

PRODIGAL GOD SERIES  
 Wk3 – Compassionate Core  
*Luke 15:1-2; 11-32 / Hebrews 1:1-3*  
 Jack Schull

**Intro:**

We've been in this series Prodigal God – exploring Jesus' story that he told, why he did, what he's wanting us to see, to learn...

How a story begins is important – it sets a context: (illust)

- “Once upon a time” – so many fairytales begin this way
  - Beauty & Beast, Cinderella, Snow White (not: GI Joe)
- "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...." – *what movie is it?* (*Star Wars*)

Think of your favorite movie – opening scene sets a context...

T Well there is a context that shouldn't be missed as we gaze into this story one more time this week.

**Luke 15:1-2**

Muttering – (diagongyzo = *grumble, indignant complaining*) not just a mere reaction – this is an attitude that has corrupted and occupies the heart, not just outward one time reaction)

**Illust:**

- we see this play out: I might grumble at a ref's call in soccer / March Madness; but if left alone to simmer and fester, my heart can begin to marinate it and it grows from a grumbling into a *diagongyzo* – indignant feeling that occupies my heart – it's gone from a simple critique to now holding them in contempt... → that's the context / backdrop when Jesus tells 3 stories...

T These 3 stories are about: lostness / foundness / celebration / invitation → this invitation to learn from these stories about the heart of God – glean some truths. Jesus is trying to get across a broader understanding of what it means to 'spiritual lost' and then found in God's grace

Last 2 week recap:

It's an invitation to consider: that the Escape / Earn paradigms don't ultimately bring fulfillment  
 1. Escape It: Those who try to escape it believe God's love and admiration can't be had... so they seek to escape the religious life all together.

(Escape) (Vegas Boy) We looked at the 2 different paradigms that come from within this story – on one hand you can get to a place where you just try and ESCAPE – run, thinking that is where you'll experience meaning, significance and happiness...only to discover that it comes up short -it seems fun to begin, but it's a hollow happiness, that is short-lived and crumbles when least expected...

2. Earn It: Those who try to live in such a way as to gain God's love & admiration because they have harnessed some moral power.

(Earn) (Kaki Boy) he stays home and works and works to EARN the father's things. And this Earn it mindset has shaded all his interaction with the Father, it's colored how he sees the world, people and has led him to a position of goodness, but he's missing out on the enjoying the Good Father.

*(put out the 2 pairs of shoes – running shoes/work boots)*

\*Younger boy takes off – creates this seeable distance b/t him and the Father

\*Older son never left the premises – but the truth is: the proximity of his heart with the Father was just as far away as the younger son (Vegas boy)...

Maybe why Jesus spoke of the Pharisee's at one point in gospel of Mark

### **Mark 7:6**

He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

→ last week – Glenn unpacked what it means to live in the identity of "son-ship" – that the relational identity that Jesus is driving at here matters! These are sons and the longing of the Father is that they enjoy relationship with him and one another... - God desires that for us too.

- you already have God's love and admiration – b/c of who you are, he wants all to come home, to come into fellowship with him and he's made a way for that to be true (in Christ)

### **1 John 3:1 (NIV)**

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!"

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 T Today, I want us to gaze into this story as we close this series from another angle. It is clear through this text that Jesus is driving home the Mission he's about and also an insight into a key character value of God the Father.– in this story is Jesus is emphasizing the nature of the Father/God's heart...

God's heart is compassionate at its core. It's the chief characteristic of Jesus and what he modeled. → Compassion is the most described emotion of Jesus – this compassion, concern for people.

It's what is *causing the muttering in the heart*, as the religious Pharisee's are struggling to understand Jesus' concern for the broken, tainted...they have devalued those they've label as lost.

God's heart runs on compassion – to seek out all who are lost and have them experience the grace and wonder of being found, relationally restored.

T Sometimes it's important to zoom out to catch a further context of the gospel story – what life with God is like. We can forget Jesus isn't just telling a story – it's the way he's living that has ruffled the feathers of the Pharisee's – those laboring through obedience to EARN their way into good standing with God...

Illustration:

There was a Sunday School teacher that taught some young children and for an exercise he would have them draw a picture of God – then have the draw a picture of Jesus. It was amazing – as he observed, how similar the pictures looked, with one great difference.

