

The Father Heart of God

INTRODUCTION

Well today is Father's Day, so instead of talking about earthly fathers, which is one of my favorite subjects, I am going to talk about our heavenly Father, because in reality every day is Father's Day, in the sense that the Holy Spirit wants to reveal the Father so that it would ignite our heart and empower us. There is nothing that will empower the human spirit like encountering the Father. We know that phrase, and most people who love the Lord would agree with it, but they don't really experience it, so I want to say it again. There is nothing that will ignite and empower our hearts more than when the Holy Spirit reveals the Father to us. It creates a confidence in our spirit and an assurance before the troubles of the future; even in the midst of our failure, we have confidence. It gives us the resolve to go forward with all of our hearts, so that we run to God instead of from God, even when we fail and stumble in our weakness.

“IF YOU HAD KNOWN ME, YOU WOULD HAVE KNOWN MY FATHER”

Here in John 14, it's the end of Jesus' three-and-a-half year ministry and He's about to go to the cross. Here in John 14 He's giving a message, clarifying what His ministry was about for three-and-a-half years, as well as giving them promises for the future. In John 14:7-9 He's clarifying, saying, “I'm not sure you understood what I have been doing for three and a half years. I have been raising the dead; I have been teaching the Word of God. I have been relating to you as a personal friend, but I am not sure you understood exactly what that was about. In verse 7, speaking to the disciples, He says, “If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also” (Jn. 14:7). This was a brand-new idea to the disciples. They thought, “No. We do know You, but what do You mean that we would know the Father if we knew You? That is new, Jesus. We thought we knew You when we knew You and that was it.”

Jesus says, “No. The whole time, I was revealing to you the personality of the Father.”

“HE THAT HAS SEEN ME HAS SEEN THE FATHER”

In John 14:8, Philip, one of the disciples, breaks in and says, “Well, Lord, show us the Father and that is sufficient” —or, one translation says, “That is enough for us. Show us the Father.”

Jesus says in John 14:9, “He that has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9, paraphrased). Again, Jesus is clarifying His ministry for three-and-a-half years. The reason this is so stunning and so significant is because in the Jewish context, with the Jewish traditions and Jewish teachings, the Jews understood God as the Creator God of Genesis 1, which is right. They saw the transcendent God. *Transcendence* is a fancy word meaning that He has power so utterly beyond anything we can imagine. He is wholly other than; He is in a realm of His own. The Jewish mindset understood the Genesis 1 God as being filled with power, and transcendent. He is very distant and very powerful, and the only appropriate response is to tremble before Him. That is the word transcendent; there is nothing we can compare it to. Keep your distance and tremble before Him.

Jesus came on the scene and said, “Let Me tell you, it's different than that. Yes, He is transcendent. He has such power that, when you see it, you will tremble when you encounter it in the greater measures. However, that is not enough; it's not a complete revelation. I want you to know that He has affections like a Father. He has a desire for personal relationship. He has an individual plan. He has a plan for every individual who comes to

Him. He is not just a transcendent Creator before whom you tremble. He has an individual plan; He is a tenderhearted Father before whom You have confidence.”

A FATHER FROM ETERNITY PAST

This was new to the Jewish mindset, because they knew about trembling before a God of great power, but they didn't know about confidence before a God of great affections. They knew to keep their distance and worship with awe. They did not know how to draw close with confidence, to open their heart and to rest in the presence of the Genesis 1 God. Because He is more than a creator; in fact, He is from the beginning a father. He's not like a father; it's not like He functions as a father just to make a point. At the core of His being He feels, thinks and acts like a father because from eternity past He is a father at the heart level.

THE INCREDIBLE ATTRACTIVENESS OF JESUS

This was a new idea to the apostles. When Jesus said, “If you had known Me, you would have known Him,” what He was doing, again, was clarifying what He had done in the last three years. He was helping them connect the dots, so to speak. They saw Him as so attractive; these apostles and multitudes of others wanted to be wherever Jesus was. He was full of enthusiasm and kindness. He had so much strength. He had so much confidence. He had clarity. He had a pure spirit. He was tender. He was anointed. He had the presence of God. They wanted to be with Him; they would argue with one another to get in the front of the line so that they could be closer to Jesus. Jesus was so profoundly attractive to them. They were awed by His teachers, by His personality, by His miracles; I don't just mean the power dimension, but the tenderness of His miracles. The miracles that He did showed how much He cared for people. They loved Him. Even the night before He died, they had never, ever settled the idea that when Jesus said, “I am going to die,” He meant, “I am going to die.” They really didn't get it the night before. When the gals were at the tomb on Sunday morning, the guys were still freaked out. They said, “I don't get what just happened,” but the ladies said, “He told us He was going to die.”

The guys said, “Well, what did He mean?”

“He meant He was going to die.”

So He wanted them to get ready for His death. He wanted to connect them to the Holy Spirit who would reveal the Father to them. He was telling them, “Guys, as attractive as I am to you—you love My ministry, you love My presence, you love My enthusiasm, you love My kindness, you love My bright countenance, you love My teaching, you love the way I do miracles that help others and that help the oppressed—let Me tell you something: My Father is equally attractive, because what I do is a representation of His personality. You will like Him as much as you like Me, if you can only understand that I was really just revealing His personality during this last three and a half years.”

