



of Biblical Studies

Ephesians 2:4-9

TRANSFORMED THROUGH THE FATHER'S LOVE

COURSE COMMENTARY



1 John 4:17

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By Charles R Gray II, Ph.D
GraceLife University, Inc.

Course Requirements

- 1) Read Course Commentary
- 2) Take Mid Term Exam
- 3) Take Final Exam
- 4) Submit Exams to Dr. Gray @ graceESBS@bellsouth.net
- 5) Dr. Gray will email you your Course Grade

Transformed Through The Fathers Love

Chapter One: How Great Is The Father's Love For You?

He sat at the front porch every day, scanning the horizon for any sign of movement. He did this faithfully, even as the days rolled painfully into weeks and then months. When his friends came by to persuade him to give up and move on, he would simply smile and wave them on and persist unflinchingly. Keeping his gaze on the surrounding hills, he waited unwaveringly and patiently for the return of his son. As he waited, he rehearsed in his mind over and over again what he would do the moment he saw his son. And every day, as he looked earnestly across the fields, he wondered if that day would be the day.

One evening the familiar silhouette of a lone figure appeared in the distance. Recognizing his son, he enacted without hesitation what he had done a thousand times before in his mind: he pulled up his robes, cast aside all dignity, and ran toward his son with all his might. He could feel his heart pumping wildly and his lungs expanding and contracting as his feet tried to outdo each other across the field. Tears streamed down his face as his son grew larger in his sight with each pace. And before any words could be traded, he had leaped forward, embraced the young man, and rained kisses on him.

This unexpected, joyous reception from the father overwhelmed the young man. He had expected to be disowned and even had a rehearsed speech to tell his father to make him one of his hired servants. How could he have known that his father had a rehearsed plan of his own? Without waiting to hear the son's rehearsed speech, his father commanded the servants to bring out the best robe for him, to place a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. The young man thought he had lost the right to be called a son because of the bad choices he had made that resulted in shame and loss to the family. But his father made it clear that wasn't so and even called for a party to celebrate the homecoming of his beloved son.

Unveiling the Heart of the Father

What an incredible and moving story. Jesus shared this parable, and I think it's one of the most beautiful parables in the Bible. It's a parable that Jesus used to skillfully unveil to us the true heart of our gracious and loving heavenly Father.

Bible commentators call this the parable of the prodigal son, but the real hero of this story isn't the son, but the father. This is a story about the father and his love for his two sons. You may already have heard this parable shared a hundred times, but I want you to look at it again to see how this parable exposes the wrong beliefs that many believers today still have toward their Father in heaven.

This is without doubt one of the best known, if not the best known of Jesus' parables. It has been called the parable of parables. But, it is most commonly referred to as "The Parable of the Prodigal Son". Like many parables it was mis-named in antiquity.

The subject of this parable in Luke is not the Prodigal Son; For He is only one of the supporting characters in this story. Just like the Elder Brother is only one of the supporting roles in this story. As we go through this story you will see the true subject of this Parable.

The Arrogance of the Son

Luke 15:11-12

And He said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them.

Under Jewish law a father was not free to leave his property as he liked. The elder son must receive a double portion, so in the case of two sons, the younger would get one-third of the estate (Deuteronomy 21:17). It was by no means unusual for a father to distribute his estate before he died, if he wished for example to retire from the actual management of his affairs. But there is a certain heartlessness and a certain callousness in the request of the younger son. He said in effect, "you are as good as dead to me. I cannot wait until you die. So give me what you owe me... **now!**"

The father did not argue. He knew that if the son was ever to learn, if the son and the father were ever to have the wonderful relationship that the father long for and that the son was searching for, the son must learn from the consequences of his behavior. He also knew that the Son must follow his own path and find his way home again. So he granted the son's request. Without delay the son took his share of the property and left home.

The Devastation of the Son in the Far Country

Luke: 15:13-16

“And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he was longing to fill his stomach

with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him.” --- Luke: 15:13-16 NASB

He soon ran through the money; and he finished up feeding pigs, a task that was forbidden to a Jew because the law said, "Cursed is he who feeds swine." He had sunk as low as you could sink as a Jew. This is like... feeding pigs to a Jew. I have never come across a true parallel in our culture to just how far one would have to fall to be the equivalent of feeding pigs in Jewish culture.

An interesting bit of trivia about the pods that the prodigal son was feeding the pigs and that he wanted to eat, was that they were from the carob plant. Carob is often used as a substitute for chocolate in trail mix and various other health foods.

It is interesting that just as The Prodigal Son comes to the end of his resources, the bottom falls out of the economy. Was this a coincidence?... Maybe... Personally, I think that God just uses circumstances to His best advantage. We see an inkling of this in Romans 8:28 which says:

“And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.”

When circumstances become tough, we begin to evaluate our situation.

Let's see what happens as the Prodigal Son thinks through his situation and at what conclusions he comes to.

Hunger Not Repentance Brings The Son Home

Luke 15:17-19

“But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!

I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight;

I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants.”

At this point Jesus pays mankind the greatest compliment it has ever been paid. Jesus said “When he came to himself,” Jesus believed that so long as a man was away from God he was not truly himself; he was only truly himself when he was on the way home. Beyond a doubt Jesus did not believe that anyone was beyond redemption, even though He understood that not all would “come to themselves” and go home. He believed that a man or woman was never essentially themselves, unless they came home to God.

The son decided to return home and plead to be taken back, not as a son, but in the lowest rank of slaves, the hired servants, the men who were only day laborers. The ordinary slave was in some sense a member of the family, but the hired servant could be dismissed at a day's notice. The hired servant was not one of the family at all.

Had the Prodigal Son Repented?

Was it a realization of his sin that motivated the Prodigal to decide to return home? NO

If you look closely at the story, it never says that the Prodigal Son repented. He did not change his mind about his lifestyle. He just wanted food on a regular basis. It was hunger that was the catalyst that brought him to this decision, not because he came to the realization that he had done anything wrong. He came to the realization that he had a need and his need could not be met where he was. Hunger brought him to himself. Hunger caused him to examine his situation and decide to go home. Hunger can make us do things we would never consider unless we *were* hungry. This started the process of coming home for the prodigal. Simply saying “I am hungry.”

