

Reaching the Hurting and Lost
This Changes Everything • Message 7
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Prayer Points for Prayer Time

- **Thank God for loving you unconditionally.**
- **Ask God to help you trust His purpose for your life.**
- **Thank God for our church and the people He has placed here to support and encourage each other.**

Scripture Reading:

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."

Luke 15:11-24 (NIV)

A. Introduction

We've created a resource to help you set aside intentional time to prepare your heart for Easter. This guided experience helps you slow down and walk with Jesus through each part of the story. Reflecting on His suffering, sitting in the quiet of waiting, and celebrating the hope

and new life found in His resurrection. Taking time to engage each day allows Easter to become more than a moment. It becomes a personal encounter with what Jesus has done for you.

Experience each day:

- **Friday – Focuses on the Day of Suffering:** Pause and remember the depth of Jesus' sacrifice and the love that led Him to the cross.
- **Saturday – Focuses on the Day of Silence:** Sit in the stillness and trust God, even when it feels quiet and uncertain.
- **Sunday – Focuses on the Day of Resurrection:** Rejoice in the empty tomb and the life and hope we have because Jesus is alive.

Each day includes:

- A short video to help you prepare your heart
- A 15-minute devotional for personal reflection
- Guided ways to pray to help you respond and connect with God

Take this time to engage each day and prepare your heart for Easter.

Today we are looking at the story of the prodigal son...

Years ago, when Tristan was first born, I had one of those weeks where I felt like I had made so many mistakes.

And I just had these thoughts of guilt, shame, and anxiety start to overwhelm me. I was holding Tristan and I felt God ask me, *Hey, how would you feel if your son felt what you felt right now?* I thought, *I'd be heartbroken.*

It then felt like God asked, *Why?* I said, *Because He's my son and I want more for him...* and then I felt like God just said, *That's exactly what I want for you... you're my son and I want more for you.*

The truth is, if you are anything like me... when I'm serving, when I'm leading, when I'm spending time with God... I have no problem grasping God's love. But when I wander or when I mess up... I just can't seem to grasp the fullness of God's love.

See, there are so many people out there that tend to believe the lie that their performance, however good or bad, dictates how God feels about them.

This is religion and it says.....

Religion: Performance = Love

If you find yourself sitting here carrying some of those same emotions... if you find yourself carrying around guilt, shame, anxiety, or fear, or if you find yourself in a place where your heart is just distant from God... then there's a good chance you are living out of religion.

There is a big difference between religion and the gospel.

Gospel: Love = Performance

I want to take a look at the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15... a story that isn't about performance or religion, but rather a story about the radical, unearthly love of God. It's about the gospel.

B. This Changes Everything

1. God has GOOD PLANS for you.

(Luke 15:11-14. C/R: Jeremiah 29:11)

The story starts off in Luke 15 saying this....

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."

Luke 15:11-12 (NIV)

Notice there are two sons...

The older one.... How many of you are the older child? The responsible one, the rule follower, the future president of the HOA, the hall monitor... this is the older brother.

How many of you are the youngest child? The wild one, the rebellious one, the problem child... like the younger brother in this story.

Now, how many of you are the middle child? I'm sorry... there is no mention of you in the Bible.

This younger son starts thinking one day that there is a better future out there waiting to be seized and his father, albeit with good intentions, is causing him to miss out.

So, with boldness, he asks for his inheritance. He asks for his freedom.

Now, you can't miss this: you must grasp that for Jesus' audience... family was absolutely everything. It was unheard of to speak to a parent like this; this statement would have been absolutely shocking. People's mouths would have been wide open in disbelief. This kind of request would have been met with rage, even a slap... because what he is saying is: *I want your things, but I don't want you.*

As painful as this request is, the father reluctantly agrees. And listen to what happens next.

"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."

Luke 15:13-14 (NIV)

At the heart of all our rebellion against God is a disordered vision of God... one that seeks to limit us, oppress us, and keep us from joy, life, and pleasure.

