

A GraceFULL Home

Good morning, Fellowship. How we doing? Good to be with you today. It's always good to be with you on Family Sunday. I love working with our families here. In my time at Fellowship, I have encountered some pretty interesting families and I thought to start this morning, I would tell you about one of the more complex situations I've encountered.

There's a family I interacted with recently and it's a doozy of a story. It's a single parent family with two kids. The parent is a successful business owner. The oldest child in the family is responsible and driven. He had a 4.0 in high school, went to SMU on a full academic scholarship and then followed that up by going to law school at SMU. He's grown to be a good guy. Most would speak differently about his little brother. He's less than a golden child. He's confident, social, but also engages in some risky behavior. Every year he receives shares of stock in his dad's company and a few years ago, he asked for his shares to be released to him. He immediately cashed them in, told his dad he hated him, and moved out to Las Vegas where he went a little wild. A few weeks into his time there all the money had been blown on only things you can imagine – hey – don't imagine too much – we're in the church this morning. The money was gone. The friends were gone. This kid found himself alone and hungry with nowhere to turn. Remorseful, he came back home to his dad to see if his dad would take him back.

If you're the dad in this family – do you take your son back? If you do, what will others think and say about you? How would you respond if you're his older brother?

My guess is that some of you have already figured out this isn't a story of anyone you know here. It's a modern version of one of the most well-known stories in the Bible – The Prodigal Son. **Turn with me to Luke 15.** This morning we'll encounter three characters – a father and his two sons and my hope is that when you walk out of this place this morning you walk out with a grateful heart because of your encounter with a radically gracious Father.

Look at Luke 15, verses 11-12. Jesus is talking here: ¹¹And He said, "A man had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' He's essentially asking for 1/3 of the property and in this culture, asking for your inheritance with a living dad basically says, "Dad, you're as good as dead to me." In his pride and selfishness, this son prefers "stuff" over a relationship with his father.

The father obliges and days later, the son, disrespects his father again by exchanging his inheritance for cash. He heads to a distant country, and blows it all on what the passage calls, "loose living." Armed with a ton of money, he overindulges in a life of sinful pleasure and satisfaction but because of his gluttony finds himself broke and miserable.

The younger son chooses a rule-breaking rebellion over a relationship with his father. C.S. Lewis says, "Human history is the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy."

After living life in the fast lane, he's left with nothing. No friends. No family. No more "stuff." A famine hits the country. He's starving and in order to make money, he hires himself out to someone and begins working in the fields feeding pigs – which means he has arguably the most degrading and embarrassing job a young Jewish boy could have. He's desperate and envies the pigs ability to eat the seeds or pods of the carob tree. This wasn't a nourishing or appetizing meal. In fact, there was a Jewish saying that went: "When Israel is reduced to the carob-tree, they become repentant." Remember two

weeks ago, I told you that repentance is a **change of mind that leads to a change of action**. The younger son through his brokenness is moving towards repentance.

Look at verse 17 and we'll see how. ¹⁷ "But when he came to his senses." But when he came to his senses he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'"

The phrase, "when he came to his senses" is a phrase that indicates repentance. Alexander Bruce says, "... recklessness leads to misery and misery prompts reflection." His misery prompts reflection and his reflection points him back home. He's had a change of mind and it's changing his action. **When we don't stay tethered to the father, when we don't stay near him seeking out His guidance and wisdom, we can get all tangled up in sin until it breaks us.**

Now before we read the next verses. Isn't the story, up to this point, true of many of us in this room? We idealize freedom and independence from our parents. We JUST want to find happiness and, in our pride, we think life on our own would be better.

I remember thinking that as early as 10 years old. My mom and I got into an intense argument. I wanted something. She said, "No." That was the last "no" I was willing to hear. I had had enough of her "parenting." I said some terrible, hateful things to her and told her I was running away – off to start a life of my own where I could do what I want, when I wanted, with no restrictions from my wicked mother. To my surprise, she responded with this, "Aw, I'm sorry you feel that way. I'll help you pack." And she did.

I think I had all the essentials for a new life – a change of clothes, probably some Dunk-a-roos and a Capri Sun. Looking back, I was prepared to make it about an hour that night – tops. As soon as my feet exit the house, the door shuts, and behind me I hear two clicks. That was her, locking my arrogant little self out of the house.

Now at this point, I have to go. I start in one direction. As I do, my dog, Dusty, meets me at the fence. I go say hi to him and now I am REALLY ready. I make it about 15 feet and realize – "I don't know anyone that lives in that direction. I better go the other way." As I make it to the other side of the house, there's Dusty again. I go to him, pet him, and tell him I'm leaving. And then it hits me, I can't leave him with her. I literally tell him, through tears, "Dusty, I can't leave you here with mom. I have to stay and take care of you."