Coming to God does not require getting your act cleaned up or changing your life style. You do not need to take a shower in order to take a bath! Remember..., God cleans the fish *after* He catches them.

The turning point comes when a person “comes to him or her-self,” which simply suggests that he makes a wise choice. His thinking changes and he understands that, “This is stupid. This is not who I am! I have a home and I Have a father.

Let’s look further

The Love of the Father

Luke 15:20-24

“So he got up and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and

embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate." --- Luke 15:20-24 NASB

In the Middle East in that day, even the wealthiest of people lived in towns for protection. They often lived in compounds behind barred gates. It was not unusual for the elders to sit in the gate and greet people, conduct business, or just see what was going on.

The Father in this story was sitting where he could see the road and who was coming and going.

When the Prodigal Son was a long way off, the father saw him and had compassion.

There was a saying in Jewish culture in the time of Jesus:

“for anyone who is over 30, it is undignified to run”.

They wore long robes in those days. Underwear that was almost as long as their robes. The father had to hike up his robes to run so his legs were free to move. Seeing the Father run in long robes would have been quite a sight. He would have been showing the world his underwear! Not unlike these baggy pants boys we have these days!

But, The Father was not concerned about his dignity and position in society. He was concerned about his son. The son was more important.

There are two words for run in Greek. One is for a jog. The second word is *treco* (*Tre-CO*). It means to sprint or to run fast. It was this second

word that is used in this verse. The father ran as fast as he could to the son.

The Father embraces him and kisses him repeatedly, even though he smells of pigs and body odor from his travels. Have you ever smelled the odor from a pig farm? Believe me if you ever have, you will never forget that smell!!!! That is just like God with us. No matter how much we mess-up or how bad we stink... He Loves Us!

Notice here that the Prodigal did not get all the way through his speech. The Father would not let him. The Father loved his son **so** much, that He was determined to treat him as a Son and... to show him how much He... Loved... His...Son!

How Did the Father Show His Love to His Son?

The Father Said “Bring the Best Robe and put it on him.”

In Jewish culture giving a robe to someone said you were an Honored guest in their home. The Best Robe was a robe that would be brought out on important occasions. It was reserved for special and honored guests.

The Father said: “Put a Ring on his hand.”

In Jewish culture putting a ring on a man’s hand was to say “You are an heir of mine” and “I grant you authority.” It was also the ancient equivalent of a visa card. Do you remember in the movie “Ben Hur” when Charlton Heston stamped the ring into the clay tablet? The seal on the ring says who will pay the bill. It also conveys that you have been given the authority of the one whose seal was on the ring.

The Father said: “Put Sandals on his feet.”

In Jewish culture only children wore shoes or sandals. Neither slaves nor hired servants were given shoes. So the Father was saying you are restored to the position of being my Son.

In the Greek there are two words for Sandals:

The first is:

Sandallon--- This is made of very cheap material. They were worn by the poor. They cost very little and did not wear well.

The second is:

Huppodema (Huppo-DEE-MA) --- is made of leather. It was a luxury item. It was worn by those who were better off. These would wear very well and were more comfortable and much easier on the feet.

The Father called for Huppodema. He gave his son the best. Did you know there is never any sense of cheapness in God’s world!!! You never see God being cheap in the scriptures. God gives His best!!!

In fact God is so far from being cheap that He sent his only begotten son, His first born, to be the payment for our sins. Jesus was such a perfect sacrifice for us that he represents an over payment for our sins.

For example, if you owed a debt of a hundred thousand dollars and you had promised to pay it in a certain length of time. When that time came you did not have the money. But unknown to you, your best friend had gone to the person you owed and gave them 10 million dollars. The person who held your debt would say, “They only owe one hundred thousand.” Your friend would say I love them so much, I never want them to worry about this debt again or any future debt. You however did

not know that your best friend had paid off your debt. He or she had to go out of town and did not get to tell you. So you continued to worry about the debt. You were afraid they would take away your home to satisfy the debt. You were worried about that debt all the time. So you did not get to rejoice and rest in what your friend had done. God loves us so much He does not want us to worry about sin ever again. He wants us to rest in Him and enjoy our relationship with Him. That way we are able to do as one of my teachers said many years ago... "Why not live like we are in heaven, while we are on the way to heaven, since we are going to be there anyway."

There is a scripture that reflects that view:

1 John 4:17 (NASB) Says:

"because as He is, so also are we in this world."

Enjoy His Presence. Rest in Him! Enjoy the benefits of being His Child!!!!

The Father Said "Bring the Fattened Calf, Kill it, and let us eat and Celebrate."

The Slaughter of the Fattened Calf is yet another Gift of The Father. The Slaughter of The Calf represents the sacrifice of the Blood of Christ Jesus on the Cross. It represents the New Covenant. It was the Gift of Jesus that made ALL the other gifts possible including the redemption of God's Children.

God always gives the best. He gave us His very best in Christ Jesus. He gave His only begotten Son... just for us! He loves us enough to Give the *Very Best!!!*

How Did the Father Show His Love to His Son?

Extravagantly, The Father showered him with gifts!

The story does not end there. At this point the Elder Brother enters the story. *He* was actually sorry that his brother had come home. He stands for the self-righteous Pharisees (and some church members) that would rather see a sinner destroyed than saved. Have you known people with this attitude?

Let's Look at the Elder Brother

The Self-Righteousness & Anger of the Elder Brother

Luke 15:25-32

“Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be.

And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.

But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father,

'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat,

so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes,

you killed the fattened calf for him. And he said to him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours.

But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.”

If you asked the question “Why was there music and dancing?” Then you are of the Older Brother Generation. There is supposed to be music... celebration... and JOY in the Father’s house!!!!

The Older Brother would not come in so the Father went out to him.

The father pleaded with The Elder Brother to come into His house.

The Elder Brother Responds by Telling The Father:

First: What he (The Elder Brother) has done for him, that he has obeyed ALL the Commandments of The Father and had been the Perfect Son.

The religious will always tell God (or anyone else who will listen) how many good deeds they have done, how often they go to church, etc.

Second: The Elder Brother proceeds to tell The Father what He (The Father) had never done for him, despite all his years of service and obedience!