TRANSCENDENT, BUT LOVELY

What Jesus wanted was for them to put the Old Testament image of God, the transcendent God—and again, *transcendent* means power that is in a wholly different realm. This was the “wholly other than,” the awesome power of God, and Jesus wanted them to connect that Jewish paradigm or perspective—paradigm just means, “point of view or perspective”—the Jewish paradigm of the transcendent God before whom they trembled with a new paradigm of God as the Father in whom they could have confidence, so that they would tremble before

His power and have confidence in His affections. This was the combination of understanding that Jesus wanted them to have.

“FATHER, I HAVE DECLARED YOUR NAME”

Now, in John 17:26 a few hours had passed. It was the same evening, the night before His death. He was going to die the next day. Jesus was praying, and they were listening to Him pray. He was talking to the Father. Jesus said, “[Father], I have declared Your name to them” (Jn. 17:26). He said, “For three-and-a-half years, in My miracles, in My relationship style, in My enjoyment of them and their enjoyment of Me, the whole time, I was telling them about You. Father, yes, I came down to the earth to offer Myself as a sacrifice for sin, but also to make known to the human race how tender, how kind, how compassionate, and how interested You are in the human race.”

THE THREE HUNDRED NAMES OF GOD

In the Old and New Testament there are over 300 different names of God. The names of God reveal different facets of His personality. Many of these 300 names overlap in the facets of God’s personality that they reveal. During Jesus’ three-and-a-half years of ministry, He identified many of the 300 names, and taught about several of them, but He talked about the Father over and over and over. He emphasized the revelation of the Father like no man in history. He said, “Yes the 300 names of God are real, and they reveal facets of His personality, but I have come to emphasize that the Genesis 1 God before whom you tremble is the Father. You can have confidence in His presence. He is deeply interested in you. He has a plan for your life. He wants to be close to you. He feels your pain. He wants you to know that His heart is towards you and His eyes are on you.”

THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

So now, in Romans 8:15, the three-and-a-half years of Jesus’ ministry is over. He has died and risen again, and then the Holy Spirit comes. Now, the Holy Spirit has the same ministry focus that Jesus had. The Holy Spirit takes up where Jesus left off. Jesus revealed the Father to the Church, and now the Holy Spirit is revealing Jesus to the Church as well. He came to glorify Jesus, but He came also to reveal the Father. Paul the apostle gives us a very important description of the Holy Spirit’s ministry, one which is very similar to that of the ministry of Jesus: to reveal the Father. This is in Romans 8:15. Every believer is called a saint in the New Testament; every born-again believer is one of the saints of God. Paul tells the saints, “You have received” —that is past tense— “the spirit of adoption by whom we cry, ‘Abba, Father’” (Rom. 8:15).

There are so many implications to this one sentence. The Spirit of Adoption is another name for the Holy Spirit; it’s one of the Holy Spirit’s names or titles. The Holy Spirit cries through us and inspires us to pray this way, and then empowers us while we are praying this way. We come before the Father and say, “Abba, Father.” The word *abba* was a familiar term in the first century. It’s the same word that we would use today for *papa*. And at first it seemed irreverent that you could call the God of Genesis 1 “Papa.” I mean this is the God before whom the angels fall, trembling before His power and His holiness, and you would have the audacity to call Him “Papa”? The Holy Spirit says, “That is what I have come to show you: This is what He wants. Yes, He wants you to tremble before His power but He also wants you to have confidence before His heart and His affections.” The word, the term *Papa* speaks of, is a respectful term; it’s not a slang term. It’s respectful, but it speaks of intimacy and affection. It’s the little child, the little boy or girl who gets into papa’s lap and feels secure in the arms of a father, and knows that everything is OK because father’s eyes are on her. That’s the image.

ADDRESSING GOD AS “PAPA”

Now, Paul says, “The Holy Spirit is crying through you because He wishes to inspire you to come before God, the God of Genesis 1, and address Him and relate to Him as Papa.” The Holy Spirit wants to convince us of this; then He wants to inspire us, actually, when we worship, not just to say, “God we love You,” at a distance but rather to go the next step in your nearness and actually connect with Him as *Abba*. The Holy Spirit is pushing this agenda. He cries through us, prompting us over and over: “Don’t just go before God and say, ‘Holy, holy, holy.’ Do that, for sure, but also, take the next step, put your guard down, relax in His presence and call Him ‘Abba’; call Him ‘Papa.’” As we do that, as we obey that prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit says, “Now I will take you to the next step. First I prompted you to do it and convinced you to do it; now I will unfold greater insight into God as *Abba*, if you’ll do this.”

