

RELATIONAL THEOLOGY SERIES TWO
THE FATHER WITH THE OUTSTRETCHED ARMS
Dr. Roger Barrier
Luke 15:11-32; Genesis 2-3

•SLIDE #1: (Slide of Prodigal son as soon as offering special concludes and I walk to the pulpit.)

•BUILD SLIDE #2A: Most people love Christmas time. People love the hype—joy—families—gifts

•BUILD SLIDE #2B: But not everyone will enjoy this Christmas. Some will experience it alone.

We received several emails this week from lonely singles. One newly divorced: “I dread enduring this holiday, alone.”

Aloneness reaches deep into the inner recesses of the human heart. No one likes to be alone.

•SLIDE #3: I was flying recently to Orlando: girl on airplane: *Celestine Prophecy*: spiritual search. Why? Stillborn baby: I am going to tell you what she said, it is integral to the story. Comfort Catholics. What I am about to share happens at times in every church. RCC priest refused to baptize child. “I am so sorry.” Comforted her. She broke from anger to hurt to sorrow. “Four miscarriages.” What do you think I am thinking? (Don’t try any more.) No. I’m thinking, “I bet she endured all four miscarriages alone. We husbands can be so clueless. So, I said to her, “I bet he had no idea what you were going through. You carried that baby. You were already getting close to that child. Your husband just kind of blew it off. He had no idea what you were going through.” She got real quiet. “I am so sorry.” Comforted her. What was I doing? “I was ministering to her aloneness. She endured some of life’s toughest events—alone.

Ministering to people’s aloneness reaches to the deepest recesses of the human heart.

•BUILD SLIDE #4A: Genesis 3, Adam fell and God dealt with fallenness: “I will send a savior to die in your place in payment for your sins.”

•BUILD SLIDE #4B: Before God ever ministered to Man’s fallenness, He first ministered to Man’s aloneness in Genesis 2.

•SLIDE #5: Adam was alone and “it is not good to be alone.”

The struggle with aloneness is a big deal. We fight it throughout our entire lifetimes.

•SLIDE #6: STORY of kid in airport in Orlando. Mom with 5-year-old and two year old toddler. Put them in play area with tv. Hear them playing and singing along with tv children’s video. Suddenly, this piercing voice, “Mommy? Mommy!?? Mommy!!!!” Came running from the play area. He realized he was alone and he didn’t like it.

•SLIDE #7: See him grow up to teenage years. He still won’t like to be alone. Why do teenagers congregate in cliques? They don’t want to be alone. They will even see another teenager hurting and alone and they will even join with their clique in ostracizing and teasing mercilessly another if that is what the group does, just to stay part of the group—so deep is the need not to be alone.

•SLIDE #8: I imagined him 80 years from now, old and frail, and his children sit down with him and say, “Dad, it is time to put you in a nursing home.” Sorrow, he is going to be alone.

It is not good to be alone.

•SLIDE #9: Let me tell you the natural, human response to loneliness.

Self Reliance: "I am alone, well, I can make it on my own. I don't have any needs and if I do I will take care of them myself, thank you."

Self condemnation: "I am not good enough to have any friends. No wonder no one likes me."

Selfishness: "I have needs and to meet those needs I am going to take from you."

•SLIDE #10: Let me show you something else. This is also what fallenness looks like. It looks just like our natural response to our aloneness: Self Reliance; Self condemnation; and Selfishness.

•SLIDE #11: The human response to loneliness of Genesis 2 looks just like the manifestation of our Fallen sin nature in Genesis 3. This stuff is all over the Bible.

•SLIDE #12: This is why the fallenness of sin is so terrible. It isolates us from God and from others. It makes us alone.

The story of the Prodigal Son, the Elder Brother and their Dad is a story of self-reliance, self-condemnation and selfishness which brought loneliness and isolation among people who longed to enjoy closeness, support and companionship.

READ LUKE 15:11-12: 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.

•SLIDE #13: What symptom of fallenness do we see here in the younger son? "Give me" is selfishness.

This reminds me of the man at Casas who won a trip for two to Hawaii and was so selfish that he went twice.

What does this selfishness produce? (pause) Aloneness.

How do you think the father felt? Father's feelings: "Dad, I wish you were dead." Talk about separation. Now the boy is alone and the dad is very much alone.

STORY of selfish man at MacDonald's at breakfast. Noticed couple coming in. Shabby dress. Looked for coins in telephone, and newspaper box. Man enters. Couple looking at menu and I hear him say, "Well, get out of the way. If you don't know how to get in line, I do. I have to go to work and you don't look like you are going anywhere. I don't have all day."

"Well, I guess, I don't have anything much to do today."

Silence in the room. Total separation. Sensed that the man was very much alone. "You look like you've had a hard morning. May, I buy your breakfast?" I was ministering to his aloneness.

Was the selfish man alone? Yes. I was too angry at the moment to minister to his aloneness. He was hurting, too.

Selfishness is a terrible thing.

READ LUKE 15: 13-15: "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.

•SLIDE #14: What is this? Self-reliance. Neediness presented itself so Prodigal handled it with self-reliance. Lost it all, "I will get a job and take care of this."

Taken to its ultimate end, self-reliance produces extreme aloneness. Self reliant people won't let you minister to their needs and they become very insensitive and intolerant of other people's neediness. They end up

very alone.

Julie and I were in Albany NY several months ago leading a conference for pastor's and wives on how to heal the hurts of ministry. One pastor's wife was hurting and very alone. Handled her hurt and loneliness by self-reliance. She had recently written a poem about her feelings toward life. Based on Beatitudes.