Third: He finishes up by complaining about what the Father had done for the younger brother, who was obviously unworthy of the Father’s Time of Day or even the dirt that he walked on.

The religious will complain about the good that is coming to those that they see as evil or ungodly or that simply are not as good as they perceive themselves to be. They will ask why them and not me? You know, we live in a fallen world. Stuff happens. We must continue to believe and have faith. And at the right time for US, we will receive GOOD THINGS!!!

There Are Certain Things That Stand Out About the Elder Brother:

(i) The Elder Brother's attitude shows that his years of obedience to his father had been years of grim duty and not loving service.

(ii) The Elder Brother's attitude shows he was without sympathy. He refers to the prodigal, not as my brother, but as "your son". The Elder Brother was the kind of self-righteous character who would cheerfully, have kicked a man further into the gutter when he was already down.

(iii) The Elder Brother had a suspicious and dirty mind. There is no mention of prostitutes until he mentions them. The Elder Brother, no doubt, suspected his brother of the sins he himself would like to have committed. But he was too busy being good, righteous, and dutiful or maybe it was just that he was afraid of what people would think of him, if they found out what he was doing, so he just resented his younger brother rather than doing what he wanted to do.

(iv) The Elder Brother shows the amazing as well as unfortunate truth that it is often easier to confess to God, than it is to people; that God is more merciful in his judgments than many people, *even* people who claim to be Christian.

(v) The Elder Brother just did not get it. He did not understand that All that the Father had was his. The Elder Brother could have taken a goat or a calf at any time to celebrate with his friends because the Father had already given it to him!

(vi) The Elder Brother's Anger and Pain prevented him from entering The Father's House and from receiving the Love of The Father.

(vii) The Elder Brother did not understand the Father's Love for him. The Father loved the Elder Brother just as he loved his younger son—The “so called” Prodigal!

(viii) The Elder Brother is a picture of the church or more specifically a good “Religious Christian”. Far too often in the Church there is this attitude that the world should have been here *and acting* righteous and working for the Kingdom all along. The church often does not understand The Prodigal and rejects him or her. Likewise, The Prodigal often does not identify with the church and often feels rejected by her. But, both need the Love of the Father.

Conclusion:

The Love of God can defeat the foolishness of man, the seduction of tempting voices, and even the deliberate rebellion of the heart.

So, it is *not* without reason that... this has been called the greatest short story in the world.

In His ministry, Jesus sought the lost in all sorts of unlikely places. He offended the religious leaders by eating with the lost—those who were not righteous, not clean, not good.

Jesus is the Great Physician and a physician does not set a broken arm from across the street! He goes where the patient is. Jesus seeks us out in our lostness, in our pain, and in our loneliness. Being found is simply coming home, finding our roots once again, or for the first time. It is God alone who can heal the hurts and remove our loneliness.

Bible commentators call this the parable of the prodigal son, but the real hero of this story isn't the son, but the father. This is a story about the father and his love for his two sons. You may already have heard this parable shared a hundred times,

but I want you to look at it again to see how this parable exposes the wrong beliefs that many believers today still have toward their Father in heaven.

Consider this for a moment: What is your opinion of God, especially when you've made a mistake? Do you see Him as an all-powerful, distant, and unfeeling judge who is angry whenever you fail and who constantly has to be appeased? Or do you know Him as your Daddy, your Abba Father whom you can run to anytime, even when you have fallen short? As I was studying the Word, the Lord revealed to me that many believers have come to a place where they have forgotten their heavenly Father. They have forgotten about His love, His grace, and His loving-kindness.

They relate to God in a judicial and transactional fashion.

Today many believers come before Him with apprehension and trepidation, presenting their failings to Him and quickly leaving before they get the punishment and condemnation they think they rightly deserve from Him. They perceive Him exclusively as a God of holiness, judgment, and justice— His face steely and stern, His mighty arms folded in dissatisfaction and disapproval. They see a God who is easily displeased, quick to anger, perpetually disappointed with them, and waiting impatiently to be placated.

This wrong belief of who God really is has driven many into fear, guilt, depression, and insecurity. And that is why it's so vital we see the heart of the Father as unveiled by Jesus in this timeless parable. Not too long ago, Lydia, a sister from South Africa, wrote to me. I believe that many of you would be able to identify with what she shared about her struggles in relating to God as her Father:

“I grew up with very low self-esteem, having been labeled the difficult child in my family. I was an unplanned baby, and my parents already had one child— a girl, so they really wanted a boy. They were disappointed when I turned out to be a girl and even considered giving me to a paternal family member who did not have children.

“My dad comes from a very cold, strict family, and he has a very bad temper, so I grew up naturally fearful of him and always felt like I was walking on eggshells around him. My mom also grew up in a household where she had not received

love. Both my parents are extreme perfectionists and very organized. On top of that, they raised us with military discipline and no compassion. It was your own fault if you got hurt— you brought it on yourself. Thus, I could never relate to God as a Father. God was unapproachable and sitting with a lightning bolt ready to strike me whenever I wasn't good enough, didn't pray enough, or wasn't obedient enough. I was under the impression that God was only pleased with me when I obeyed the law. Being a perfectionist myself, I felt that I never met His expectations and I was always under condemnation.

“Since encountering your teaching resources, the veil in my life has been torn. For the first time, I am free. I no longer walk under the heavy burden of condemnation. I learned that God loved us first and I can now have a love relationship with my heavenly Father and Jesus.

I have experienced victory over fear and sin that kept me captive for years— not by trying to be obedient, but by just learning that my sins have already been forgiven on the cross. And no, I am not sinning more now. I am actually overcoming more and sinning less, and I have a grateful heart for what Christ has done on the cross.”

Do you feel the same way Lydia did about God?

Do you feel as though you are never good enough, can never do enough and be obedient enough for God to love and accept you?

Do you feel like you are always living under perpetual condemnation?

Perhaps you can't relate to God as a loving Father because you've never experienced the love of your earthly father or because your own father has hurt you terribly.

My brother or sister, I pray that as we study the Word of God together, you will supernaturally experience the intimate love of your heavenly Father in a deep and personal way like never before. I pray that this experience will heal, renew, restore, and transform you in a spectacular way because His love for you is nothing less than spectacular.

