan Ahead and Steward What God Has Given You

The younger son demanded his inheritance early, wasted it on reckless living, and was unprepared for the famine.

Application: Young or old, plan for the future while enjoying the present. Your time, money, talents, and relationships are gifts from God. "Wild living" may feel thrilling short-term, but it leads to ruin. Use what you have wisely for God's purposes. Build strong connections with family, church, and community—they provide the solid base you'll need when storms come.

4. Forgive Generously and Celebrate Restoration

The father absorbed the financial loss, forgave completely, and threw a party—robe, ring, sandals, and the fattened calf. He didn't lecture or demand repayment.

Application: In marriage, family, church, and friendships, people will fail. When genuine repentance comes, choose to forgive and forget. Absorb the cost instead of holding resentment. Stubbornness and self-pity destroy relationships; love cleans the slate and starts the celebration. This mirrors how God has forgiven us in Christ. Who in your life needs your full restoration today?

5. Guard Against Self-Righteousness (The Older Brother Trap)

The older brother stayed home, worked hard, and obeyed outwardly—but his heart was bitter. He resented the celebration for his brother and refused to join the party.

Application: It's easy to look down on those who have fallen farther or repented later. "I've served faithfully—why do they get grace?" This attitude makes us just as distant from the Father's heart. Don't stand outside the party. Rejoice when sinners come home, when the lost are found, and when the "dead" come back to life (Luke 15:32). Churches must welcome repentant people wholeheartedly, not with suspicion. Heaven celebrates—so should we.

6. Rest in the Father's Constant Love

The father loved both sons. He waited patiently for the younger and went out pleading with the older. Everything the older son had was already his.

Application: Whether you've run far away or stayed but grown resentful, the Father's love is for you. He offers belonging, not just hired-servant status. In Christ, you are fully adopted—dead to sin and alive to God (Romans 6:11). Live in that secure relationship. Let it free you to extend the same compassion to others.

This parable is ultimately about coming home to the Father's heart. God rejoices more over one repentant sinner than over the self-righteous. As we remember our own rescue, may we reflect the Father's compassion in our homes, church, and community—welcoming the lost, forgiving freely, and celebrating every return.

[Sources: 8-9]

Resources: Rev. Brad Standfest, (1) Logos Bible Commentaries; [1] Gerald M. Bilkes, *Glory Veiled and Unveiled: A Heart-Searching Look at Christ's Parables* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 119–120. [2] Pieter Verster and A. van de Beek, *The Triune God and Mission: A Theology of Mission* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2022). [3] - Rev. Brad Standfest [4] *NIV Bible Speaks Today: Notes*. 2020. London: IVP. [5] Wilson, Gerald H. 2002. *Psalms. Vol. 1. The NIV Application Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan. [6] All Scripture references are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (1984). [7] Barton, Bruce B., David Veerman, Linda Chaffee Taylor, and Grant R. Osborne. 1997. *Luke. Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers. [8] Barton, Bruce B., David Veerman, Linda Chaffee Taylor, and Grant R. Osborne. 1997. *Luke. Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers. [9] All Scripture references are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (1984) & ESV.

Sermon Notes:

Good morning, everyone... And greetings to everyone joining us online. Thank you for your faithfulness—I know summer is a busy time.

Happy Father's Day, men of God! Praise the Lord, we have a Father in Heaven who loves us unconditionally. We are in a summer series titled "The Sandals of Jesus." If you missed any sermons, let me give you our AVC Connections: YouTube, the AVC App, Facebook/Website.

[Let's Pray]

Let me get your attention this morning by sharing a mind-blowing American statistic with you. Mind you, this is several years old:

Upwards of 28% of children born in America grow up without a father—roughly 1 in 4 children born.

Out of 130 countries, the U.S. has the world's highest rate of children living in single-parent homes. This is more than three times the global average (Pew Research 2019).

I don't know about you, but I would have thought America would have the best parenting in the world. No, we actually rank the worst.

I'm not sharing this to shame anyone. I'm just giving you real and raw truth—research and data. What has gone wrong in this great America? I believe Scripture tells us the answer:

Romans 1:25-26

"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts."

Listen to this thought-provoking question. I titled it "The Dream Father."

What kind of father would you want?

Wouldn't you want a father who is a defender, a protector, and a provider—not someone who just runs his mouth off with false promises, leaving you with nothing but the same old status quo and another heartbreaking letdown?

You want a father who loves you unconditionally, who forgives freely and shows grace when you've run far from home. A father who teaches you, corrects you with wisdom, and disciplines you because he cares too much to let you destroy yourself. A father who kindly walks with you through the hardest situations, showing you the way forward when the path seems dark.