Both had a warm face, long flowing hair, a long beard, and a long flowing robe. The difference was that the picture of Jesus had sandals and the drawing of God had no feet.

→this is such an acute insight into the reality that Jesus was God with feet – God in a bod, sent so humanity would know what God is truly like.

### **Hebrews 1:1-3b**

Jesus' relationship with the Father has always been different from what the world expected and described. The prayers of Jesus recorded in the Gospels begin with “Abba, Father.”

Jesus' contemporaries had plenty of names for God including Lord, God, and God Almighty. God may be YHWH, but that sacred name evokes mystery and distance. From a long list of names, Jesus chooses Abba.

**A. In Judaism.** This Aramaic word is a familiar term for “father”; it is also a title for rabbis and a proper name, but is almost never used for God.

**B. In Christianity.** Jesus probably used *abbá* for God not only in Mk. 14:36 but also whenever the Gk. *patēr* occurs. It denotes childlike intimacy and trust, not disrespect. In Paul (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6) it may be a liturgical reminiscence, possibly of the opening of the Lord's Prayer. It undoubtedly expresses the new relationship with God proclaimed and lived out by Jesus and then experienced by believers in him. → *patēr* [G. KITTEL, I, 5–6]

What Jesus wants to evoke with the name Abba is God's closeness to us—His unconditional, unlimited, and unwavering love for His people. In Jesus' name for God we are standing face-to-face with the very premise of spiritual formation; God loves us and we are His children. The amazing love of Jesus' Father is now expressed in the parable before us.

T We see this on display as the Father is allows the younger to leave (free will), but watches for him, hoping to see his return...

### **Luke 15:13-14; 20**

What the father does in his homecoming scene can best be understood as a series of dramatic actions.

These actions begin with the father running down the road. An oriental nobleman with flowing robes never runs anywhere. To do so is humiliating.

- One Rabbi, Ben Sirach confirms this attitude. He says, “A man's manner of walking tells you what he is.”
- Aristotle says, “Great men never run in public”.

The text says he had compassion. This compassion probably included an awareness of the gauntlet the boy will have to face as he makes his way through the village. The father then runs this gauntlet for him, assuming a humiliating posture in the process.

A surprising feature of this parable is that the Abba is the first to notice his son's return.

There was a Jewish custom that when a son disgraces his father through sinful behaviors, runs away from him and then later returns; the elders of the city take the young man to the village center and break a pot at his feet. The broken pot is a legal act of banishment. It is possible that the Abba runs to his son so that he can prevent the really awful event he fears: Others banning him from the community if they reach him first.

→ So the Abba sprints and quickly says bring my best robe. The father makes the reconciliation public at the edge of the village. Thus his son enters the village under the protective care of the father's acceptance.

The boy, having steeled his nerves for this gauntlet, now to his utter amazement, sees his father run it for him. Rather than experiencing the ruthless hostility he deserves and anticipates, the son witnesses an unexpected, visible demonstration of love in the humiliation of his father. There are no words of acceptance and welcome. The love expressed is too profound for words. Here is a picture of total acceptance.

T It's this beautiful picture of the Father of compassion coming out to find that which was lost... But this is a story of 2 sons isn't it?

### **One son RETURNS / One son Refuses**

*Luke 15:25 (meanwhile back at the ranch)*

### **Luke 15:26-28**

Now this older brother had some outstanding virtues. He was hard-working, obedient. He had never brought disgrace on his family.

Earlier in Luke 10:25–26, Jesus has told the Pharisees that the real test of virtue is how one relates to God and how one relates to other people. How to truly love... (*Great Commandment*)

The older brother shows in both his words and his actions that he did not love his father or his brother.

What's his response to this beautiful family reunion? = Refusal to participate...

Jealousy and resentment fill his heart (remember: *diagonyzo* = *grumble, indignant complaining*)

He can't even bring himself to say "my brother." He refers to the returning sibling as "that son of yours." He is bitterly resentful of the attention his brother received, and jealous that the love of the father extended to one whom had initially rejected him.

