

All right. Hey, everybody, welcome to Valley Creek. We are so glad you are here with us today. Whatever campus you're at, whatever's going on in life, wherever you are, we are so glad that you are here with us today. And last week, we started a new series simply called Living Loved. On the backside of Easter, which answers the deepest question of the human heart, "Am I loved?" With a resounding yes, once and for all. We're starting a new series that just simply asks, "Are we living loved?" And what does it look like to live loved? And are we ready to live loved? Because there is a big difference between knowing you're loved and actually living like you're loved. And I know we know the information, we have the knowledge, we have the head of this whole concept. And so, even last week as I started the series, I can feel it. Like, just so you know, I can feel and pick up and see and sense you.

I can feel a little bit of the deflection. I can feel a little bit of the distraction. I can feel a little bit of the, "Yeah, yeah, I know I'm loved. Tell me something I don't know." But there's a big difference between knowing you're loved and living like you're loved. In fact, Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hear God's voice and make God's message their way of life." The blessing comes when we hear God's voice and then make that message our way of life. There is no blessing in just hearing that we are loved. The blessing comes when we hear that we're loved and then start to make that message our way of life, and then start living like we are actually loved. And the problem for us is when we hear God's voice, but we never make that message our way of life, the blessing actually becomes a curse. Instead of shalom, peace, abundance, the fullness of life, it actually becomes a curse because we become deceived. We think we already know it, even though we're not living it. And unused revelation leads to a hard heart.

When God reveals something to you, tells you something and you don't do anything with it, you become hardened to that very truth. It's kind of like a vaccine. You get a little bit of the virus injected into your body, then your body becomes resistant to that disease or that virus or that sickness. Well, when I hear over and over again, God's voice in my life, but I never make that message my way of life, I actually build up a resistance to that very concept. This is why the Bible says knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. When I have a lot of knowledge about something, it actually makes me resistant to that thing as a way of life. We don't want to be people who just hear it. We want to actually be people who live it. This is why Paul talking about religious people says, "They claim to know God, but by their actions, they deny Him." This is the great problem of religion. We claim it, we talk it, we know the chapter, we know the verse, we can give you all the information.

We have the head knowledge, but there is no demonstration of that reality in our lives. It's like when Paul says they have a form of godliness but without power. It's like I have this external conforming reality of my life, but no internal transformation. Yes, I can talk about the love of God, but my life doesn't show the love of God. In fact, if you look at your life and the way you think and talk and act and move and how you do your time and conflict and how you treat people and how you respond to situations and circumstances and storms, does it demonstrate

that you not only know that you're loved, but that you're actually living like you're loved? Do you live free? Free from insecurity and free from pride and free from worldliness, free from anxiety and depression and worry and sin. I think there's room for all of us to grow in living love.

This is why John, one of Jesus' 12 disciples, writing in the Gospel of John, talking about himself, calls himself the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to Him. The disciple whom Jesus loved. This is not arrogance. This is not pride. This is John hearing God's voice and making God's message his way of life. John wasn't loved more than the other 11 disciples, and he's not loved more than you. He just actually believed that what God said about him was true, so he focused more on God's love for him than his love for God, and that's how John goes from being the guy with the anger problem to being known as the apostle of love. To be a disciple starts with living loved. If you're going to be a disciple without first living loved, it's an exercise in futility. It's religion. You will do everything out of duty and fear and obligation, external transformation or external confirmation without any internal transformation, but to be a disciple is to actually believe and live like Jesus loves you.

And so, you get three choices. You can be the disciple whom Jesus loved and live very close to Him. You can be the disciple who is trying to love Jesus, always trying to get close to Him, or you can be the disciple who loves the world and not even be aware that Jesus is in the room. Which are you? You see, this is why Paul tells us, "I pray that you being rooted and established in love." May you be rooted. May you know, but then be established. Live, actually draw the nutrients into your life, the very love of God. "And may you have power, the capability, together with all the saints," with all the rest of us, "to grasp, actually take a hold of how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." You see, the need of the human soul is so great that it can only be filled by the limitless love of God.

The desire of the human soul is so great that it can only be satisfied by the limitless love of God. You were created to live in the glory of God. That's how big your soul is. That's why the things of this world will never fill it nor satisfy it. "And to know this love that surpasses knowledge," you aren't supposed to know about love. You're supposed to experience love. You're supposed to know beyond knowledge. You're supposed to experience that which cannot be grasped through comprehension or understanding the love of God. It's an experience. It's an encounter. Love is not meant to be studied. It's not meant to be parsed. It's not meant to be memorized. It's meant to be experienced and encountered in Jesus' name. And so, in this series, I'm not trying to teach you anything new. I'm praying for a revelation and an encounter of God's love for you.