•SLIDE #15: Blessed are the poor in spirit. No,
Blessed are the strong, who are always in control and never show weakness.

•SLIDE #16: Blessed are those who mourn, No,
Blessed are those who deny their pain and deaden their hearts—they need no comfort.

•SLIDE #17: Blessed are the meek. No,
Blessed are the survivors who need no one and depend only on themselves.

•SLIDE #18: Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, No,
Blessed are those who have killed their longings, who no longer have any expectations---nothing will disappoint them.

•SLIDE #19: Blessed are the merciful, No,
Blessed are those who have minimized the damage in their soul so that there is no need for mercy or forgiveness for “nothing bad really happened.”

•SLIDE #20: Blessed are the peacemakers, No,
Blessed are those who keep the peace at any cost (even to the peril of their own soul) so that conflict, self-revelation and the possibility of rejection is avoided at all costs.

What do you say to a woman like that? Fortunately, I know what to say. We will talk about that on January 2 as we enter the new millennium.

READ LUKE 15:16-19: 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 men 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 men.'

•SLIDE #21: What is this? Self-condemnation. Slopping pigs: “My father’s hired hands do better than this. But I am not worthy...” is self condemnation.

•SLIDE #26: READ LUKE 15:20a: So he got up and went to his father.

Picture the Prodigal: Selfishness failed. Self-reliance was a disaster. “I am not worthy.” Utterly defeated. Completely humiliated. Utterly alone. It doesn’t get any lower than this.

Close eyes and allow the Lord to identify you with the Prodigal in your self-reliance, selfishness, and self-condemnation.

He imagines in his mind his father’s response.

Accusations: Where have you been? What have you done? What happened to the Money?

Endless questions.

Comparisons between him and his elder brother.

Scolding and shaming him for all his sins

Now, look up here: What sets us free, folks, is the prodigal's next experience: So much dysfunctional views of God that we don't have the right view of the Father.

- SLIDE #27: Look at the dad with outstretched arms. READ LUKE 15:20: "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."

Picture the Father as he comes running off the front porch, arms outstretched, wounded side, nail prints. Runs to embrace.

This is the picture Jesus gives us of the dad when we have allowed self-reliance, selfishness, and self-condemnation to make us prodigal.

READ LUKE 15:21-24: "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.

Father hardly heard the words.

Best robe, probably had it made up for him. Symbolic reminder. Never thought he'd use it.

Sandals: he had no shoes.

Ring for finger

Feast: hungry.

This is how God accepts us back. If we see this picture with awe and wonder we can be free from self-reliance, selfishness, and self-condemnation.

- SLIDE #28: Meanwhile, all is not well at home.

READ LUKE 15: 25-28: "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him.

READ LUKE 15:29-30: But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and 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!'

- SLIDE #29: Father's response: "But you had me."

READ LUKE 15:31-32: "My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 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.'"

He wanted a relationship with his dad and never saw it. If you look closely you will see again the problem of aloneness and fallenness with the elder brother: He was blinded by self-reliance, self-condemnation and selfishness. Glenn will deal with the elder brother next week.

Let me go just a little deeper here. Reflect on the hurting heart of God.

- SLIDE #30: Here is a picture of Rembrandt's *Return of the Prodigal*.

Now, his younger son has come home; it is time for rejoicing—and the elder brother stands by in anger and isolation—and the Father has to rejoice (what?) alone.

It is time to minister to his long-lost, son—and He has to minister (what?) alone.

This is why he pleaded with the elder brother to come to the party. He did not want to minister alone.

I want to read a poem written by my youngest child when she was in middle school. We found it on the floor one day after she had gone to school. It absolutely broke our hearts. It expresses the loneliness, isolation, self-condemnatory rejection felt by millions of Americans:

- SLIDE #22: People come and people go,
But never get attached
“Cause usu’lly by the time you do
They drop you down the hatch.
- SLIDE #23: People only care about what you wear
As stupid people do,
But they never look inside of you
To see the real, true you.
- SLIDE #24: Older sisters let you know
How awful that they feel
But sometimes it is in a way
That shoots straight for the kill.
- SLIDE #25: I know that life is full of twists and turns
And the occasional little loop,
But I feel I have to tell you
That I really feel like poop.”

We were so busy that we had not seen this? Well, we knew she was hurting. Middle school is a tough time for a girl.

God said, “Roger, I really want to minister to Bronwyn. Do you believe that?” “Yes, God.” “Well, Roger, too often I feel like I have to minister to her alone. I need you to help me.”

Changed my whole view of parenting. My biggest job as a parent is to minister to her aloneness. When she called, we answered. Spent hundreds of hours with her. Now doing well in Germany. “I miss you, you and mom are my best friends.”

Imagine God is wanting to minister to your wife, child, co-worker and there we stand by in criticism and judgment and isolation.

God says, “You know what is breaking my heart? I want to minister to your wife, husband, children, friends, but, I am having to do this alone. I am pleading with you to help me.

- SLIDE #31: You know God wanted to minister to that alone child in the airport in Orlando. He did not want to do it alone. He needed a mommy.

- SLIDE #32: You know God wanted to minister to the aloneness of the spiritually searching girl on the airplane—but He was having a hard time doing it alone. “Roger, why don’t you minister to her aloneness and then introduce her to Me again.”

When I ministered to the aloneness of the girl on the airplane, I had an open door to address her isolation from the father. I came down with the resurrection. Reached right into her heart.

- SLIDE #33: There will be many lonely people this Christmas: Don’t let them spend Christmas alone.

- SLIDE #27: When we see the Father’s heart, we can be fully and forever free of our self-reliance, selfishness, and self-condemnation.