

# A Father's Heart

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, this morning, well, really this week, because this morning is Father's Day, as I started working on a Father's Day sermon.

The first passage that came to mind was the passage of Eli and his two sons. And assuming you're a little familiar with it, I think there's a lot of very important lessons that we as fathers can learn from that passage.

And I'd encourage you to be familiar with it. The problem was I had a hard time figuring out how I was going to end it positively. Okay, and so just as a reminder, look at these couple verses from 1 Samuel chapter 2, starting in verse 22.

It says, Now Eli was very old, and he kept hearing all that his sons were doing to all Israel, and how they lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

And he said to them, Why do you do such things? For I hear of your evil dealings from all these people. No, my sons, it's not a good report that I hear the people of the Lord spreading abroad.

[ 1 : 22 ] If someone sins against a man, God will mediate for him. But if someone sins against the Lord, who can intercede for him? But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death.

And if you remember, in the next chapter, that's exactly what happens. Both of Eli's sons are put to death, and the Ark of the Covenant is actually captured. And if you remember, when Eli hears it, he falls backwards in his chair and breaks his neck.

And I thought, ending with, Happy Father's Day, don't lean back in any chairs. This didn't seem like it was a good option. But the truth is, this last phrase in this verse, that they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death, really captured my attention. And if you think about it, it's a very terrifying verse. And I've come to decide this week, after thinking about it, it probably embodies my greatest fear.

Which is that, at some point in the future, my children would turn their backs on God, and jettison their faith, and be enemies of God, apart from his grace.

[ 2 : 40 ] And honestly, I would like to, at this point in life, with my children grown, adults, walking with the Lord, be able to say, wow, I dodged that bullet. But we all know, that's not necessarily the truth, is it?

How many people have you known in your life, that have seemed to be walking with the Lord, for years, or for decades, or for a lifetime, only to then, suddenly one day wake up and say, I've never really believed, and walk away from their faith.

And so, pondering these things, and thinking about it, led me to a very familiar passage, which will be our passage this morning. And it's the story of the prodigal son.

It's found in Luke 15, verses 11 through 32. Luke 15, verses 11 through 32. And just as a reminder, the story of the prodigal son, is a parable that Jesus told.

And just a simple definition, that's easy to remember, of what a parable is, is it's an earthly story, with a heavenly meaning. And Jesus told many parables, most of them, he has one main point, that he's trying to make, and you really have to be careful, to not overanalyze them, or you can end up, in some interesting places.

[ 4 : 02 ] But the parable, of the prodigal son, is such a rich and deep parable. Many commentators call it, the crown of all parables. That there's depths, that we could mine for weeks, or months, and never exhaust the limits, of this one parable.

And every time I read it, I can honestly say, I am challenged. I'm encouraged. In some way, it impacts me in a new way. And so this morning, as we look at this, as fathers, or mothers, grandparents, or even just as children, of our Heavenly Father, I hope, we will be transformed by it.

Before we get a little further, would you just join me in prayer? Father, we come to you this morning, and we ask that your spirit, would be upon us. That you would open our hearts, and minds to hear your word.

That you would lead, and that you would speak. That we would listen, and that we would receive, the truth of your word. And that it would use, you would use it to transform us, into a greater, more clear reflection of your son.

Father, we thank you for the privilege of your word. Help us not to take it for granted. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So let's begin, and we'll just look at this section by section, and talk about seven things that we see, as we look at the father's heart, the father's heart, in the parable of the prodigal son.

[ 5 : 32 ] So starting in Luke 15, with verses 11 and 12. Luke 15, 11 and 12. It says, And he said, there was a man, and that's Jesus.

Jesus said, there was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me. And he divided his property between them. Now, it's a very simple opening, and if we were to just read it and keep going, we wouldn't stop to consider the impact this had on the original audience.

In the culture where Jesus was speaking, this would not just so easily flow by, okay? And so it would be a riveting, almost abhorrent thing for them to hear the younger son deal this way.

So let me give you just a brief translation to help you hear it more accurately. It's basically like the younger son came to his father and said, I am so sick and tired of being around you.

[ 6 : 35 ] I can't wait another day for you to die. I have to get out of here. Would you just give me what you're going to give me whenever you die and let me leave? You see, it's a lot more weighty.

And the original audience would have been struck by that. They would have been shocked at hearing the younger son's audacity in how he approached his father. And what I think is interesting for us to see as we look at the father's heart in this is that the father just very simply says, and he divided it and gave it to him, right?