See the Father's Perfect Love

There is a vacuum in our hearts that can only be filled by the Father's love. So stop trying to find love and approval in all the wrong places and getting entangled with all kinds of fears, insecurities, and addictions. I believe that if you would allow the Father to come into your heart today and fill you up with His perfect love, you will find the joy, confidence, fulfillment, and freedom that you have been looking for in life.

God's Word declares:

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4: 18–19).

Today, under the new covenant of His amazing, incredible grace, our Father in heaven isn't looking to judge you for your failings because He has already judged your every failing, mistake, and sin in the body of His own Son, Jesus Christ. The name that Jesus came to reveal in the new covenant of grace is “Father.” Today God wants to reach out to you as a caring and loving Father.

Do you know His heart of love toward you?

Do you know that it was His idea to send Jesus to be punished at the cross for you?

Read the most famous passage in the Bible and personalize it so that you can see God's heart for you: “For God so loved _____ that He gave His only begotten Son, that you who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn you, but that _____ through Him might be saved” (John 3: 16– 17).

Know beyond the shadow of a doubt today that your Father loves you and sent His own Son to save you.

Understand that we are not belittling the work of Jesus at the cross when we talk about the Father and His love for you. The truth is Jesus came to reveal the love of the Father to you. God so loved you that He sent His one and only beloved Son to pay the heavy price at the cross to cleanse you of all your sins.

Do you know that God loves Jesus dearly? Jesus is God's darling Son, the apple of His eye. Now, if your Father in heaven didn't withhold His precious Son, Jesus Christ, and sacrificed Him for you, how much do you think He loves you? You cannot begin to comprehend the intensity and sheer magnitude of your Father's love for you until you realize how much the Father loves Jesus— because He gave up Jesus to ransom you.

I hope you are beginning to experience and see for yourself just how loved you are by the Father and how precious you are to Him! Don't fear Him— see the heart of your Father's love unveiled through Calvary's Cross.

No Matter What You Have Done

But Dr. Charles, you don't understand my past and all the mistakes I've made.

You are absolutely right. I don't. But your Father in heaven sure does, and He who knows you perfectly, loves you perfectly.

At the very beginning of the parable of the prodigal son, the younger son came to his father and demanded his share of his inheritance. In the Jewish culture, this was tantamount to the young man telling his father to “drop dead.” He was effectively saying, “Give me my share of the inheritance right now. I can't wait for you to die.” It was a stinging slap on the face of his father. The young man completely humiliated and dishonored his father by making such an insolent request.

We need to understand this because if we are unable to grasp the extent to which this young man utterly rejected his father and chose his own way, we cannot

appreciate the extent of his father's love and grace in receiving him back home as his son. In the same way today, if we don't realize how much we have rejected the Father through our sins, we cannot fully grasp, appreciate, and respond to the immense grace that He extends toward us in forgiving us totally. Those who think they have sinned little and are thus forgiven little, love little. But those who know they are forgiven much, love much (see Luke 7: 47). Remember who told this parable— our redeemer Jesus, and He has firsthand knowledge of the Father's heart of love.

This may be a difficult concept for some of you. Some of you may not agree with this picture of a father. You may not have experienced what it is to be loved by a father. You may not have even experienced the love of a mother. You may have grown up with an absentee father. You may have had a father that was never there for you. Or you may have had an abusive father who treated you harshly. A father you could never measure up to; A father for whom you could never do anything right. So your image of a father is tainted. You may have assumed that God is like your earthly father. You may find it difficult to see God as a gracious, loving, giving father. Let the Father show His Love for you. Let Him show you what a Father's love truly is. Let him heal those hurts so you can receive His LOVE.

Let Him pour over you HIS Extravagant, Un-Ending Love.

Corrie Ten Boom in her book, *The Hiding Place* said ...“There is no pit so deep that the Father's LOVE is not... deeper still.

How Great Is The Father's Love For You?

If you need to experience this love I have talked about today, Please Pray this prayer....

Father Prayer:

Jesus, I do not know what it is like to have a father to love me. I ask you as the Great Physician to heal the hurts and pains in my life, so that I may know what it is to experience a Father's love. Show me your LOVE and your Grace. Show me what Extravagant, Un-Conditional Love is. So that I might be able to receive THE Father's LOVE for me AND That I might understand what it is to be loved.

AMEN.

Or perhaps you have never experienced the love of a mother. If not, pray this prayer to heal & receive:

Mother Prayer:

Jesus, I do not know what it is like to have a mother to love me. I ask you as the Great Physician to heal the hurts and pains in my life, so that I may know what it is to experience a Mother's love. Show me your LOVE and your Grace. Show me what Extravagant, Un-Conditional Love is. So that I might be able to receive THE Mother's LOVE for me AND That I might understand what it is to be loved.

AMEN.

Chapter Two: Receive The Father's Love

He sat at the front porch every day, scanning the horizon for any sign of movement. He did this faithfully, even as the days rolled painfully into weeks and then months. When his friends came by to persuade him to give up and move on, he would simply smile and wave them on and persist unflinchingly. Keeping his gaze on the surrounding hills, he waited unwaveringly and patiently for the return of his son. As he waited, he rehearsed in his mind over and over again what he would do the moment he saw his son. And every day, as he looked earnestly across the fields, he wondered if that day would be the day.

One evening the familiar silhouette of a lone figure appeared in the distance. Recognizing his son, he enacted without hesitation what he had done a thousand times before in his mind: he pulled up his robes, cast aside all dignity, and ran toward his son with all his might. He could feel his heart pumping wildly and his lungs expanding and contracting as his feet tried to outdo each other across the field. Tears streamed down his face as his son grew larger in his sight with each pace. And before any words could be traded, he had leaped forward, embraced the young man, and rained kisses on him.

This unexpected, joyous reception from the father overwhelmed the young man. He had expected to be disowned and even had a rehearsed speech to tell his father to make him one of his hired servants. How could he have known that his father had a rehearsed plan of his own? Without waiting to hear the son's rehearsed speech, his father commanded the servants to bring out the best robe for him, to place a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. The young man thought he had lost the right to be called a son because of the bad choices he had made that resulted in shame and loss to the family. But his father made it clear that wasn't so and even called for a party to celebrate the homecoming of his beloved son.