I make my way back to the house, knock on the door, and my mom opens it. And I have to make my speech, "Mom, I don't want to run away. I want to stay here. I want you to be my mom still." And she ushers me back inside. Knowing what I would be missing led me back home.

This younger son, wanted freedom, independence, and power. He wanted the ability, like many of us, to go and find himself, but in the process, he lost himself. He chooses to leave his father's protection and provision and he chooses to live contrary to the way he would have been raised by his father in this culture. **He responds to his father's love and grace with a rule-breaking and moral rebellion. And because of that, assumes his sonship ceases to exist. He believes there are limits to his father's grace. The message the younger brother believes is "My father will never accept me as his son again because I _____."** He's just hoping to work on his father's land to make money to feed himself. He rehearses his speech of contrition and heads home.

Luke 15:20-24: ²⁰ So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion *for him*, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; ²³ and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

The father responds to his son's rebellion with radical grace. This is a grace-FULL home. The father has been waiting for his son's return. And when he finally sees him coming down that road, the father – filled with relief and joy – takes off running towards his son. Generally speaking, this didn't happen in this culture. Children, women, and even some younger men might run. But patriarchs didn't. He wouldn't pick up his robes and bare his legs like a little boy. But this father, like the man who lost 1/100 sheep – like the woman who lost 1/10 coins – is elated that 1/2 sons has returned and, in his feelings, he puts aside all cultural norms and takes off running towards his son. He runs out, embraces his pig-smelling, slop-covered son, kisses him, and welcomes him home.

The father ignores his son's rehearsed speech and immediately tells his servants, "Bring out the best robe and a ring and sandals." In other words, go get MY robe, go get MY ring, and go get MY sandals for my son to wear. Shoes in this time were a symbol of freedom – people without shoes were in slavery. The boy left home looking for freedom and found himself in a pigsty. Upon return, he finds true freedom in the grace of the father and finds he hasn't lost his sonship at all.

Warren Wiersbe - "Everything the younger son had hoped to find in the far country, he discovered back home: clothes, jewelry, friends, joyful celebration, love, and assurance for the future. What made the difference? Instead of saying, 'Father, give me!' he said, 'Father, make me!' He was willing to be a servant!"

Instead of getting the punishment he might deserve or being asked to pay off a debt he couldn't pay, the son receives radical grace from his father. And then the father throws the biggest party that village had seen in quite some time. He celebrates the return of a rebellious son.

There's a group of people listening Jesus tell this story that would have been elated by His words. Go back to Luke 15:1-2. Now all the tax collectors and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. ² Both the Pharisees and the scribes *began* to grumble, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them." The passage simply calls them "tax collectors and sinners." Let me tell you about those people.

Let's start with the tax collectors. These were men of Israel working for the Roman empire – an empire ranging from India to England – that was abusing, murdering, and intimidating the Israelites. This was an evil empire and the tax collectors were working for them. Add to that, they were known for skimming money off the top for their own gain. They were traitors to their own people. They're hated.

Now the sinners. This was a class of people marked by disease and deformity or people who had occupations of ill-repute. The thought back then was that if you had a disease or if you were deformed – it was because of sin – yours or your parents – and you were considered an outcast. This was a group of people known for loose and wild living or they were being punished for the loose and wild living of their parents. These two groups of people were not accepted by the religious of the day. And that Jesus is eating with

them means he accepts them and is willing to fellowship with them. In His grace, He invites them into relationship. They are no longer the outcast or the marginalized but the accepted. As they hear this story, you know they're able to identify with the younger brother. And now they've heard that they're welcome in God's family. **What an incredible story of redemption – a surprising story of redemption for these people.**

Also, in the crowd listening are a group of people – the Pharisees and scribes – and they would have been equally surprised by the father's response. They would have been completely offended by it. These guys knew the Word of God and were strict in obedience to it. They had the first 5 books of the Bible MEMORIZED. These guys prayed. They fasted. They did all the RIGHT THINGS. These guys had rules upon rules upon rules – some of which were in the Bible – and they obeyed these rules every day and they did it with perfection. On the outside, they appeared perfect. And they wouldn't associate with anyone that didn't do the same.

Let's see how Jesus addresses them in the story.