He won't come into the party – and when the Father comes out to him (*something he has done now for both sons – which would have been scandalous in that cultural context*) he doesn't even

address his father with respect – anger has boiled over and tainted his attitude of the heart. “Look” – would be like saying “Look you” (derogatory) – not honorable in that culture...

It's important to note in this story that the father treated both sons with the same compassion. The father pleaded with the older son to join the feast. The father is too joyful to be angry at the son's insult. But the older brother refuses, just like the Pharisees refused Jesus' offer to join the kingdom of God.

Listen to the older brother's complaint: "All these years I've been slaving for you, I've 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!" Gratitude Gives Way to Resentment

→ What the older brother was saying to the Father revealed his expectation for justice, not mercy.

→ He was saying that their relationship was one based on reciprocity. "I've done this, and you should have done that." It was not based on love, but on work and reward.

→ I performed, so now you should be blessing me and punishing those who didn't perform as well as me...

**\*Definition of Spiritual Laboring (legalism):** continually seeking the love, blessing & affection of God through the perfecting of your performance for God.

### **Luke 15:31**

-- you don't have to perform to get God's love/admiration – you're a son/daughter. It comes with your new identity through Christ.

- (Gal. 3:26-28 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus...)

### **Relational Reciprocity makes an ugly foundation for a true loving relationship**

→ “I do this, so you must do this...” - I scratch your back, you scratch mine. Work & Reward

→ leads to viewing our spiritual journey through a dangerous performance-based lens:

To quote the great theologian: Brett Farve: “you're only as good as your last pass”

- So what happens when you fail, does God love you less – but if you obey, does he love you more? How do you know where you stand at any given moment – whether your scale is tipping good or bad...

Illust: our very culture runs on this performance perspective (work/reward model) – not a bad model for a country/governmental system – but it makes a lousy religious system. Because you never know if you've done enough...

God doesn't seem to work this way through the story of the scriptures – not every story has a happy ending...think of faithfulness of Isaiah and Jeremiah (and yet the anguish in which they had to lead through) – or the persecution of the disciples in the early days of the church – their martyred – well, that shouldn't be what they got if it's all based on work/reward?

Luke 15:

Elder brother self-talk – we all fall victim too...

First, he had defined his own righteousness. In other words, he had excelled at keeping the rules that he had defined as important. "I've never disobeyed you," he said. It was obviously an exaggeration. But it reveals a tendency. Pharisees are masters at recognizing the sins of others, but are blind to their own.

It can lead to the heart of compassion that God longs to form within us, to erode away or to never take shape...

This is no ordinary Father - he comes out to each one – runs to the one who rejected him.

Father comes out in tenderness to the one that is now pushing Him away.

Father has to go out “My Son” (*tekknon* – “my child” in greek) – you’ve always been with me, I appreciate you, come on in, get rid of your anger, join me, humble yourself)

Both were trying to control the fathers things – one by breaking rules, one by keeping rules – but both were missing the Father...that heart of compassion (experiencing it/having it formed w/in)

T There are 3 things that begin to chip away at having a heart of compassion formed in you.

- 3 signs (v. 28-30)

1) When we allow our hearts to keep score – it will foster an undercurrent of anger inside.

– that self talk is what makes an elder brother – I have never disobeyed...and I don’t get...

-if you believe that out of your obedience God owes you – then you will live constantly angry at worst - frustrated at best - with others, with God, and even with yourself

If you’re trying to justify yourself in right standing with God purely by your actions, obedience and being a good person - then Jesus may be your coach, your helper, your example, or even your inspiration, but he is not your Savior. You’re trying to serve that role. And it’s role you can’t

2) When we drift into letting our spiritual journey become “all duty without beauty”

- **all these yrs I’ve been slaving...**

Elder son’s obey – it’s a grind, but there is no joy. But yet all throughout the scripture there is this context and experience of God’s joy – joy of being found in Him...that God takes delight in us, God likes to celebrate. *Joy of serving/living for him and something greater* → But we miss that, if the only lens in which we see religion is to make sure we’re staying in line, doing the things that God says, so that he will give me the blessings I want.

What this story (and the Bible) drives home – is this invitation to come home into relationship with God b/c of what he’s done. He makes the way, (**thru Christ**) we don’t have to earn it! → We have to accept it and then we live out obedience *in response of that love/grace*; but it’s not to attain it or even hold on to it.

