10/11/26 **The Loving Father** ***Luke 15:1-2, 11-32***
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Good morning! My name is Pastor David Pranga, and I'm one of the pastors here at Brewster Baptist Church. I would like to welcome you to our services, whether you're watching online or here in our Sanctuary. Thank you for choosing to be with us.

Several months ago, Pastor Doug asked me a question. He said, "David, what's your favorite parable of Jesus?" I thought about it for about 15 seconds and responded, "*Luke 15* — The Prodigal Son." But I told him that instead of calling it "The Prodigal Son", I think we should call it "The Loving Father". I shared that the story isn't just about one son who is lost. It's about two sons, who are lost in different ways. And it's about a father, who loves them both.

At our next staff meeting, Doug began sharing about our new series: Jesus' Upside-Down Kingdom, which was going to be focused on the parables. Guess which parable I got to preach on? *Luke 15*.

As many of you know, Christy and I have five children, ranging in age from 16 to 25. One of the things I've discovered about being a parent is that your relationship with your children changes over time. When they're little, you make many of their decisions. But as they enter high school, move away to college, and begin their careers, they begin making more decisions for themselves. And as much as you love them, you begin to realize something. They don't want your advice anymore.

We can encourage them. We can share what we've learned. But ultimately, they have to make their own decisions. And sometimes that's hard because we love them and want what's best for them.

Here's something else I've discovered. The older my children get, the more I find myself praying for them. When your children are hundreds or thousands of miles away, there are many things you simply cannot do. But you can always pray for their wisdom, protection, relationships, and decisions. Maybe some of you, here today, can relate to that. And here's what gives me tremendous comfort. I have a Heavenly Father who loves my children even more than I do. That's an incredible thought, isn't it?

When I look at these two lost sons, in *Luke 15*, I can also see a little of myself in both of them. There have been times when I've wanted to do things my own way,

without God. And other times when I've tried to do the right things, but struggled with pride, resentment, or a sense that I deserved something more. Maybe you can relate to that, as well.

Today, I want us to look at three attitudes in this story. The younger son says, **"Give me what I want."** The older son says, **"Give me what I deserve."** But the loving father says, **"I want you."** And I believe that last statement is the heart of this parable.

Before we look at the story, we need to understand the context, and why Jesus told it. Turn with me to *Luke 15*. "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 them'" (*Luke 15:1-2*).

Did you notice the two groups of people? On one side were the tax collectors and sinners, people often looked down upon by society. Yet, they were coming to listen to Jesus. On the other side were the Pharisees and teachers of the law. These were religious people who knew the Scriptures and worked hard to follow God's commandments. But they were upset because Jesus was welcoming sinners and eating with them.

I want you to keep these two groups in mind as we look at this parable. Jesus has something important to say to both groups. And I believe He has something important to say to us. Let's continue with the story.

"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.’”

1. **The Younger Son — “Give Me What I Want”**

The story begins with the younger son asking his father for his share of the inheritance. Remember, his father is still alive! Can you imagine one of your children coming to you and saying that? I’m sure I would not appreciate it.

In those days, the younger son would normally receive one-third of the inheritance, while the older son would receive two-thirds. But asking for it while his father was still alive was quite an insult. He’s essentially saying, “Dad, I want my inheritance now. I don’t want to wait until you die.”

The younger son wanted his father’s wealth, but he didn’t want his father. He wanted freedom and independence. And surprisingly, the father gives him what he asks for. He allows his son to leave, even though he knows his son may make some painful mistakes.

Let me ask you a question. **Have you ever had someone you love make a decision that you knew might hurt them?** Maybe it was one of your children, a grandchild, or a close friend. You wanted to protect them, but you couldn’t make the decision for them. That’s one of the difficult things about loving people.

And we know what happens next. The younger son travels to a distant country and wastes everything. His money runs out, a famine strikes, and he becomes so desperate that he takes a job feeding pigs.

But I love what happens in verse 17: **“When he came to his senses…”** He finally realized where his choices had taken him. He remembered his father’s house and decided, “I’m going home.” The younger son plans to confess his sin and ask to become a hired servant. I imagine he was nervous. Would his father forgive him? Would he even welcome him home?

But while the son is still a long way off, his father sees him, runs toward him, and embraces him. The father doesn’t stand there with his arms crossed. He doesn’t say, “I told you so!” Instead, he welcomes his son home with joy!

And when the son begins his confession, before he can ask to become a hired servant, the father calls for the best robe, a ring, and sandals. The father isn't interested in hiring another servant. He's celebrating the return of his son! The younger son was hoping to come home – as a servant. **But the father welcomed him home – as a son. That's grace and forgiveness!**

What does the younger son teach us? I think, if we're honest, there's a little of the younger son in all of us. We like our independence. We like making our own decisions. We like being in control. Sometimes, we approach God with the same attitude. "God, I want Your blessings. I want Your protection. I want You to answer my prayers. But when it comes to making decisions about my life, I'd rather do things my own way."

