

What is God Like ?

Luke 15:11-32

**Delivered by Dr. Daniel Kitinoja at Calvary Baptist Church, Tilton, IL
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Well, this morning we're in Luke 15, Luke 15.

It's great to have the children in here with us again.

Kids, you're going to have opportunities to answer if you have an answer.

So here's going to be the first question for the kids.

What is God like?

When you think of God, what you know about God, what is he like?

Some time ago, I read a book with some researchers.

They said, I want to know what children think about what God is like.

So they tried to draw various ways to show how big God was.

That was the big thing in their mind.

And so they found a way to sort of indicate that God was ginormous compared to us little people.

What is it, Trinity?

He is like everything.

Well, he's everywhere and he created everything.

Omnipresent is a big word for that.

What else?

Anybody?

Any of the other kids?

What is God like?

Is he angry or is he loving?

Both.

Yeah.

What do you got, Lawson?

What's that?

He's loving.

Yeah.

What else?

Anything else before I start giving my own answers?

All right.

So here's one of the things.

When people talk about God, there's different things that they'll focus on.

God is big.

He's the creator and he's really strong and he's loving.

And he's gracious and merciful and he is those things.

But now in our day, we don't focus on this a whole lot, but God is also a judge.

And because he's holy, he doesn't tolerate sin.

And so one of the things that's really difficult for us people to deal with, whether we're little or adults, is this idea that God is loving but also a judge.

He's merciful but also gives sentence to people when they sin.

And so we try to, some of us try to block out certain parts of God and some of us just emphasize certain parts of God.

But here's the deal.

When we understand God better, one of the things we have to do is learn how to hold all of this truth about God together.

And I got to tell you something that is not easy to do.

And here's what's going on in our passage today.

Jesus is going to teach us what God is like because there were some people who emphasized one part about God.

And when Jesus did something that seemed out of sorts with that part about God, His judgment, the religious people got very angry.

So Jesus started to tell stories to explain to people what God is like.

And this morning, we're going to be reading Luke 15 verse 11–32.

And we're just going to be kind of looking at how does Jesus describe God the Father?

And to do that, he tells a story.

The story we're looking at, there's a father, an older son who mostly does the right things.

And then there's a younger son who, well, he does not.

Many of you will know this story well.

But if you know well, pretend like you've never heard it before.

Let's take a look.

It begins with an ugly separation, verse 11–16.

And he said, There was a man who had two sons.

And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.

And he divided his property between them.

Not many days later, the younger son gathered up all that he had and took a journey into a far country.

And there he squandered his property in reckless living.

Verse 14, and when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in the country and began, he began to be in need.

So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country who sent him into his field to feed the pigs.

And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate.

And no one gave him anything.

Let's pray.

Blessed God, our Father, I thank You for this time to be together in worship and in the Word.

I thank You for our students, our children, and just pray that You'd help them to understand what the Father is like.

That's been my prayer this week.

But I pray that for us as adults that we too would grow in our understanding of what the Father is like.

Because Lord, You told this story so that we would understand Him.

It's in Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

I saw something recently.

It's on my Facebook page, but it says, You are now entering Ohio.

And then it had a subtitle on the sign that said, Now think about your life choices, choices which brought you to this place.

Now, if you are reading the story of this son, also known as the prodigal son, you'd like to think by the time he's saying, I'd like to eat the pig's food, he'd be thinking through his life choices that brought him through to that point.

Now, I shared that thing on Facebook, I love Ohio, but it made me chuckle.

What brought you, what decision did you make that brought you here?

What got you here?

And so this guy, he is so hungry and is so hungry that he is thinking about eating pig food and it sounds appealing to him.

So he's made some choices that got him there.

I don't know about you guys, but I hate, I'm gonna confession time.

When I was a kid, I tried to eat dog food once.

Am I the only one in the room that ever tried the dog food?

Like what is the kibbles and bits?

Apparently I'm alone in this.

Kids don't try it at home.