\*\*Elder brothers – find God useful, but gospel believing Christians, find God beautiful.

3) We can allow our performance/obedience to foster a sense of superiority

Religious, Cultural and Class superiority – (if you ground your self image in your performance – if that is how you justify yourself, hard working person, then you have to look down your nose on people that are lazy; and who are lost and those that aren't doing as much as you...

**Illustration:**

Chili's story – God working on my own heart...

How you can tell if you're struggling with "elder brother heart"?:

- when you look at people of diff races, classes, faiths and you think less of them; you squirm within when you're around them; you feel creeped out by them – you're an elder brother, and the heart of compassion God is wanting to build within you, is eroding/slipping away.

→ Jesus ends the story with bad boy being saved / good boy remains lost

- he's not saying that bad life is fine...in the end: being the younger brother is you know you're lost, that you're in trouble, you've got a problem, your alienated from the father, your broken and in need of a saving

The problem with being the older brother is that you can loose sight that you are also lost and in need of a savior.

T What is astonishing in this story is that Jesus is once again pleading with the Pharisee's, those that labor in their spiritual journey trying somehow to rescue themselves through their goodness – he's pleading with them to humble themselves and enter into LIFE –

- this is radical vulnerability of Jesus for you – this is Jesus Christ pleading with his enemies to return, to come in, (does he renounce, yell, hate) – I've come to seek and save the lost (all the lost – the good ppl, bad ppl – only people who know they are lost have any hope that they will found)

Romans 5:7-8 // 7 Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Colossians: while were yet enemies, Christ died for us – you are so lost (at the cross) and he still says (and I'm so glad to come to find you)

Later Jesus would share another story where he highlights what is needed to come home to the Father – it's humility that you do need him to rescue you. It's the humble that receive and are exalted again.

**Luke 18:14b** *(For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted)*

**Conclusion:**

These 3 stories so close together give us another insight – all involve something lost, something found, rejoicing and celebration in being found – and in 2/3 – someone searches. Jesus is the true elder brother – searching for that which has been lost (humanity – all – those who took off running and those sticking around, but still trying to earn their way into relationship with God) –

the gospel is good news – because it's not about our failures of trying to be our own savior – it's about A Savior who comes searching for us!

T We have this incredible freedom to enjoy the celebration, b/c we have a true elder brother in Jesus that sought us out - welcomes us home into relationship with God – through his atoning sacrifice and resurrection.

The key difference between a Pharisee and a believer in Jesus is inner-heart motivation  
~Timothy Keller

-Wrong heart motivation: breeds anger, robs beauty and fosters superiority...  
-Wrong inner heart motivation can lead you to places of even trying to protect your spiritual reputation more than nurturing and growing your relationship with God, the Father of compassion. (that can happen for individuals / and churches)

→ Friends, we will be a church that lives with a heart that reflects the Father, we will even sacrifice our reputation in order to have a heart that values, shows concern and welcomes home all who are lost!

\*\*Much like this Father (in the story) sacrificed his – as he ran to one son and pleaded with the other...*both considered humiliating/degrading acts within that culture.*

→ Jesus is modeling a heart motivated by compassion – he longs for all the lost to be found – he desires to form a heart of compassion within each of us...

Reflection Questions: (musical underscore)

- not sure this morning which shoes you tend to try on, wear around – maybe more predisposed too? Neither paradigm leads to good – Jesus says to **repent** (*metanoēō*) change your paradigm – return to God's provision of grace/compassion and allow that to fuel you forward...
- What throughout this day/this series is the one thing God keeps bringing up?
- God longs to form the Father's heart of compassion within you – are there things holding you up from allowing that to occur?
- How's your heart for those things lost – does it occupy your mind and grip your heart? Who might God be leading you to invest more into? How?

PRAYER:

God, we long to be a people who experience your compassion, admiration and love – becoming continually fueled by it – filled up to overflow with it to those around us. Father, I thank you that you search for lost things – of which I was one. Thank you that we can live now as found. Father form your heart within us – help us see as you do, to search as you do, to love and care as you do, and to lean in and enjoy you...

*Worship team leads*

Closing Song: