

Rich Nathan
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Evangelism: The Heart of the Father
Luke 15:1-10

Five Rules That God Lives By

This morning I am going to continue in a series that I have been doing on the Heart of the Father. One of the points that I have been trying to make over the last several weeks is that we are going to have this Summer Harvest that many of you have been hearing about where at the end of the summer we will have four days of music and food and crafts. We are going to have a speaker in who will be able to help people to start a relationship with God. And we are involved in training the church. I am personally excited about this whole process in that together we can participate as a church toward a certain end—that is the end of reaching out to the larger community, to our neighbors and friends and family with the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.

But the thing that I have been asking the Lord for is that the Lord would not only unleash the church, that is to discharge all of us, as I so much want to be a part of a church that does not run based on the pastors or the pastors' activity, but that the church is off and running. And the church is trained and mobilized. That is Jesus' desire for the church. But in addition to that at the end of the summer when all is said and done, we really will be changed because we will have the heart of the Father in a much-increased way.

Now, this morning what I would like to do is to discuss with you some of the principles that govern the heart of the Father. You know, I believe that in growing in your relationship with God, it is really important for you to get to know the character of God. Those things about God that are fixed in him, that are unchangeable. The

principles or rules by which God relates to this world. I am convinced that most people look at God as being so changeable; being so arbitrary that there is not the sense that God has fixed convictions. God is not moody. He does not have bad days. He is not like some of our earthly parents, whom we needed to catch at the right moment to get something from them.

You need to understand, in growing in your relationship with God, that God is totally consistent and that God does live according to certain principles all of the time. In the same way that you can pretty much bet that the sun is going to rise each day, there are certain things that you can bet on when you look at the face of your Father in heaven. And these principles, I believe, can lay a foundation in your life of tremendous confidence, something that is really solid. Where you can say, “Ah, okay, well this is the way God is—period. All the time.”

There is no shadow of turning. He is not like this one day and then he changes the next day because of a change in circumstance, some unexpected occurrence or something that we do. The things I am going to lay out are the way God is all the time. And I think these five rules that God lives by himself are rules that he wants us to live by, the way we conduct ourselves in the world as we more and more gain the heart of the Father. I have called today’s talk, “Five Rules That God Lives By”. Let’s pray.

Luke 15:1-10

“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: ‘Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders

and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.'

'Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'"

I have called today's talk "The Five Rules That God Lives By". The first rule that God lives by is that *God likes people*, even those who don't know him. Let's look at verses 1 and 2: *"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear him [that means to hear Jesus], but the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, 'This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.'"*

What I would like to do is to contrast the view that the Pharisees had of tax collectors and sinners and the view that Jesus had of these two groups of people. First of all, I want to tell you who was meant by the tax collectors. Obviously, in every age people have not liked those who collect taxes. Tax collectors have never been popular at any time. Nobody enjoys giving a share of his or her money to the government. And people probably never will enjoy it. But tax collectors in Jesus' day were not simply viewed like the IRS, one of these necessary evils. People who are just doing a job for the government. See, they were viewed as robbers and not just government civil servants, but robbers. Tax collectors were generally despised by everyone in the ancient world.

The reason why you read about tax collectors so often in the Gospels as a group of people who were universally hated was because the way that a person became a tax collector was by purchasing the office from the government of Rome. See, the way the system back in Jesus' day worked was that wealthy people would purchase different government offices from Rome. So a wealthy person would give Rome a certain amount of money and purchase the office of tax collector. Rome was happy because it got an advance and then, that wealthy person would turn around and recoup the money that he gave to the government by gouging the people. And the tax collector worked on a commission basis. So what he would attempt to do is to take as much as he could from the people, keep a lot of it for himself and then give a little bit more to the Roman government.

I guess what would be comparable would be today if someone who was wealthy purchased a bridge over a river that was the only bridge into a city. And the way he would recoup his investment with the government was to gouge people by charging as much as the traffic would bear in order to make up for his loss. I think of shady businessmen selling cheap furniture, advertising EZ credit, gouging the poor and then planning to repossess it all.

