

Harris Creek Baptist Church
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Series: Far from the Father
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The Father's Response to Rebellion and Repentance

Luke 15: 11-24

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

"Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 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 servants 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 servants.' 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.

Harris Creek, good morning! It is good to be with you guys, starting a new series. Last week, I talked about my mom some. When her father passed away, I was asked to speak at his memorial service - his funeral. He was a good man, a God-fearing man. He loved Jesus. It was such a privilege to be able to speak at his memorial and tell stories about him. So, when the time came, I was going to share something about him. I approached the podium; I did not really prepare for it because I wanted to share from the heart, and this is what I do for a living. I speak. I went up there confident that I was going to share something about him. And when I got up there, all of these stories started coming to mind and I did not know what to say. It was not that I did not have anything to say, it was almost that I had too much to say. I did not know which story was going to come forward.

The one I thought about, the only thing I could grab in the midst of this crowded head space, was from when I was seven years old. He was at his house; going to sit down; and as a seven-year-old, as he was going to sit down, I pulled the chair out from underneath him. He fell to the floor. He jumped to his feet and said “Ow!” Everyone looked at me and said, “What did you do? Why did you do that?” He jumped to his feet and said, “It was an accident, it was an accident. He did not mean to. His shirt got caught on the chair.”

As his casket is right beside me, we were there to celebrate him. All I could think was, it was not an accident. And I could not even ask his forgiveness, because he was gone. He was a gracious man; he would have forgiven me. What happened next was everyone went up and said something about him. All from different sections of his life and of how they knew him. There were people that worked for him that talked about how he was a hard worker and a generous man. There was a person that fought a war with him in WWII. He was in the Navy on a boat, and he would tell these compelling stories, different snippets of his life. Someone else would get up and say, “Well I knew him in this season.” Someone else, “Well I knew him in this season.” “Well, he was like this.”

And then after everyone, my mom went up last. She stole the show. It was as though she leaned forward and said, “Let me tell you about my daddy”. The room calmed. Everyone leaned forward and listened. She has all of the credibility and all of the authority to tell us about the man that she spent much of her entire life with. She saw him at the breakfast table; at the dinner table, when he came home for lunch on summer vacation. He took her to school. When they went somewhere together as a family. She saw him in all of these different seasons. So, when she takes the podium she says, “Hey, let me tell you about my daddy.” And everyone leans in because we all want to hear about him. It was this an all-encompassing picture.

What Jesus is going to do today is say, “Hey, let me tell you about my Daddy. Let me tell you about my Father.” See Jesus has all of the authority and all of the credibility to tell us about God because He spent eternity passed with Him. No one in the history of history knows God the Father better than the Son. No one! Every single person here, I do not care how long you have been in church, every person who can hear me and listening at home, you have misconceptions about God. There are things about God that you have made up that are not true of Him. You have given Him a personality, ascribed to Him character traits. Some of them are grounded in the Scripture, some of them not. Jesus is going to say, “Lean forward. Let me tell you about my Father.” And if what Jesus says about God is different than what we say about God, then we should take what we say and throw it away and fully embrace what Jesus says about God. He knows better than we do.

The reason this matters so much is because what we think about God, determines how we approach Him. AW Tozer says, “What comes to mind when a person thinks about God, is the most important thing about them.” Imagine this: the most important thing about you is what you think about God. I hope you argue with me when I make that statement. “Wait no. The most important thing about me is this.” I hope you argue. No. The most important thing about you, is what comes to mind when you think about God. If you think He is disappointed in you, then you are going to be hesitant to approach Him. This is just true; it is human nature. If we feel that

someone is disappointed in us, then we are not super eager to go hang out with them so they can express their disappointment to us. That is just not how we feel. If we think He is short tempered, a loose cannon, then we are going to approach Him really delicately. Maybe superstitiously. “Father God, daddy, Lord Almighty in heaven, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I just come to you today...” you’ll figure out how many “justs” you can fit in the prayer. “We just... I just... I just want to... In the name of Jesus, I pray this in all things...” you get weird. Depending on how you think about Him. If you think He is impotent, like He is not powerful, then you might not want to waste your time talking to Him. If you think He is not going to care about the things you bring to Him, then you might think that you do not want to waste His time. If you do not believe in Him, then you will not want to come to Him at all, except to perhaps convince others that you do. What you think about God impacts how you approach Him, and Jesus is going to tell you what you need to think about God.