See, Satan wants you to think God's plans are worse.

Do we really need to forgive our enemies?

Does lying really matter?

What's the big deal about a little anger?

Do you really need to wait for marriage?

Do you really need to tithe?

Does marriage really need to be between a man and a woman?

Pope John Paul II, in his book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, writes this:

Sin attempts, then, to abolish fatherhood...placing in doubt the truth about God who is Love and leaving man only with a sense of the master-slave relationship.

He thought his father was simply a killjoy, keeping him from adventure, life, and real joy. What he failed to see was that he was actually a keep-joy.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

2. God's grace is **BIGGER** than your sin.

(Luke 15:15-16, 20b, 22-24. C/R: Ephesians 2:10)

"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."

Luke 15:15-16 (NIV)

Now, why would he stay in this situation, under these circumstances? Why wouldn't he go home?

Because, like all of us, somewhere he starts to believe the lie that his performance dictates how his father feels about him.

He knew how upset his father and his family would have been.

Now, whenever I made a mistake, my parents would utter a few pretty interesting phrases... let me know if you've ever said one of these. And this is a church, so you have to be honest!

- Money does not grow on trees.
- Close that door; you weren't raised in a barn!
- What if everyone jumped off a cliff? Would you do it, too? (I was at the mall and heard a parent ask that question- the kid responded, *Depends on if there's water underneath.* Touché...)
- If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times!
- Just wait till your father gets home.
- I have eyes in the back of my head.
- I brought you into this world, and I can take you out! (Maybe you shouldn't raise your hand for that one, because that's going to come up in counseling.)

See, the son was fearful of what his father would say... fearful of what he might do.

But there was another reason that he stayed away from home.

In Jewish culture, if a boy squandered away his inheritance among the Gentile community, that was a massive offense. Jewish people believed that God had given them every resource they had; and to squander it to the Gentiles was a huge offense.

In fact, they had a ceremony they would perform if this happened. The offender would stand in front of his family, his friends, and his entire village, and then someone would grab a pot

and slam it down. They would then say the word **Kezazah**- which means you're cut off, you're broken, you're not whole.

All that would lie in front of this demoralized offender would be broken pieces of pottery that would symbolize his life... his relationship with his village, his family, and his father that were now all broken.

Imagine the guilt and the embarrassment as you stand on the firing line in front of a community of people who have loved you and who have raised you, and the only word your aching heart hears is *Kezazah*.

Why is it that when we make a mistake, when we rebel against God, or when we squander things away, the last place we want to be is church?

Perhaps it's just because we feel a bit guilty, which is natural... but I also wonder if we fear something else.

I think for a lot of people, we are so prone to believe certain lies that pop in our head... things like...

- What if people really found out about that?
- God gave us his best and that's how you repay Him?
- God is so disappointed in that area of your life.
- You've been in the church for how long, and you can't seem to get that right?

I think a lot of people fear that once they stand before God, He's going to throw down this pot of judgement and say, *Kezazah- that's it. You're done. You're cut off. You aren't whole. You aren't good enough.*

A few years ago, I decided to build a shed in my backyard. Steph didn't think it was the best idea; she thought it was going to be a huge project. I tried to console her worries by sharing that YouTube had told me it could be done in seven simple steps. Let me tell you, YouTube is a liar... she wasn't consoled. A project that I told her would take three days took probably close to five-six weeks. But I finally got it done. Here's a picture of it... [show picture] Now, here's the thing: it looked pretty good. In fact, people would come over and say, *You did that? Really?...* which I'm pretty sure was an insult. What they were saying was, *I didn't expect someone like you to ever be able to create something like this...* Now, the worst part is, a month after we get done, we moved to South Carolina...so I never even used it. But I'm not even mad, because I got to come be a part of one of the greatest churches around. But the

reason I tell you this is... something struck me as I showed the shed to a few friends and neighbors: I kept pointing out the mistakes and flaws. I would highlight every mistake I made...