THE WOOING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Many believers are content to love Jesus and say, “God, we love You.” We call Him Father, but we don’t really connect with it. The Holy Spirit is wooing us. He wants to talk us into it; He says, “Go the next step, open your heart, believe for more than just power from God and forgiveness. Enter into the dimension of God’s tender heart. Receive it and let it tenderize your heart.” That is what He is saying in this passage. The Holy Spirit’s name is called “The Spirit of Adoption.” That’s actually a title of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has various titles or names or descriptions. He is also called the Spirit of Comfort; He is called the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of Hope, etc. When the Holy Spirit reveals one of His titles, like the Spirit of Adoption, He is saying to us, “I want to reveal and minister this truth to your heart. I want to reveal the power and the benefit of this particular truth to you. When He comes to us as the Spirit of Adoption, He stirs us to come to God in this way, not to be content with just forgiveness, content with God as the Father of Jesus, and there you have Him. Rather, He wants us to take the next step, to take that risk and move closer to God, to the tenderness of God’s heart, and to allow the tenderness of God to tenderize our hearts. The Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Adoption, wants to convince us to do this. Here I’m repeating myself, but the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Adoption, says, “These are the truths I’m going to minister to you: truths about your position as adopted sons and daughters.”

SONS OF GOD AND BRIDE OF CHRIST

The Scripture calls men and women the sons of God; the Scripture calls men and women the Bride of Christ. We are sons and we are the bride. There are different facets of experience of God that the son dimension contained in our salvation. All the women are sons of God and all the men in the body of Christ are the bride of Christ. It’s something bigger than being masculine or feminine. As sons of God, we encounter His power but also, as sons of God, we touch that unique dimension of the Father’s heart as *Abba*, as *Papa*. As the Bride of Christ we touch that unique dimension of Jesus’ heart as the Bridegroom God. The same person is both son of God and Bride of Christ. What is happening in this verse is that the Holy Spirit wants to convince us of the benefits of our position before God as adopted sons. As adopted sons, both men and women, we are adopted sons of God. It’s proper to call us sons and daughter, but more often than not it calls us “the sons of God” because that’s not a masculine distinction, just as the Bride of Christ isn’t particularly feminine. It describes a position of privilege before God. As sons of God, we as adopted sons; we are heirs to the family name. We are heirs to the resources of the family of God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The entire estate of God belongs to His children. His entire estate is ours. All of His resources are ours.

THE PERPLEXITY OF ANGELS

That is something the angels cannot say. I can imagine the angels, as Jesus was unfolding this dimension of salvation with His own lips during the three-and-a-half years of His ministry. I don't know how it works, but I can imagine them being a little perplexed. Jesus said, "When you come before God, here's how I want you to pray: 'Our Father who art in heaven...'" This was a brand new idea to the angels, because they minister to God at a distance, and with only respectful titles. They call Him "Holy, holy, holy." They call Him "the God who was and is and who is to come." They refer to God in titles of respect and they stay at a distance. If they sin, they are dismissed from His presence forever. Most of us are aware that Lucifer, Satan, was originally an exalted angel in the presence of God. He was the worship leader around the throne, but he sinned and one-third of all the billions of angels sinned as well. They were dismissed instantly and permanently from God's service. They were cast into darkness. Jesus came to men and said, "You guys are different; you don't serve at a distance like the angels. No; you draw near to Him. You don't only give titles of respect, like 'Holy, holy, holy.' Rather, you speak titles of endearment: 'Our Father, Abba.' When the angels sin, it's over; when you sin, His mercies are new every single day. His abundant loving-kindness is towards you.

I can imagine the angels hearing this and thinking, "Jesus, what are You saying? You're telling these weak, fallen, sinful, human beings that they can talk to God like You do? You're telling them to call Him 'Abba'? Are You kidding? They can't call God Abba! He's Holy, Holy, Holy!"

SEEKING A HEARTFELT CONNECTION TO DIVINE REVELATION

Jesus was making a way for us to relate to God as He does. Beloved, this is absolutely astounding. The Spirit wants to convince us, and is crying through us, "Say 'Abba.' Go for the Abba revelation; move into the Abba relationship. Don't stay at a distance." The Spirit woos us, prompts us, wants to convince us. To those of you who move forward in this, the Spirit says, "Now I will help you. I will increase the revelation. I will let you feel the power of it if you want it." This is surprising. I have been in ministry for over thirty years, and this surprises me: Many believers, though they like the idea of this when they hear it, saying, "Thumbs up... cool... awesome..." underlining it in their Bibles, even telling a friend afterwards about the awesome Father-heart of God, they don't do anything with it for another year or two. I've watched this happen for thirty years. The Holy Spirit says, "I am willing to release that Abba cry in you. I'm willing to inspire you to move forward in your walk with God. I am willing to unpack and reveal this revelation of God to you. I'm willing to give you the power to feel the emotions of this truth, but you have got to pursue it. You have got to go after it." You pursue it simply by studying it and by bringing it into your dialogue with God in prayer, by actually saying it to God and asking the Spirit to unfold this to you. You have to determine that you're going to know God this way. "Father, I am going to know You as Abba; Holy Spirit, bring me into this relationship." We begin to speak to God this way; we study the Word of God along these lines. The Spirit says, "If you do that, I will give you more. If you are not content to live at a distance from God, I will actually help you in your journey in this."

