

Today's Message:

"The High Calling of Fatherhood"

Elder Jay Cooper/Shadow Mountain Church/June 19, 2011

TEXT: Luke 15: 11-32: The Parable of the Lost Son

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "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. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

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! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ 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.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "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. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'

³¹ "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND: The context of time of Jesus' ministry, the power of parables.

4 Observations of the Prodigal Son

Observation #1: Not Wanted: Dead or Alive. (Verses 11-12)

Whether the son was demanding an inheritance as though the father was dead, or simply tired of the father's government in his life, the son saw the father's generosity as debt, not favor. How often do we do that? We take God's provision as so much landscape and say, "I got it from here!"

Observation #2: Self-Centeredness: The "Crack Cocaine" of the Soul (Verse 13)

As powerful drugs shrink the user's world to a single pursuit at the cost of everything else, so does unbridled selfishness. The first action taken is putting distance between those that could create any sense of accountability, genuine affection or guilt because poor treatment of those that love you the most. The second is an increased velocity to chase pleasure and "spend" all one has to attempt to obtain satisfaction.

Observation #3: Consequences are simply outcomes of earlier choices. (Verses 17-20)

The son had given up "his" wealth, along with his dignity. But there was more to come. His religious and national identity was now being smeared. Think of it! A Jewish young man, living in another country, feeding "non-kosher" animals, and hungry enough to compete with the pigs for their feed! However, such dire circumstances can create amazing clarity – "When he came to his senses..."

Observation #4: While we don't know the motives of his decision to go home, we do know that the son moved in the right direction. (Verse 17)

Whether he missed the affection of his father and community, or simply knew that he was REALLY hungry and that what he was doing wasn't working, he moved in the right direction. For the most part, God lets our choices have their natural outcomes, and we have the opportunity to respond by moving towards God.

5 Observations of God, Our Pattern for Fatherhood

Observation #1: God is good, all the time, even when we are not. (Verse 12)

The son's request was entirely selfish, but that did not change the character, or the wisdom of the father. He granted the request, knowing the poor character of the son and the lessons that would come out later on.

Observation #2: The father was watching for the son's return. (Verses 20-21)

The son was on the father's mind. The father was not passive in his affection for his son. He was looking out for him and saw the son "while he was still a long way off". We see a picture of our Heavenly Father running to the prodigal, with full abandonment of dignity. Oh that I, and you, fellow fathers, would have the strength to love openly and unabashedly to those in our family- to our wives,

daughters and especially our sons. There was no mistaking this man's courage and masculine love for his son – and his servants saw it! Kindness and affection is birthed out of strength, not weakness!

Observation #4: The Father is the true source of value and identity. (Verses 22-24)

The father welcomed the son, and saw past his dirty clothes and sandal-less feet and ignored the literal stench of the son's outright sin and rebellion. He dressed him in the best and placed the family signet ring on his hand, and hosted a BBQ with the son as the guest of honor. You can search and try to fill the need for belonging and identity in all sorts of things, "There is a God shaped vacuum in the heart of every man which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God, the Creator, made known through Jesus" – Blaise Pascal (French Mathematician, Philosopher and Physicist, 1600's).

Observation #5: The Father doesn't need permission to bless who He wants to, although He may give a courtesy explanation. (Verses 21-24 & 31)

Whether the repentance of the son up to this point was genuine, we don't know. It became genuine very quickly in the face of the father's love and actions towards him. The father blessed him because he chose to. As for the older brother, he was angry. It could have been he was genuinely hurt by his younger brother's earlier actions and abandonment of him as well. The text indicates another facet; a misplaced sense of moral judgment. He felt that he deserved the father's affection, and the younger did not. He characterized his participation in the family as "slaving" (verse 29) – a far cry from genuine family affection!

5 Applications for Fathers Today

Application 1: When kids make poor choices or choose to rebel, don't shield them from life's lessons. (Verse 17 – describing the son – "when he came to his senses...")

Application 2: There are few forces on earth as powerful as a praying dad. This discipline shapes both the father's character, as well as moves the hand of God. (Verse 20)

Application 3: Being a father is not a passive event, it's an intense pursuit, complete with flaws, public apologies, ups and downs, all with high hopes for your children. (Verse 20)

Application 4: When it gets difficult with your kids, lean in! Love must be resilient and spoken. Your kids have plenty of friends, they need a dad – MAN UP! Learn to be a compassionate authoritarian.

Application 5: Where ever you are in the scale of difficulty or distance with your children, remember the story is not over – God willing, there are still chapters to be written! (Verse 32)

CLOSING THOUGHT

Romans 2:4: "...do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you to repentance?"

How about you? Are you responding to or avoiding God's kindness?