I'm just praying that the Holy Spirit will reveal God's love to you. And that in some way, shape, or form, you will actually have an encounter and an experience with the very love of God. And so, all we're doing is just simply saying, "Father, I open my heart to your love. And even right now in your... just Father, I open my heart to your love because I don't want more knowledge. I

long for experience and encounter. And to build your faith, I've heard all kinds of stories and had my own experiences and encounters this week of how God is moving and bringing revelation and encounter with His love." You see, one day Jesus was hanging out with a bunch of sinners. And the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, the religious guys who knew that God loved them but didn't live anything like it, they were offended by who Jesus was hanging out with.

And knowing what was happening in their heart, Jesus told them three really simple stories. And this is all in Luke chapter 15. The first, He tells them a story about a good shepherd who has a hundred sheep. And when the one sheep wandered off, he left the 99 and went got one sheep. And when he got it, he brought it back, and there was a great celebration. And then, He tells a story about a woman who had 10 silver coins and she lost one in her house. And when she realized it was gone, she lit a lamp and searched all over the house until she found it. And when she found it, there was a great celebration. And then, the third story, He tells a story about a father who has two sons. It's probably one of the most famous stories in all of Scripture. It's the story that you probably are used to hearing called, The Prodigal Son. The prodigal son, which means recklessly extravagant. And while the son was recklessly extravagant with his life, this story is not about a son's sins. It's about the reckless extravagant love of God. It is a story about the father's love.

So, I'm going to read it to you again. And I want you to listen, not with your head, but with your heart. Because all today, I'm not talking to your head. I'm believing that the Holy Spirit is moving in your heart. There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his 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.

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 him, '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, threw his arms around him, and kissed him. 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. What a story. Here, this father has this son who, one day, we don't know why, we don't know when, but he decided to close his heart off to the father's love. He closed his heart off to the father's love and basically wished the father dead because he wanted his inheritance, and he wanted it now. The only problem is when you wish the father dead, the father doesn't die, you do. And in that moment, he moved from being a son to being an orphan. He took on the orphan spirit. "I don't want a father. I don't need a father. I refuse to submit or surrender to anyone. I'm going to go over here and live my own life and do my own thing and be independent." And there is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it only leads to death. And the father, in graciousness and goodness, gives the son his inheritance, and the son sets off because he wants to go and taste the world.

And when he goes and tastes the world, at first it tastes so sweet. But when it goes down, it becomes incredibly sour because sin over-promises and under-delivers. Sin takes you further than you want to go, keeps you longer than you want to stay, costs you more than you want to pay. Sin steals your soul, kills your heart, and destroys your life. And when he hits rock bottom, it says he comes to his senses. And he realizes how good his father actually is, but he knows he can no longer be a son. At best, he could be a hired hand, so he sets off. And while he starts moving back home, the father sees the son a long way off, which means the father has been looking for him every single day since he left. And when he sees the son in the distance filled with compassion, the father runs to the son, picks the son up, and embraces him. Just holds him. Loved. And when the son starts into his little speech, "If I'm no longer worthy to be called your son," the father interrupts that speech because he refuses to validate a lie.

And he says, "Go get the best robe. Go get a ring. Go put sandals on his feet because my son is home. Kill the fattened calf because we're going to party." And in so many ways, that is the Christian story. That is the journey with Jesus, is we become an orphan, we reject God, we go off into the world, we hit rock bottom, but the Father comes to get our prodigal heart and bring us back home, and He puts a robe of righteousness on us to cover the sin and the shame of your life. He puts a ring on your finger to say you're fully restored with authority and power in the kingdom. He gives you sandals of sonship so you can once again walk in the spirit and live your destiny. Blood is shed, the fattened calf, there is a party because the father has no greater joy than to see his son come home. But if all that would have happened and there would have never been the hug, the son would have spent the rest of his life striving, performing, earning, trying to make it up to his father, living with the orphan spirit.

