

Learning From Jesus

Week 4

His Joy, His Presence, and His Grace, II

Key Verse

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Luke 15:1-2

The love in which God made us never had a beginning. In it we have our beginning.

Jullian of Norwich, quoted in "Embracing", p. 164

Opening Discussion: Legalism

Define Legalism: "Earning God's favor by human effort applied to keeping God's law." Sift our phrases in this sentence. What phrases are good? (i.e., "God's favor", etc.) Where is the poison? "Earning". Discussion... Why is "earning" poison? Is there a difference between human effort and human earning? What are the spiritual disciplines? Are they "effort"? "Earning"? What happens to them – and to us – if they become "earning"? Dallas Willard says the "disciplines are wisdom, not righteousness". What might he mean by this?

Reflections on God's Grace

I this course we are going to take the time to answer some of life's biggest questions –

- Who am I?
- What kind of world do I live in?
- What is my purpose for life?
- What makes life worth living?

Everyone has answers to those questions. Your answers are the grid of reality through which you experience the world. If your answers correspond to the way things really are, you can see clearly. If they tilt, your sight and your life are distorted.

One of the problems Jesus faced in his teaching ministry was that the prevailing worldviews people had embraced were hostile to the Kingdom of God. So Jesus does things to explode people's worldviews. Like tell strange stories. Like break the rules on the Sabbath. Like say abrasive things. You know why Jesus fought with the Pharisees and

the Scribes and the Teachers of the Law so much? Because they were the guardians of a worldview that stood against the Kingdom.

The Pharisee's Worldview...

- God has put us in charge. (so we get to set/enforce the rules)
- Good people keep the rules and bad people break them.
- Good people are loved by God and bad people aren't.
- The problem with the world is the bad people. (stay away from them)

This is "self-salvation", what is classically called "salvation by works", by human effort, and it is a real problem, because you can't be good enough. We think, "I need to be good then God will accept me." When we believe that, we live under a crushing load of anxiety, disapproval and condemnation, and we heap that load onto others. Or, we come to believe we are better than others and are convinced that God owes us because we have earned his pleasure. The Pharisees believed this and hammered people with it. People resented them for it, and no one who ever failed or messed up would come to a Pharisee for help or healing or hope. But Jesus said things so differently and did things so differently that people flocked to him...

Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Then Jesus told them this parable...

Luke 15:1-3 (NIV)

Jesus decides it is time to get clear about this issue. So he tells three stories in a row because he wants us to get this straight.

People Get Lost...

By Foolishness

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them."

Luke 15:4 (NIV)

Or Carelessness

"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one."

Luke 15:8 (NIV)

Or Willfulness

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)

And By Goodness

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.

Luke 15:29 (NIV)

For this second son, it is not his badness that got him lost, but his goodness. He stayed home, did it all right, and thought God owed him. It is not his failure but his success that tripped him up. Can you hear his heart through his words?

'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me...

Right then is our first hint that this father doesn't just have one lost son. He has two. As a matter of fact... The older brother is farther away from the Father than the younger brother! This is important to understand. Let's start with this idea: **you can be close to God and still be far away.**

Look at the older son...

*And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me...
But he was angry and refused to go in...*

Luke 15:31, 28 (RSV)

Younger Brother Lostness...

There is no hiding for the younger brother. Everything he is and has is right out there, easy to see. He says to his Father, 'I am out of here. I don't need you or want you. Just give me my stuff and get out of my way. I am going to run my own life, and I don't need you to do it for me or tell me what is right and wrong.' No hiding that!

When his life falls apart, there's no hiding that, either. When he starts to think about it, he thinks... 'Whew, this isn't working out so well. Maybe I am not so smart. Maybe I really do need God, maybe I do need a fresh start, maybe I even need a whole new life.' Everyone around you says, "Yeah, you really do!"

But Older Brother Lostness is Different...

Your lostness is hidden because of your goodness. He stays home, does it all right, and everyone approves of him. He approves of himself. So he can't see his lostness. He can't see what is killing him. And neither can the people around him. And what is killing him is his pride, his self sufficiency. All covered over very nicely by his goodness! He doesn't think he needs a new life, he is convinced that he can manage life pretty well. He has this pride, "I am good. I have earned my place in this family. The family owes me."

Signs of 'Older Brother Lostness'...

- He Is Angry About His Life and Withdrawn From His Family
But he was angry and refused to go in.

Luke 15:28 (RSV)

When his world comes apart, he gets angry and he withdraws. That is how lost older brothers handle their problems. They get angry about their life. They **blame God**. And get angry at him.

- He Has a Judgmental Heart

But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!

Luke 15:30 (RSV)

Lost older brothers look down on people, on lots of people. Especially lost younger brothers. Can't you just hear him talk about his younger brother, '**I would never do that.** Never.' This younger brother is **gone**. And **he is glad**. It is another sign.

