

The Heart of the Father

Rich Nathan

May 13-14, 1995

Evangelism: The Heart of the Father

Luke 15:11-31

This morning I am going to start a new series to prepare us for our Summer Harvest. I have been talking about it over the last few weeks, but this summer we are planning to focus, as a church, on reaching out to the community around us. And we began laying a foundation for reaching out to the community, to those who live in houses around here, to our neighbors and friends, by taking some time last weekend. Several hundred of us gathered together to fast and pray.

As I have mentioned to you, we are planning to take about four days at the end of August to set up a tent out in the parking lot and have food and music. Something that each one of us can participate in and bring friends to. There will be guest speakers. I think we are just going to have a wonderful time.

See, the church is designed to not just exist for itself. The church in the plan of God exists for God and also for others. The moment that we lose sight of the other-directedness of the church, then the church begins to die. And so often, the tendency in western Christianity has been unfortunately institutional self-preservation where the church just exists to keep the institution going and to cater to its own members. The moment a church turns in on itself and exists only to preserve itself for another year or another ten years, the church is bound to wither and die.

The thing that keeps a church's fire alive is focus on God in worship and a focus on the world in evangelism and compassion. That brings fire and life back into the church and that fuels everything else.

In preparation for this Summer Harvest, what I would like to do today is to begin with the story of a runaway as we talk about "The Heart of the Father." As I prayed for what God wanted to do this week, the theme that kept coming back to my mind was that the Father wanted to show us his heart. And if, as part of the fruit of the week, we as a church have gained the Father's heart for the world, the Father's heart for us, we will have a lot at the end of the summer to be grateful for and to celebrate.

Where I would like to begin in talking about the Father's heart is in one of the really familiar stories of the New Testament. Turn with me to Luke 15.

—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. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything."*—

Jesus tells a story about two sons. There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Give me my share of the estate." In my opinion, he is referring, symbolically, to the Gentiles and the Jews. The Gentiles are the younger son. The one who came along later in the plan of salvation. The Jews are the older son. The ones who were first chosen by God for salvation.

We see here the younger son turns to the father and says: "Father, give me my share of the estate." In Jesus' day, the oldest son would get the lion's share of an estate. Usually that meant about two-thirds of the father's wealth. The youngest son was entitled to one-third of the father's wealth.

And so the other son demands his inheritance immediately. I wonder what was going on in the heart of that young man that he was so eager to leave the father's house? You know, I can imagine that when he was very young, he probably very much enjoyed being near to his father. Maybe he followed his father around the fields as his dad oversaw the workmen working in his fields. Maybe he tried to walk behind his dad and copy his walk. Maybe when his dad was swinging a large hammer, he took out his little hammer and imitated his dad, just loving being with his Dad.

I can imagine the son just sitting and staring at his father while his father read at night. Imitating his father's prayers, folding his hands just the way dad did. Maybe he even enjoyed putting on his father's shoes or one of his father's large robes and walking around in his father's clothing.

But as he grew older, something happened inside the young man. He began, perhaps like lots of teenagers, to resent the rules in his father's house. There just seemed to be so many rules. He would sit and stare outside the window of his house and watch his friends able to do things that his father told him were off limits to him. And while Dad tried to reason with the son, he tried to explain to his son that the rules were designed for protecting his son, so that his son would grow up healthy and not wounded. Yet, the son, I think, grew increasingly resentful. Sometimes he and his father would get into shouting matches. "Why can't I stay out later? Why do I have to clean out the dishwasher? Why can't I get a tattoo? Why do I have to do the laundry and take out the garbage?" You know, you don't have to argue to be a rebel. Like the old story of the little boy whose mom told him to stand up – he said, "Well, I'm standing up on the inside." I can imagine the son at times internally saying to himself, "I wish the old man would get off my back and stop riding me so hard. All of these rules, I feel like I can't breathe. It is so stifling and so limiting being in the father's house. Sometimes I just hate being here. I wish my father would just leave me alone and get off my back."