But that hug from the father broke everything and restored him fully. Meanwhile, while all that was happening, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So, he called one of the servants and asked what was going on. "Your brother has come home," he replied. "And your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound." The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, "Look, all these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet, you never gave me even a young goat so I could

celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours, who has squandered your property with prostitutes, comes home, you kill the 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 now found." You see, while the younger brother wished the father dead and took his inheritance and went out and hit rock bottom and came back and was restored, and the party started. All the while, the older brother was out working in the field. And when that older brother hears the sound of the party and the celebration going on, he asks what's going on. And when he realizes there is a party for his brother, oh, he becomes mad. Oh, he's angry because we don't know how long, but we know he's been out there slaving in those fields for a long time.

And so, the father goes out to the older brother as well. And what I want you to understand is that the father goes for both the prodigal heart and the prideful heart. Neither one can come home until the father goes and gets them. The father leaves the porch to get the prodigal heart, and the father leaves the party to go get the prideful heart. And when he gets to the prideful son, he tries to hug him, but the son keeps him at a distance. You ever tried to hug somebody who did... And he's mad. And then, he says this key thing, "Look, all these years, I've been slaving for you." And in that moment, we realize that this boy was just as dead as the other boy and was just as lost as the other boy, because we don't know when and we don't know where, but we know he closed his heart off to the father's love. Why? Because he was in the field slaving, performing, striving, earning, trying to achieve what he had already been freely given.

See, he knew all about the father. He could give you every fact, every detail. He could tell you the father's entire life story, but he had never experienced the father. He had never encountered the father. He was an orphan spirit. Yeah, he didn't go off and hit rock bottom in the world, but it's not because he stayed back because of good motives, because he loved the father. No, he probably was worried about the consequences and getting arrested and being embarrassed in front of his friends if he went off and actually did those things. No, no, he's just as orphaned and just as prideful. And so, he strives and he performs and he earns, and the father is always with him, but he is not with the father. So, he's closed his heart off, and he is trying to earn through performance what he has been freely given by grace. He's trying to get through effort what the father had already lavished on him, love and acceptance and pleasure, the pleasure of the father.

And in so many ways, I think our hearts are like that older brother. We try to get through performance what we have been freely given by grace. The only problem is you can't get through effort what you have already been freely given. You see, I think one of the most important verses in the Bible is when Jesus gets baptized. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water and behold, the heavens were opened to Him and He

saw the Spirit of God descending on Him like a dove and alighting on Him. And suddenly, a voice came from heaven saying, "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." You have to catch this. Jesus is 30 years old. He's 30 years old. He hasn't begun his ministry yet. He spent 30 years in the secret place, 30 years in hiddenness. He hasn't done anything amazing. He hasn't healed anybody. He hasn't raised anybody from the dead. He hasn't cast out any demons. He hasn't preached about the kingdom. He hasn't built the disciples. He hasn't walked on water.

He hasn't multiplied the bread and the loaves. He hasn't given anybody vision. He hasn't cleansed anybody from leprosy. He's been in the secret place, been hidden for 30 years. He hasn't done anything yet. And yet, the Father says, "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." The Father loved Him and was pleased in Him for who He was, not for what He did. And if you are included in Christ, then this is what the Father speaks over you, that you are His beloved son or daughter in whom He is well pleased before you do anything right and even after you do everything wrong. This is why this is so profound because we think God may speak this to us when we're living at our peak, when we're crushing it, when we're hitting it on all cylinders. "Yeah, I am the beloved son in whom He is well pleased."

But you realize He speaks it before you do anything right and after you do everything wrong. That's where the power is. See, you don't have to spend your life trying to get the world to say what the Father already has, that you are loved and He is well pleased in you. You don't have to spend your life trying to get your industry to say that you are loved and he is well pleased with you. You don't have to spend your life trying to get the popular kids to say that you are loved and that they are well pleased with you. You don't have to spend your life getting your friends or your family, or the people, or yourself to say that you are loved and that you are pleasing. Why? Because the Father has already declared it once and for all. You are His beloved son in whom He is well pleased. You don't have to strive in the field of religion or in the field of the world any longer. You can come home. You can come home.

See, your heart was created to need a Father's love. This is why we spend so much of our lives trying to win the approval of our earthly fathers. Maybe not just your biological dad, but the father figures in your life. If you really look at people's lives and you think about your own life, you spend much of your life trying to win the approval and the favor and the affirmation of the father figures in your life because your heart was created to need it. Have you ever been to a funeral of a man who had children and he died? Listen to how those children try to talk about their dad. Everything comes back to, "Did my dad love me and was he pleased with me?" Because your heart needs it. But you don't have to spend your life trying to get it from anyone or any place because you already have it in Jesus' name. This is why it says, "As He is, so we are in the world." As Jesus is, so we are. Because Jesus is holy, so am I. Because Jesus is righteous, so am I.

