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# THE FATHER WHO SEES

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*"...God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts crying 'Abba! Father!'  
So you are no longer a slave, but God's child."  
Galatians 4:6-7 (NIV)*

Today's message is for all the dads, but it is also for every one of us. God the Father calls us to simply be His children. Luke 15 is a story that most of us know very well and have heard sermons about many times. But none of us fully grab hold of the massive truth it contains. And there's a twist in the story that you may not have seen before, that speaks to us deeply about our relationship with our heavenly Father.

## Context

The scribes and pharisees are not happy. Jesus is spending time with the tax collectors and sinners - the traitors and the immoral. They want to be with Jesus, and, scandalously, He seems to want to be with them! He is even regularly eating with them as if they are close friends or family! The scribes and pharisees are indignant. How could a great teacher, supposedly a man of God, welcome those people? Jesus turns to them and tells them three powerful stories, ending with this one.

## A Story about a Dad and His Sons (Luke 15:11-32)

What a story! It's usually called the Parable of the Prodigal Son or the Lost Son. Not the greatest title because first, it's a story about two sons who are both really key characters; and second, it really is more a story about a Loving Father. And, of course about you and me. Let's zoom in to a few key scenes together:

- + **'Give me'** (v12). Starts with dramatic tension and sadness. The father would have been seriously hurting from the disrespect, but mostly because his son has left without his blessing.
- + **'In a far country'** (v13). He wasted all the wealth in reckless living.

- + **'Severe famine'** (v14). Things go wrong. Not even as a consequence of his actions – just life. But as desperate as he is, he cannot contemplate going back to a place where they would taunt him for what he had done – what a failure!
- + Out of absolute, desperate need, he does the hardest thing he's ever done – goes to work for a gentile. So hungry and uncared for, he's even jealous of the dirty animals he is forced to live with. He is lonely, he is lost.
- + **Finally (v17) he comes to his senses.** What moment brought him to this? Perhaps the contrast of his reality with the memories of the goodness and generosity of his father.
- + **On his way home** – He's rehearsing his speech, and it's a good one!
- + **It's in three parts:**
  1. 'Father I have sinned against heaven and against you.'
  2. 'I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'
  3. 'Treat me as one of your hired servants.'
- + He's getting close to the village. Ashamed and afraid of what is coming, he just wants to hide.
- + **THEN: His father SEES him.** He has been watching, waiting and now he sees him. The father runs to him (v20) – does the opposite of what is expected by the son and everyone else.
- + **Speech Time (v21).** The confession and the consequence but then the father interrupts.
- + That interruption is THE GOSPEL – the Good News. *“For the wages of sin is death, but the GIFT of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.”*
- + **The 'best robe.'** Now the son is dressed in his father's robe of righteousness. *“What great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!”*
- + He puts on the signet ring and the shoes. He prepares the fattened calf and begins to celebrate.

## That Older Son

The story of the Loving Father is not done. There's another key character in this story who God wants to speak to us through. Remember – Jesus told this story primarily to the scribes and pharisees, not to the 'sinners'.

The older son 'refused to go in' (v28). As first born, he would need to serve and embrace any of his dad's honoured guests. He refuses. By not going in and by publicly disobeying his father he now also brings shame upon himself and his family.

Once again, the Father SEES him. He does not respond as all would expect.

He goes out and pleads with him. This self-righteous son also has a speech prepared, which reveals how far he has drifted from His father, despite not going anywhere.

Listen to his language: '**Look**' '*this son of yours*' '*with prostitutes*'. He's bitter. When we start to think we are in the Kingdom of God because of something we are or do or have done, we will wrongfully demand that others also earn their place. But that's just not the gospel.

He continues. '*All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders*'. That's not father-child thinking – it's master-slave thinking! It's all about keeping the rules. It's the same way of thinking that the Father interrupted in the younger brother's speech earlier.

This older son may have never been to the 'far country' but he has somehow missed the point all along. He has been living in his father's house, but failed to understand his father's heart.

v32 Again, the Father's amazing grace: He pleads with his son in front of the guests. 'My son...' Jesus doesn't tell us how the story goes from here. He just leaves it hanging there.

## A Third Kind of Son

Which son are you more like in the story today? Do you deep down believe that your goodness or obedience qualifies you as a child of God? Or that your failure or disobedience disqualifies you from being one? The first son connects his sin with his sonship. The other son connects his goodness with his sonship. Both are about behaviour instead of birthright.

Our Father wants children. Not distant religious observers. Not slaves. We are in His family because He loves us... forever. Whether we come as law-breakers or law-keepers. Are we willing to let the Father interrupt us today - the things we believe we deserve that don't come from a place of true sonship? We need to humble ourselves, confess our sin, let Him put on the robe, the ring, the shoes... and become that third kind of son, (the one who has submitted to his father's unearned love and comes inside). And then celebrate in faith that we are who He says we are!

## **He sees you!**

He calls you in. You need His grace. You need His embrace today. And your family, this community, this world needs you.

## **Discussion Questions**

1. You've probably read this story many times before. In this season of your life, what stands out for you? What do you think the Lord is highlighting to you?
2. Which son are you more like in the story? Do you deep down believe (even just a bit) that your goodness or obedience qualifies you as a child of God? Or that your failure or disobedience disqualifies you from being one?
3. Discuss some things we might believe that we deserve (both negative and positive) from God - beliefs that may not come from a place of true sonship?
4. What would it look like for you to live fully embracing your 'sonship' tomorrow as you go about your day, here in Brisbane, in 2023? For you to live fully and freely as a child of God?
5. The Father sees each of us like He saw those sons - and He calls us to 'come inside' with Him. Whether we've been far away or near to Him but living outside of our true identity as children. Spend some time in prayer with your Father so that He can speak to you about this personally.