So, tax collectors were hated because they generally really put the press on folks, especially the poor. They were hated because they were in complicity with the oppressive government. And sinners were people, not necessarily with a bad reputation for stealing or drunkenness, but sinners were the common, every day people who didn't even try to follow the rules and laws set out by the Rabbis and the Pharisees. Sinners were the every day man or woman who just didn't even try to follow the rules because they felt there was just no way.

Now, the Pharisees believed that in order to maintain their own integrity and to be holy and pure so that they could draw nearer to God, they needed to separate themselves from tax collectors and sinners. Because hanging around with these kinds of people, they believed, would corrupt them and make them ritually impure.

Now, they were looking at Jesus who was going around teaching people about God. He is not only talking with tax collectors and sinners which they would never do, in fact, the Rabbis taught that it was a waste of time and actually wrong to teach sinners the law of God. The only people Pharisees taught the law of God to were folks who actually turned from sin and really made a sincere attempt to follow the rules of the Rabbis. Then they would help to instruct those folks. But they would never try to instruct a sinner in the law of God.

Now they are looking at Jesus and Jesus is not only instructing sinners and tax collectors, but more than that in verse 2 it says, *“This man welcomes sinners, but he also eats with them.”* Again, to give you a little bit of cultural backdrop, to eat with someone in first century Palestine was so much more than just grabbing a bite to eat. Eating with someone was to have table fellowship with him or her. To sit down with a man over dinner was to invite that man into a relationship of intimacy and friendship. When two people were estranged—that is they had some conflict between them—the way the conflict would often be resolved would be by one of them inviting the other for a meal. Eating together was a sign that we are now reconciled. I want to have a relationship with you. That is why anyone you ate with was telling you that they were your friends. And that is why when Judas betrayed Jesus after a meal, it was so shocking. Because this man that Jesus had shared bread with had expressed to Jesus in the culture of the day, “I am

your friend. You are safe with me.” To turn your back on someone that you ate with was a shocking breach of social custom.

And so the Pharisees are looking at Jesus inviting these tax collectors, these hated people, and these sinners who don’t even try to follow the rules into intimate friendship with him. People we wouldn’t give the time of day to – loan sharks, pawnbrokers.

Now, we must see that Christ, who after all is God incarnate, God come in the flesh, reveals continually in the Gospels, a fundamental rule that governs the heart of God and that is that God likes people. Even those who don’t know him. God likes sinners, those people who don’t even try to follow the rules. Wrap your mind around this idea: God likes people. All people, even those we sneer at – people who have a different political affiliation than you, they are much more liberal or much more conservative.

I am not saying at all that God likes everything that people do. I am not saying that God says that every life style is equally okay in my sight. But, God likes people, even those who don’t know him. Even those who don’t try to obey. And lots of people don’t even try. Do you know that? If you talk with folks about church and if they were honest with you about why they don’t come to church and why they prefer to work in the garden on Sunday or read the paper or race around in their boat, whatever folks do, folks would say number one: Church is boring. They don’t understand the messages at all. Number two: All they want is your money. These are the top answers that surveys have indicated for why people don’t go to church. The sermons are boring and all they want is your money. Number three: People at church are unfriendly and don’t like people like me. Number four: There is probably no place for my kids. They don’t care about kids.

But I am convinced that at the bottom of people’s objections to going to church are two basic ideas. The first is that people are convinced that God does not like them.

This idea runs right down to the core of folks' view of God. That because of what they are and because of who you spend time with and because of what rules you have broken, because of your temperament, your wiring, your way of relating, your recreation, God does not like you.

Now, people respond out of that, I think, with anger toward God or belligerent statements toward the Father, but it is coming out of this wound in the soul, very fundamental: God does not like us.

Why do we think that? Well, there are lots of psychological reasons. Perhaps we have experienced profound disapproval growing up, this sense from father and mother. Parents often represent God to children. But sometimes we experience this continual sense of being a disappointment to father, being a disappointment to mother, never measuring up. Or to significant friends or to our spouses, we are just not what we ought to be. We are convinced that people in authority don't like us.

And in this regard, I believe that Robert Schueller is exactly right. That the average American doesn't think that God likes them. That is a major hurdle for people to overcome. Jesus welcomes sinners and tax collectors, and he actually eats with them, invites them into relationship.

And if they overcome that hurdle, the next hurdle that they are going to encounter is even if God might actually like me, the church almost certainly wouldn't like someone like me. I don't fit with Christians.