The father doesn't take any efforts to try and force external obedience on the son. He could have used guilt or shame. He could have just said, no, I'm not going to do it, right?

But he doesn't. Notice that the father lets the son have what he so wickedly asked for, that he deals gently and graciously with his sin. And I think it's important because I believe what it shows us here is that the father is most concerned about his son's heart.

The father is most concerned about his son's heart. He's not content to push for merely external obedience. He's not willing to just get some comfort right now and avoid the awkwardness of the moment by saying no.

[ 8 : 00 ] He wants his son's heart. And so in pursuing that, he's willing to deal gently and graciously with the sinful request of his son. Now, honestly, in parenting, isn't this one of the greatest challenges?

Trying to discern in each situation how we can pursue our child's heart. I know if any of you are like me, it's just so much easier to parent out of response to the inconvenience or to the frustration or to the embarrassment of whatever's happening and try to address that and just need to get this fixed now.

But that's not what we see in the father in this parable. We see him focused in on pursuing his son's heart. Let's look at verses 13 through 19.

It says, Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey to a far country. And there he squandered his property in reckless living.

And when he'd spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

[ 9 : 17 ] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate and no one gave him anything. So stop for a second and just think, okay? Almost immediately, the son gathers his stuff, goes off to a faraway country.

We don't know where. It doesn't matter. It's a parable. The point is, he wants to get as far away from his father as he can. And then we see that God lets him continue in this sinful living, right?

He wastes everything that he's gotten. It's just all immediately thrown away. And then God sends a famine. So he has nothing and then everyone else is struggling.

And all his new friends are gone. Suddenly he's not sure what to do. He's in this far off place. So he hires himself out to feed pigs. And if you don't know, pigs are like one of the lowest options in the biblical world, right?

The audience, when they hear pigs, they're like, ooh, pigs. Okay? And if it's not bad enough to be a pig feeder, which that's just nasty because pigs are nasty, he wants to eat pig food.

[10:21] I mean, that's like, Jesus takes it another rung down. This guy is low. I mean, it's bad. It's bad news. Okay? But notice in verse 17 as it continues what happens.

But when he came to himself, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread? But I perish here with hunger.

I will arise and go to my father. I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.

Isn't it interesting? All of these things happen. And then suddenly, the Holy Spirit brings to mind the fact that his father had modeled godly character.

He comes to the awareness of the fact that his father had dealt graciously with his servants. He'd cared for them. He'd given them an abundance. He was suddenly, the son is suddenly aware of the kind of character his father had.

[11:23] And from wanting to be as far away as possible, he suddenly realizes there's no place else he would rather be. He's even willing to be a servant in his father's house because of the kind of man his father is.

Isn't it interesting the change that happens? And it made me think as I was studying this, am I doing that? Am I being faithful to model the kind of godly character that we see was modeled by the father here?

Am I laying a foundation in my children's life that whatever happens in the future, it would be something the Holy Spirit could use to bring to remembrance, to stir in their hearts, make them aware of their sin against God, call them to consider coming back.

Is that the kind of character I've modeled? I think even just considering laying a foundation in their lives so that they know no matter how far they've gone, that they can always come home.

Are we being that kind of father? Let's look at Luke 15, starting with the beginning of verse 20. It says, And he arose and came to his father, but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him.

[12:52] The third thing we see is that the father never gives up hope. In this parable, we get the feeling, as Jesus tells this, that the father's constantly looking.

There's an expectation. He's expecting his son's return. It doesn't catch him off guard. He has this anticipation, this hope, this faith that he's clung to.

And the truth is, sometimes holding on to faith when things are hard over any length of time is terribly challenging.

Whether it's an ongoing physical illness or whether it's relational problems with our family, our spouse, it's hard to hold on to hope as days and months go by.

And we see here that kind of character in this father, he never gives up hope. And the most powerful example of that in my own life wasn't actually from a father.

[13:46] It was from a grandmother. Not my grandmother. But a woman named Vera Griffin. Miss Vera was a godly woman. She loved Jesus. And she had five children that were unbelievers.

And she prayed for more than 40 years for them to know Christ. And whenever you were with her, you always could get that sense that it wasn't something she hoped would happen in the sense of wishful thinking.

There was an assurance there. And she prayed and she was committed to it. And what's interesting is she prayed for her children and then she eventually prayed for her unbelieving grandchildren.