It's not worth it.

All right.

But one thing I never did was I never tried the cat food.

You know, you got the little cat, the can and you rip open the lid and it's like, holy smokes, how do they like?

They eat it up.

Now imagine, now I was never attempted to eat the fancy feast that we're giving the cat.

But imagine this guy is looking at pigs thinking, these guys are lucky, I don't eat their food.

That's how hungry he was.

That is how bad things had gotten.

And it was his decisions that got him there.

And the way the story unfolds, here's the thing, the story is a father and two sons.

The father apparently is described as wealthy.

And so this younger son says, hey, dad, give me my inheritance and kids.

What that means is essentially, dad, I wish you were dead.

So just go ahead and give me the money now, because if you want to think about inheritance, it goes something like this.

When an older person passes away, the younger people usually receive maybe the money, maybe the house, maybe the car, maybe the stock options, I don't know, maybe the furniture.

When I lived in the country town, I remember a fellow passed away across the street, and before

the police and the paramedics came, the family was running in, getting the guns.

They wanted that before somebody else could claim it on their inheritance.

But this son is even worse.

He's just saying, dad, give it to me now, and then we'll be happy.

And so the father in the story who represents God, gives him the inheritance early.

This is an ugly separation.

And so a day or so later, the son leaves and he goes off into another country, and he spends all of his father's money on wild living.

Translation, he spent it on sin.

Kids, what this sin did is he asked for dad's money, and then he left and he spent it on sin.

I have a friend like that who inherited a bunch of money before the relative passed away.

He gave him stock options, and he spent that money on wild living.

And eventually the money was gone, the party was over.

But then the problem goes from bad to worse, because not only is he broke, then a famine hits.

Kids, I don't know if you know what a famine is, but a famine is this.

It's for various reasons, especially in the ancient world, crops would just not be, it would be a bad year for farmers.

Whether the rain didn't come like it was supposed to, whether it was locusts came in and ate, or just various reasons that a crop failure might happen.

And so the food is harder to come by.

Like if you went to County Market, imagine all the shelves are empty.

But the few things that are there because there's a famine are very expensive.

So this guy is broke, he's hungry, his clothes are probably wearing out, and he just in a moment of desperation, he takes whatever job he can get, and he's going to go feed the pigs.

And this is, as that great philosopher Dusty Rhodes said, he's fallen on hard times as a pro wrestler.

Some of you guys may know his son Cody Rhodes.

But his father talk about hard times.

Well, this, this prodigal son is in hard times.

He's broke, he's hungry, and he is in shame.

The party is over.

And like the son in the story, when we leave God for sin, it leads to bad situations.

Kids, when we leave God for sin, it leads to bad situations.

Years ago, when kids used to ride bikes a lot and travel the neighborhoods, I had one street I was not supposed to pass, and that was Porter Road.

I knew that.

But I wanted to go somewhere where mom and dad didn't want to drive me to.

But Porter Road was in the way, so I crossed Porter Road.

And wouldn't you know it, I got hit by a car.

Turns out mom and dad knew what they were talking about when they said don't cross the road.

Now, thankfully, I was okay, although I think so.

My neck might be messed up from it.

I had three, but I need to stay off bicycles, apparently.

Looking back in my childhood, there were three significant accidents involving bikes.

Any one of them that could have messed me up.

But I got hit by a car.

I don't know how I am alive except for the fact that for some reason, the Lord told my mom to pray really hard for me that day.

I don't believe in accidents.

Not those kind of accidents.

Well, when we, like the son of the story, when we leave God for sin, it leads to bad situations.

Disobeying my parents was leaving God in the pursuit of sin.

Sin will take you farther than you want to go and cost you more than you want to pay.

The son in the Prodigal son story, he has found this out.

Sin separates us from God.

But like the father in the story, God is waiting and looking for us to come home.

You want to know what God is like?

When he sees that people have abandoned him in pursuit of sin, he sees sin for what it is.