Let me ask you a question. **Are there areas of your life where you want God's blessings, but you don't want God's authority?** Maybe it's how you handle your money, a person you need to forgive, a family relationship you're struggling with, or even a person you are dating? We don't have to travel to a distant country to have the attitude of the younger son. We can be sitting in church on Sunday morning, and still be trying to live parts of our lives independently of God.

The younger son believed freedom meant getting away from his father. But instead of finding freedom, he found himself empty, hungry, and alone. But here's the good news. The younger son's failure wasn't the end of his story. He came to his senses, recognized his sin, and turned toward home.

Maybe there's someone here, today, who needs to do the same thing. Maybe you've wandered away from God, or made decisions you regret. Or maybe you have been coming to church for years, but have been holding back certain parts of your life from God. I want you to hear the good news of this parable. No matter how far you've wandered away, you can turn back to God. God's grace and forgiveness are greater than your past. Through Jesus Christ, God offers you forgiveness, mercy, and a restored relationship with Him. But it is up to us to "come our senses" and meet with the Father.

Now, if Jesus had ended the parable here, it would have been a beautiful story about forgiveness and grace. This parable is for the first group of listeners: tax collectors and sinners. But Jesus isn't finished. There's another son. And we're about to discover that **you don't have to leave your father's house to be lost.**

"'Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. "Your brother has come," he replied, "and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound." The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 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. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'"" (*Luke 15:25-30*).

2. The Older Son — "Give Me What I Deserve"

The older brother never left home. He worked hard, followed the rules, and did what was expected of him. From the outside, he looked like the good son. But when he hears that his younger brother has returned and his father is throwing a celebration, how does he respond? He's angry! In fact, he's so angry that he refuses to go inside. The elder brother wants nothing to do with the celebration. He was so focused on what he thought was fair that he could not celebrate his brother's return.

And honestly, can you understand why? His younger brother wasted his inheritance, while he stayed home and worked hard. Now his father is throwing a party for the son who made all the wrong decisions! What happens next? His father leaves the party to go find his older son.

But listen carefully to what the older son says to his father in verse 29: **"Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders."** Did you catch that? He doesn't talk about the joy of being his father's son. He talks about how hard he's worked and what he believes he deserves. He sounds more like an employee than a son. It's almost as though he's saying, "Dad, look at everything I've done for you. Don't you think I deserve something?" The older son wanted what he believed his father owed him. He was treating their relationship like a transaction.

What does the older son teach us? This is where I think the parable becomes especially challenging for those of us who have been Christians for a long time. And I include myself in this. Sometimes, we can develop the attitude of the older brother without realizing it. We come to church. We serve. We volunteer. We give financially. We teach Sunday School. We may lead a ministry. Those are all good things! Let me ask

you a question. **Are we serving God because we love Him, or are we serving God out of duty and expectations?**

Sometimes, our faith can become a routine. We come to church because it's Sunday. We volunteer because we've always volunteered. And before we know it, we can be doing all the right things, while losing some of the joy in our relationship with God. Now, there's nothing wrong with being faithful during difficult seasons. But there's a difference between faithful service and a heart that has become resentful toward God. And that's what we see in the older brother. He wasn't simply tired. He was keeping score. He had a scoreboard in his heart**.** He felt like he was owed something. "Look at everything I've done for you! And what have you done for me?"

Let me ask you another question. **Have you ever felt that God owed you something because you've tried to live a good and faithful Chrisitan life?** Maybe you've thought, "God, I've followed You for years. I've served in the church. I've tried to raise my family to know You. So, why am I going through this? Why haven't You answered my prayers?" It's not wrong to bring our disappointments to God. But there's a danger when disappointment becomes entitlement. We begin treating our relationship with God like a transaction, rather than a relationship. "I've done my part, God. Now, You need to do Yours."

But God's grace doesn't work that way. We don't earn His love through our service. We serve Him because He has already loved us.

There's something else I want us to notice. The older brother wasn't just angry with his father. He had become resentful toward his younger brother. Listen to how he refers to him in verse 30: **"But when this son of yours…"** Not "my brother", but "this son of yours".

His brother has come home! His father is celebrating! But the older brother can't find any joy in it. And I wonder if we sometimes struggle with that same attitude. **Do we celebrate when God shows grace to someone else, or do we secretly believe they don't deserve it? Maybe God should be blessing us, instead?**

Remember the Pharisees and teachers of the law? They were upset because Jesus welcomed sinners. And now, Jesus tells a story about an older brother who is upset because his father welcomes home a rebellious son. Both were offended by grace being shown to someone they thought didn't deserve it. Do you see the connection? The older

brother reflects the very same attitude Jesus was confronting in the religious leaders. They kept God's commandments, but they were struggling to understand God's heart for lost people.