You want a father who has your back—not a backstabber. One who doesn't just say the words "I love you," but proves it with his actions. A father who encourages you, who speaks the truth in love without harsh judgment. He never mocks you or tears you down with his words. Instead, when you're at your lowest, he lifts you up, dusts you off, and says, "I am here for you!"

Who is this Father? Who could be this kind of man?

The fact is... No father on this earth can satisfy this dream.

Listen... You may have a great father or no father... Or someone that claimed you but let you down... You may be an orphan...

Maybe you just have a lot of pain from a wanna-be father...

Let me tell you some great news for anyone with some sort of void, pain or wound.

Hear the Word of the Lord:

Psalm 68:3-6a

“May the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful. Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds—his name is the Lord—and rejoice before him. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families.”

Friends, our Heavenly Father is a father to the fatherless and your defender when everyone has abandoned you.

There is a Gospel parable Jesus used to describe a Dream Father I want to discuss today. In most of your Bibles this story is known as the Lost Son or Prodigal Son. I am going to paraphrase some of the story and then I will read some key Scriptures.

Let’s read Luke 15:14-27/ In Bible

“After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

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

“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. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

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

What was this Dream Father’s reaction to his son coming home? He was filled with compassion and joy. He didn’t mock his son. He didn’t tell him to leave. He didn’t tell him everything he did wrong.

Who is this Dream Father standing on the road?

The Father is Jesus (PP Slide Showing Jesus on the Road)

Understand... If you feel fatherless today, Jesus has his arms wide open for you to experience his warm embrace. He's waiting.

The truth is... The Lord is a Father to the fatherless... and a defender of the weak.

The Dream Father says to all of us... Welcome Home!!

Devotional Questions:

These seven devotional questions are designed to help you reflect deeply on Sunday's message, engage with the key Scriptures, and apply the truth of our Heavenly Father's love to your life. Take time this week to read the passages slowly, pray through each question.

1. The Dream Father Ideal

The sermon describes the kind of father many long for: a defender, protector, provider, unconditional lover, gracious forgiver, wise teacher, and encourager who proves love through actions. Read Psalm 68:3-6a again. In what ways have you experienced (or longed for) these qualities in an earthly father? How does knowing God as "a father to the fatherless" and "defender of widows" bring comfort or challenge to areas of pain or disappointment in your own story?

2. Exchanging Truth for Lies

Romans 1:25-26 explains a cultural and personal drift: exchanging the truth about God for a lie and worshiping created things rather than the Creator, leading to being given over to shameful lusts. Reflect on the sermon's statistic about fatherlessness in America. Where in your own heart or in our culture do you see this exchange happening today? What created things (success, pleasure, independence, etc.) tempt you to put ahead of the Creator, and how can you realign your worship this week?

3. Coming to Our Senses

In the parable (Luke 15:14-27), the younger son hits rock bottom—feeding pigs and longing for their food—before he "came to his senses" and decided to return home with a confession of sin. Think about a time when hardship or emptiness helped you recognize your need for the Father. What does true repentance look like according to the son's words and actions? Are there areas in your life right now where the Father is calling you to "come to your senses" and return?

4. The Father's Compassionate Response

While the son was still far off, the father ran to him with compassion, embraced him, kissed him, and restored him fully with robe, ring, sandals, and a feast—without mockery, lectures, or conditions (Luke 15:20-24). How does this picture of the Dream Father (Jesus) differ from how you sometimes imagine God responding to your failures? Take time to thank Him for His grace and ask Him to help you receive it fully, without shame.

5. Jesus as the Dream Father

The sermon declares that the waiting father in the parable represents Jesus, who says, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18). Drawing from Psalm 68:5 and the broader theme of God as defender

of the vulnerable, how does seeing Jesus in this fatherly role change the way you relate to Him in prayer and daily life? In what specific “road of life” situation do you need His warm embrace and open arms right now?

6. Guarding Against the Older Brother’s Heart

The older brother stayed home and worked hard but became angry and resentful when the father celebrated the younger son’s return (Luke 15:25-32). The sermon warns against self-righteousness that keeps us from joining the party. Where might a critical, resentful, or comparative spirit be lurking in your heart—perhaps toward others who have wandered and returned, or toward God’s generosity? How can you cultivate the Father’s joy and generosity instead?

7. Living as Restored Children

Because of the Dream Father’s love, we are welcomed home, adopted, and invited to live as beloved sons and daughters. Reflecting on the full parable and supporting passages (such as Ephesians 2:11-19, James 1:27, and John 1:12), how should this truth shape how you treat others—especially the fatherless, lonely, or those returning from “distant lands”? What one practical step of reflection, forgiveness, celebration, or care for the vulnerable will you take this week to mirror the heart of the Father?