Today we are starting a two-week series, Far from the Father. It comes from the most famous parable Jesus ever told, affectionally known as the Prodigal Son. Those headlines in those chapter titles and even the chapter numbers were added later. Those were not inerrant, not infallible, not the inspired word of God. A person added those. So, this one is usually called the Prodigal Son and we will talk about why that may or may not be a good name. Mark Twain said about Jesus that “He was the best storyteller that has ever lived.” He said the best story that He ever told was this one that I am going to read you today in Luke 15. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to Luke 15. We will talk about a Father's response to rebellion and repentance. A Father's response to rebellion and repentance. As we move through this story that may be familiar to some of you, we are going to talk about how He responds to rebellion; how He responds to our ruin; and before you leave here today, how He responds to repentance.

It is very important that I start this story later in Luke 15, in verse one. Because you need to know that Jesus is telling a story, but it is also important who is there listening to this story. Verse one says, **“Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus, but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered ‘this man welcomes sinners and eats with him.’”** So, there is two groups present, let me explain it to you. You have the Pharisees and the religious leaders, or the teachers of the law. When you hear ‘**teachers of the law**’ do not think professors or attorneys, think ‘people who understood the religious law and they taught the Bible.’ Think the pastors, the ministers, the religious people at that time. Then you have the sinners and the tax collectors. In this culture there is a class system. So, when you see **“sinners”** it's not like Romans: **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”** It is a class of people.

What they would have believed is if you had some physical deformity, some maladies, some sickness, that was because you have sinned. If you could not walk, or you could not see, or you could not hear, that might be because of your sins. You would be rejected by this society. They would not want to get near you. They would not want your sin to jump on them. These people would kind of huddle up, these are the people who have been rejected by the society. And along with them are the tax collectors. Now we just had tax season and we think IRS, but no. That is not the tax collectors. The tax collectors were people who would tax about 80 to 85% from the

Jews. They would take 80 to 85% of a Jewish person's income. They take it and they give it to the Romans. Then the Romans would use that to further oppress them (Jewish people), sometimes crucify their family members and their friends. So, you can imagine in this culture, you are walking home from work, and you see your friend, your neighbor, a relative, your cousin, crucified on the side of the road. They are bleeding out of their corpse, and you know a tax collector did that. And you enabled them to do that with your money. You funded that. So, this middleman, you really despise them.

You begin to realize in the Chosen, why there's so much animosity toward Matthew. They really did not like the tax collectors. These people are confused and say "Man Jesus. This man named Jesus, this Rabbi, He's hanging out with sinners and tax collectors." And then it is like Jesus says "Hey, let me tell you how my Daddy treats sinners and tax collectors" and He puts them in the story.

He tells two stories: first, lost sheep and lost coin. If there's time, I will get to those, but He starts in verse 11 about the prodigal son, or the story called The Prodigal Son.

"There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. 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.

In that short paragraph there is so much going on, so let me explain it. First, he says, "Can I have my inheritance early?" In this culture, that is the equivalent of saying, "Dad, I wish you were dead. Can we get this show on the road? I know after you die, as the younger son, I will get 1/3 of the estate." He's like "Hey, let us go. Let us go pops. I do not want to have to take care of you in your old age. Let me just have my inheritance." Rather than the father being outraged by that, which Deuteronomy would tell you that he would have all of the authority to do in that situation. He had authority to take the son, hand him to the elders, and they would stone him until he was dead. That is what he could have done. But instead, he obliges the request. He actually gives him what he wants. He gives him 1/3 of the estate.