Unveiling the Heart of the Father

What an incredible and moving story. Jesus shared this parable, and I think it's one of the most beautiful parables in the Bible. It's a parable that Jesus used to skillfully unveil to us the true heart of our gracious and loving heavenly Father. Bible commentators call this the parable of the prodigal son, but the real hero of this story isn't the son, but the father. This is a story about the father and his love for his two sons. You may already have heard this parable shared a hundred times, but I want you to look at it again to see how this parable exposes the wrong beliefs that many believers today still have toward their Father in heaven.

Consider this for a moment: What is your opinion of God, especially when you've made a mistake? Do you see Him as an all-powerful, distant, and unfeeling judge who is angry whenever you fail and who constantly has to be appeased? Or do you know Him as your Daddy, your Abba Father whom you can run to anytime, even when you have fallen short? As I was studying the Word, the Lord revealed to me that many believers have come to a place where they have forgotten their heavenly Father. They have forgotten about His love, His grace, and His loving-kindness. They relate to God in a judicial and transactional fashion.

Today many believers come before Him with apprehension and trepidation, presenting their failings to Him and quickly leaving before they get the punishment and condemnation they think they rightly deserve from Him. They perceive Him exclusively as a God of holiness, judgment, and justice— His face steely and stern, His mighty arms folded in dissatisfaction and disapproval. They see a God who is easily displeased, quick to anger, perpetually disappointed with them, and waiting impatiently to be placated.

This wrong belief of who God really is has driven many into fear, guilt, depression, and insecurity. And that is why it's so vital we see the heart of the Father as unveiled by Jesus in this timeless parable.

Let me share with you a testimony from Lydia, a sister from South Africa, who wrote to her pastor. I believe that many of you would be able to identify with what she shared about her struggles in relating to God as her Father:

Dear Pastor, I grew up with very low self-esteem, having been labeled the difficult child in my family. I was an unplanned baby, and my parents already had one child—a girl, so they really wanted a boy. They were disappointed when I turned out to be a girl and even considered giving me to a paternal family member who did not have children.

My dad comes from a very cold, strict family, and he has a very bad temper, so I grew up naturally fearful of him and always felt like I was walking on eggshells around him. My mom also grew up in a household where she had not received love. Both my parents are extreme perfectionists and very organized. On top of that, they raised us with military discipline and no compassion. It was your own fault if you got hurt—you brought it on yourself. Thus, I could never relate to God as a Father. God was unapproachable and sitting with a lightning bolt ready to strike me whenever I wasn't good enough, didn't pray enough, or wasn't obedient enough. I was under the impression that God was only pleased with me when I obeyed the law. Being a perfectionist myself, I felt that I never met His expectations and I was always under condemnation.

Since encountering your teaching resources, the veil in my life has been torn. For the first time, I am free. I no longer walk under the heavy burden of condemnation. I learned that God loved us first and I can now have a love relationship with my heavenly Father and Jesus.

I have experienced victory over fear and sin that kept me captive for years— not by trying to be obedient, but by just learning that my sins have already been forgiven on the cross. And no, I am not sinning more now. I am actually overcoming more and sinning less, and I have a grateful heart for what Christ has done on the cross.

Do you feel the same way Lydia did about God?

Do you feel as though you are never good enough, can never do enough and be obedient enough for God to love and accept you?

Do you feel like you are always living under perpetual condemnation? Perhaps you can't relate to God as a loving Father because you've never experienced the love of your earthly father or because your own father has hurt you terribly.

My dear brother or sister, I pray that as we study the Word of God together, you will supernaturally experience the intimate love of your heavenly Father in a deep and personal way like never before. I pray that this experience will heal, renew, restore, and transform you in a spectacular way because His love for you is nothing less than spectacular.

See the Father's Perfect Love

There is a vacuum in our hearts that can only be filled by the Father's love. So stop trying to find love and approval in all the wrong places and getting entangled with all kinds of fears, insecurities, and addictions. I believe that if you would allow the Father to come into your heart today and fill you up with His perfect love, you will find the joy, confidence, fulfillment, and freedom that you have been looking for in life.

God's precious Word declares, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:18–19).

Today, under the new covenant of His amazing, incredible grace, our Father in heaven isn't looking to judge you for your failings because He has already judged your every failing, mistake, and sin in the body of His own Son, Jesus Christ. The name that Jesus came to reveal in the new covenant of grace is "Father." Today God wants to reach out to you as a caring and loving Father.

Do you know His heart of love toward you?

Do you know that it was His idea to send Jesus to be punished at the cross for you?

Read the most famous passage in the Bible and personalize it so that you can see God's heart for you:

“For God so loved _____ that He gave His only begotten Son, that you who believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn you, but that _____ through Him might be saved” (John 3:16–17).

Know beyond the shadow of a doubt today that your Father loves you and sent His own Son to save you.

Understand that we are not belittling the work of Jesus at the cross when we talk about the Father and His love for you. The truth is Jesus came to reveal the love of the Father to you. God so loved you that He sent His one and only beloved Son to pay the heavy price at the cross to cleanse you of all your sins.

Do you know that God loves Jesus dearly? Jesus is God's darling Son, the apple of His eye. Now, if your Father in heaven didn't withhold His precious Son, Jesus Christ, and sacrificed Him for you, how much do you think He loves you? You cannot begin to comprehend the intensity and sheer magnitude of your Father's love for you until you realize how much the Father loves Jesus— because He gave up Jesus to ransom you.

I hope you are beginning to experience and see for yourself just how loved you are by the Father and how precious you are to Him! Don't fear Him— see the heart of your Father's love unveiled through Calvary's cross.

No Matter What You Have Done

“But Dr. Charles, you don’t understand my past and all the mistakes I’ve made.”

You are absolutely right. I don’t. But your Father in heaven sure does, and He who knows you perfectly, loves you perfectly.

At the very beginning of the parable of the prodigal son, the younger son came to his father and demanded his share of his inheritance. In the Jewish culture, this was tantamount to the young man telling his father to “drop dead.” He was effectively saying, “Give me my share of the inheritance right now. I can’t wait for you to die.” It was a stinging slap on the face of his father. The young man completely humiliated and dishonored his father by making such an insolent request.