GOD LOVES US LIKE GOD LOVES GOD

John 17:23 is one of the most astounding statements in the whole Bible. I truly mean this: I cannot imagine anything more astounding than John 17:23. Jesus is praying to the Father and He says, "Father, that the world may know" —here it is—"that You love them" —those disciples—"in the same way You love Me" (Jn. 17:23, paraphrased). What? Again, I can imagine the angels saying, "What? I mean, OK, we've settled that God loves them as His own children. Though we don't fully grasp it, we've settled in. But that the Father could love these fallen, sinful human beings with the same intensity and in the same way that He loves You, Jesus? Come on?"

Of course this whole thing is a made-up conversation, but Jesus would say, “That is why I came to the earth. I didn’t come to the earth to give them fire insurance so that they could escape hell. I came to the earth to remove everything in the way, everything that was hindering them from connecting to God as a father like I do. I came because My Father had a plan from before Genesis 1: He wanted a family that would dwell in voluntary love with Him, who would receive His love and return it because they chose to return it. That is why I came. I came because My Father longed for a family.” I mean, can you imagine this? I’m going to make it really personal, and then I’ll apply it to you, but I’m going to enjoy this myself for a minute. God the Father loves Mike Bickle as much as He loves Jesus. That is intense. I have it made; I am the main man, but so are you. So are you. This verse is no joke and people think it’s cute, but it’s more than cute. It’s real! This verse gives every single born-again believer the right to stand before God as God’s favorite. I am unquestionably God’s favorite. You are unquestionably God’s favorite. God cannot love Jesus any more than He already loves Him. The Father loves Jesus with an infinite love; The Father’s love for Jesus is eternal. They’re both uncreated; there was never a time when the Father was created, and there was never a time when the Son was created. The Father, Son and Spirit are all three equally God and they are uncreated in eternity past. There has been a love relationship within the Trinity; The Father, the Son and the Spirit have loved each other fiercely and fully from eternity past. That love cannot be improved upon. That love is at the full measure. It is called “perfect love.” The Scripture calls it “perfect love” several times. It is perfected; it cannot increase. It cannot improve, so the Father cannot love Jesus more. That’s impossible.

BEING LOVED AS JESUS IS LOVED

Jesus said, “Well, let’s take the implication. He loves you, Mike, the way He loves Me.” God the Father will never love me more than He loves me now. When God loves me with all of His heart, and loves you at the same time, it doesn’t diminish His love for me. He has infinite love; He’s not like human beings. He doesn’t have a limited capacity. When He loves you, it doesn’t diminish His love and intensity towards me. When He loves me, it doesn’t diminish His intensity towards you. He loves all of us in the way He loves Jesus. It cannot be increased; it cannot decrease. His love for you will never diminish; nor will it ever increase more than it is right now. Beloved, why do we want to wait until the resurrection, when we’re standing face-to-face with Jesus, in a resurrected body, before we say, “Oh, I get it! Why did I not live in more of that before? If I had understood this, I wouldn’t have been nearly as attracted to the lust of this age.”

SEEING THE FATHER, AN ANCHOR IN OUR SOUL

See, Philip said it in the passage with which we began. He said, “Jesus, if you show us the Father, it will be enough for us. It will be sufficient.” That’s true. If the Spirit reveals the Father to us, it settles something deep in our spirit. It is sufficient. It places an anchor in our soul. I’m not saying all of our needs are met. Some people say God meets all of our needs. No; there’s still emptiness, there’s still a vacuum in our hearts. There’s still a lack in this age, in this fallen world. As intimate as we become with God, there are still dimensions to our fallenness where we feel the pain, the gaps, the moments of loneliness, and in those moments the enemy comes and attacks us. That’s true for all believers across the ages, so don’t feel like you’re being picked on, but that revelation of God can make a substantial difference. It won’t cause all the needs of our inner man to go away, but the fact that His eyes are on us will become an anchor. It really will! We’re uncertain about the future; there are relationships we’re uncertain about in the future. There’s our occupation; there’s our ministry. There’s the economy. There’s the future of the world. There are so many uncertain things in the future. We say, “Lord.”

He says, “My eyes are on you. I have power. Don’t worry; I like you. My hand is with you. I will be with you as the future unfolds.” Beloved, this creates an anchor in our soul. In other words, it creates stability, rather than an up one day, down the next, emotional roller coaster, which is so common in the human race. Then, when we have a revelation of the Father, even our own failures don’t have to throw us into a rollercoaster: “He loves me, He loves me not...” That’s what the devil comes and tells us: “He doesn’t love you today!” You don’t have to go on a rollercoaster, even in the midst of your own failures. We can have an anchor that He loves us, that we are His. Though we don’t know all the things that are going to happen, by any means, and though not all the ache in our heart is gone, though there is an ache in us that makes our inner man strong, even in the early years of our lives, this anchor can be there in your life.

THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH; THE SPIRIT OF ADOPTION

In John 16:13, Jesus called the Holy Spirit “The Spirit of Truth.” Paul called Him the Spirit of Adoption. Again, whenever there’s a name for the Holy Spirit, it’s the same Holy Spirit. He’s emphasizing how the Holy Spirit will minister to us in this way. When He comes to us as the Spirit of Truth, it means He is going to magnify truth in our inner man; He is going to reveal truth to us. He will guide us into the truth. I like to put this verse together with the verse we looked at only a moment ago. I say, “Holy Spirit, guide me into the truth of how the Father loves me. I want You to take me by the hand and escort me,” for He is the escort into truth.

THE GOD-SHAPED VACUUM IN THE HUMAN HEART

It’s as if the Holy Spirit is saying this: “Get into My car. I will escort you personally into that realm of truth.”

So I say, “Well, what realm of truth would You like to touch? I want to know about the Father loving me like Jesus. I’m going to be tenacious about this one; this is the one I really want to know. I want to know about me being God’s favorite forever!”

The Holy Spirit smiles and says, “Oh, you mean the ‘Abba’ truth.”

“Yes. Yes. I want to get near that tenderness of God. I want it to tenderize me.” Beloved He will guide you. He will escort you into this; if you have set your heart, you are going to enter into this truth. You’re telling Him, “Holy Spirit, I cannot do this without You, but I cannot live without this truth.” I assure you, if you determine this tonight and stick with it for the next five to ten years, you’ll look back and tonight will be a life-changing night. You’ll look back and think it’s a beginning, the time when you and the Holy Spirit agreed that you were going to be guided into this truth of Abba loving you like He loves Jesus. All of us are created by God this way: We need the assurance that we are enjoyed by God. Every single human being on the earth has a God-shaped vacuum. There is a hole in every heart that only God can fill. “The God-shaped vacuum” is what C.S. Lewis called it. There is a God-shaped vacuum, there is a hole in my spirit that only God can fill. A romantic relationship cannot fit it; a deep friendship cannot fit it. An economic prosperity, an anointed ministry cannot fill that hole. It has God’s name on it and it is reserved for God. It’s a craving, and all of us were made with this craving to know that God enjoys us.

CONFIDENCE BEFORE GOD’S LOVE

It’s not enough that He loves us. I mean, we want to know that He loves us, but to a lot of people, God’s love for us means He stamped the passport, “Accepted into heaven. Next!” “Stamp! You’re accepted into heaven, you’re saved, next!” To a lot of folks, God loving us has been reduced to the fact that He stamps our passport so

that we can get into heaven when we die. Beloved, it is more than that. He actually enjoys us. He enjoys us in our weakness, because we have profound weaknesses, all of us. Can you imagine the implications of knowing that God enjoys us even in our weakness? He's not waiting until the resurrection when all the weakness is gone and He says, "Finally Mike, finally, I can enjoy you! You know I knew you had potential in a good relationship! Finally the sin is gone; you have a resurrected body and we can really talk heart to heart." No, He's not waiting until then. The Lord is willing to talk to me and you right now. He says, "I am not gritting My teeth enduring you. I actually enjoy you right now; right now!" One of the things Jesus came to teach was to convince people that the Genesis 1 God, before whom they trembled, was also the Father, and that they could have confidence in His presence; that He actually enjoyed them.

THE BRANDING OF LUKE 15

The primary chapter in the whole Bible on this is Luke 15. I'm talking to the ATC: If there's one chapter you should leave with this summer, it's Luke 15. Mark it down; say, "I am going to have the Holy Spirit brand 'Luke 15' on my heart." There are three parables in Luke 15: the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son. Basically they say the same thing with different points of emphasis. Some of you might say, "Hey, I need it on my heart! I'm forty, fifty, sixty, and it has never been branded on my heart." Everyone needs Luke 15 branded on their spirit, it's true. This is how God feels about you while you are in the process of recovering from your compromise. That is what Luke 15 is about. Jesus came to reveal how the Father feels when we're confronting our compromise and how we're growing through our compromise.

WARRING AGAINST SIN IS THE EXPRESSION OF SINCERITY

I'll take only a minute on two of the parables. We won't go long on either one of them, but we will touch on them. What I'm really doing is just drawing your attention to it, so that this week in your prayer room time or private time at home you can take these verses and go further with them. Luke 15:4-7 is the parable of the lost sheep. First, I want to say this before we read this: God loves. "God so loved the world" (Jn. 3:16). He loves every unbeliever. There are almost seven billion people in the earth. He loves every single one, but He doesn't enjoy them all. He loves them but He does not enjoy them. However, He enjoys a believer. That is the difference. He loves believers and unbelievers, but there is a distinction: He actually enjoys us, but not only when we mature. Rather, He enjoys us through the process. But here is the important part; here is the condition: We have come to Him in Jesus. That is condition one, but the other condition is that we are sincere in our desire to obey Him. That is a very critical condition. It doesn't mean we have victory over the area in which we have been compromising, but it does mean that we are going to war against that area, and that we have set our hearts to call that area "sin." We're not making peace with that sin, meaning we're not saying, "Well, since I'll never get through that sin, for the next few years I think I'll just do it for a while." That's making peace with our sin, and it's bad. I'm talking about a sincere believer. They say, "It's true, I'm stuck in compromise on this or that issue, or these two or three issues, but I'm warring against them and calling them sin. I'm fasting occasionally, crying out in prayer, talking to friends, and I will get through with the Spirit's help. I am not yielding to defeat or giving up. I am going to war against it." Beloved, if you don't get free, even for a long time, the fact that you are warring is the expression of your sincerity. If you are sincere, you can have the confidence that God enjoys you even before you are free from that sin. He is enjoying you because the cry of your spirit is to be pleasing to Him in this area.

THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

Really briefly, Luke 15 tells the story of the lost sheep. Of course we know the parable. “What man, having a hundred sheep, if ninety-nine go astray, will not leave the ninety-nine in the fold, and go search until he finds that sheep?” (Lk. 15:4, paraphrased). Notice that this is one of the sheep; in other words, this is a born-again believer in our context. Often we use this parable to talk to the unbeliever, which is OK, but it’s talking about someone who is part of the flock of God. It’s talking about someone who is in the sheep fold, a believer.

Now Jesus is talking about Himself. “When the shepherd finds that lost sheep, he lays it on his shoulder” (Lk. 15:5, paraphrased). He puts that sheep on His shoulder, because that sheep had been stuck in the mud and in the thicket. He marches back to the right path carrying that sheep in his own strength, and he rejoices all the way back to the sheepfold. Then he calls his friends (Lk. 15:6). “Hey!” Jesus says to the angels. “Hey!” He says to other believers. “Hey, look! Mike has repented! Look! Rejoice with Me! This is a great day, for I have found My sheep.” For Jesus to find His sheep means that that believer has come to terms with that area of compromise. Now they are waging war on that area of sin and are asking for help. The Lord is intervening to help them. That is what this is about; it’s the Lord’s intention to intervene, to come and carry them and help them.

THE GLADNESS IN GOD’S HEART WHEN WE REPENT

Here is the point I want to make, and then we will be done with this parable. In Luke 15:5, as he’s carrying that sheep on his shoulders, in other words, as the Lord is intervening to rescue him, that intervention may take a while. It may not happen in one day; it may be a process of weeks and months, or it may be longer. But He is carrying us back to the path of recovery. He is rejoicing. See, this is how we would imagine it: He’s carrying us on His shoulders and saying, “You do that one more time, and that’s it! That’s the last time I’m forgiving!” We imagine that that’s what He’s saying, but, beloved, that’s the voice of the accuser. That’s the devil’s voice talking in your ear. Jesus is saying, “You repented. This makes My heart happy. My heart is rejoicing.”

You say, “Yes, but I haven’t even gotten the victory yet. I’ve only repented!”

He says, “That’s good. I see the cry in your spirit, and My heart is happy to see the cry in your spirit.”

“ADAM, WHERE ARE YOU?”

Beloved, this truth needs to become more real to us, always, but when it became real to me some years ago, it gave me confidence to run to God instead of from God when I discovered my sin and my weakness. A lot of people, when they discover they’ve sinned, they get in so much shame that they run from God. They close their spirit and they run from God. They hide like Adam and Eve did. They hide under the fig tree, so to speak. And the Lord says, “Adam, where are you? Where are you, Adam?” He was hiding from God. You know that when God asks a question, it’s not because He needs an answer. When God asked Adam, “Where are you?” He was asking because Adam needed the answer; Adam needed to know where he was. God already knew where he was. He wasn’t saying, “Hey, little guy! Where are you hiding out?” That’s not what He was doing. He was saying, “Adam, where are you?” In other words, “Do you know where you are right now? I’ll tell you where you are: You are in shame. You are in condemnation. Break it and come here, and let Me speak to you face to face. Let Me cover you; let Me make a way back into My presence.” Beloved, when this truth touches our spirit, we run to God instead of from God.

PRODIGAL SONS AND EXTRAVAGANT FATHERS

The next parable, Luke 15:17-20, is one we know. It's the story of the prodigal son. If you're brand new to Luke 15, there was a rich man who had a big farm and two sons. The farmer was worth millions, and one of the sons, the younger, was maybe twenty years old. He said, "Hey Dad, can I have my part of the inheritance? How much am I going to get when you die?"

The father says, "Well, you would actually get about ten million dollars."

"Well, Dad," says the son, "I don't want you to die, but I don't want to have to wait around until you do. Can I have the ten million now?" I mean, what a disgrace.

The father says, "You don't want to do this with me? You don't want to build the farm with me?"

"No, give me the money, give me the cash, I have a party to attend!"