And unless something changes, they face judgment.

But God is looking and waiting for children, his wayward children, to come home.

And because that's so, in verse 17–20, we see the reunion.

Verse 17.

But when he came to himself, that means he came to his senses, he said, How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread?

But I perish here with hunger.

I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

Whenever you read in the Bible, where it says something like, I have sinned against heaven, that's a way of saying, I've sinned against God.

It's just a little more polite way of saying it.

I've sinned against heaven and before you.

Verse 19, I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

Treat me as one of your hired servants.

He arose and came to his father, but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion.

And ran and embraced him and kissed him.

I think the father was waiting and looking.

The son of mine, maybe he'll come home someday.

Well, this is a reunion.

The son came to himself.

That means he came to himself, his senses and he realized my life choices have taken me far from home.

He realizes this is crazy.

I'm a servant in this far away country doing the grossest job ever.

And if things are so bad, I want to eat the pig's food.

Pigs were considered filthy animals to the Jewish people.

And there's a reason why even today, farmers, when they work with pigs, usually have to wear what's called muck boots.

I remember I was preaching at a country church and I talked about this and the wife said, my husband doesn't believe that pigs are dirty animals.

And I said, you tend pigs?

He said, yes.

I said, you wear muck boots?

He goes, yes.

I said, I rest my case.

The Jews saw them as dirty animals and they also were religiously unclean and so now this guy is working with the pigs.

And he's like, this is crazy.

The servants at my dad's house live better than I do.

Why have I left that?

Well, he knows why, but he works up this speech.

He says, I'm going to go home and I'm going to say, look dad, I know I've messed up.

I don't deserve to be one of your sons.

Just let me be one of your servants.

I know that's how good you are as a father.

I didn't see it then, but I see it now.

In biblical terms, we might say he's repenting.

Repentance is when we realize that we have done what is wrong.

We have sinned against God.

We come to our senses and say, I sinned against God.

I'm going to go back and do things right this time.

I'm going to get right with God.

Well, that's kind of what this son is doing in the story.

And the father sees this son come and he's worked up this speech and he's going to just lay it all out there.

But the father was waiting for him and he ran to him.

I don't run a lot these days.

And in the ancient world, fathers never ran.

And so this was like he forgot all concerned about looking proper and keeping his dignity.

He saw his son and he was off to the races because he was looking for this son.

The father is looking for us.

God the father is looking for us because he wants us to come home.

In fact, that is why he sent Jesus so that we can be reunited with him.

Kids, why did Jesus die on the cross?

Do you know?

Any kids?

Carter.

He had to pay for our sins.

Right.

Here's the gospel.

You ready?

Really?

All these books I've read, it comes down to one sentence with 10 words.

Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins and rose again.

He died on the cross to pay for our sins.

And when we put our trust in Jesus, it allows for a reunion to happen.

That's why Jesus came.

In fact, later, just a few chapters later in Luke 19, they're getting mad once again because Jesus is having a party with sinners who have come home.

And he says, I have come to seek and to save that which was lost and to give my life as a ransom for many.

He gave his life as a ransom for many when he died on the cross to pay for our sins.

The just in place of the unjust.

Kids, I'm going to tell you a story.

I'm going to teach you a deep truth rather.

When we talk about Jesus dying on the cross, understand that that is where I belong and everyone belongs because of sin.

When he went to the cross, we call that a substitute.

How many guys ever went to school and there was a different teacher that day?

We call that a substitute teacher.

When Jesus died on the cross, he was the substitute.

We were supposed to be there, but Jesus took our punishment for us.

He did that, died on the cross and rose again, and because of that, the reunion with God the Father is possible.

Well, this reunion happens, and then it gives way to celebration.

Look at verse 21 to 24, the celebration.

And the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.

That is humility.

Verse 22, but the Father said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet and bring the fatted calf and kill it.

Let us eat and celebrate.

Translation, it's party time.

Why?

