

# Message Extras

a little something extra to keep you connected to Jesus this week

*Message Extras accompany the [weekly message](#).*

I love school. If I'm counting correctly, I have spent about 30 years either attending school or working in one. But love it or not, there can be times that I miss the point of what I'm learning. I remember when I was taking an acoustics class in graduate school and I either missed a day or just wasn't paying very close attention when a key point was introduced. For a solid chunk of the semester, everything that we were learning hinged on that foundational piece of information, and not knowing that I had missed it, I was having difficulty making sense of the concepts and formulas that followed. After spending some time backtracking, I figured out what I had missed, and the rest of the content seemed to fall into place. That acoustics class turned out to be one of my favorite classes ever, but how much easier would it have been if I hadn't initially missed the point?

Whether you've been going to church since you were born or this week is your very first time, there's a good chance that you've heard the parable of the prodigal son. We use "the prodigal son has returned" as an idiom to describe someone who has left for a time and returned or who has made some poor choices and turned things around. This is not an unfamiliar story. But do we understand it? Do we know what it's really all about?

This weekend we heard about three themes in the parable of the prodigal son that we may have missed in the past: the goodness of God, how we use God, and our need for a perfect older brother.

Jesus' parable provides several examples of the goodness of God. The man in the story had two sons who each in their own way dishonored him, and yet the father's pursuit of them was relentless. In Luke 15:20 we read, *"While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him."* What a beautiful picture of the way God pursues his children. This son had shown a callous disregard for his relationship with his father, preferring what his father could give him over the relationship, and yet the father welcomed him back with open arms. In the same way, we can run away like the younger brother, or be cold and selfish

like the older brother, and still God demonstrates his goodness. *"For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."* (Luke 15:24)

What about how we use God? Can any of us read this parable and not see some of ourselves in one of these brothers? Whether we're the brother who thinks he's doing everything right or the brother with more obvious shortcomings, both have expectations of what they feel their father owes them. In Luke 15:29 the older brother says to his father, *"Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends."* I have four daughters, and it's safe to say that they bring an element of drama to our lives. The older brother in the parable certainly brings the drama with this statement. While contemplating going home, the younger brother thinks about how well his father treats even his hired help, and yet the older brother claims that he is "slaving" for his father without any reward? Seems a bit dubious. But do we do the same thing sometimes? Do we expect that our good behavior will earn us God's favor, and maybe feel a little salty if God doesn't respond how we think He should?

The third theme we might miss in the parable is the need for a perfect older brother. Whatever our separation from God looks like, be it running away from him as fast and as far as we can or something more subtle, we are all in need of God's grace. And through the gift of His son Jesus, God shows us that grace freely and immeasurably. That is a treasure too great to miss.

#### Reflection Questions:

1. In which brother do you tend to see yourself? How are your choices similar to his?
2. Who is someone in your life who has shown you grace? How did that grace make a difference in your relationship?
3. Can grace be earned or deserved, or is it always unmerited?
4. Are there other themes or ideas in the parable of the prodigal son that you noticed today that you may have missed before?
5. How will you show grace to others this week?

