

Session 4

CANCELLED

The Father

Luke 15:20, 22-24, 31-32

As we mentioned in the last session, Luke 15 is about celebrating what was lost and has been found. The prodigal son story includes a wayward son, an older brother who is lost as well, and the Father who welcomes both back to the party. How can a Father love two wicked sons with this kind of never giving up, never ending type of love?

Have you ever met someone who loves people generously to the point of their own personal sacrifice?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT:

Read Luke 15:20, 22-24, 31-32. These are the verses about The Father's reactions to the sons. Briefly summarize the story in your own words.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

The Older Son (Luke 15:20, 22-24, 31-32)

²⁰ ...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.

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.

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.'"

We see four clear aspects of the Father's disposition towards His children. First, the Father gives away everything, despite it not aligning with tradition or custom. Second, we see the Father rushing to meet the younger son who has returned from wayward living. Third, we see the Father employing His resources to throw a great party. Finally, we see the Father imploring the religious older brother to leave behind his selfishness and join the rest in the party.

The Prodigal Son story is a narrative about The Gospel. *The Father lavishly loves His children. There is nothing so evil they can do to cancel that love. There is nothing they can do so well as to earn more of it.*

The Prodigal Son story is also a narrative about the character of God. God is a perfect loving Father to those who are in relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. God gives away everything in ways that seem reckless and counterintuitive to us. We see this same character revealed in John 3:16, *For God so loved...that He gave.* God rushes to meet us and, in fact, never leaves us. As the psalmist reminds us in Psalm 23, *"His goodness and mercy follow us all the days of our lives."* God employs all His resources in throwing parties. Jesus likens this type of lavish love the Kingdom of God in Matthew 22, *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son. And, God is the one who implores religious people to join the party. In Matthew 22 Jesus also says, "and [The King] sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come."*

Which of these four aspects of God's character (giving generously, rushing to meet the lost, employing resources to restore, imploring the legalistic to come in) are most familiar to you in your walk with Jesus? Which ones are least familiar?

CROSS REFERENCES: John 3:16, Psalm 23, and Matthew 22 are cross references for the Prodigal Son story. Are there any other cross references that you can think of that tie the story of the Father to other parts of the Bible?

THE TROUBLE WITH RECKLESS KIND OF LOVE.

The Christian songwriter Cory Asbury wrote a tune a few years ago entitled "Reckless Love." The lyrics paint a picture of a love so vast, "overwhelming, never-ending." It's a love that "chases us down, fights 'til we're found," like a shepherd leaving the ninety-nine to rescue the lost sheep.

Many churches, including our church, used the song in corporate worship. And yet, other churches refused to include this tune on the grounds that it misunderstands God's character and nature. God would never be reckless – and in fact cannot be reckless. There was quite a controversy at the time.

But what many detractors failed to admit is that the song is written, not from God's perspective, but from the perspective of the broken humanity that ends up receiving this kind of love. This isn't a love earned or deserved. It's a love "given away" freely, a love that "bankrupted heaven" for us. It is the love of Luke 15. It is the love of a Father who runs after His children and pleads with them to come into the party.

Think of the prodigal son, welcomed back with open arms despite his transgressions. That's the nature of God's love – reckless, extravagant, and overflowing.

So, let this song be a reminder. No matter your past, no matter your burdens, God's love pursues you. Embrace His forgiveness, bask in His grace, and let the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God transform your life.

What do you make of this idea of God loving us with a reckless and lavish kind of love? What do you think this would do for you if you loved other people in this kind of way?

THE BIG IDEA

- Grace is terrible math.
- God loves us with a lavish love.
- The Kingdom of God is a party that God is inviting everyone into.

What relationships in your life need to experience a lavish kind of love from God?

What relationships in your life need to experience a lavish kind of love from you?

Prayer Needs