It says, **"The son goes off to a far-off country."** So, picture, he goes over to Amsterdam. He goes far. Then he starts eating weird brownies; experimenting with drugs; hiring prostitutes; and he wastes all his dad's money. Then there is a famine in the land. I will tell you that, often, when you run against the will of God, or you run away from the will of God, you come to a storm. When God tells you to go to Nineveh and you do not go to Nineveh, there is a storm. People come to me all the time, "I don't know why things are so hard!" I am going to ask, "How is your relationship with God right now?" "I don't know why my marriage is so hard." "How is your relationship with God right now?" This happens sometimes. God will get your attention and that is what happens.

He brings himself under the authority of a foreigner, some authority in that world. I think we do this with Satan. Satan has authority here. Then we say “Here I am Satan. Let me give you a foothold. What would you like to do with me?” Then he finds himself where he is feeding pigs, which would have been outrageous to the Pharisees and the teachers of law there. Understand, pigs are unclean. They cannot go anywhere near pigs, there are no pigs in their community. They know he is in a foreign country. He is feeding pigs, this disgusting unclean animal, and he is jealous of the pigs! “I wish I could eat what they have.” When you give yourself to a sin and you feed an animalistic desire.... I cannot tell you how many times I am sitting down with someone who is a formally upstanding citizen of the community, but they have fed perverted desires in their heart that they long for what the animals have. There is such perversion in their heart and mind, that they long for what the animals have. That is what is going on here. How does the father respond to his rebellion? This will be the most unsettling point that I have for you today.

1. *When You Rebel, God Will Let You*

When you run from Him, He will allow you to. So that you might come to a place where you would find out that life is only found in Him alone. Some of you, you follow Jesus. You found at an early moment in your life that there is no life apart from God, and you followed Him faithfully. That is not my story. My story is that I had to look for it in sex and drugs, in the party. In all of the things that the world had offer. In Vegas, time and time again in Vegas. I am trying to find life, so that I would get to this place where I realized there is no life apart from God. This is the lesson that He wants to make sure that we know. Life cannot be found apart from Him! And really, I think some of us this morning, we are trying to find life apart from Him. You find it in shortcuts - trying to experience sexual intimacy outside of marriage. Or shortcuts in marriage - thinking “This isn't worth working for. It is too much work. It is too challenging. I think I need out. I need to start over. I need a new life.” We start to think about escape. Sometimes you get to this really terrible dark place, but you could never say this out loud because you are Christian. Maybe you are in church on a Sunday, but you start fantasizing about people dying. I know it is gross. Maybe you have been there, maybe you would never say it out loud, I get that. Maybe you have been there.

Romans 1:24 says, “**Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another.**” Do you want a commentary on our culture today? If so, I want you to go home and read Romans 1. It is your “homework” assignment - go home and read Romans 1. If you want to understand what is happening in our country today, read Romans 1. The Christian life is a journey of learning, over and over, that life cannot be found in possessions, experiences, progression, or achievement. Life is found only and ultimately in Him alone.

As I read this story called the Prodigal Son, if you're here and you know you looked at pornography this week; you're in an affair and nobody knows it; you're here this morning maybe you're hungover - you partied a little hard last night; you understand there are sins in your life that you're hiding, it's very easy for you to understand who you are in this story. You're like, “Oh yeah, yeah, I'm the younger brother. That is me. That is the character that I play. I hope he does not preach a sermon too convicting because I just want to continue to keep this hidden. I do not

want the Holy Spirit to move too much. Surely I can justify keeping this a secret.” You understand your role.

However, here is my concern for Waco TX. There are people here that have been in church their entire life; they have memorized Scripture; they know the Bible; they read this, and you are going to pass the Sunday school quiz; you went to AWANAS - you got the patches and the pens; and all the weird stuff that you get for being “good” in church - and you are eating with the pigs. You are eating with the pigs, and you do not even realize it. You do not even realize that there is something better out there; an actual real authentic relationship with God that you will not find because you think you have it. You settled for the counterfeit. You are playing church games, religious games. You learn the lingo and jargon and language to make it sound like you know God when you do not know Him. We have to have that repentance moment where we wake up eating with the pigs like, “Oh no. I actually don't have a relationship with the Creator of the heavens and the earth. I've just been pretending like I do.” What has kept you from actually knowing Him, is pretending like you do.