Have you ever felt like that with God? Where you just wanted to do something that you knew that God didn't approve of and you felt the Father's presence near you so that it made you uncomfortable? Have you ever internally said to God, "Leave me alone?" Have you ever felt unhappy because of the restrictions that are placed on you as a follower of Christ? Sometimes it just seems like there are so many rules. Why can't I explore my sexual feelings a little? Why can't I drink whatever I want to? Why can't I have a little fun? What is wrong with partying? Why can't I go to certain movies? What is wrong with dating someone who is outside the faith? They are nice. Why do I have to live with all of these rules? I don't want to hear any more about why they are for my

own good. I don't feel like a daughter or a son. I feel like staying here in the Father's house is like being a slave.

And so the son kicks away from his father in the story. And, by the way, the son has some support from a few relatives and friends who say to the son, "You know, it is a good thing to get away from the father's house for a little while. You really need to explore the limits of your freedom. Every young person needs to test his wings for a while. You can't live in such a stifling environment." Some older brothers or sisters are talking in the son's ear telling him, "Yeah, dad is a little tough on you." The bachelor uncle is saying, "Son, you know, let me tell you some stories from when I was your age and in the service. It is a good thing for a young man to sow his wild oats."

Friends are saying, "Come on and move in with us. Leave the father's house and move in with us. We are having a blast. No rules and nobody to tell us what to do."

What is in the heart of the son? I think it is the desire for freedom, a desire to explore life without the limits of the father. Just like Adam and Eve in the Garden. I just want to enjoy life without all of the "Thou shalt nots" of God. Don't do this and don't do that. Without bumping into the father everywhere I turn.

And so he demands from the father his inheritance. Give me my inheritance. I want your gifts, father, but I want to enjoy them without you. I want the good life. But I want the good life without reference to God.

Friends, isn't that where many of you are right now with your parents? We want to enjoy the good things in life. We want the cars and the video games and the money for the movies and the tons of presents on our birthdays and Christmas. Give me all the goodies but don't make me talk to you or have a relationship with you. I think that is where a lot of folks are with God "Keep me well; don't let me get sick or in an accident. Help me with this test, but I don't have time to have a really deep relationship with you.

Inside of the son's heart there may have even been a death wish. I am so sick and tired of the old man I wish he were dead. Back in the 60's radical theologians were trumpeting this. God is dead. Now we can really enjoy life and come into full humanity, full personhood, without ever having to tip our hats to God or refer to God. Let's get rid of all God-language.

What was the father's response to the son's demand for freedom? How does the father respond to the son's desire for the gifts of the father that will be used outside of the father's house? We all sit around and wait...what is the father going to say?

The father gets up from the table and goes inside and opens a drawer. He takes out a deed to some of the land on the farm. He walks back outside and hands it to the son.

Get out of my life, God. What does the Father do? He gives the son half the farm. I think to myself, "Have you no discernment? Why so extravagant? You know, the one in this story who is prodigal is not the son, it's the Father." Have you ever been bothered by the generosity, the extravagance of God – not toward you, of course, not toward us; we say, "God, pour it on" but toward others? He allows us to have our freedom.

Doesn't that trouble you? That God regularly lets your heart wander from him? We say to God, "God, can't you keep me on a shorter leash? Won't you assert your power more and just dominate me and pin me to the ground? Make me obey you."

But every time our hearts tug away from the father, he says, "If that is what you want, you can have your freedom. If you would prefer living outside my house and away from the rules of my house, I will let you do that."

I am stunned sometimes by the amount of freedom that God gives to his children. When I reflect on the abundance of freedom, sometimes I actually get resentful and wish God had made the world otherwise. Why do you allow people to do what they do? Why do you let people make life miserable for others? Why do you let parents get divorced or continually fight? Why so much freedom?

And yet God has made us in his image, wanting from people a free response of love. He never intended for us to be robots. He wants people to make internal decisions for him. And if we choose to leave, he allows us to leave.

