Right Side Up in an Upside Down World: Week Five

Connect Group Guide - 11.18.26

Opening Prayer

Key Scripture

- **Luke 15**

Message Recap

In this message, Pastor Mike explored Luke 15, where Jesus answers the Pharisees' criticism with three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. This week focuses on the elder brother, who stayed near his father's house but was far from his father's heart. His story invites us to examine our own hearts and ask whether our life with God is rooted in love or has become a religious routine.

Key Takeaways

- **You can be active at church and still be far from God.** Serving, attending, and giving can all be part of church life while our hearts remain distant.
- **Both brothers were lost.** The younger brother was lost in rebellion, and the elder brother was lost in religion. Neither understood the father's heart.
- **Serving can become a transaction.** The elder brother's attitude shows up when service turns into duty and we want the Father's gifts more than His presence.
- **It can be hard to see that we are lost.** The hardest person to reach may be the one who is convinced they do not need to be found.
- **The invitation is still open.** Jesus never tells us whether the elder brother joined the celebration. The invitation He left for the Pharisees is open to us today.

Discussion Questions

Opening Question

Does your relationship with God feel like a friendship or a job? Go around and share your first thought.

Understanding the Text

1. In Luke 15:1-2, the Pharisees criticize Jesus for welcoming sinners and eating with them. Why do you think Jesus answered with stories? What does that tell us about how He communicated truth?
2. The message traces three parables: a lost sheep, a lost coin, and a lost son. What was Jesus building toward by the time He reached the story of the prodigal son and his elder brother?
3. Read Luke 15:29-30. What words or phrases in the elder brother's response reveal how he feels toward his father?

Going Deeper:

4. A slave asks, "What do I have to do?" A son or daughter asks, "How can I honor my father?" Which question better reflects how you approach your faith right now? What shaped that posture?
5. The elder brother believed his father owed him. Pastor Mike said, "We don't obey God to purchase his goodness. We obey God because he's already been good to us." Have you ever treated obedience as a transaction? What did that look like?
6. Which sign of the elder brother's attitude do you recognize most in yourself: serving out of obligation, growing bitter when life goes differently than expected, or valuing God's gifts more than God Himself? Why?
7. Pastor Mike asked, "Have you become so committed to doing things for God that you've lost the joy of knowing God?"

Personal Reflection

8. Why do you think Jesus leaves us wondering whether the elder brother joined the celebration? What does that say to you?
9. Pastor Mike recalled his mother praying over his bed before dawn while he lived as a prodigal: "I thought I was returning home, but I really wasn't returning home. My father came and got me." How does that picture change how you see your walk with God?

10. The message closes with this question: "Do you crave God more than you crave what God can give you?" Take a moment of silence, then share as honestly as you feel comfortable.

Practical Applications

Choose one or more to practice before your group meets again.

For Your Personal Life

- **Pray without requests.** Spend time in God's presence without a list. Notice what feels natural and what feels uncomfortable.
- **Read Luke 15 in one sitting.** Ask the Holy Spirit to show you which character you most identify with right now.
- **Name a transaction.** Write down where you have treated faith like a transaction. Confess it and ask God to deepen your love for Him.

For Your Relationships

- **Pray for someone you resent.** Think of someone you have written off. Ask God to replace resentment with the father's compassion.
- **Pray persistently.** If you are a parent, grandparent, or mentor, follow the example of Pastor Mike's mother. Pray regularly and specifically for a prodigal in your family.

For Your Church Life

- **Examine why you serve.** Is it out of love for God and people, or out of duty, guilt, or a desire to be noticed? Bring your answer to God.
- **Encourage someone who serves quietly.** Name something specific you have seen them do and tell them why you appreciate it.

Prayer Requests & Closing

- **Honesty.** Ask God to show you where bitterness, obligation, or a desire for recognition has taken root.
- **Surrender.** Ask God to restore the joy of knowing Him and deepen your love for His presence.
- **Others.** Pray by name for people far from the Father's house, trusting that He is already running toward them.

Luke 15:20 - Picture the father seeing his son from far off, running to him, and welcoming him with compassion. Let that picture shape how you see God this week.