Because Jesus is free, so am I. Because Jesus is secure, so am I. Because Jesus is the Father's Beloved Son in whom He is well pleased, so am I. I am not defined by what I did, by what I do, or what I will do. This is why Jesus says, "It is finished on the cross." I am not defined by what I did, the prodigal son. I am not defined by what I do, the older brother. And I am not defined by the mistakes I will make in the future. I am who He says I am, which is a beloved son in whom He is well pleased, before I do anything right and even after I do everything wrong. This is why He says, "I will be a Father to you and you will be my sons and daughters," says the Lord Almighty. He wants to be your father. And He wants to bring you as His son or His daughter home. He delights in you. You're the apple of His eye. He rejoices over you with singing. He has drawn you with loving kindness. He has loved you with an everlasting love.

And all you have to do is receive Him. To those who believe in His name, God gave the right to become children of God. You don't have to earn it. You didn't deserve it. You don't have to perform for it. You don't have to achieve it. In fact, on the cross, Jesus became a rebellious orphan so you could become a beloved son. In that moment on the cross, when Jesus says, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In that moment, the Father became a distant God to Jesus and turned His face away from Him because of our sin so that He could forever turn His face towards you and become a loving Father coming out to meet you in your filth as the prodigal or in your pride as the older brother to bring you back home. This is great to know in our head. But the question is, is do you live it in your heart? See, at some point in time, you have to ask yourself questions like this. Like, what are you trying to prove and who are you trying to prove it to?

But what are you trying to accomplish? Who are you trying to accomplish it for? What are you trying to earn, and who are you trying to earn it for? What are you trying to do, and who are you trying to do it for? Like, look at your life. What are you trying to prove, and why, and to whom? Like, do you really think one more business deal will make you measure up? Do you really think just if you had that new house or that car, then? Do you really think if you just sat at that lunch table, then if I could just win this award, if I could just get this thing, if I could just get this grade on this test, then I would... Like, do you really think that? Because you don't have to do to become who you already are. I don't have to perform, strive, achieve or earn to become who God already says I am, which is beloved son or daughter and whom He is well pleased.

I don't do to become. I do because I am. Yes, this boy should have worked in the field, but not slaving for the affection of his father, going out into the field with the affection of his father because his father was already with him, and he had opened his heart up to receive the love of that father. I mean, just think about Jesus. Jesus didn't need the praise of man, so He wasn't defeated by the rejection of man. He never needed the approval of man, so He wasn't destroyed by the criticism of man. Jesus could walk into any... Jesus could walk into this room right now, and He is, and whether you accept Him or reject Him, which some of us are doing, one or the other, He will leave, and He will be totally secure. He will be totally fine. He won't be all puffed up if you accept Him, and He won't be all mopey if you reject Him. Why? Because He

actually lived as if He was loved. He heard that voice suddenly from heaven speak at His baptism, and that voice was the message that became His way of life. "I am the Father's beloved Son in whom He is well pleased."

And do you realize Jesus wanted to be known as Son? That's His primary identity. Think about this. Jesus, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Great I Am, Alpha and Omega, Ancient of Days. You know how He wants to be known? Son. Son of God and Son of Man. Which means what? His identity is not based on His performance. His identity is based on response of who the Father is. You're not what you do. Your identity, your core identity, isn't even determined by you. It's determined in response to who the Father is. And He has created you to be His Son that He loves. And He has moved toward you. I mean, we spend so much of our lives with this fear of man. Trying to prove, earn, create, achieve, whatever. To get other people to say we measure up, we're worthy. But the fear of man will prove to be a snare. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord.

It gets us all tangled and knotted up in our life, and the more we try to get their approval, the tighter and tighter things become. And I think if we're honest, for a lot of us, the person that we have the most fear of man of is ourselves. And I never perform, earn, achieve, look pretty enough, do enough, make enough, accomplish enough to win my own approval. But you are not who they say you are, and you are not even who you say you are. You're only who He says you are. Your identity is based on response to who He is. Not even who you think you are. And I get it. Like, I get this guy. This is so much in my life. I read the second half of this, and I'm like, "I get it." You know what he wants? He's here in this party, and you know what he wants? He's like, "I just want to party. I just want to party for me. Because I've been out here like every day."