I think we are tempted to think that He's withholding good from us at times. Friends, if you like what you got, keep doing what you are doing. But if you keep doing what you are doing, you are not going to like what you got. Imagine if you had to take this multiple-choice quiz and it said “What life do you want? What do you want? What do you want in life?” Ready? Let me give you three options:

Option A - You can do whatever you want. You can eat where you want. Buy what you want. Live where you want. Drive where you want. It represents financial freedom. You are kings and queens in this world. You can do as you please and follow your preferences. Whatever you want, that is what you can do with Option A.

Option B - You'll be depressed, anxious, and ultimately, you will want to end your life. Probably not going to choose Option B. You do not read that like, “Oh yeah A or B, I don't know. I'm really stumped.”

Option C - You will use your life to serve others in the name of Jesus Christ. You will take the things that are entrusted to you, and you will leverage them for the sake of the Kingdom. And really, it is not the life of a king. It is the life of a servant. I am a servant to the Most High King. I will do whatever He asks.

Most Americans will look at Options A, B, and C, and the vast majority of Americans are going to choose A; not realizing that A is often a path to B. You hear what I am saying? When you pursue A with reckless abandonment, you often find yourself at B. This is the lesson we cannot learn to listen to! Right now, you maybe arguing with me like “Whoa! What did he say?” You may not want to learn from me. Let me let me give you some friends you can learn from, okay? How about you learn from Robin Williams? How about you learn from Anthony Bourdain? Kate Spade? Bud Dwyer? Marilyn Monroe? Do you want to learn from Kurt Cobain? Maybe Ernest Hemingway? Ray Combs? Chris Cornell? Chester Bennington? It is a really long list! What does it have in common? What does that list have in common? They could do whatever they wanted. They could do whatever they wanted. They had all of the freedom to do whatever they wanted.

So, you know what? They wanted to end it all. To leave this place. To get out of here, it is too much.

You were not meant to be God. Your soul cannot support the glory of this world. You have to offload it onto the sturdy shelf of Jesus. You will get crushed under glory. You have to put it where it goes. I got those names from an article entitled *Why Suicides are More Common Among Celebrities and CEOs*. Because we have a proclivity to find life in this world apart from God, and you cannot.

Verse 17: **“When he came to his senses, he said ‘How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare and here I am starving to death.’”** He’s saying, “My dad's employees eat better than I do. I do not understand, 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'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.’ So he got up and went to his father.”**

He is practicing his apology. I do not know if you have ever practiced your prayer in your mind, like “This is what I'm going to say to God.” “Should I talk to him?” He's like, “Father I have sinned against heaven and against *you*. I sinned against heaven and *against* you. I'm no longer *worthy* to be called your son.” (JP repeats line with the inflection on different words). We will practice prayers as if God's not right there seeing all of our thoughts. He [the Prodigal Son] has no hope of being a son again. He says, “Maybe I'll just be an employee, because my dad's employees are treated better than me.” It is not a hope to be a slave. A slave would not be paid. What he is actually saying here is, “Maybe there's a chance I can pay my father back all that I owe him.” That is his hope. “Maybe I'll be able to pay my father back.” And so, what am I going to walk up on? That is what you want to know. How do you approach the person that you are indebted to? Are they disappointed? Are they discouraged? You know how this goes. You have been in Vegas; you spent all your family's inheritance; and you come back. And the response you might expect is... “Hey, there you are. This better be good man. What is that smell first of all? You stink. Where have you been? Let me guess, you are broke, huh? You lost it all didn't you?! (sniffs in disgust) Is that pigs? Have you been with pigs? You disgust me. You are a disappointment. Is that how it goes?

Let us see how it goes. It says, **“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him. He was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.”** He is looking for his son. He's peering out the window, “I hope he comes back. God bring him back. Would you bring him back? I miss him. I want to see him!” In the Greek it says, **“He fell on his neck and kissed him repeatedly.”** He throws his arms around him, falls on his neck, and kisses him repeatedly.