We need to understand this because if we are unable to grasp the extent to which this young man utterly rejected his father and chose his own way, we cannot appreciate the extent of his father’s love and grace in receiving him back home as his son. In the same way today, if we don’t realize how much we have rejected the Father through our sins, we cannot fully grasp, appreciate, and respond to the immense grace that He extends toward us in forgiving us totally. Those who think they have sinned little and are thus forgiven little, love little. But those who know they are forgiven much, love much (see Luke 7: 47). Remember who told this parable—our redeemer Jesus, and He has firsthand knowledge of the Father’s heart of love.

Coming back to the story, upon his younger son’s demand, the father divided to his two sons what was due them. We know that the younger son then spent all his inheritance on riotous living and, when a severe famine arose in the land, he became penniless and was reduced to feeding swine on a farm.

It’s recorded for us that he was so famished that even the pods he was feeding the swine looked delectable to him. Let’s listen in on what he says at his lowest point:

“How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I

have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants' ” (Luke 15:17–19).

Despite Your Hidden Agenda

Let me ask you a question. Based on what you have just read, was it the son's love for his father that made him journey home?

Do you think for one moment that he was truly contrite? Or that he even cared that he had broken his father's heart?

I think not! He was clearly motivated by his stomach. He wanted to go home because he remembered that even the hired servants in his father's house had more food than he did! The words that he planned to say to his father—"I have sinned against heaven and before you"—was what he thought would be the right dramatic, religious rhetoric to ensure that he would be allowed some benefits for returning home. You and I know that he wasn't genuinely remorseful. What we are hearing is his stomach talking, not his heart. So it wasn't repentance that drove him home. It was his stomach and perhaps even his sense of pride that he deserved at least what his father's servants were getting.

When I was growing up, I would hear people teach about how the son repented and decided to go home to his father. The truth is there was no repentance here. The young man began the trek home because he was starving. He was even prepared to go through the motion of saying words like, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants," with the sole intention of getting his stomach filled since he had reasoned that the "hired servants have bread enough and to spare."

He never expressed any love for the father or said that he missed his father's presence and love. This is important for us to note because God wants us to know that even when our motivations are wrong, even when we have a hidden (usually self-centered) agenda and our intentions are not completely pure, He still runs to us

in our time of need, just as the father ran to the young man and showered upon him his unmerited, undeserved, and unearned favor.

Oh, how unsearchable are the depths of His love and grace toward us! It will never be about our love for God. It will always be about His magnificent love for us. The Bible makes this clear: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4: 10 KJV). The hero in this parable is the father. It’s about the father’s perfect love for his imperfect son. It will never be about our love for God.

Some people think that fellowship with God can only be restored when you are perfectly contrite and have perfectly confessed all your sins. They think that you must apologize to God before He can be appeased. Please understand that I have nothing against saying “sorry” to God or confessing our sins. All I am saying is that we are not as important as we make ourselves out to be. The father was the initiator. Before the son even had thoughts of returning home, the father had already missed him, was already looking out for him, and had already forgiven him. Before the son could utter a single word of his rehearsed apology, the father had already run to him, embraced him, and welcomed him home.

It’s All about His Love

We are not the heroes in this story. It will never be about our apologies to God, our repentance, our actions, our love, our confessions, or our obedience. In and of ourselves, our actions— even the best ones— are laced with imperfections and impure motives. For those who believe that one must apologize before fellowship with God can be restored, this parable will rock their theology.

Read the parable for yourself in Luke 15:11–32. Notice how the son never got to complete his rehearsed speech. He attempted to but was completely overwhelmed by his father’s joyful response to his return. However impure his intentions or motivations were for coming home, the father lavished him with undeserved, unmerited, and unearned favor.

It's all about our Father's heart of grace, forgiveness, and love. Our Father God swallows up all our imperfections, and true repentance comes because of His goodness. Our Father is the hero— not us. Let's make it all about Him and not about us!

Do I say “sorry” to God and confess my sins when I have fallen short and failed?

Of course, I do. But I do it not to be forgiven because I know that I am already forgiven through Jesus' finished work. The confession is out of the overflow of my heart because I have experienced His goodness and grace and because I know that as His son, I am forever righteous through Jesus' blood. It springs from being righteousness-conscious, not sin-conscious; from being forgiveness-conscious, not judgment-conscious. There is a massive difference.

You know, one can insist on the need to say “sorry” before we can be forgiven. But we all know that we can say “sorry” outwardly, yet deep in our hearts there is no true repentance. It's like the kid in school who, together with his buddy, has to see the principal for bad behavior. Told to sit down, he sits, but whispers to his friend, “Inside I am standing up!” It's like the account of Judas who betrayed Jesus. It's recorded for us that he “repented... saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood... And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple” (Matt. 27: 3– 5 KJV). But there was no true repentance as it was merely outward. We know this because the word “repented” here is the Greek word *metamelomai*, which expresses one's desire that what has been done might be undone, but it is not accompanied with an effective change of heart.¹

That is why we are not interested in the outward. Let's go deep into the essence of our relationship with God and really experience His love when we have failed. If you understand this, you will begin experiencing new dimensions in your love walk with the Father. You will realize that your Daddy God is all about relationship and not religious protocol. He just loves being with you. Under grace,

¹ Retrieved April 5, 2013, from www.blueletterbible.org/lang/trench/section.cfm?sectionID=69&lexicon=true&strongs=G3338.

He doesn't demand perfection from you; He supplies perfection to you through the finished work of His Son, Jesus Christ. So no matter how many mistakes you have made, don't be afraid of Him. He loves you. Your Father is running toward you to embrace you!

God Doesn't Want Hired Servants

The wrong belief of the younger son was that he wanted to come back and earn his own keep as a hired servant. He didn't want to receive his father's provision by grace or unmerited favor. In his own self-absorbed pride, he wanted to work as a hired servant and earn his own food in the father's house together with the rest of the servants. The father, of course, would have none of that.

You cannot merit by your own efforts the favor and blessings of God. They can only be received as gifts through His grace. He doesn't want you as His hired servant. Your identity is that of a child— God's child. He has a host of heavenly angels as His servants. What He desires of you is relationship. Instead of fearing Him and thinking that you must walk on eggshells in His presence, He wants you to come boldly into His presence.