Friends, we Christians have an image problem in contemporary society. We need to be honest about this. We have an image problem. And the image that has been communicated to the larger society, sometimes very unfairly and sometimes fairly, is that

Christians probably will reject someone like me, whoever the person is. Because of what I do, because of who I am, because of how I look, I don't fit in.

Now, I believe that if we are to capture the heart of the Father, then it is incumbent upon churches and church planters to like people, even those who don't know God. See, there is something radically wrong (these are very basic concepts) with you or with me if we fundamentally do not like people, especially people who don't know God. We who have the Spirit of God, or claim to have the Spirit of God living through us, how is it that we can continually communicate to everyone around us by our way of relating, by our thoughts, that many of our colleagues at work are basically annoyances to us, that people who don't know God in our neighborhood are irritations, that we basically do not like people at our gym or fellow students, that we would prefer that these folks disappear.

I have been going down to Ohio State a couple of times in the last few weeks with some of the Ohio State students and the InterVarsity staff worker who works down at OSU. We have been talking with students on the oval about Jesus. And I have been listening to another preacher down on the campus. The basic message that I hear as I listen to this other preacher, and I think I am being fair to him, those of you who might have heard preaching down at OSU you can evaluate for yourself whether I am being fair, but the basic message that I am hearing is that God doesn't like students and that the preacher who is speaking doesn't like students either. That is simply unacceptable for a Christian.

Now, I know that not every single person is your cup of tea or my cup of tea. And I know we all struggle with liking someone at work or liking a neighbor or someone in the family. But I believe that if you are to have the heart of God, then you need to pray that God would change your heart and enable you to really care about someone that you

are presently struggling with. I also believe that you do need to find a group of people, every one of you needs to find a group of people who do not know God, but who you like and are drawn to. There must be some group of people that you just like—women in the neighborhood, someone at your gym, a few guys that you play racquetball with. I happen to like students. I just naturally like them. I like the way students relate. I like the way they think. I like their questions. I like their curiosity and their openness. I enjoy hanging around with college students. And so I like going down to OSU. But there must be some group of people that you like and that you can relate to.

I can't emphasize this first principle enough. That is we Christians must communicate to the world that God likes and, yes, God loves people. Even those who don't know him. And that we, the church, also like people – not just people who go to church and not just people who try to be good.

The second rule that God lives by is this: *God values people* no matter how many rules they have broken. I want to look at this story of the woman with the lost coin in a moment to show you the value that God places on one lost coin. Of course, in the first story we see God's valuing of one lost sheep out of a hundred. In this second story, in verse 8, the woman has one lost coin out of ten. There was a woman who has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?

Why does the woman value the coin that she is looking for so much? And why do I say that God values people no matter how many rules they have broken?

Well, you know, when you think about a coin, first of all, we realize that the coin had an image on it, a likeness of a person. Now if the coin fell; in ancient Palestine the floors were made of dirt; if the coin rolled into some dirt or fell into a crack in the floor

and got full of dust, the image on the coin was still retained. So it is with us. God's image, his likeness is in people no matter how much dust he or she has on them and no matter how much dirt. No matter how many rules the person has broken. God values people because we bear his image.

But I think there is a second thing in this lost coin that perhaps you don't realize. You see, the ten coins that the woman had bore a special meaning in Jesus' day. They weren't just 10 coins thrown in a purse. On her wedding day a bride would be given a headdress, a dowry, with ten coins placed on a string. She would wear those ten coins on her head as a headdress at her wedding. The 10 coins symbolized her marriage to her husband.

But if a wife was ever unfaithful, what a husband would do is break that string of coins and they would go rolling on the ground. It was like taking away someone's wedding ring or putting a scarlet A on her forehead. Understand a woman's horror if she woke up one day and discovered that despite her faithfulness and fidelity to her husband, somehow the string of ten coins had gotten broken and one of those coins had rolled away into the dirt somewhere. In panic, she begins to think, "What are my friends going to say? What are the neighbors going to think? They will think that I have been unfaithful. They will think that I haven't loved my husband." Her honor is at stake. Her reputation is at risk.

Do you know that God values people because he sees in us the image of God? But you know, God also goes after folks because the honor of God, the reputation of God, just like that woman's, is at stake. If we remain lost, you say how is the reputation of God at stake? Isn't it the case that many people accuse God, saying that God doesn't want to have a relationship with people. That God is the kind of God who likes to hide

himself. That God is the kind of God who won't stoop down to our level. He won't give us evidences of his existence. He won't let us in to the mystery of finding the way to God. It is always going to be a guess whether God exists or not. God's reputation is at stake so long as people die in their sins and are not rescued by God.

You know, Moses tapped into this idea that God's reputation is at stake in Exodus 32, when God threatened to leave the Jewish people. Moses said to God – the Egyptians are going to say it's because God couldn't save the Jews; it's because God doesn't care that he let them die in the desert. One of the great prayers for evangelism and for world missions you can pray is “Lord, for your name's sake, for your honor, rescue this person.” Not because we deserve it, not for what we've done – just so people don't get the idea that you don't value them.

And if a sheep is valued by the shepherd and if a coin is valued by a woman, how much more, the parables are trying to communicate, do people matter to God? Friends, it doesn't matter to God that he has 99 sheep saved in the church. As if that balances out the one that is not yet in the church. God doesn't care that the church is already big. He cares about the one coin that is not yet in, the one person. If we are to gain the heart of the Father, then we've got to completely repent of the idea that the church is too big already. In the heart of God, there is always room for one more. Not only must we like people, even those who don't know God, but we also must live as if people matter because people matter to God.

It is a radical concept to live as if people matter above everything else. We have so many substitutes in our life for people don't we? We substitute computer games and preoccupation with fixing up and decorating our homes. Studying, cars, trying to advance in business and all of that. God has a primary value: people. People matter.

Wealthy people matter to God. Poor people matter to God. One older person stuck in a nursing home matters to God. A mother with AIDS matters to God. Your boss matters to God. Your professor matters to God. Down and outers matter to God. Up and outers matter to God.

Now, I spend so much time in this – on the first two principles that God likes people and God values people because I believe that the proper way to preach the gospel to folks is to begin with the good news. God likes you, God values you and God wants a relationship with you. There has been an unfortunate way, I believe, an unbiblical way, I believe, in preaching the gospel which is to tell people bad news—God hates your sin; you are lost and going to hell—before communicating the good news of God’ rescue. I don’t think that is the biblical pattern. That has been the pattern of preaching for 300 years of Protestantism. But I don’t think that is the biblical pattern.

The biblical pattern starts off with creation, good news. God likes you and you are made in God’s image. Then we hear the bad news: But you are fallen and you have turned from God. And then we hear the good news: But God has engaged in a rescue operation for you by sending his son, Jesus Christ, into the world to open up the way to God. Biblically, we say good news, then bad news, and then good news. So, we start with the good news, only then do we mention the bad news.

What is the bad news? The bad news is that people are lost without God. People who do not know God and who are not walking in relationship with God are lost. And so Jesus tells a parable where we see the same element in three different stories. A man has a sheep and loses one of them. A woman has a coin and loses one of her coins. A father has a son and loses one of his sons. Lost sheep, lost coins and lost son. Jesus is trying to communicate that without God, people are lost. Lost Forever. God does not force

someone who doesn't want a relationship with him to have one. People are lost in sin. Like sheep, we nibble our way away from God. We just wander away from God continually like sheep.

We see a pasture that looks better than God. We think that over there with that person and in that activity, doing that thing will get us greater satisfaction, greater fulfillment, greater peace of mind than being with God, near God, in the Father's house and so we nibble our way away from God. Don't we do that all of the time? We find God substitutes. And we lose our relationship with God bite by bite. Nibble by nibble.

And if it is not by wandering away from God, then it is through neglect. You know, a coin gets dropped and dirty. No wandering, just negligence – no attention to order in our lives. Or it is by willfulness and rebellion. We know better. We know what the rules of the game are. We know how to stay close to the Father. We willfully choose not to like the lost son. People are lost in sin.

But I also believe, friends, that people are lost in suburbia. It is so important that you see the world through the eyes of God. And with the eyes of God, you have to begin to look at every person that you see, who doesn't know God, as lost. Now, I know that it doesn't seem that way. You look at one of your neighbors in suburbia. You look at someone driving by you in this great car and you say to yourself: You know, what does that guy need? He has the pretty wife on his arm. That person has a great house. He seems to have the great job and great kids. Great body.

I will tell you something, there is no one whom I have ever met, no one, who when they have let me in on their life, when I have been able to somehow been able to penetrate the veneer, I have never met anyone who has not had significant holes and deep, deep needs. Whatever the pretty exterior is, that pretty wife hasn't slept with her

husband for three months; she is so angry with him; their relationship is so frayed, and they are just going in two different directions; that great house—that great house is mortgaged to the hilt. That great job that you are so impressed by? The guy will tell you that there is so much pressure on him from that great job. They are talking about taking over. The great job is not so secure. There are going to be cutbacks. Those great kids—he hasn't a clue why those great kids don't want to relate to him. If those kids talk to you, which they probably won't, but if they did they would tell you that they can't relate to their father, that they are angry with their father. Don't be fooled by the veneer of how wonderful your neighbors seem to be. Everyone has a hole that can only be filled by God.

You know in your own life how big the holes are. Whether the hole is in your marriage and the fact that you can't figure out why your spouse is always so upset. Or you are a very anxious person. Or it is in your job or in some life-controlling habit. Or in your kids. People are lost without God. That is an absolute rule of the universe set up by the Lord himself – we cannot find our way on our own; on our own, with us in control, we get lost.

The fourth rule that God lives by is that *God makes an all-out effort to find lost people*. In the case of the sheep, Jesus says in verse 4, “*Suppose one of you has a 100 sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the 99 in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it?*”

Suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it?

God makes an all-out effort to find the lost. And in God's all-out effort to find the lost, God initiates the search. He goes. There is nothing like this in all the world's

religions of God who initiates a search for people who are not interested in him. Who aren't interested in obeying the rules. Who aren't interested in church. Who aren't interested in having a relationship with God. There is nothing like this in all the world's religions, a God who initiates a search for lost, sinful people like us, who have been trying to maintain control of our lives without God.

After all, there are at least three other ways for God to respond to the lost. He could respond to the lost the way the Pharisees did by hating and despising people who break the rules, telling them regularly how much he dislikes them and how bad they are. He could be merely indifferent. Hey, I don't care if one of the sheep is lost or if one of the coins rolls away. Big deal. I have 99 nice, clean people in church, safe and sound, who cares about that one person who doesn't know me?

He could welcome people if they come to him. Many churches are like that. You know, they are very friendly. If you come, we will be friendly to you.

But God takes a fourth step and always communicates this value to his people the church: God goes after the lost. He doesn't simply say: If you come, I will welcome you. He goes after people and tells us to go after people. Christianity is not just a "come ye" message; Christianity is a "go ye" message. Go out to all the world. Go to the highways. Go to the byways. Go to the lost. God initiates the search.

The Bible in 1 John says we love because he first loved us. There is a hymn that recognizes God's initiation when it says: "I sought the Lord and afterwards I knew, He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me. It was not I who found O Savior true. No, I was found of thee."

God spoke to a philosopher four centuries ago, a guy by the name of Pascal. And he told Pascal, "You would not be searching for me if I had not already found you."

Do you understand that the reason why you want a relationship with God, the reason why you turn, sometimes, to God, the reason why you think about turning control of your life to God who values you is because God himself is drawing near to you? God is searching for you.

And God perseveres in the search. In verse 4 the key word is “until”. Does he not leave the 99 in the open country and go after it *until* he finds it. And in verse 8, the same key word is found, the word “until”. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully *until* she finds it?

God keeps going after people until they are rescued. He doesn’t give up. He doesn’t give up on the lost. He keeps going after them.

Let me ask you a question. Are you persevering in your search? Is there anyone in your life that you have given up on in terms of their ever finding God? Listen, a rule that governs the heart of God: God doesn’t give up on people. Is there anyone whom you have given up on? Some of us have given up on our parents. We have tried to talk and tried to relate. They aren’t interested and are into something else, into fixing up the house or into whatever it is they are into.

Maybe you have given up on a child. They have turned their back on you. They are into a life-style that you don’t approve of.

You have given up on someone at work. You have given up on a spouse after years of prayer, or on an old friend who just has never been interested in spiritual things.

I want to encourage you. God keeps persevering until he finds us. Some of you have given up on yourself. You don’t know if you can live the Christian life. It seems too demanding. One of the saddest things that could ever happen is a person giving up on himself or herself. I can never have a quality relationship with God because of this or

that in my life. Listen, God has not given up on you, even if others have, or if you have given up on yourself.

And God spares no expense in finding us. The man in verse 5, after searching diligently for joyfully puts the sheep on his shoulders and carries it back. The woman lights the lamp, sweeps the floor, and spares no expense. So it is in the search that God has for lost men and women. God spares no expenses. The hymn tells us: “He left his father’s throne above so free, so infinite his grace, emptied himself of all but love and bled for Adam’s helpless race. Amazing love.”

What are you willing to spend? How much are you willing to spend to see a lost person be rescued? Are you willing to spend 15 minutes in a conversation? Are you willing to be inconvenienced? Are you willing to risk your image to a neighbor or colleague or fellow student by letting them know that you are a Christian? Are you willing to spend a drop of reputation?

God spares no expense. He makes an all-out effort. He asks his people to join him in his heart.

Now, the fifth and final rule that governs the heart of God is *God experiences joy and wants to share his joy with us*. It says in verse 5: “*When he finds the sheep he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors and says, ‘Rejoice with me. I have found my lost sheep. I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent.’*”

Verse 9, likewise with the coin: “*When she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me. In the same way, I tell you there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.’*”

When they speak about 99 who need no repentance, I believe that Jesus was talking about 99 people who think they don't need to turn to repent, who like to think of themselves as righteous people who don't have holes in their lives. I think of church people when I look at the 99. I think of those of us who believe we have the heart of God and we are living according to God's rules, but we aren't. We aren't governed by the rules that God lives by. We don't regularly ask ourselves, "Do we really like people?" Do we really value lost people? Is it showing up in the way that we spend our time and energy and worry and effort? Do we really see that people are lost without God? Do we really make an effort to search?

Do you know that God experiences joy? I know that there is this view of God, which portrays God as like an emotionless marble statue who doesn't feel anything. But you know, this shepherd really does like finding the sheep and rejoices. And this woman really does enjoy finding the coin that has the image on it and rescuing her reputation that was lost. You can imagine what God feels like when one of his children who is lost is found.

Parents, have you ever lost one of your kids? Have them wander away in a shopping mall? Leave the backyard without telling you? Wander out of a car? Have you ever had that horrible feeling? Your little four-year old is lost in a crowd amongst strangers? Didn't come home on time on the bus? Isn't where you thought they would be? How did you feel when you found them? Joy. This is really a reflection of how the Father feels when he finds us. When he can pick us up. You know, the rabbis used to say that God rejoices at the destruction of the wicked, but the truth is God's joy is lit by the rescuing, the saving of the lost. And that joy in saving people – he desires to share with us. The shepherd says to his friends: "Rejoice with me." The woman says to her

neighbors: “Rejoice with me.” The Father says to the church: “Rejoice with me. I want to share my joy with you. I don’t want to just have it for myself. I want you guys in the church to be able to rejoice with me.”

I know there are many, many of us who have found the Christian life to be rather unexciting. There is no thrill. Things have just gotten boring. The coke has lost its fizz. Why? Because you are not sharing the joy of your Father.

How do you share the joy of God? By participating in those things that God enjoys. Those things that the happiness of God is on. Wherever the kingdom is being extended, that is where Jesus is and that is where his joy is.

The joy of God is expressed as we use our spiritual gifts to God’s glory. Those of you who are trained and enjoy worship as Christ is honored, God rejoices and he shares that joy with a worshiper. Those of you who are compassionate and have captured God’s heart for wounded, hurt people, for people who have been abused – as you care for people, as you pray for people, God’s kingdom is being extended and you are going to share in God’s joy. Visit a nursing home, hand out a bag of groceries, do a back yard Bible club for kids.

God enjoys seeing people come to know him. When was the last time, if ever, you experienced and shared in the joy of leading another person to Christ? When was the last time you shared your faith? For some of us it has been too long. You have missed the joy. And there is no substitute, no sweeter wine, than the joy of God.