Verse 24, for this, my son was dead and is alive again.

He was lost and is found.

And they began to celebrate.

Why is Jesus telling this story?

At the beginning of chapter 15, here's why.

Jesus is hanging out with tax collectors and sinners.

Amongst the bad people, these were the worst of the worst, and they are coming to Jesus, and he's having a dinner party with them.

So the religious people are bent out of shape.

They're like, this man receives sinners and eats with them.

And what they don't understand is that what Jesus is doing is what the Father does.

He celebrates when sinners come home.

So Jesus tells three stories.

And if you've been hanging around Children's Church for a while, you might have heard these before.

There's this story about a shepherd leaving 99 sheep to go find the one sheep that's lost.

And then he brings the sheep back.

When he gets back to the fold where all the rest of the sheep are, he calls his other sheep for shepherd friends and he says, let's party, I found my sheep.

And then he tells another story about a woman who loses something that's very precious and she turns the house upside down looking for it, sweeps everything, looks under the under the under the carpet, under the blankets, finds it.

And then she calls her friends and says, let's party, I found what I was looking for.

And now he tells this story of the prodigal son and the reason he's saying is that I am celebrating because God is looking for people.

They are lost and they are precious to me.

What does God like?

He celebrates when sinners come home to Him.

When I came to faith in Jesus Christ when I was six years old, God was celebrating.

And that's the point of the passage.

And one of the things that's been said to me that I've heard recently is that what we celebrate says a lot about us.

A person shared a story about how when they graduated college, the family didn't throw a party.

But when a family member was released from prison, they had a big family reunion and celebrated.

He said that said a lot about what was important to my family.

What we celebrate says a lot about us.

We have birthday parties.

Celebrate the entrance of a new life into the world.

In America on 4th of July, we celebrate the birth of our nation.

These things are important to us.

And so we celebrate.

Why am I extending so much time on this?

Because we see Jesus took a lot of time making the point that Jesus is looking for lost people and celebrates when they're found.

They celebrate.

God celebrates when lost people come home to Him.

So like the God Dad in the story, God the Father celebrates when we come home to Him.

What is God like?

I'm going to give you two words that shows up in the passage.

In verse 20, it says He's filled with compassion.

But the word grace doesn't show up, but the concept is God is clearly being gracious and compassionate.

In verse 20, it says He had compassion.

Compassion, I said, I got to look this up.

I think I know what it means.

But I'm going to summarize it in kid language.

You ready, kids?

Compassion is feeling sad because someone else is suffering.

Compassion is feeling sad because someone else is suffering.

But God's compassion on this son who was hungry, broke, his clothes are probably worn out, and he doesn't have any shoes on.

His compassion causes him to take action.

And so he runs to him.

Grace is being kind to someone who does not deserve it.

Grace is being kind to someone who does not deserve it.

When the son shows up and he says, I am X, Y, and Z, I'm not deserving to be your son, the dad says, he's almost like he doesn't even listen to the speech.

And he starts talking to the servants.

He says, go get him the best robe.

In the ancient world, the best robe belonged to the dad.

Go get my robe, the best one.

Bring shoes for his feet and put a ring on his finger.

Those are things you do when you want to honor somebody.

And here's the thing, this son doesn't earn the honor at all.

So when God is doing this, God who is the father honors us and shows mercy to us, He's showing grace, giving kindness to us that we do not deserve.

When we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, the Bible says that we are clothed in Christ's righteousness.

This morning, I put on a suit, I put on the coat, the pants, the shirt, off I went.

Similarly, when we put our trust in Jesus, Christ's righteousness is put over us.

It's an honor.

And now we are welcomed into the presence of God.

So what is God like?

He is gracious and compassionate.

Well, we got to remember the reason that Jesus is telling us this story is because some religious people were angry that Jesus, who is God, is welcoming sinners.

The story continues by telling what happens when the older brother shows up, who usually does the right thing.

Look at verse 25 to 30, we see the reaction.