Luke 15:25-32

²⁵ “Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ And he summoned one of the servants and *began* inquiring what these things could be. ²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸ But he became angry and was not willing to go in;

The older brother is busy in the field working. He's never left his father's side. He does whatever the father says. But it's because – like the Pharisees – he believes he has to earn his father's love through hard work and merit. His efforts dictate his father's rewards. Younger sons forsake relationship with the father through moral rebellion. Older sons forsake the relationship through rule-following. If younger sons believe, **“My father will never accept me as his son again because I _____.”** Older sons believe God will only give them grace and love them if they _____. **Younger sons choose sin over relationship. Older sons choose religious rule-following over relationship. They choose their own self-righteous effort and their own ability to keep the law over grace.**

One of the servants tells of his brother's return and he's angry – angry that his father would welcome home the rule-breaker. **Rule-keepers and rule-breakers don't like each other much.** He's angry that his father is so gracious. Doesn't he know there are supposed to be limits to love and grace? It's the same gripe the Pharisees and scribes have about Jesus that he “receives sinners and eats with them.”

And just as he did the younger son – the gracious father engages his oldest son – he goes out to him and invites him into the party to celebrate the younger son's return. But he's met with disrespect from the older son. I'll summarize for you. “Look, you!” I mean, you can imagine this older son – indignant – finger pointing in the father's face – “Look, you. How dare you. This isn't fair. He's been bad I've been good. He broke all the rules I followed all the rules. He wished you were dead and I've done everything you've said. He sold your land. I've been working hard on what's left of it. How dare you celebrate him and not celebrate me! I have earned your love and your favor!” **He wants justice over grace. He wants punishment for the sinner – his brother – and reward for the rule-follower – himself.** And yet, the father responds to this son with grace.

³¹And he said to him, 'Son (the Greek term for dear child), you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and *has begun* to live, and *was lost* and has been found.'

We don't know how this story ends. The father extends to him the same grace and an invitation to celebrate but we're left with him on the outside of the party. We see a gracious father inviting his son to celebrate the return of the lost. If he goes in, we know he has understood the goodness of God's grace towards all and accepts it himself. If he stays outside, he has missed an opportunity to know his father and to know what truly pleases the father is a right relationship with Him. He doesn't know God's radical grace – through the death and resurrection of Jesus – is about to be unleashed on all people.

God's grace surprises both the rebellious rule-breaker and the religious rule-follower.

So, what do we take-away from this? Let me encourage you today with some reminders:

First to parents, specifically. **Give yourselves grace.** Grant yourselves the same grace the Father extends to you. Listen, you are not necessarily a bad parent because your child goes rogue. It's impossible for you to parent perfectly. There is only one perfect Parent and He had a child go off the rails and choose rebellion over relationship. Don't give up on your rebellious rule-breaker. Find ways to extend grace to them. Don't compromise yourselves. Let them know you'll always love them and you're waiting for their return and never ever stop praying for them.

Second, you can be close to the rules but far from the relationship. Rule keeping isn't what brings joy to your father. We think if we just keep the rules, God must be thrilled with us. What thrills His heart, is that we're awakened to the fact that we are all rule-breakers. Our faith isn't about rule-following – it's about relationship. "How Religion Works: If I obey, then God will love and accept me. The Gospel: I'm loved and accepted; therefore I wish to obey." – Keller We are the older brother when we want justice for others and grace for ourselves. Elders believe living a good life means you get a good life. Rule-followers love comparing themselves to Hitler instead of comparing themselves to Jesus. We are the older brother when we forsake a relationship with the Father for perfect rule following. You might be the older brother if you are withholding forgiveness towards someone else or have difficulty celebrating stories of grace. Like the father recommends in the story – celebrate and rejoice when what was lost is found – when what was dead has been given life.

Lastly, you can run from God but you can't outrun His grace. You can't out-sin the love of God. This younger son was wheels off and for years we've called this story, "The Prodigal Son." But you know God is the real prodigal in this story. The word prodigal means, "spending money or resources recklessly or extravagant." God used His most important resource on you. He had His Son pay for your debt. And some of you came in here today feeling like you've disappointed God. You believe that God is frowning at you because of something you've done in the past. Today, you can bring a smile to his face by simply being grateful that He has extended grace to you. Because you can't outrun His love, turn toward Him and come home this morning. He's got His arms open.

You know. I told you that I ran away or attempted to anyway. A few years ago, I asked my mom – "What would you have done if I had left? How did you know I wouldn't get hurt?" Her response, "Richard, I never took my eyes off of you. I watched you from the window the entire time. I would never have let you get out of my sight." Friends, you have a heavenly father who has never let you out of his sight. He wants you to come home and to stay home because of Him and His goodness.