I'm guessing it's years to blow through the amount of money that kid blew through and came back home. Can somebody see me? Somebody appreciate me? Somebody love me? Does somebody want me? But his mistake was he thought the party was for his brother. The party was not for his brother. The party was about the love of the Father. The party was a celebration that mercy triumphs over judgment. The party was a celebration of how great his Father was. And if he could just realize that the Father is always with him, in his presence is fullness of joy, and his kingdom is righteousness, peace, and joy, and His love is better than life, then I live in an unending celebration of the goodness and the love of the Father in my life, if I'll open up to it.

See, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not? Did we not? Did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Like, have you seen what we've done, God?' And I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers.'" This is a hard verse. What Jesus is saying is that a whole bunch of us come to Him and we're like, "Look at all we've



done," which is the orphan spirit at work. The orphan spirit wants to draw attention to how great it is. "I did this and I did this and I did this. Here's all the work of my hands." And Jesus is like, "That's great that you did all this, but you never received any love from me in here." You did all these things and you could say all these things, but you never experienced or encountered me like we never had an us. So, I'm glad you slaved in the field.

"Actually, I'm not glad you slaved in the field because I never asked you to go out there in the first place. I asked you to be with me, and that was the one thing you didn't want to do." And you say, "Well, how does he call them evildoers? Aren't these good things?" Well, what is evil? Evil is bad will. My will is bad. And the problem is, love is goodwill. "So, when I'm full of love, my will for you will be for your good. But when my will is for my good, the orphan spirit is for me and my good, I will unintentionally find myself doing evil things against you to get my own good." That's the orphan spirit at work. Or how about this one? He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She had a sister called Mary who sat at the Lord's feet, listening to what He said, but Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and said, "Lord." Like just the way people, it's fascinating how we talk to Jesus.

"Don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? I've been out here slaving in the field while she's been partying. So, tell her to help me." "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen what is better and will not be taken away from her." Do you see the older brother? She's making a meal. Jesus never asked her to make. She's slaving in the field of the kitchen that Jesus never asked her to go into performing, earning, striving, thinking that somehow that was going to make her better than Mary. And the more she did it, the more bitter and resentful she became. And all the while, Jesus is saying, "Just come and receive that which I freely offer. You don't have to earn that which I'm freely giving. You can't earn that which is freely given. So just come, Martha. Come, Martha. Hey, come, Martha. Come back inside. Let me come get your prideful heart. Bring it back home."

This is why it says, "The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." The orphan spirit looks at all the things we do on the outside. Accomplishments, achievements, earning, performance, looks, friendships, followers, success, significance. But God looks at the heart and says, "Is there any love in there? Is there any sonship in here?" That's why David was a man after God's own heart, because he didn't care about out here. He was focused on in here. Are you with me on this? Now, stay with me for a little bit more. If you were here last week, if you remember, I said, "The moment that younger son closed his heart off to the Father, his heart became full of love for the things of this world." If your heart is not full of the love of the Father, it will be full of love for the things of this world. That is true, not just for the younger son, it's true for the older brother.

"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world," the love of, not the love for, "the love of the Father is not in him." He's not receiving, he's closed off. "For all that is in the world," the lust of the flesh, craving for sensual gratification, the lust of the eyes, greedy longings of the mind, and the pride of life, assurance in one's own resources or in the stability of earthly things, "these do not come from the Father, but are from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever." When I close my heart off to the love of the Father, my heart will be full of love for the things of this world. But when I open my heart up to the love of the Father, it will displace and drive out. There will be no room for love for the things of this world. Make sense? So, this boy, when he closes his heart off to the Father, his heart becomes full of the pride of life.

The pride of life. It's really easy to see the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes in the younger son, but it's even easier to see the pride of life in the older brother. The moment he closes his heart off to the Father, his heart becomes full of pride, judgment, condemnation, criticism, harshness, envy, self-righteousness, bitterness, resentment, this sense of better than, elitism, which ends up coming and overflowing and taking over our hearts, and we become passive-aggressive. We become defensive. We think we're better than everyone, and we need to tell everyone why they're not. Why? Because there's no love in our heart, so our heart becomes full of the pride of life. And I think we look at this, and we think that these two boys are so different, that the second boy is so much better, and, oh, he struggled, he's just so much better. They are both equally lost. They are both equally dead.

Listen, this second boy didn't stay home because he loved his father. He had just as much lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes. I just think he was scared of getting an STD. I think he was scared of getting arrested. I think he was scared of losing all his money. I think he was scared of what other people would have said about him if he went and did what his brother did. Pride. But it's what he actually wanted to do. And, yes, the younger brother, parties and prostitutes, but the older brother had this sense of praise and prominence, promotion and prestige, achievement and accomplishment, success and significance. His heart was just as full of the things of this world. It just manifested differently, and it primarily manifested through pride. Through pride. Come on, think about this with me. He says to his father, "Look, all these years, I've done this for you. Look, look at what I've done."

Can you imagine saying to God, "You created the heavens and the earth. Look at what I have done." All these years means he keeps a record. All these years. See, we keep a record of what we do in our flesh. God keeps a record of what we do in the spirit. We keep a record of all the times we achieve the law. God doesn't keep a record of how much grace He has to lavish on us. We keep a record of all the times we choose good over evil. God keeps a record of when we choose life. We keep a record of all the accomplishments we have as an orphan. God keeps a record of all the things He has given to us as sons. We keep a record of our self-righteousness. God keeps a record of the cross, the Lord as our righteousness. All these

years. "Look, all these years, I've never disobeyed you, and you've never even given me a goat."

See, what he should have been saying is, "Look, all these years, you've been so good to me. And even when I closed myself off to you, you never gave me anything but the best." See, every prideful place in your heart is a place where you're not receiving love. We don't look at pride like this. But if I don't have the love of the Father, then the pride of life is the result. Humility flows from love. Humility is a fruit of love. So, every place of pride in my life, every place of judgment and criticism and condemnation towards others or myself, every place where I'm resentful and bitter and passive-aggressive and defensive, every place where I need to put myself in the center and tell everybody else all the things that I've done and how great I am is a place where you have no love in your heart.

Pride appears where love is absent. And when I allow the love of the Father to fill my heart, there's no room left for pride. And the problem is when my heart becomes full of pride, in church, I will start judging other people's journeys. "This son of yours, he squandered your property and done all these things." He's judging his brother's journey. Why? Because there's no love in his heart. So, there's pride that takes place. It's like a weed that appears because there's no grass that's growing there. There's no love, so there's pride. So, he judges his brother's journey. Paradoxically, in this moment, his brother's living in more love than he is. His brother's in the party. His brother's been embraced. His brother is free. And he's still criticizing his brother's journey. And that's what we do when there's pride in our heart. We talk about others. "They did this. They didn't do that. They should do this. They shouldn't do that. They can do this. Can you believe that they let their kids? Can you believe that they went here? Can you believe that they do this?"

Listen to me. When your heart is full of the love of the Father, you don't have any room for the pride of life. So, if you find yourself criticizing or complaining about other followers of Jesus, it's a place where you're living loveless. Loveless. Because love drives it out. And the longer you sit here, the more loving you're going to become, or the more prideful you will become. There is no in between. Because my heart's either being full of the love of the Father or in its absence, it's becoming more full of the pride of life. And if this bothers you, as I'm saying it, it proves the orphan spirit is alive and well in your life. Well, yeah, I know. But they still. Yeah, totally. Totally. I mean, do you remember when Jesus goes to Simon the Pharisee's house for dinner? Luke chapter 7, this guy, religious leader, invites him over. And Jesus goes to his house, and in walks this sinful woman, and she is so broken, she comes to Jesus' feet. She weeps.

She washes his feet with her hair, pours out this alabaster jar of perfume on him. And all the while all this is happening in Simon's home, he's offended. And he looks at it and he thinks to himself, "If Jesus was really who He says He is, He would know what kind of woman this is and He wouldn't let her touch Him." And Jesus knows the thoughts in his heart. So, He says, "Simon, I want to tell you a story." He says, "Tell me." He says, "There's two men, both who

owe a moneylender a certain amount of money. One owes 50 denarii; another owes 500 denarii. Neither of them had the money to pay him back and the moneylender decided to cancel the debt of both men. Who do you think will love him more?" He says, "The man who had the greater debt canceled." He said, "You're right. You see this woman? I came into your house and you didn't give me any water for my feet, but she has not stopped washing my feet with her hair and her tears. You did not give me a kiss on the cheek, but she has not stopped kissing my feet. You didn't give me any oil for my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. I tell you, Simon, he who has been forgiven much, loves much. He who has been forgiven little, loves little."

