

Our Image of God

The Prodigal Son

I. Introduction: Two Sons, One Wrong Picture

"Jesus told a story about a father and two sons. Both sons lived in the father's house, and neither one really knew him. Today we'll find out why, and whether we're making the same mistake."

Where do we get our image of God the Father?

- Our fathers
 - Imperfect. Maybe harsh, distant, judging, hard to live up to expectations. Even really good dads are not God.
- Sermons
 - God looking to judge, He is to be feared, Destroyer of the world...
- Misinterpreting experiences
 - Consequences of our actions ascribed to God, natural disasters, sickness, disease, deaths.

"If those are the wrong sources, where should we look?"

II. Where Should We Get Our Image of God the Father?

A. From Scripture

- **1 John 4:7-8** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.
- **Exodus 34:5-7** Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and

truth,⁷ keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...

- **2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

B. His Names (which are also in Scripture)

- **Jehovah Jireh:** The LORD our Provider (*sets up the younger son, who knew his father only as a provider*)
- **Jehovah Rapha:** The LORD our Healer
- **Jehovah Shalom:** The LORD our Peace
- **Jehovah Nissi:** The LORD our Banner
- **Jehovah Raah:** The LORD our Shepherd
- **Jehovah Tsidkenu:** The LORD our Righteousness
- **Jehovah Shammah:** The LORD is Here (*He is waiting and watching for us*)
- And so many more!!!

C. By Watching and Listening to Jesus, His Son

- **John 14:9-10** Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.
- Jesus is the exact representation of the Father.
- **The misconception:** Some think God is an angry God and Jesus is the merciful, kind one standing in the gap between us and God, assuaging His anger.
- **The correction: John 3:16** For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.
 - God was motivated by love. The Son came *because of* the Father's love.
- So, if Jesus is just like His Father, what do we see in Jesus?
 - Unconditional love

- Accepting even with failure and sin, but brings power to change us
- Compassion
- Forgiving
- Truthful
- Kind
- Full of grace
- Joyful
- So much more!!!

If you want to know the Father, look at the Son.

III. Jesus' Baptism Shows Us the Father's Love

- **Matthew 3:16-17** When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷ And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

We see three things from God in this passage:

- God gave Jesus a gift (the Spirit).
- God loves His Son.
- God proudly proclaimed His love publicly for His Son.

What had Jesus done at this point in His life to deserve this?

- Nothing. No miracles, no healings, no sermons, no dead raised.
- He was His Son. That is all.

What about us? We are His children, co-heirs with Christ.

- **Romans 8:17** and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.
- It is the same for us. It is out of unconditional love.

Bridge: *"That's hard to believe, isn't it? That God would say that about you before you've done anything, or after everything you've done? Jesus told a story for people who couldn't believe it."*

IV. The Prodigal Son

Context

- **Luke 15:1-2** Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them."
- Jesus tells three stories in response. In the third, there are two sons, and both kinds of people in that crowd are in it.

A. The Younger Son

- **Luke 15:11-24** Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. ¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. ¹⁴ But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, ¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" ²⁰ "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. ²³ And bring the

fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry.

- **The Younger Son:**

- Wanted his inheritance early. This is like saying to your father, "I wish you would die so I can have your stuff," or "You are more valuable to me dead than alive."
- He left his father and family. He turned his back on them.
- He pursued things that he thought would make him happy: things that would fulfill his needs for love, acceptance, worth and security.
- Famine came, and it felt as though his life was falling apart.
 - *Callback:* This was the consequence of his own choices, not his father punishing him.
- He remembered his father, but only as a provider (Jehovah Jireh). **His image of his father was too small.**
 - He came home expecting to work off his debt: "Make me like one of your hired servants."
- He felt shame and unworthiness for his failures.
- **But he still returned to his father.**

B. The Father Toward the Younger Son

- Allowed his son to make his own choices.
- He was waiting for him, and noticed him from "a great way off."
- He **ran**. He had compassion, and embraced and kissed him before the son could finish his speech.
- He dismissed his son's guilt and unworthiness without a thought. He never let him finish asking to be a servant.
- **Robe, ring, sandals:** he restored his son's identity, not his job.
- He had sufficient resources for all.
- He celebrated who his son is now, instead of looking at what he had done.
- *Callback:* This is the Father your earthly dad may never have been able to be.

C. The Older Brother

- **Luke 15:25-32** "Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.' ²⁸ "But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ So he answered and said to his father, 'Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰ But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.' ³¹ "And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³² It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'"
- **The Older Brother:**
 - He was faithful. He never wandered off.
 - He kept the law and never transgressed.
 - His relationship with his father was **built on obedience, not intimacy.**
 - He was angry and jealous, and would not go in.
 - **His image of his father was wrong, too.** He saw him as a taskmaster: "These many years I have been serving you."
 - He did not understand his position as son. He did not know what he had access to.
 - All that is the father's is his, but he never lived like it.
 - He was home, but he also could use a homecoming. (*He is the Pharisees from verses 1-2.*)

D. The Father Toward the Older Son

- Allowed his son to make his own choices.
- He noticed the older son's absence from the celebration.
- **He went out to him, too.** He ran to one son and pleaded with the other. **The Father pursues both.**

- He didn't apologize for the celebration: "It was right that we should make merry."
- He explained that the older son had access to everything all along: "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours."
- Jesus leaves the story unfinished. *Did the older brother ever go in?*

E. The Main Point

- **Both sons had the wrong image of their father.**
 - One thought he had to earn his way back. The other thought he had to earn his keep.
 - Neither knew how much the father loved him.
- **Which son are you?**

V. Conclusion: Come Home

The Father is waiting for us to come home, no matter where we are. He does not look at our shame or condemnation. That is not who He is.

- **Romans 8:1** *There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.
- He runs to the one who is far off, and goes out to the one who is close but distant.
- He desires to lavish His love on us.
- He allows us to live as we choose:
 - **Estranged:** in the far country
 - **As an obedient servant:** in the house, but out in the field
 - **As a son or daughter:** at the table

The same voice that spoke over the Jordan speaks over you today:

- **"This is My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased."**
- "Look at My daughter, isn't she awesome. I love you, My daughter."
- "Look at My boy, I delight in him. I love you, son."

Have you ever heard Him say this to you?

- Can you believe He would say that about you?
- Can you believe you are His precious treasure?

Come home. Be a son or daughter.