In fact, when people would talk about how good it looked, I was quick to point out my mistakes. My flaws. It was the only thing I could notice.

And I wonder if, for a lot of us, we are so keenly aware of our flaws, our failures, and our mistakes that we fail to really notice the good.

Maybe you walk into a room and you see moms who have it all together... perfect kids, perfect house, perfect body... and all you see are your flaws... your mistakes.

Maybe for some reason you haven't been able to have kids, and somehow you've started to believe the lie that you're flawed. A mistake.

Maybe you made a mistake that cost you your business, your spouse, your future... and every day is like a reoccurring nightmare reminding you of your failure.

Maybe there are some parenting mistakes that you can't seem to let go of.

Maybe there is a secret sin or addiction that keeps resurfacing, and your inability to overcome it has left you feeling flawed and broken.

And here's one that is true of me, and I imagine is true of a lot of us: Maybe your constant comparison to others and their achievements has left you believing the lie that you don't quite measure up.

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

Appliances are mass produced. Masterpieces are handmade.

I want to remind you today that you were created uniquely by God... with purpose, creativity, and immense value. God sees it, and I would bet that people around you see it, too.

This is important: there is a big difference between guilt and shame... God will allow us to feel guilt.

Guilt says, *I made a mistake...* Shame says, *I am a mistake...* (Guilt leaves room for grace.)

The son in this story feels guilt, and that's understandable... he made a big mistake.

But he also feels shame... He feels *Kezazah*. He feels broken. Cut off. Irredeemable.

See, that's why the lost son stays away; anything is better than this. I imagine him sitting in the mud...starving, dirty, absolutely alone, with no hope on the horizon.

Then the thought crosses his mind: *What if I went home?*

He has nowhere to go and no food; he has absolutely hit rock bottom. He has two choices...

1.) Stay here and die.

2.) Or go home and face the look of disappointment in his father's eyes and hear that word *Kezazah*. This would be worse than death. The feeling of shame.

But he decides to wager it all and go home... He has no idea what his father will do.

But listen to what happens...

"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."

Luke 15:20b (NIV)

Now, people in Jesus' day would have been floored. In the Middle East, the head of the family... a man of great dignity, a strong man, an influential man, a man of great authority dressed in elaborate clothing... doesn't run. He walks in a dignified fashion.

For this father to run would mean he had to gather up the edges of his robe, so he didn't trip over them if he was really going to run, let alone sprint. That would mean he would be displaying or showing his legs... his naked legs... in public. That was not done. That was humiliating. A little boy might do that. A slave on the bottom rung might do that. No father would run. Yet this father runs.

His son would have been dirty, sweaty, and foul-smelling, and notice what he does: he kisses him. Beauty kisses the beast. And did you notice it says he threw his arms around him? That means the son's mess would have been all over the father.

This is a picture of what Jesus did for you... and me... He climbed up on the cross and He took our sin upon Himself. See, it wasn't the nails in Jesus' hands and feet that kept Him on the cross; it was His love for you and me.

See, we as humans tend to focus on the son. To focus on his mistakes. To focus on what he does. Jesus didn't tell the story to reveal our human nature to hide; He didn't share this story to show our predictable nature to try and be in control or follow our own plans. He told this story to show how unearthly, how radical, how unpredictable, and how great this father's love is.

Religion makes you and me the central characters. The gospel makes Jesus the central character. That's why we say *Jesus at the Center* here at Brookwood.

"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."

Luke 15:22-24 (NIV)

The Robe was a sign of royalty; it meant protection as well.

The Ring was a symbol of authority.

The Shoes- only servants and slaves went barefoot; this was declaring he wasn't to be treated as a servant, but as a son.

Sometimes you can hear this and think it's too good to be true... and it is... do you know how you and I get these things?

It's because Jesus became Kezazah. He became broken so that you and I could be made whole.

The enemy is the accuser... guilt vs shame.. the enemy might be keeping some of you from coming home.

God paid it all... Jesus was crushed for you.... God is the healer.

What do you need to trust God with today?