And we hear that story, and the problem is most of us think we owe 50 denarii when the truth is we all owe 500 denarii. We hear that story, we hear this story, and 90% of us in this room, where we put ourselves in the old, "Yeah, man, I slaved, raising these kids and going to work every day. I showed up to church, unlike other people, where's everybody back from Easter? I owe those people." And we think we only owe 50. And that's why there's such little love in your heart. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life. This is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God. What we deserved was death. What he gave us was an experience and an encounter with love.

Not because we deserved it, but because he did it for us. We all owe 500. Who cares if you're less dead than someone else? You're still dead. It's like, "I'm less dead than her, so I'm doing really good." Like, whether you've been dead a week or a year, you're dead. Who cares if you're less lost than someone else? Well, they're lost in outer space. Yeah, and you're lost in the anxiety in your mind. So, you're just as lost. And you're just as dead. But God, because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in our transgressions. And it is by grace, His grace, you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages, He might show the incomparable riches of His grace expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

You did nothing. You were dead. I don't care if you were less dead than anybody else. You were dead. And you couldn't do anything. He created you. He sustains you, and He redeems you. It's His grace that saves you. It's His grace that changes you. It's His grace that empowers you. It's His great love that made you alive through grace. He raised you up because you were dead. He seated you because there's nothing left to do that He might show you His grace and His everlasting kindness in Christ Jesus. This is a totally different way of thinking. You think, "Oh, I'm less bad than other people." Congratulations. Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at one point is guilty of breaking all of it. Prodigal heart or prideful heart, it doesn't matter. It's all broken. It's all lost. It's all dead. And I get it. Because I'm a whole lot more like the older brother in my heart than I think I am the younger brother.

And as the older brother, we sit here and we hear all that and we're like, "Yeah, yeah, I should probably have a little more gratitude that Jesus died for my 50." I mean, wasn't, I mean, let's compare it. And we say things like this. "All these years I've done all that and he never gave me the goat. The goat, I just want the goat." What's your goat? All these years, I just wanted the goat. I'll keep slate, just give me the goat. What's your goat? A healing? A breakthrough? A business? A promotion? Some money? A job? Friends? A spouse? It's like this goat. There's like this thing that we all want. And we sit there and we get so offended that He didn't give us that thing. Well, I think there's like four reasons why He didn't get it. Don't worry, I'm just about done. Four reasons. Why don't we get the goat? First one is you have not because you ask not.

Maybe he never asked his father for the goat. Maybe he just never had the intimacy with the father to just say, "Hey, could I have a goat to hang out with my friends tonight?" The father knows what you need before you even ask, but sometimes he doesn't give it to you until you ask because he's looking for intimacy, not just provision. Second reason is you have not because you ask not, and when you ask, you don't receive because you ask with wrong motives that you may spend it on yourself, James tells us. In other words, sometimes the goat that I want is out of the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, so he can't give it to me because it's actually bad for me. Third reason, all throughout Scripture says, "He withholds no good thing from those who love Him." So, if I've cried out for this goat over and over and over again and I don't get it, at some point in time I have to stop and say, "He withholds no good thing from me. So, if He's not giving it to me now, it's not good for me now." And the fourth reason is sometimes there are things in life, storms, crisis, situation, circumstance, sin, brokenness that is not from God, so don't call it good.

It's not from God. It is a part of this broken and fallen world that we live in, but we know that He works all things together for the good of those who love Him. So, even when He doesn't give me the goat and its brokenness in my life, I can trust that He is doing something good in it. And maybe like this boy, He's not giving the goat because He wants more than anything else is for that boy to just come home." And when you realize you have the Father; no longer do you care about the goat. That's what I'm trying to tell you. The more consumed you are with the goat, the less consumed you are with the Father. When I realize the Father is always with me, you can have the goat because He is with me, and everything He has is now mine. So, all these years, He's been so good to me. Even though I've turned away from Him, He's never withheld His best from me. You can have the goat. I got Him.

Go get all the goats and give them to my brother. I got Him. But he would rather have the goat than the Father. Why? Because his heart is so full of pride. Because he's closed his heart off to the Father. Last verse. "And you did not receive the spirit of religious duty, leading you back into the fear of never being good enough. But you have received the spirit of full acceptance, enfolding you into the family of God. And you will never feel orphaned, for as He rises up within us, our spirits join Him in saying the words of tender affection, 'Beloved Father.' For the

Holy Spirit makes God's fatherhood real, real to us. As he whispers into our innermost being, 'You are God's beloved child.'"