It says, **“he ran.”** Every commentary you are going to read on this passage will tell you the same thing, first century men do not run. Which is odd, we do not get that. Let me just explain it like this. If you go to Haiti, when you turn 18 in Haiti, you do not wear shorts. It is just a sign in their culture, boys wear shorts and men do not wear shorts. I know it is weird to us because we do, the men wear shorts. In the first century, men, under no circumstances, would run. They just did not

do it. Now, that is different. That is hard for us because you have your running shoes, you have your HOKAs, and you have been running around the neighborhood. You run for fun. You run “fun runs,” I do not get it. Nothing is fun about running. See, these first century folks are my people man. I will be honest; I get first century men.

His father sees him, he hikes up that robe, and he sprints to that son. He falls on him and kisses him repeatedly. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law are listening to this story, and they are outraged. They would have been pleased that this son was starving to death, that would have made sense to them. But now, to see the father's response, they are furious. But the sinners and the tax collectors, they are filled with hope. They are like, “Aw man, this story has just turned around.” So how does the Father respond to the ruin that comes from our rebellion? Is He disgusted? Is He disappointed?

2. *When You Come to Ruin, God Hurts With You*

God hurts with you. He says, “**He's filled with compassion.**” It is a really strange term in the Greek. In the Greek it says, “**He was moved deep within his bowels.**” Here would be my English translation: “He felt a kick to the gut.” When it says, “**He was moved with compassion,**” it was like he was kicked in the gut. Now, did he experience hurt *by* his son? The preposition matters so much. Some of you, you are here today, and you think you hurt God. That God's hurt *by* you. Do you think that, even as I say that? You have felt that before. That you hurt God; that He's hurt *by* you. That is not what I said. He is hurt *with* you. In fact, Jesus was hurt *for* you. By “for,” I mean “in place of.”

Those prepositions really matter. Was God hurt *by* you? Was He wounded *by* you? No. He was hurt *with* you because He did not want you to hurt. He is not hurt by what you have done to Him; He's hurt by what you did to yourself. See, sin is always a bad idea, and the only reason God does not want you to sin is because He loves you so much. He knows that it is going to bring pain on you. That your sin is going to impact your marriage, your relationships, your work, your headspace, your mentality, your mental well-being. God does not want you to hurt you, because God loves you and so He does not want you to sin. He hurts with you, not by you. His Son was hurt for you. It is not “I told you so,” but the Gospel is Jesus hurting in your place. Looking for life apart from God will always have real consequences. No one in the history of history has ever gotten away with sin; except eternally, where it has been paid for. So, the father is not responding with disappointment but with compassion, as the Word says.

When my son was two, I was in the other room and Monica calls. I hear this kind of frantic “Babe! Babe! Come quick!” I'm like, “What now? It could be anything.” So now I am running (because she said quick), and I am making the corner, and you never know what you are going to see with a 2-year-old. What did he do now? Did he cut his hair? Who knows? I turned the corner and he had gotten sick, and he was throwing up. I know I talked about my kid's throwing up a lot, but kids throw up a lot. So, he is throwing up and it was the most interesting vomit you have ever seen. There is a wall about 15-foot away and it was all over that wall. Then there is a wall in front of us with cabinets and it was all over that wall. And the cabinets had crevices, so it made its way in between the cracks and into the cabinets – so that was interesting. Then there is

another wall over here also painted with throw-up. It just seemed like it went everywhere else, but somehow it was also all over him. It was just like this unstoppable vomit train, and it is still coming out when I make the corner. It is beginning to pile up. I have never seen that before. I do not know where a two-year-old puts all this, but just it just starts piling up.