The younger son left home and became lost. The older son stayed home, but his heart was lost in a different way. **Two very different sons. One loving father.** As we continue with the story, we read **Luke 15:31-32.**

"""My son," the father said, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 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""" (*Luke 15:31-32*).

3. **The Loving Father — "I Want You"**

Now, we come to what I believe is the heart of this parable – the loving father. The older brother is angry and refuses to go inside. And the father goes outside to plead with him. I love how the father responds. He doesn't respond with anger. Instead, he begins with two beautiful words: **"My son"**. There's tenderness in those words. Even though the older brother is angry and resentful, the father still loves him.

And then he says, **"You are always with me, and everything I have is yours."** The older brother was so focused on what he hadn't received that he had forgotten what he already possessed. He had his father's presence. He had his father's love. He had the privilege of being part of the family. Sometimes, we become so focused on what we want God to give us that we forget the greatest gift He has already given us, Himself. The greatest blessing of being a Christian is having a relationship with our Heavenly Father.

Now, there's something else in this parable that I don't want us to miss – the father goes out to meet both sons. Go back to verse 20. The younger son is returning home after wasting his inheritance. While he's still a long way off, **his father sees him, runs toward him, and embraces him.** The father doesn't wait for his son to reach the house. He runs to meet him.

Now look at verse 28. The older son is angry and refuses to go inside. What does the father do? Jesus says, **"So his father went out and pleaded with him."** Did you catch that? The father goes out to both sons!

One son is coming home in shame. The other is standing outside in anger. One has been living in rebellion. The other has been living with resentment. But what does

the father do? The Father moves toward both of them. He doesn't stop loving the younger son because of his rebellion. And he doesn't stop loving the older son because of his pride and anger. God's love reaches out to both the rebellious and the self-righteous. Both sons needed their father. And both sons needed God's grace and mercy.

Earlier, I shared how Christy and I have watched our five children grow older – we've never stopped loving them. The kids move away, pursue their dreams, and make their own decisions. Sometimes, you agree with those decisions. Sometimes, you don't. But your love for them does not stop. You want them to succeed.

But I've come to realize something. As much as I love my children, my Heavenly Father loves them even more than I do. I can't always be there for my children. I can pray for them, and entrust them to a Heavenly Father whose wisdom, patience, and love are much greater.

And here's what gives me hope: the same Heavenly Father I trust with my children is the Father who loves me. And He's the Father who loves you. That's what I want you to understand about this parable. The father didn't love his sons because they made all the right decisions. He loved them because they were his sons. We are all God's children. Jesus didn't tell this parable simply to give us a heartwarming story about a family. He told it to reveal the heart of God. The greatest demonstration of God's love is found in Jesus Christ. *Romans 5:8* tells us, **"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."**

God didn't wait for us to become perfect. He loved us while we were still sinners. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God offers us forgiveness and a restored relationship with Him. That's the good news of the gospel. We cannot earn God's forgiveness through our good works. We need Jesus Christ. The younger son and older son needed grace and forgiveness. We need grace and forgiveness, as well.

There's one final detail in this parable that I find fascinating. Jesus never tells us what happens to the older brother. He leaves the story unfinished. And I wonder if He did that because He wanted the Pharisees and teachers of the law to think about their own response. Would they continue standing outside, criticizing Jesus for welcoming sinners? Or would they recognize God's grace and join the celebration?

The younger son said, "Give me what I want." The older son said, "Give me what I deserve." But the father was saying, "I want you."

As we come to the end of this parable, I want to ask you one question. Which son do you identify with?

Maybe you see yourself in the younger son. You've been living life on your own terms. You've made decisions you regret. Perhaps, you've wandered away from God. The good news is: the Father is running after you.

Or maybe you see yourself in the older son. You've been faithful. You've served. You've tried to do the right things. But somewhere along the way, you've become resentful, or you've lost the joy of knowing God. The good news is: the Father is pleading for you to come home.

And perhaps, like me, you see a little of both sons in yourself.

Here's what I find so remarkable about this story – the father wanted both sons to come home. God wants you to come home, too.

Questions for Discussion or Reflection

1. When you hear the words "loving father", what characteristics come to mind?
2. Read *Luke 15:1-2*. Why were the Pharisees and Teachers of the Law upset with Jesus? How does knowing this help us understand the story of the two lost sons?
3. Read *Luke 15:11-24*. What do you notice about the father's response to his younger son's request? Have you ever loved someone whose choices concerned you, but you could not make those choices for them? What did that experience teach you about love and patience?
4. What brings the younger son to his senses, and what does he do next?
5. What do you think the father was doing while his son was away? What does *Luke 15:20* tell us about the father's heart towards his son? How does the father's response go beyond what the son expected?
6. Why did the father call for a celebration? What does this teach us about God's response when someone turns back to him?
7. Read *Luke 15:25-32*. What do the older son's words reveal about how he sees his father and his own years of service? How does the loving father show love towards the older son?
8. What does this parable teach us about the heart of God? Where do you see yourself in this parable? What might God be saying to you?