Now, this older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

Why do I hear music and dancing?

What's the party about?

Verse 27, and he said to him, Your brother has come, and your father has killed a fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.

But he was angry and refused to go in.

His father came out in and treated him.

He said, come on in.

Why come in?

This is a big deal.

Verse 29, but he answered his father, Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command.

Yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate with my friends.

But when this son of yours, not even his brother now, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.

He spent all of the inheritance on vile sin.

You never let me have a party, but he shows up and you're throwing the biggest party of all.

The son is offended and upset.

Some people who walk away from God, who know Jesus, but then walk away from Him, they are afraid that Christians will act like the older brother if they come back home to Him.

I can't say that's never happened or that it won't ever happen, but I've not really seen that.

But Jesus told this story because religious people were upset that Jesus was celebrating with and welcoming sinners who had come home to God.

Jesus' point was this, I am celebrating because people like the son in this story who have left God have come home.

I am celebrating because that is what God the Father is doing.

So why is the Father celebrating?

Because His Son is born again.

In verse 31 to 32, the Father gives the reason for the party.

And He said to Him, Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

It was fitting to celebrate and be glad for this, your brother.

Don't forget who he is.

He was dead.

He is alive.

He was lost.

And is found.

We're talking about being born again.

In John chapter 3, Nicodemus shows up and he's got questions for Jesus.

Jesus knows the question.

He just cuts the chase.

Unless someone is born again, they cannot see the kingdom of God.

Well, Nicodemus takes it very literally, very scientifically, very biologically.

How can a man be born when he is old?

But Jesus has something else in mind.

What he has in mind is people who have walked away from God, who are dead to God, who have literally said, I wish you were dead.

But now they have come to their senses and turned away and come back home.

We are born again through faith in Jesus Christ.

Kids, when we've seen baptisms and when a person is baptized, a preacher will often say this based on good biblical teaching.

Buried in waters of baptism, raised to newness of life.

Baptism is something like a little skit, a little play that demonstrates visibly being born again.

Raised to walk in newness of life.

The story has a son who is dead, but alive again because he's come home.

What is God like?

He gives people new life.

He celebrates when people who were mired in sin come back home and are born again.

And in fact, he is seeking to save that which was lost.

When we think about Bible truths, we have to then ask the question, what is the application?

Is there a truth to know, a command to obey, or an example to follow?

We've been looking at the truth to know.

Here's what God is like.

Here's the example to follow.

Jesus was sent by the Father to seek out that which was lost.

We should do the same.

And when sinners come home, we celebrate.

Maybe you don't celebrate in front of them.

Like, I can't believe you're here, because that might be really awkward.

I don't know.

But maybe we celebrate.

If not externally inside, we're jumping.

We're going out of our way to make sure they know we're glad they're here.

What is God like?

He's compassionate.

The son's choices had brought him to a very lowly, humble state.

You might say he was humiliated.

But the father knew this and had compassion.

This isn't a statement that his decisions were not bad.

He just said, we're going to move past that now.

And then he was gracious.

See, as Christians, aren't you glad that God is gracious?

I thought about this passage.

I had someone told me that their daughter came and got ahold of this survey.

And it was a survey you'd fill out, and it would kind of tell you how much you're like, how likely you are to struggle with depression.

And she does this thing and goes, it's like nothing.

She goes, how come there's so much depression and I have nothing?

And the mom looked at her and goes, probably because you're following Jesus and you have a Christian family, and you've never walked away from God.

Am I saying that people who are close to Christ don't ever struggle with depression?

That's not what I'm saying.

What I am saying is sometimes we who have always stayed close to God don't know what it's like to be the prodigal son.

And I'd rather I wouldn't want it any other way.

I hope my kids never walk away from Christ.

But even us who have stayed with God, we're sinners too.

All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

The Gospel is good news for everybody.

It was good news for the son who was prodigal, and the son who stayed home because he was a sinner too.

Here's what I want you to know.