I am like “Oh gosh.” Then Monica says, “Can you take him to the bath?” (long pause) I am thinking, is that a multiple-choice question are there any other options. You know? I am looking at him, and there is a 2-inch strip on his arm without throw up on it. So, I am thinking, “How do I make my hands small enough?” I am trying to pick him up like one of those grabber machines. Then I am thinking, “Maybe I just carry him to the bath like this.” When I do, it gets on me a little bit and I shriek back thinking “I don't want to get whatever he has.” It is gross. And Monica looks at me – a very loving, God-fearing, godly woman - she looks at me with this look. She does not say it out loud, but it looks like “What a wuss...are you serious right now?” But what comes out of her mouth is, “That’s your son.” I am like, okay, calm down. I am working through it right now. I have a weak stomach. Then she responds, as if I am not shamed enough, she picks him up and just pulls him close and says, “I’ll do it.” Okay...okay.

Some of you think that God is responding to you like I did to my son. “Gross! What is wrong with you? Yuck! Covered in your filth. Yeah, I saw what you looked at! I saw the hashtag. I saw what you did right after that. I saw the conversation. I saw the text exchange. I know the thought you had when you passed them walking into church! What is wrong with you? You had those thoughts? One minute you are all smiles talking to somebody, next you turned around like ‘What’s wrong with them?’ You are so two faced!” You think that's how God feels about you, when in reality He's running for you. He is ready to throw His arms around you, get your filth all over Him. He is not scared of it. Motivated by one thing, His love.

If I were to describe it appropriately, it would sound blasphemous. Because I would have to say things like, ‘insane’ or ‘reckless.’ His reckless love for you; His nonsensical love for you; that is what He's motivated by. He is moving toward you, ready to fall on your neck and to kiss you repeatedly in a scene that is uncomfortable. Maybe even embarrassing. We think we have to get right to go back to God, but you cannot get right without God. It is only God who makes you right.

In verse 21, **“The son said to him, ‘Father I have sinned against heaven and against you.’”** He is practiced this. He has had a long way, long walk, to practice this. **“I have sinned against heaven and against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son.”** “Quick! Bring the robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger.” The father just interrupts him. “Stop! Get the stuff.” **“But the father said to his servants, ‘quick bring the 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 us 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.’”** The father cuts him off mid-confession.

I was raised in a religion where you had to pay penance. If I sinned, I would have to say ten *Hail Marys*, or ten *Glory Bes*, or 10 *Our Fathers* so that I might get right with God. Show me penance in that Scripture! Show me penance. Show me any barrier between you and God. That the second

you turn toward Him, He's running towards you - throwing His arms around you. Jesus says, "Let me tell you about my Daddy. You don't understand Him." Show me penance in that. It is not there.

Sometimes it is wise and responsible to create healthy boundaries between people who hurt you repeatedly. I get that. I get those boundaries can be healthy between human relationships when somebody is sick, and they hurt you repeatedly. So, you allow them not to hurt you anymore and I get that. I just want you to know, God does not do that. Do not project that on the Father. He is created no boundaries between you and Him. He is ready to take you back the second you turn toward Him, in an action called repentance. In fact, I would tell you that God is the prodigal. That is why I do not like the title "Prodigal Son." The son's prodigal-ness pales in comparison to the father. Let me define it - because you are confused. Prodigal means "spending money or resources freely and recklessly. Wastefully. Extravagant. Giving something on a lavish scale." That is what the Father does.

Tim Keller writes the book *The Prodigal God* based on this text. He says, "Put the robe on and the ring and sandals on his feet. Slaves go barefoot, not my son." The ring, so you understand what is happening, it is the signet ring. If you go to a home closing and you are buying house, you are going to sign your name 786,000 times. In this culture, there were no signatures. A signature was not a thing, it was the ring. You would stamp your ring. In the ring would be your family seal. So, that ring signifies: You are our family. You are restored. You are one of us. Put the ring on his finger. He is saying nothing has disqualified you from being a part of this family. Nothing. Now this is so important.