The father actually gave it to him. The son went out and blew the whole ten million dollars. It took a few years, but he wasted it all. Now he's out in a distant land. You know the story. He comes to his senses. In Luke 15:17 it says, "He came to himself." I like the other translations that say, "He came to his senses" —in other words, that's when he repented. He came to himself and said, "Wait, wait, what am I doing? Why do I not go back to my father and admit that I have sinned?" (Lk. 15:18, paraphrased). "Then I will make a deal with my father..." He's planning this out. He says, "I'll admit that I blew it and say, 'Father, I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me one of your hired hands.'" In other words, "Let me back on the farm, give me minimum wage, put me on the far east side of the farm in those acres way out in the distance. I will live with the servants. Don't invite me to any family dinners for a few years. Let me really learn my lessons. Put me on probation. Give me minimum wage and treat me like a servant." The son has it all thought through. He says, "I am going home and I am going to repent."

THE JOY IN THE FATHER'S HEART

But then comes the shock of his life (Lk. 15:20). The young man comes walking, over the horizon, as I picture it. The father is on the front porch of the big ranch. Now, this is my version of the story. He's in the rocking chair. Every evening he goes out and watches the sunset. He looks over the hill, because he knows his son and he knows that one of these days his son is going to come to his senses. He knows that he's going to come over that hill. There it is, in the far distance: There is a lonely figure walking, too far to see, but he has that walk, and the father says, "That's my boy. I can't see his face but I know that walk from a mile away. That's my son." Then, in Luke 15:20, the father jumps up and runs. He has compassion. He runs. The boy sees this man running and thinks, "Oh, my goodness. Either he's really mad or he's really glad, I'm not sure, but I have my speech ready: minimum wage, probation for three years, the distant part of the ranch. I've got it; I've got it." So he's starting to get it ready when he sees the light in the father's eyes. There are tears in his eyes; there's compassion. He falls on the son and says, "I love you. I love you. I love you. Oh, you are home." The son is absolutely stunned; he's bewildered.

Jesus is saying, "This is the Father I'm telling you about. I know Him. This is how He feels when you come back to Him." We're willing to put ourselves on probation; the devil is willing to help us out with a probation clause. "Lord, I will come back. I remember my early days. Lord, You forgive me one more time and I will

never ask forgiveness in this one area again, never. I know I am about to exhaust Your forgiveness, and this is it. This is a promise; this is a vow.” You don’t need to do all that. “I tell You what, God, You can make it hard on me for a while.”

The Lord says, “No. I don’t need you on probation. I love you. I need you in confidence, not in probation with condemnation and shame. I need you in confidence near My heart; that is where I want you.” This son has only repented. He hasn’t yet settled all the issues. He still has wrong emotions, wrong mindsets, and he still has to go through counseling for a long time. The issues are not gone. The only difference is that he has decided to declare war on them. That is the only thing that’s changed: He is now declaring war on the issues with which he was at one time comfortable in compromise.

RINGS, ROBES, AND FATTED CALVES

In Luke 15:21, the son starts the speech. The father is kissing him and the son is overwhelmed. Now remember, Jesus isn’t just telling a nice story, he’s revealing how the father feels when a son, not just an unbeliever, comes to God. This is what happens when a son returns from a season of compromise. The son starts his speech (Lk. 15:21): “Father I have sinned. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” He’s about to add that third phrase, “I will be with the hired hands. Give me minimum wage; give me the servant’s quarters,” but the father interrupts him (Lk. 15:22). “Enough! I don’t want your negotiations. I don’t want your probation. I don’t want you in the servant’s quarters. You are my son. You will be next to me in the house. The father interrupts and won’t even let him finish his religious negotiation. He says, “Bring out the best robe” —that is the garment of honor. This was the best robe! It was a status of a position of honor. Only the most honored guests wore the robes.

“Oh no, father! You are killing me with kindness!”

“Bring the ring out!” The ring was the signet ring. This signet ring gave the son the authority to engage in business transactions. In today’s language, then, the signet ring is a signature on the check book. He said, “Put my son on the checkbook at the bank! I want his name. He can sign the checks.”

The son says, “Dad, wait. I blew the money. Don’t let me sign the checks!”

“Let him sign the checks, he’s my son!” Then he says, “Bring the fatted calf!” (Lk. 15:23, paraphrased). In other words, “Let’s have a big feast,” but here’s the word: “Let us be merry.” Jesus is saying, “The Father is happy.” Remember this is the first day of repentance. This is not month three; this is not year two. There is no probation. This is hour one, the first hour; this is the first ten minutes. He has not even had a chance to prove that he’s sincere, but the father knows his heart.

“THEY BEGAN TO BE MERRY”

“They began to be merry” (Lk. 15:24). Beloved, when we feel the gladness of the Father in our hearts, it settles something in us so profound. I mean, it is profound. When the Lord began to settle this in me, that I don’t need to go anywhere else when I sin or fail, I know where to go, because I know the feeling of confidence and assurance that my spirit craves for, and that is where you need to go because that is the only thing that settles it. This parable is not primarily a story about a son who lost his inheritance. You will hear some people teach it and it’s OK to emphasize it. They say, “This is the story of the son who lost his inheritance and how he got it

back.” That’s not the main point. The main point is about a father who lost his son and how the father restored the son back to favor. This is about how the Father feels when He loses a son to compromise.