And it was for more than 40 years until one day her grandson, who would eventually become a good friend of mine, was invited to a Young Life meeting.

Young Life's kind of like a Christian club if you're not familiar with it, like Campus Crusade or InterVarsity. Anyway, he was invited to go to a meeting and he didn't really want to go but they kept inviting him so he decided to go to this one meeting.

And at this one meeting they were doing a drawing for one person to get a free week at Young Life camp that summer. And everybody else wanted it.

[14:58] He didn't want it but they made him turn his name in and guess what? He was the one that got it. And everyone else was so depressed and he was like, I don't know if I really want to go

but he thought, you know, it'll be fun.

There'll probably be girls there. They might as well go. And he went and at that camp Jesus radically changed his life. And then from that it began to work throughout his family. His parents came to Christ. The other siblings came to Christ. The other grandchildren came to Christ. And after more than 40 years of prayer this Vera saw her family come to know Christ. And as far as I know all of their great grandchildren that I know are walking with Christ. Are we committed to that kind of hope in the lives of those around us?

Whether it's our children whether it's our family members a spouse the people that we work with are we prayerfully committed to pursue them trusting that God will be faithful?

[ 15 : 56 ] Let's look at the next part of verse 20. He arose and came to his father but while he was still a long way off his father saw him and felt compassion. Notice the father's heart is full of compassion.

It's the immediate response. He's not only been hoping but then when he finally sees his son a long way off the immediate response is compassion flows out of him.

Now if it was me it would be so easy to be bitter to be hurt to be spending all the time while he was gone thinking about how could you do this to me? I'd be tempted to be critical or ridicule or find some way to be negative but this father's heart is full of compassion and that compassion compels him to do the unthinkable.

Look at the next part of verse 20. But while he was still a long way off his father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him. Now I said in the beginning that the audience was shocked at how the younger son had acted but that probably pales in comparison to what happens here as Jesus is telling the parable because it was not dignified for men like this father to go running passionately with reckless abandon around town.

Okay? But have in mind the picture of what's happened. The father's been hopeful he's been waiting he's been looking he's been longing and finally he sees it. Finally he sees his son on the horizon whether that's the edge of town or the edge of their street coming up past the nosy neighbors we don't know it's a parable but he sees him and he knows the kind of ridicule that son is going to face from his shameful actions from what's happened the townsfolk have been gossiping about him this whole time he knows the kind of attention that he's going to receive as he's walking that distance to the house.

[ 17 : 51 ] And so the father does the unthinkable. He hikes up his robes and goes running full speed whether it's down the street or through the town all of his reckless abandon pursuing his son.

And now imagine if this was at your house okay and you're sitting out on your porch and you look down the street you see kind of homeless guy walking there he's coming you're kind of intrigued hey what's up with that guy who's he why is he in our town and all of a sudden a businessman goes running by you in his boxers right your attention immediately is like I don't care about that guy anymore what is with this man right and we see that and it's intentional that the father is taking the shame he's willingly taking the shame his son deserves all of the attention is immediately torn from his son and placed on him they see him running just like a madman and now you know they would be almost as aghast at this father's action now as they were at the sons in the beginning now maybe there's this moment of comprehension where the audience puts two and two together oh okay he's realized that's his son and he's gonna go give it to him he's gonna let him know he's gonna draw him back snap the whip and get him back in line but then what happens he runs up and sweeps him up in his arms embraces him kisses him now the audience is enraged what what is happening this is unreasonable this is not appropriate for you to treat this shameful wicked son in such a way but isn't that the heart of our father willingly taking the shame that we deserve taking the attention that we deserve taking the guilt that is ours and we see that happen here as well it makes me ask the question am I like that with my children how do I deal with this sin in their lives am I am I inclined to put more guilt and shame on them is that how I respond to the people in my life when they wrong me am I piling it on or am I seeking to take their shame and to lead them to Christ how do I respond am I doing all that I can to help alleviate their guilt and shame at the foot of the cross or am I making much of them starting in verse 21 and the son said to him father I have sinned against heaven and before you