- He Has No Passion For Christlikeness

"Lo, these many years I have slaved for you, and I never disobeyed your orders..."

Luke 15:29

Think about the phrases. '*Slaved for you...*' '*Your orders...*' This older brother **hates his life**. He doesn't love his father. He sees his life as **slavery**.

- He Believes God Owes Him

"Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me..."

Luke 15:29 (RSV)

'You have never given me what I deserve' is his conviction. It is his outlook on life. And so he is a victim.

- He Can't Celebrate The Return Of A Younger Brother

"You never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends."

Luke 15:29 (RSV)

"You never even gave me a goat" But he never asked for one! He never asked for a goat because **he has nothing to celebrate**. There is **no party in the heart** of the older son. They make terrible evangelists. Ask a prodigal younger brother if they are a Christian, and before too long they will **start to dance**. Prodigal brothers never quite get over the fact that God has forgiven them. They make great evangelists.

What Is It That Pulls This Family Together?

- The Father Eagerly Pursues His Sons

But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him...

Luke 15:28 (RSV)

It wasn't the first time the father came out. He had been longing and looking for his youngest son for months upon months. And when that boy came home the father pounced on him. That's the way God's love is. Grace pounces! But now another son was lost and once again, **the father goes out after him**. It will take that to bring this family together. But it will take more.

- The Father Willingly Bears The Shame Of His Sons

but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.

Luke 15:29 (RSV)

I want you to picture the scene to understand what the father had to bear. I imagine that all the father's family and servants and friends had been invited to this party. Word traveled fast, and people streamed in. Last to arrive outside the home was the older son. Again, word traveled fast. He was angry. He wouldn't come in. And everyone sees the father go out to him. Silence descends on the hall. Then, through the walls comes the voice of the angry brother...

'Lo, these many years I have slaved for you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends.

All throughout the hall, heads hang. Many – most fathers gathered there would never bear the insult, the shame. But this father is different. He bears the shame of his son's lostness willingly. That is the heart of the Father. That is the heart of the Savior. Willingly he leaves his home, walks out of the feast to seek another lost son. Willingly he bears the shame and pays the price of our lostness. Willingly he carries it all the way to the cross. Willingly. Why?

- Because The Father's Home Is Built On Grace

*And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and **all that is mine is yours.** It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'*

Luke 15:31-32 (RSV)

That is the heart of the Father, and the central reality of the Kingdom that Jesus gives in his gospel. It is all about grace.

Reflection Question: Summarize the key ideas in the Reflection in your own words.

Bible Study: God’s Grace Infused Kingdom

1. Look up the following verses, and summarize them in the spaces below.

Reference: Ephesians 2.8-9

Reference: Ephesians 1.8

Reference: Romans 3.22-28

Reference: Romans 5.6-11

2. How would you summarize what these passages teach about grace?

3. Give a definition of grace in your own words

Spiritual Tool for the Week

The following exercise is to be done this week. Record your experiences in the spaces below.

Spiritual Tool: Slowing

The level of noise and activity in our lives is astounding. It is hard for us to disconnect from the world. But Jesus had a habit of disconnecting that was foundational to his life and ministry. The seeds of our stress are found in the garden of our hearts. As John Ortberg wrote, "Hurry is not just a disordered schedule. Hurry is a disordered heart." He calls this "hurry sickness" (*The Life You Always Wanted*, pp 76-90). When John went to Dallas for spiritual mentoring, after sharing some of the details of his frantic life, Dallas told him, "*Ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.*" John Ortberg responded, 'OK, I have written that one down. That's a good one. Now what else is there?' "I had many things to do" [he writes] "and this was a long distance conversation, so I was anxious to cram as many units of spiritual wisdom into the least amount of time possible." Another long pause.. '*There is nothing else,*' he said.

Think about it a moment. We get busy because we want to get important things done. So we up our pace. We never say, 'no'. But when we pick up the lifestyle of Jesus and the habits of silence and solitude, we learn to let God set the pace and God lead the way. Then you actually find you can get a lot done without being in a hurry. Jesus did.

"Slowing means deliberately choosing to place ourselves in positions where we might have to wait." (Ortberg, p.83) Think of some examples of how you might do that. Look what Jesus did in Mark 6.31. Not the pressing demands all around him. Experiment this week.

Reflections on your experience

Readings for Dec 10th

Read "Embracing...", Chapter 9 and Epilogue and answer the following questions.

1. Have you found a "vast network of care" in your life? (pp. 148-149)

2. How have you been "taught by God to love one another"? (p. 151, 1 Th 4.9)

3. What are three primary ways we must care for one another (pp. 154-163)? Which are you best at? Which do you want to be better at?

4. Look at the third full paragraph of the Epilogue. Is this happening for you?

5. What have you liked most about Jim's book?