“HIS COMPASSIONS FAIL NOT”

We read in Lamentations 3, “It is because of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed” (Lam. 3:22). Because of His mercy He does not consume us. We are not finished; He doesn’t write us off. In place of the word *consume* you can write, “He doesn’t burn us up.” He doesn’t destroy us. Because of mercy we are not finished when we sin. The angels are, but not us. We are not consumed; His compassions do not fail.

“But Lord, this is the thousandth time I have repented of the same sin.”

The Lord says, “My compassions are still as strong today as they were then. They never fail.”

“But Lord, is there not a tipping point? Is there not a line where You don’t forgive anymore?”

He says, “If you repent, there is no line. I will forgive you every single time.”

We end with this statement: His mercies are new every single day. Beloved you can have a new beginning in God every single day. Every morning when you awaken, if you’re in the day watch, and every afternoon when you get up if you’re in the night watch, they are new every afternoon. His mercies are new every single day. You don’t have to walk around as a second class citizen. When you repent and you come before Abba, His heart, His interest, and His kindness is toward you. Beloved, we can push “delete” after we repent of that sin. We can repent of it; we can push “delete.” We can stand before Abba and we can say, “Abba, here I am. I am Your favorite one. Here I am, Your beloved.

Amen. Let’s stand.

MINISTRY TIME

We all need this. I need this; you need this; there’s not a person who doesn’t need this message. I need to grow in this, but if tonight you’re saying, “No, something has got hold of me for this ‘Abba’ cry, and I want the Spirit to break through for this cry; I want to feel the power of it; I want to feel the confidence of it; I want to have the confidence in my relationship with God when I blow it. I want that tonight,” for some of you, tonight, the confidence will begin. Others of you, you will be prayed for, but this is the beginning of the process, and the confidence will come over time.

If you would like prayer, I want to invite you to come up and stand on these lines. We have these lines all the way around here at the front, for those who are new with us from the teen camp. The reason I like you to stand on the lines is so that we can have room for a ministry team to come around you. You’re saying, “I want this ‘Abba’ cry. I have got to have it. I have got to have it!”

Jesus is saying, “My Father loves you as much as He loves Me. I promise you, He cannot love you more than He does now. Take hold of it. Take hold of it.” We’ve got lines over there as well. Go ahead. Here we are, Lord. Beloved, there is nothing more powerful than confidence. When you have confidence in your spirit with God, it is powerful. You are not finished; that is a lie from the devil. He has not written you off. Don’t write yourself

off. He has not written you off. Come Holy Spirit. Every person in this room needs this truth in our heart. Come, Holy Spirit, touch our hearts. Release the ‘Abba cry’ in our spirit. Here we are, Holy Spirit.

We’re going to wait for a moment as the instruments continue. Holy Spirit, release Your power right now in this room, I ask. You’re speaking to the Lord in your own language, in your own words, and you’re saying, “I will enter into this. I’m not going to let this evaporate over the next few days. I am going for this.” Talk to Him: “Here I am, Lord; I am Your beloved. I am Your favorite one.” For some of you, that’s really hard to say. I mean, the enemy is just screaming inside, saying, “Don’t you dare!”

Jesus says the opposite. He says, “I died. Don’t you dare draw back!” The enemy says, “Don’t you dare go forward in that kind of confidence. Jesus says, “Don’t you dare draw back, I died for you!” Some of you are in a place of struggle and compromise. You’re telling the Lord, “OK Lord, I know what to do. I’m admitting it.” Go quietly before the Lord and say, “I’m not trying to cover it up; I’m going to war against it. Help me! Help me, Lord. I am going to set my heart against this.” Let’s take a moment here. “I need Your help, but I’m going to set my heart tonight, right now. I am going to walk free of this. Carry me on Your shoulders. Help me. Father, You love me like You love Jesus. Here I am; here I am, Your beloved. Here I am, Your favorite one. Here I am, Abba; Abba, I want to know You as Abba. Holy Spirit, show me God as Abba.”

I’m going to invite anyone in the room who loves Jesus, whether you’re visiting from out of town or live in the area here, if you love Jesus and you want to pray for people, to come up. The Holy Spirit gives more when the Church prays for the Church. If you love Jesus, that is all you need. One thing I ask you to do is, when you’re praying for people, stand in front of them. You might say the simplest phrase, such as, “God wants you,” and that’s the very phrase they said an hour ago and you don’t even know it. They can hear you; they may ask you something. Or you might say, “The Lord wants to give you a breakthrough.” They might have asked you for a breakthrough an hour ago during worship. You don’t know. So, those who are praying, just pray little phrases over them. Move around and ask the Holy Spirit to release His glory. “Here I am, Lord. Release Your glory on me, Lord. Release Your glory in this room, I ask.”

I need a bunch of people coming over with the teens and young ones here. I need about twenty-five more of you coming over, if you would. Some of the teens can come and be on the prayer team as well. We want everyone to have hands laid on them. “Lord, release Your glory. Break the power of shame.” We break the power of condemnation right now. We release the revelation of the Father on their hearts.



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