Your Father wants you to know that as His beloved child, washed by the blood of Jesus, you can “come boldly to the throne of grace” at any time to obtain mercy and find grace to help in your time of need (Hebrews 4:16). For a child of God under the new covenant, it's not a throne of judgment; it's a throne of grace.

Do you believe in His grace?

Do you believe that the blood of Jesus has washed away all your sins?

Do you believe that your Father in heaven loves you?

Then come boldly into His presence whenever you fail. Come just as you are to receive mercy and find grace. He has promised in His Word that He will help you

in your time of need. What is your need today? Talk to your Father about it. What struggles, fears, and addictions overwhelm you today? Lay it all before your heavenly Father and let Him help you.

My dear brother or sister, you are no longer a slave to sin, you are a child of God. The Word says, “For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father’ ” (Rom. 8: 15). The word “adoption” is more accurately translated as “sonship.”² Through Jesus, you have received the Spirit of sonship by whom you cry out, “Abba, Father.” Did you notice that the Holy Spirit refused to translate the word “Abba” into English? The original Aramaic word Abba is retained. Do you know why? It’s because, to the Jews, Abba is the most intimate way in which you can address your father. I love it when I’m in Israel and I hear little children running around in playgrounds, calling out, “Abba! Abba!” and jump into their daddy’s embrace. It’s a beautiful picture. In Abba’s arms, a child is most secure, protected, and loved. No enemy can pull a child out of his or her Abba’s strong arms. That’s the image God wants us to have when we pray to Him and call Him “Abba.” Of course, you can call Him “Daddy” or “Papa,” or whatever term helps you to see God as a warm, loving, and caring Father.

Unless you can see Him as your Abba Father, you will continue to have a “spirit of bondage again to fear” (Rom. 8: 15). This spirit of bondage refers to the Old Testament fear of God. It’s a slavish fear of judgment and punishment that brings you into bondage and makes you afraid of God. But God doesn’t want you to fear Him. He wants you to have a Spirit of sonship! Too many believers are living with an orphan, fatherless spirit. If you are entangled with all kinds of fears, guilt, and worries today, what you need is a good heavenly dose of the Father’s love for you! Something amazing happens in your spirit when you see God as your Father. If your son or daughter has a nightmare, all he or she has to do is cry out, “Daddy!” and Daddy is there! And if there is a monster under their bed, that monster is about to be torn to pieces by Daddy! Your child doesn’t have to go, “O Father that liveth and inhabiteth the next room, I plead with thee to come to me at this time of peril,

² NT: 5206, Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words. Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.

that thou mayest rescue me from this mine nightmare!” All he or she has to do is to cry out, “Daddy!” and you are there.

Similarly, in your moments of weakness you don’t have to approach God with perfect prayers. You just cry out, “Daddy!” and your heavenly Father runs to you! You are not coming before a judge. You are coming before your Father, your Daddy God, who embraces and loves you just the way you are.

Take time to come to your Abba Father today. Believe that He loves you unconditionally today. See Him welcoming you with a smile on His face and with outstretched arms. Run into His embrace, bask in His perfect love for you, and let it melt away every worry, fear, and insecurity. When you believe and receive your Father’s love for you, it will put unshakable peace and strength in your heart!

Chapter Three: Be Transformed By The Father's Love

No matter how many times you have failed, how many mistakes you have made, and how terrible you think your sins are, the cleansing power and blood of your Savior, Jesus Christ, is greater than them all. God made this promise to you in His Word: "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool" (Isaiah 1:18 NLT). That's the power of the cross in your life. The moment you believe in Christ, all your sins are washed away once and for all and you are made as white as snow. Have you seen how snow dazzles in the sunlight? That's how your Father in heaven sees you right now, clothed with the gleaming robe of righteousness.

"But Dr. Charles, what have I done to deserve this robe of righteousness?"

Well, you've heard the parable of the prodigal son. Let me ask you this: What did the son do to deserve the father's embrace? What did he do to deserve the best robe that the father commanded his hired servants to bring for him?

Absolutely nothing!

The "best robe" is a picture of the robe of righteousness that your heavenly Father clothed you with when you received Jesus. This robe of righteousness is a free gift. You cannot earn it, work for it, or merit it. That is why everything we hear about what the father did to welcome his son home is a picture of our heavenly Father's amazing and unconditional grace. Our part is to just believe in His goodness and wholeheartedly receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness from Him to reign victoriously over every area of defeat in our lives.

Receive and Reign

The truth is there is no other way to reign in life apart from believing and receiving. Since the Father's acceptance, grace, and gift of righteousness cannot be earned, the only way to get them is by humbling yourself before Him and saying, "Dear Daddy God, I know that I have done nothing to deserve Your love and blessings in my life. Thank You for giving me grace that is so unmerited. I humbly receive the abundance of Your grace and Your precious gift of righteousness."

Which do you think takes more humility— to work for and earn your own righteousness or to receive righteousness as a gift from God? I submit to you that believers who try to earn God's approval, acceptance, and blessings through their service, prayers, and good works inadvertently fall into pride.

In the parable of the prodigal son, the younger son wanted to come home and say to his father, "Make me like one of your hired servants." Even though he was completely down-and-out, he still wanted to keep his pride and earn his own keep as a hired servant rather than humble himself before his father. Of course we know that even though he believed wrongly and was still entangled in self-occupation, the father heaped upon him the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness and received him home with great celebration.

The Older Brother Mind-set

As for the older brother in the parable, he got massively angry when he heard that his shameless sinner of a brother returning home was the reason there was music and dancing in his father's house. His pride got the better of him, and he refused to go into the house because he felt that unlike him, his brother had not done anything to deserve such an honor. The older brother said to his father, "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him" (Luke 15:29–30).

Notice that the older brother was caught up with what he had done to “deserve” the fatted calf that was killed for his brother. His response also revealed what he believed about his father. He related to his father as if his father were a hard taskmaster. Instead of simply enjoying his position as a son, he was busy serving his father, busy trying to win his approval through his works.