Well, in this next movement in the story, we see the son's decline into slavery. Verse 13: *"Not long after that, the younger son got together all that he had and set off for a distant country. There he squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything."*

Jesus is telling us a story about the squandering of one's gifts and the descent of the younger son to the very depths of degradation. The son's story here is a story that many of us know. It is our story. Many of us can see ourselves and see people we love in the story of the younger son. When we first venture away from the father's house, it is quite enjoyable, really. It is nice to be on our own for a while. To explore freedom and to enjoy things that we were never allowed to do in the father's house.

Internally, after the celebration of a little bit of freedom, a sense of unease usually sets in as we begin to be reminded of the Father. Maybe someone starts talking to us about God. Maybe someone invites us to church or a Bible study. There is something on television where a person is speaking about repentance. Maybe we are driving down the road and there is a church sign that says, "Turn from your wicked ways" and in the condition that we are in as we are running from the father's house, that sign comes to us like a thunderbolt from the sky. And so we must run farther and engage ourselves in even more diversions in order to keep thoughts of our Father far from our minds.

Note this well. A person who is running from the Father's house cannot allow themselves a moment of reflection, a moment of contemplation, alone to think about the Father, to think about the Father's house because if they begin to let those thoughts creep in, then their whole game is up. So when we run from the Father's house, we must intensify the diversions, the stimulations, and the merry-go-round of activities. And it may not be drinking or smoking pot or sex. It may be we just get a part time job and work 35 more hours a week, or get totally obsessed with sport or dance or shopping. I watch adults running from God just

plunge into decorating their homes. Have you ever watched someone whose life is just consumed with home decoration? You know, we are now working on the master bedroom and we are picking out colors and fabrics. Then we're going to work on the upstairs bathroom, then the dining room. And on and on and on and, it never stops. It is just a way to divert ourselves from thoughts of the Father.

Oh, we just bought ourselves a country home. And I am going to spend days down there gardening and canning. All of people's diversions are not necessarily partying. It may be that a person who is running from the Father may be a person who plunges themselves into work. I cannot give myself a moments rest because when I do I realize I am on the run. It is exhausting, but I have to keep my mind diverted and stimulated.

And, of course, in that state internally we realize that we are just playing a game. We can barely keep on fooling ourselves. We know that a lot of our friends aren't true friends. They'd dump us in a moment if they had a date. When we are away from the Father's house, we don't have true friends who can be relied on. They are all just like us—on a desperate run from the Father. They are just like us. They have no anchor for their souls. They are just grabbing and needy, here for the moment.

So, it says in the text that the son squandered all that he had.

Have you ever squandered the gifts of God? That God gave you a precious inheritance and you just wasted it? I have. Wasted opportunities. Wasted relationships. Have you ever squandered something?

You know, some of you have squandered your abilities academically. Precious gift from God, yet we wanted something else.

Others of you have squandered our relationships with our parents. We have just so limited amounts of time to be with them. But there were other things for us to do.

In this decline, this over-stimulation and pursuit of diversions, this squandering of wealth, it says in verse 15: *"He went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country."* Literally, the Greek says that *"he attached himself to a citizen of that country."* What a fitting way to describe addiction. Here is a man who had to nail himself to someone else, to something else.

You know, we really believe in the illusion of ultimate freedom without any restraints whatever. We believe since the Garden of Eden that we could be out on our own for a period of time and take a little vacation from God and find freedom. We are continually lied to about freedom. In fact, the Bible teaches and life teaches that we always are mastered. Either we are mastered by God our Father or we get mastered by our diversions and our need for continuous stimulation and our need for getting people's approval. We get enslaved to eating disorders or pornography or other people's opinions.

There is no complete freedom. We either submit to God our Father and yield ourselves to him, surrender, or we bring into our lives a thousand harsh masters. If ever there was a picture of addiction, here it is. This young man attaches himself to a citizen of that country who sends him into the fields to feed pigs.

You know, the Jews used to have a list of dishonorable professions. In fact, there were professions that a woman was permitted to divorce her husband

if he was involved in one of those professions. You know, under rabbinical law if he was a dung collector, she could divorce her husband. There was nothing more dishonorable in Jewish culture than being a pig farmer. This would be an impossibility for a Jew. And it just reminds me that while this man was feeding the pigs, hanging around Gentiles, that he finds himself doing things that he never thought he would ever do in a million years.

Has that ever happened to you? Where you are suddenly doing something, involved in something that you said, "There is no way that I could ever do that." You weren't raised that way. Or this thing is contrary to all of your values and yet you did it? The student who was raised in a good family, with good morals, and she finds herself in bed laying next to a man in the middle of the night, staring into the darkness, thinking, "How did this ever happen? Mom and Dad told me not to do this. This is contrary to everything that I am."

Has it ever happened where you found yourself involved in something that you just never thought you would be involved in? The cycle down? All the way to the point where the boy wants to eat the pods that the pigs were eating. He got so low that he had this unfulfilled longing for garbage.

Now I am so hooked, so addicted, that there is a longing in my heart for this perverted sexuality or this wrong relationship, or this drug.

What is the father's response to the son's cycle down? What is the Father's response when you cycle down or when I cycle down? We run, we squander, we get addicted. What is the Father's response?

We don't see him at this moment, but we know later on in the story what the father is doing. He is waiting. Just waiting. One pastor called the whole parable "The Waiting Father". What an incredible way to describe the heart of the Father. He waits for us. The Bible says that the Father is patient with us. There are times where the thought of the Father's patience toward me has broken my heart as I have thought about how many times I have had to go to God with the same issues. How the Father is always there and always patient.

I think about the words of Jesus as he looked over the city of Jerusalem. *"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you kill the prophets and stone those sent to you. How often I have longed to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings."*

How often God the Father has waited for us wanting to draw us back to himself. It is the heart of a father to be long suffering, to be absolutely patient, not willing that anyone of us should perish.

So the story goes on. It says, *"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare? And here I am starving to death. I will set out and go back to my father and say to my father, father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men.'* So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son and threw his arms around him and kissed him."

Here in verses 17-20 we see the determination on the part of the son to return. He came to his senses. Literally, it says, "He came to himself." He awoke as from a dream. He had been spending so much time diverting himself and stimulating himself. Running and making sure that no thoughts broke in of

his father. But somehow the cloud that was over his mind just passed and he determines to go back.

I want to make one simple point here. What is it that draws us back? And this, by the way, this little paragraph here is a perfect picture of the nature of repentance. But what is it that makes a man or a woman change and repent? When they have cycled down and find themselves in this place of terrible shame and addiction and bondage and confusion, what makes a man or woman change?

I want to tell you what it is not. There is a popular myth that says a man or woman changes when they hit bottom. When they get so sick of themselves and sick of their condition and they say, "I am going to change."

I don't think that produces repentance, just hitting bottom. Just getting sick of yourself. You know, you can be sick of yourself for years and just keep on repeating the same behaviors. We can be absolutely upset with ourselves and distraught with our behaviors, confused about why we would sin the way we do and yet never change. It is not hitting bottom, friends. It is not just finally getting fed up with ourselves that changes. What is it?

It is the thought of our Father. When the man comes to his senses, what breaks through the cloud is his Father's face. What changes us is the thought that breaks in, "I could be back in my Father's house again." It is the longing for the Father. The idea that comes to our mind is that I could have a relationship with God. That I could change. I don't have to live this way. I could experience for myself the love of God my Father. Always, always, what changes us ultimately are thoughts of the Father. Your sin will never appear so awful to you as to drive you to change. But if you let thoughts of God your Father break in, if you will not run, just stop for a minute and think about how much the Father loves you and is waiting for you, how much you could have if you were with him—that will drive you to change.

This story is a wonderful story of repentance because he not only resolved something in his mind, but repentance is shown here by his getting up and going to his father. Verse 20: He got up and went to his father.

Many of us think we are repenting when we think through an issue of our sin. When we make certain plans in our minds and certain promises and determinations. But all the while, we are staying fixed in a place, in a wrong setting, in a home, in a wrong relationship, in a wrong behavior, in a wrong attitude. There is no repentance until we do verse 20, getting up and going back. Breaking off the relationship. Calling the person up and saying, "I am sorry we cannot do this anymore. Good-bye." Leaving the place. Leaving the friendship. Leaving the addiction. Walking away. It is not just thinking that the son did. He broke it off and left and went back to his Father.

What is the father's response? While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The Father runs—the running Father. Now, the impact of Jesus' statement is not nearly so shocking to us today as it would have been in the day of his hearers. Well, let me tell you that in Jesus' day, what he said here would have been absolutely astounding. Because you see, among ancient Jews, a great man, a wealthy man, never ever ran in public. It was considered to be an

absolute surrender of all of his dignity, if a great man ever did anything other than stride proudly. Wealthy men never ran.

And in this case, in order for this wealthy man to run, he would have had to pick up his robe because they wore long robes and bare his legs. Charge off for his son.

The father's running tells us that the Father never stands on his dignity. His heart is so much for us and so much for the lost that when he sees us coming back he charges out of his house. This is one of the most astounding facts, one of the really unique things about Christianity—that our God does not stand on his dignity.

You know, in the Pope's recent book, *On the Threshold of Hope*, which by the way has a number of very, very nice things in it—the Pope is asked a question by an inquirer that goes this way: If God exists, why doesn't he show himself more frequently?

If God exists, why doesn't he break into our existence more and show himself? Why does he hide so much?

The Pope in this book restates the question. He said, "What you really are asking is 'if God exists somewhere up in the heavens, why doesn't he stoop down to our level more? Why doesn't he step out of the heavens and go down a bit more than he does? Come down to us?'" And the Pope very wisely answers: "The problem that we have as men and women is not that God doesn't stoop down enough, getting down to our level. The problem that men and women have with God is that God stoops down too low." That God doesn't stand on his dignity.

This is a problem that the Jews had with Jesus and the cross. This is the problem that the Greeks had with Jesus and the cross. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1, "*The cross is foolishness to the Greeks and a stumbling block to the Jews.*" The Muslims say, "I could never believe in a God who stooped down so low as to become a man and then allowed himself to be hung on a cross naked. The only kind of God that I can believe in is one who maintains his dignity.

But our Father runs. He picks up his robe and charges down the road. Throws himself on us and kisses our neck.

The tendency of all religion is to try to keep God away, far away, at arm's length, far above us. But our Father doesn't want to stay far from us. He doesn't tell us to come into the church or chapel services with dignity, with religious faces on, trying to look as Christian as possible. He just says, "Turn back to me. With all your heart turn back to me in your heart. Give yourself to me and I will run to you."

The story goes on. We hear the son's declaration of wrongdoing. In verse 21, the son said to him, "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.*" But the father said to his servants, "*Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate for this son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.*" So they began to celebrate."

You know, the son tries to confess. And after we have given ourselves to attachments that are not the Father, after we have cycled down and squandered

what God has given to us, like Esau tossing it all in for one meal, we feel like we should go through a whole speech. We strategize about how to come back to God. And we say to ourselves, "Well, if I am going to come back to God, I am going to jump through all of these hoops and I am going to read my Bible every day. I am going to make sure that I pray every morning. I am going to tell God that I resolve from now on and I vow this and promise that. The moment we turn back, God cuts off our lengthy confessions and our resolutions and our vows. He says, "Quick, bring the best robe. [In other words] I have heard enough. Stop it."

A few minutes ago I said that the one who is prodigal in this story, the one who was extravagant in this story is not the son. The word "prodigal" means "extravagant, lavish, almost foolishly generous". I said that the one who was lavish in this story is not the son, but the father. He is the prodigal. And I asked the question: Why so extravagant, God, in your forgiveness? Why so extravagant? Why not wait and check the son out to see if he would live out his new resolution. Say to the son, "Son, I am glad that you came home, but I need to check you out. We are going to spend the next year putting you through the paces of discipline. If you are able to live up to certain requirements, then I will forgive you."

But the father doesn't do that. God is like a really bad card player. The son turns back and the father showers him with forgiveness. Why so quick? Why not hold his cards a little closer to the vest, keep us guessing instead of showing them to us and saying, "Anyone who comes back to me, let me show you what is in my hand—forgiveness." Wild, abundant, crazy forgiveness! Why does God display forgiveness so openly?

I believe it is for this reason. Because if God did not display it, we would not go back. If anyone of us had to wonder what kind of reception we would get if we turned back to the father, we would never go back. We would stay at arm's length. Oh, we might come to church. We might resolve to be moral. But we would never go back to the Father's house into real relationship with the Father if we had to guess at what was in his hand. But he shows us what is in his hand—forgiveness.

And he celebrates over the son and he celebrates over you if you return to him and give him your heart. Did you ever have this thought, ever, that the Father celebrates over you? It is an amazing thing. Many, many of us see ourselves as just part of a crowd, a number. The notion that God throws a party for you. That you could bring joy to the heart of your Father in heaven. The times that God has revealed that to me, the celebration that he has for me, has broken my heart. It is too wonderful. It is too great.

And in the story, of course, we have the lovely description of salvation. Because he says, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found." Moving from death to life. Moving from being lost to being found. That is a description of conversion in the New Testament. When you were dead in your sins and trespasses, God made you alive in Christ, by grace you have been saved through faith.

And then, we finish up the story with the older son. *"Meanwhile, the older son was in a field and when he came near the house he heard music and dancing. He called one of his servants and asked him, 'What is going on?' 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed a fattened calf because*

he has him back safe and sound.’ The older brother became angry and refused to go in. His father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look, all of these years I have been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so that could celebrate with my friends. With this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes, you killed a fattened calf for him.’ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.’”

We see the elder brother’s dismay and bitterness at what is going on. In Jesus’ day, of course, the elder brother would have been the Jews. The Pharisees who were watching Jesus embrace tax collectors and prostitutes wondering about a kind of a God who doesn’t care about faithfulness. When I read this story, of course, I apply it to me and to you who may have been in the church for quite a while. I think about second generation Christians, many of you who grew up in a Christian home. You have never been like the younger son. You never got involved in partying and sexuality, in smoking dope. You have been a good person. You have always been around the Father’s house. And yet it seems that when a new person comes in and gives their life to Christ, everyone is excited about them and their growth. I have talked with second generation Christians who literally have said to me, “You know, one of the things I regret is that I don’t have a testimony. I don’t have a wonderful testimony like you do.”

I think about folks who have been in the church for a long time, who have been in the Father’s house and yet somehow have lost the wonder of what it means to be a Christian, lost the celebration and joy of the whole thing. And are going about doing the right things and doing their duties, but the notion that they can have relationship with the Father, that we can turn to the Father, that the Father hears our prayers, that no matter where we are, we can talk to the Father. Somehow that has gotten lost.

Friends, we elder brothers, second generation Christians, Christians your whole life, we need to hear the Father’s response to us. You know, I believe that we often imagine that Jesus is going to tell a joke at our expense, that we will just be put down and condemned. That we simply have blown it.

But note the affirmation and tenderness of the Father to us. It says, “The father went out and pleaded” and then he says to you, “My son, my daughter, you are always with me and everything I have is yours.” Understand, elder brother, that your Father in heaven loves you and celebrates over you every bit as much as he loves and celebrates over the new person and the most exciting person who has come along in the last six months. You, who never walked away, you who have been laboring faithfully, your Father loves you and speaks tenderly and affectionately to you. He does not make fun of you or play a joke on you at your expense.

But elder brothers and sisters, he does present you with a question. You see this story has no ending. It says in verse 31, *“We had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. Again, he was lost and is found.”* Jesus doesn’t tell us in the story if the elder brother decided to join the party. And I think the reason he doesn’t tell us whether or not the elder brother

decided to join the party to celebrate, to reach out the lost son, is because he wants each one of us to answer that question for ourselves.

Will you join the party? God is throwing a party. He wants you, this week, to renew your relationship with Him, to get back in touch with Him. The Father wants you to come in. He wants you to have fun too. He loves you as well. Yes, he is interested in those outside, but he is also interested in those who have stayed in the house and who have never left.

If you have been away from the Father's house, he wants you to come home. If you are in the Father's house, he wants not just your hard work. He wants you. He wants your heart to be close to him and enjoy him again. Let's pray.