It is a weird thing. Week after week I come up here and I am preaching to all of you as we are sitting in this room, with the microphone strapped to my face, knowing that I am very possibly the biggest sinner in this room. The chief of sinners. I know that is a weird thing to boast about. But I just think about all that God has restored me from. All of the crazy, foolish things that I have done apart from Him; and it is a long list of things. Pastors all of the country are able to boast in their ThMs and their M-Divs and their Doctorates. But all I have to boast in front of you is the grace of Jesus Christ. He has restored me. And He's unlocked my mind to understand His scriptures and teach it to you. **"Therefore, I will boast all the more about my weakness for His grace is sufficient and His power is made perfect in my weakness."** I have been forgiven much.

The Pharisees and the teachers of the law are confused. "Celebrate? This idiot wants to throw a party?" The sinners and the tax collectors are like, "Man, we know how to celebrate. We get 'celebrate.'" Let me tell you friends, so does God. The number one metaphor in the Scripture for the Kingdom of heaven is a party. It is a feast and a banquet. Right? Your God, He knows how to party. How does the Father respond to our repentance?

3. *When You Repent, God Restores You*

When you repent, God restores you - with a party even. Listen, listen, listen. What someone celebrates, tells you a lot about them. You learn a lot about a person by what they celebrate. My grandfather was a dairy farmer, but he also had crops and things. He would celebrate when it

rains. That is what he would celebrate. When it rained, that is when he was like, “Get out the good ice cream! Get the Bluebell. Bring it out, come on! Get the chocolate syrup, let us go! Everybody around the table, it's raining!” He would celebrate rain. You can learn a lot about somebody from what they celebrate. Think about what you celebrate. Some of you parents, your kid brings home a report card, “All A’s! All A’s! Let us go! We’re going to get ice cream!” What is big in our culture is athletics. “Man, you scored a goal! Yeah! You made the basket; you got the touchdown! Let us go celebrate, ice cream all around!”

In my home, I want to celebrate the things that God celebrates. You come home with a report card, “All A’s! Great job! I am so glad, as long as you tried your hardest. That is what matters most, you tried your hardest. If it was all B’s, some C’s, ‘You tried your hardest? If you did your best, that's what matters the most.’ ‘You scored a touchdown? That is great. It is fleeting, but I'm proud of you as long as you played your hardest.’ ‘You come home, and you say, ‘Hey, I shared the Gospel with someone at school.’ ‘Ice cream! Let us go! We want Peach Wave! What do you want? You want Heritage Creamery? You want Sub Zero? Here we go. You want Baskin Robbins? What kind? You shared the Gospel; how did that go?’

You can learn a lot about someone by what they celebrate. You start to understand what is important to them. What does God celebrate? Repentance. Repentance is turning from your sin and turning to God. When you do, He goes out of his way to show you something. Friends, He's going to throw a party. He says it repeatedly in this text.

There was a sheep that was lost. The shepherd left the 99 sheep and goes to find that one. When he finds that one, there is a party. **“I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.”** There is a coin, a valuable coin, that someone lost. When they lost it, they swept their house. They started moving the furniture, they wanted to find the coin. When they found it, “ice cream!” In the same way, I tell you there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Interesting side note, all of these things that were lost- a son, a sheep, and a coin- they were all in the possession of the person. We always read this text like it is somebody who does not know Christ and then they come to him. But I am going to go on a limb and say while that certainly applies, I think this is even more to somebody who is in the church their entire life. The slow exhausting drip of legalism has carried them away, self- righteousness has carried them away, to a place where they come here, and they just learn to fake it. God calls them to repentance. He will leave the sheep to go and bring them back and to restore them. Because He celebrates repentance.

The application: When you rebel, God will let you; so, understand that life is found in Him alone. When you come to ruin from your rebellion, God hurts with you; and His son was hurt for you in your place. When you repent, God restores you. So repent. Repentance is not “God please make these consequences go away,” that's not repentance. “God please help me to escape the consequences of my sin,” not repentance. Repentance is, “God I’m here and I'm ready for whatever you have coming my way. I trust you. I am not scared anymore. I am not hiding

anymore. I am not trying to sweep this under the rug anymore. I want to put it out in the open and God, I trust you. Because ultimately, I am going to be with you forever and ever and ever. So, I am turning from my sin, and I am turning towards you. Thank you that you sent your son Jesus to die for my sin.”