You see, I think the most amazing thing about this story is how it ends. It ends with a cliffhanger. We don't know if the prideful son ever goes in or not. Jesus tells these three stories. The lost sheep is found and comes in. The lost coin is found and comes in. The prodigal son is found and comes in. The prideful son? The story ends. And we don't know how he's going to respond. And since Jesus was telling the story to Pharisees and tax collectors, they very quickly picked up on this was their invitation to come home. The only question was, "What were they going to do about it?"

See, this story ends for you and me with the question of, "Will you come back home?" I am so grateful that the Father comes to get the prodigal part of my heart and the prideful part of my heart. That He doesn't leave me out there on my own, but that He comes to get the prodigal, rebellious, worldly, sinful parts, and He comes to get the religious, prideful, self-righteous, arrogant parts. He comes to get all of my heart to bring me home. Not because of what I've done, but because of who He is. You don't have to slave in the field of religion or the world or that industry or school any longer. You can come home. See, the father goes out to hug the prodigal son. And when he goes to hug the prodigal son, his face would have bent down like this in shame and sin and embarrassment and despair.

But when the father came to hug him, do you ever hug somebody like this? What do they have to do? They have to lift up their head to be able to hug. So, when the father goes out to the prodigal son, he has to lift his head so they can be face to face and heart to heart. When he goes out to the prideful son, he comes to him. And the only question is, "Will he accept it?" Because if the younger brother's head had to be lifted, the older brother's head has to be lowered so it can be face to face and heart to heart. Some of you are standing like this. Everything you've got, you're holding God out because of? Because that time, because that thing, because all these things I've done. I've slaved in that field and you haven't given me all the things.

The Father's not answering all your questions. The Father is simply trying to put your arm down, bring His arms around you. And while you are rigid and stoic and angry, His love is melting you until you finally break into His arms and put your head on His shoulder, face to face and heart to heart. That I am the Father's beloved son and daughter, and I can come home, and I don't have to prove. I don't have to achieve. I don't have to accomplish. I don't have to perform. I don't have to make it happen. I can just come home and live loved in Jesus' name. So, Father, thank you that in Jesus you come.

Thank you that you've come for me, the prodigal and the prideful parts. Thank you that I am not what I did or what I do, but I am what you have done. So, Holy Spirit, would you just move

among us and make the Father's love real to us. Would you come and bring the prodigal parts home? But I think more importantly for a lot of us, bring the prideful parts home.

Help us open up our hearts when we don't know how. Help us to stop clenching our teeth and holding out our arm, and tightening up our body. It's just a prophetic picture of a closed soul. And may we just receive your embrace. And suddenly, a voice from heaven came. I think today is the suddenly a voice breaking into your life for the first time or as a reminder of at this juncture of your life that you are the Father's beloved son or daughter in whom He is well pleased. Those are not words to know, to memorize, or study. They are a reality to experience.

May you not know more about God than you experience of God. So, Holy Spirit, only You can unlock the combination, the deadbolt, the chains, the barriers, the blockades that we put around us. I just declare for the 50-year-old man that today is the day you're being healed and can come home. I just declare that today is the day for the 75-year-old man who always wanted to hear his father say he was proud of him. You just heard your Heavenly Father say He is proud in you. I just declare that 15-year-old boy right now just realized that even though his earthly dad left him, his Heavenly Father has come and found him and is bringing him home. I declare that that 30-year-old woman who always just wanted a father to look her in the eyes and say that she was pretty and worthy of significance and respect is seeing the face of the Father.

Tell her how beautiful and treasured she is. I just declare that today that 47-year-old woman who just feels like she's slaving in the field of all this duty and obligation, and has lost herself in the process. Here's the Father's voice calling her name, saying, "Come home because there is a party that I need you, that I want you to be a part of." I pray for every religious part of our heart. I pray for every sinful part of our heart. I pray for every worldly part of our heart, for those places to lose to the love of God. To lose to the love of God. Young man, you are more than enough in Jesus Christ.

Old man, you have always been more than enough in Jesus. Young woman, you are wanted and treasured and seen and valued. Old woman, you have always been wanted and seen and treasured and valued by a good Father who declares that you are His beloved. He leaves the porch and He leaves the party to come get you because that's how much He wants you. This is not a story about a 2,000-year-old boy. This is a story about you right now, right here today. Holy Spirit, break open the levy of love and wash us anew. In Jesus' name, we receive it. We receive it.

We don't know it. We receive it. We don't just think it. We believe it. We don't just say it. We want to encounter it. In Jesus' name, amen.