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

That is salvation by grace through faith.

And for those who have already put your trust in Jesus, remember that you're really not that much different than the prodigal son.

And so when other prodigals come home, we celebrate compassion.

Amen, Floyd.

And for those who have yet to come home to Jesus Christ for salvation, what is holding you back?

You're sitting in a room full of people that want to celebrate with God the Father, that you who were dead are alive to God.

Let's join in the celebration.

And if you're far from God, come back home.

We're going to take Lord's Supper here in a moment.

And Lord's Supper is an interesting thing.

We all who were prodigal sons, we've come to faith in Jesus Christ.

Lord's Supper is for believers only.

You don't have to be a member of Calvary Baptist Church to take Lord's Supper.

But we do ask that you make sure that you are a believer in Jesus Christ for salvation.

Because the Lord's Supper is a meal that prodigal children celebrate.

Because they have come home to Jesus Christ.

So we're going to take some time.

We're going to celebrate this Lord's Supper.

It is something we celebrate because what we are remembering is what Christ did for us on the cross so that we prodigals could be reunited with the Father.

Here's what the Apostle Paul writes about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11.

I'm going to jump down.

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus Christ was a betrayer who took bread.

And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body which is broken for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.

Then he gives us instructions.

Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy matter will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

Let a person examine himself then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Then he gives us a warning.

For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Because in taking the Lord's Supper, you are proclaiming the Lord's death on the cross and the shedding of his blood.

If we are not putting our trust in Jesus for salvation and we take the Lord's Supper, we are essentially saying that Christ's death does not matter to me.

So the first thing when it comes to examining ourself is number one, are you in the faith?

That is, are you a believer in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins?

If you are not, I would ask you to not take Lord's Supper with us at this time and come see me after service.

I'd love to talk with you about how to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

But the Lord's Supper is for believers only.

We are not being exclusionary.

We are being obedient to Christ by proclaiming this to you.

Second thing, when it comes to examining ourselves, each one of us as Christians, we know that we still struggle with sin.

I don't know about you, but I wouldn't have to look very far back into the week to find times when I have sinned.

And so when we examine ourselves, we ask God to help us see sins that we have committed, ask Him for forgiveness, determining to not commit those sins anymore.

And even if necessary, to go to a person we might have offended and make those things right.

So let's take a moment to pause and quiet reflection, and confess any known sins.

And then I will close this in prayer, and then we will take Lord Supper.

So, God our Father, we thank You for this teaching of Jesus, Only Begotten Son, that You are a compassionate God, a gracious God who celebrates when sinners come home to You.

We praise You for that and thank You for that.

We are also aware that as followers of Christ, we still struggle with sin.

We thank You that the cross covers our sin, the blood of Christ in whom we have trusted, washes our sins away.

And so we ask You corporately and individually, that You do forgive us of our sins.

Thank You for hearing us.

Thank You for forgiving us.

Because as Your Word says in 1 John, You are faithful and just to forgive us of our sins.

In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

If you want to open up the bread side of your cup.

On the night when the Lord was betrayed, He took bread and broke it and said, This is my body which is broken for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.

On the same night also, he took the cup, said, This is my blood which is shed for you.

Do this in remembrance of me.

I'm gonna close in prayer, but don't forget that we have, we're taking up PACE offering today.

And again, midweek, we'll have the Churchwide Family Game Night.

And so look forward to seeing you then.

And next week on Sunday, we will be having Junior Church in the old Fellowship Hall.

So let's pray.

Grace is God, our Father, I thank You for this church.

I thank You for the cross of Christ and the unity of the Spirit that You have created.

I pray that as we go throughout our week, we would live in a way that brings glory to You.

Use this week to help bring prodigal children back home to You safely.

And we pray, Father, for our friends and loved ones who are sick today, strengthen them in body,

strengthen them emotionally if they are struggling with depression or anxiety or fear or bitterness and unforgiveness.

Help heal them.

We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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