It is interesting because in everything that we experience humanly, whenever you wander from someone or somewhere, you have to turn around, and you have to walk that long, arduous path back to them. But not in the Christian life. You can wander from God so far; deep down to the dark hole of despair, and all you have to do to get back to Him is turn around. And He's right there. He has been waiting. He has been running for you. He is chasing you; you just have to turn around.

I have seen all kinds of crazy stuff. In marriages, all kinds of crazy, dark, weird stuff. I cannot even tell you right now. You would be embarrassed. That is all you would think about when you got in the car. In singleness, where we are at as a culture. In addition, in fetishes, I have seen it all. You will not come up here and stump me with any of your craziness. I know you are here; I know you are here, and God just wants you to turn around. I think one of the things that will keep you from doing that is, like the son, you are going to think “I have to pay Him back.”

I went to get a haircut. I know you guys like to go to like nice places to get your haircut, I like to go to the shadiest places to get my hair cut. It is like a mission field; it is an adventure. You never really know what is going to happen. I might come out without hair, who knows. So, I go get this haircut. The guy fading me up is named Joseph. While he is cutting my hair, he is drinking Moet...I did not know either - it is champagne. He is drinking it from the bottle while he is cutting my hair, no joke. I'm like, “Bro, you sober? Because that's sharp and that's my head.” Then, I start to share the gospel. “Do you have a faith?” He says, “I used to, I used to love God. Now I love Bud.” Just to be clear, he is talking about weed. He was like, “Yeah, man I just love the blunt too much. Man, I love to party.” He starts give me a window into his life, “You know, I love this, that, and the other thing.” And I am like, “I understand. Bro, you should come to church with me sometime.” He said, “Man, if I tried to get back right with God, I'd have to pay too much. I have too much to pay for.” He said, “I'd have too much to pay for.”

He is finishing up, and I am sitting there for a minute. I am soaking that in, “too much to pay for.” He finishes and I pay him for the haircut and give him a tip. As I am walking out of the barbershop, I turn around and I say, “Joseph let me ask you a question. If somebody comes in after me and they want to pay for my haircut, what do you tell him?” He is like, “Your next haircut?” “No, no this one. The one you just gave me. Say that somebody comes in here like, ‘JP, he was here earlier, he got his haircut. I want to pay you for it. What are you going to tell him?’” He said, “Well, I'd tell him it's already been paid for.” He said, “I'd tell him it's already been paid for.” There is Gospel.

You are not going to pay for your sins. How are you going to pay for sins that have been paid for? What happened on the cross? You think He died for fun? You think His hands and feet were pierced just for the heck of it? You think He bled out because He wanted to? Or because you are self-righteous; prideful; think you got it together; porn addict; hiding things; adulterer; struggling

with body image; identity in things; materialistic; greedy? Why did He die? For you. He died for you. So that when you turn around, you see the Father right there, coming after you. Full of grace, throwing His arms around you, falling on your neck, kissing you repeatedly. Just need you to believe that.

Let me pray.

Father I sense you have got some work to do in the hearts of your people right now. Would you bring to mind what we need to repent from and for? Would you show us right now where we have been running from you? Will you show us what we have given ourselves to, in place of you? Would you show us where we have tried to find life apart from you? Would you show us who we have hurt? As David said, "It is against You alone that we have sinned." Would you show us that in a way that's kind of scary Lord, would show us that? Amen

What I want you to do is, I want you to think about what you have to repent for. Everyone here, everyone who hears me, wherever you are at, you have something to repent from. Something to repent for. Something to turn from and to turn toward God. I just want you to think about what that is, and I do not want you to lose focus. The enemy's going to come alongside you, try to take it, distract you with something else, but I just want you to hold that thought. In fact, I want you to stay seated until you do. We will sing a song; but you just stay seated until you know what it is that you need to repent from. Then when you stand, let that be the decision that "I'm turning from that and I'm turning toward God." As we begin to sing this song, you stay seated until you know what it is that God is calling you to repent.