I am no longer worthy to be called your son but the father said to his servants bring quickly the best robe and put it on him put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fattened calf and kill it let us eat and celebrate for this my son was dead and is alive again he was lost and is found

and they began to celebrate the sixth thing we see the father forgives freely and fully how glorious how beautiful the embrace the kiss the confession but nothing more need be said the father just lets the forgiveness flow out of him over his son there is no question about reconciliation as he calls for the best robe as he calls for a ring he is making very clear to his son our relationship is restored we are reconciled everything is forgiven and not just to his son but to everyone that is watching it becomes evident to what the father's forgiveness has done dads are you that way are you lavish in your forgiveness are you stingy in your forgiveness when you deal with your children's sin are we inclined to make such a big deal of their sin that they walk away feeling like no one else has ever been as terrible as I am or do they walk away knowing that it is this sin that we all struggle with that we labor under and it's this very sin that causes us to need

Christ do you go above and beyond to communicate to your children that your relationship is restored assure them of your love your devotion your delight verses 25 through 32 now his older son was in the field and as he came and drew near to the house he heard music and dancing and he called one of the servants and asked what these things mean and he said your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf because he's received him back safe and sound but he was angry and refused to go in his father came out and entreated him but he answered his father look these many years I have served you I've never disobeyed your command yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends but when this son of yours came who has devoured your property with prostitutes you killed the fattened calf for him and the father said to him son you are always with me and all that is mine is yours it was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this your brother was dead and is alive he was lost and is found we see the parable end where it began the father's constantly pursuing the hearts of his children this time the older son but still pursuing him going after his heart

I'd like to think that there gets to be a stage in life when we as parents or grandparents can stop pursuing the hearts of our children but that day just never comes it's a never ending job and it's a challenging job it's frustrating at times it's hurtful at times it's discouraging but even as we see in the father here we're called to be continually pursuing the hearts of our children and aren't we thankful that that's exactly what God does with us right how often in your life has God pursued your heart how often has he showed you his love has he taken your shame he's constantly loving us calling us chasing us inviting us into deeper intimacy even with all of our constant silliness our fickleness our laziness our rebellion we turn from him and he calls us back he pursues us constantly seeking our hearts do you notice how this parable ends the parable ends so abruptly right if it was a Disney film it would have ended after the first son coming home and the party starting right everything was good everything was great

[ 25 : 08 ] Jesus could have just stopped there and we would have felt good but Jesus the master storyteller leans in further and challenges us with the response of this older son so that we're all left somewhere in the parable with the same question what will you do what will you allow to keep you from greater intimacy with the father what will it be will it be some sin in your life will it be pursuing worldly things and letting that take you further and further from him or maybe maybe it's just a contentment with a shallow empty acquaintance with him you're content with just enough religion to know about him but not really know his heart the final question that we're left with this morning as the audience was at that point is what will you do will you stay where you are or will you let him sweep you up in his embrace as we come to the end of the service let me just encourage you to take time today and reflect on this to consider how

God is working in your life whether it's as a father a mother whether it's with your children your grandchildren with a spouse with the people that you're working with how are these things impacted by these seven truths that we see in the father I would pray that we would be encouraged by recognizing how we've been the recipient of this kind of love but if by chance this morning you have not experienced that time in your life where you have been aware of your separation from God where you have recognized how distant you are from him how you have treated him if you've recognized your sin and your guilt if that hasn't happened in your life let me encourage you that today can be the day today can be the day where you decide that you're going to head towards the father and you'll find that he will run and embrace you sweep you up in his arms and you'll find forgiveness freely flowing into your life if you'd like to know more about starting a relationship with Jesus

I would love to talk with you after the service if by chance you're watching on our live stream and you have not had a relationship with Christ I would love to talk with you please feel free to send us an email you can find our contact information on our website it's nbccolumbus.org we'd love to talk to you we'd love to introduce you to the love of Christ and let you experience this same kind of relationship with our father I hope that you will consider that would you pray with me father we thank you as we come today encouraged by the love that we see in this father encouraged because we know that it is a reflection of you Lord thank you for pursuing our hearts thank you for not being content with external obedience but desiring for us to know you intimately father we thank you for your word that we might know your character that we might know who you are that we would know your heart

Lord we ask that you would use that your spirit would use your word in our lives to continually convict us of sin and continually call us back to you father we pray that you would continue the work that you are doing in us that we might be a reflection of Christ and how we love you and how we love others that we would seek to be quick to forgive that we would seek to find ways to lead everyone that you place in our lives at least one step closer to Christ that they would find the forgiveness that we found that they would know the joy and delight of having their shame covered with the righteousness of Christ father help us to be your hands and feet to be a light in the darkness help us to be fathers like you help us to be people like you and help us to delight in being your children in Jesus name we pray amen god bless you guys and have a happy father's day miracle

Thank you.