The older brother believed he needed to earn the father’s blessings, and in his mind he had performed much better than his disgraceful and rebellious younger brother. So he felt that he deserved more rewards from his father and was thus indignant because he thought his brother was being given more. In actual fact, the Bible records that the father had divided to them his wealth. According to Jewish custom, the older son always gets a double portion, so the older brother had already been given much more!

Clearly he missed the whole point of what it means to be a son. His eyes were not on his father’s goodness, but on his own performance. There was no relationship with his father. He had a slavish mind-set and was persistently trying to please his father with his service and by the care he took not to transgress any of his father’s commandments. He never understood the father’s heart. Simply put, he never understood grace.

Love Relationship or Business Transaction?

Unfortunately, there are many believers today who are like the older brother. Rather than receive the Father’s perfect love and acceptance by grace, they want to be able to say they have earned His blessings.

Do you think that brings joy and delight to the Father’s heart?
Imagine if you wanted to give your child a special gift as an expression of your great love and your child tells you, “No, I want to work for it. I will earn it

myself.” How would you feel if your child would rather earn your love and blessings by his own efforts than receive it? Certainly there are times when a child may “work” for something as a reward. He may get rewarded for doing well in school or keeping his room tidy. But I’m not talking about rewards. Something is very warped if your child cannot receive a gift from you without trying to earn it. It means that your relationship with him mirrors a business transaction.

Sadly, this is exactly how some believers behave today. They have an older brother mentality when they relate to God. They don’t want to receive anything from Him by grace. Like the older brother in the parable, they want to work for it, and their relationship with God becomes businesslike and transactional. Instead of enjoying a love relationship between a Father and His child, they want to go back to the way it was under the old covenant of the law. Under the old covenant, if you did right, then God would bless you, and if you did wrong, you would be cursed.

It really is quite sad because they will inevitably end up becoming resentful and upset with God when they see their “undeserving” brothers being blessed by the Father’s abundant grace. Like the older brother, they end up angry with God and saying to Him, “Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me...”

Believers who still live under this veil of the law are like the older brother. They hear the music and the dancing, and they don’t understand it. They hear about their Father’s amazing grace, and they can’t comprehend it. They read stories of lives transformed by grace, and they can’t accept it. To them, God is all about keeping commandments, service, and obedience. Rewards should be meted out when right is done, whereas just punishment must be exacted on all who have transgressed.

If that is you, I pray this veil of the law will be removed and that you will experience the Father’s grace in a deep and personal way.

All That Is God's Is Already Yours

Do you know what the father, who had left the party to seek out his older son, said in response to this son's complaint? "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours" (Luke 15:31).

My dear brother or sister, it's not about your love for God; it's about the Father's love for you. He is always the initiator. It has always been about His love for you. Don't live life mad, angry, guilty, and frustrated. Come into the Father's house and find rest for your soul. It's not about your own efforts. Your Father wants you to know that ALL He has is already yours— not because of your perfect performance, but because you are His child through Jesus' finished work.

Romans 8:32 declares, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" Daddy God has already with Jesus given you all things. Jesus is your acceptance. He is your righteousness, your holiness, your provision, and your wisdom. Whatever it is you need in your life, your Father has already given to you through Jesus.

So come home to His embrace. Come home to grace. Come and join in the music and dancing!

Transforming Power of the Father's Love

It is interesting to note that in the parable of the prodigal son, both brothers wanted to earn their own keep. I think that demonstrates to us that our fleshly propensity to want to merit blessings from God is far greater than our ability to receive from Him. We are generally more inclined to want to merit His love, acceptance, approval, and blessings than to receive them by His unmerited favor.

It truly takes a revelation of grace to see the Father's love and to receive from Him. And the Word tells us that it is only by receiving from our Father His grace and His righteousness that we can reign in this life (see Rom. 5:17). Perhaps that's the reason we don't see more believers reigning in life. The key lies in how they perceive their Father in heaven.

Is He a hard, heavy-handed taskmaster to you or a loving, generous Father? Will you allow Him to clothe you in His righteousness and by His loving grace put a ring on your finger and sandals on your feet? Or will you fight to earn your own righteousness, merit your own provision, and deserve your own possessions by your own works? The power to reign in life hinges on what you believe about God.

Dr. Charles, are you saying then that everything is just by grace and we can live any way we want with total disregard for God? Are you saying that we don't have to serve Him?

Ask yourself this question: When someone genuinely encounters the Father's love, favor, and blessings in a way that is totally undeserving, how do you think he or she will live?

Take a moment to put yourself in the younger son's shoes: You've squandered away your father's wealth. You've run out of money and food, so you decide to go home because you know that even your father's servants have an abundance of food to eat. But when you reach home, instead of rebuke and condemnation from your father and having to beg him to make you one of his hired servants, he gives you a lavish reception filled with hugs and kisses.

Just a couple of days ago, you were starving and even eyeing the food meant for pigs. But now you are clothed with a fresh, clean robe. You are wearing the ring of your father, authorizing you to make payments in his name. And as if that is not enough, your father has invited all the neighbors, killed a choice calf, and they are having a homecoming barbecue party with music and dancing in your honor.

Imagine that all this has happened to you. You've just experienced your father's loving embrace and forgiveness. Now, does this make you want to rebel against

your father again by leaving home and going back to the filthy pigpen, wallowing in the mud and feeding on things that will never satisfy you? Of course not!

There is a great misunderstanding that those believers who struggle with and indulge in sin, and who are still in love with the world, do so because they don't love God enough. That's what we hear from a lot of preachers who tell believers to love God more, thinking that if people love God more, they would love sin and the world less.

But God opened my eyes one day to the real reason believers are still entangled with sin and the world. I've never heard anyone preach this before, so this is fresh from heaven. The apostle John tells us, "If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2: 15). Notice that it is the love of the Father, not the love for the Father. So people who love the world and are trapped by worldly pursuits are actually people who don't know or don't believe in their hearts the love of the Father for them.

Unfortunately, we hear a lot of messages that are all about our love for the Father— "You've got to love God more! You've got to love God more!" What we really need is more preaching that is all about the love of the Father. It will never be about our love for Him, but His love for us.

Beloved, when people come to truly know and believe the Father's love for them and have it burning in their hearts, they will no longer want to go out and live like the devil. There is just something powerfully transformative about grace. If you've tasted and savored grace from your heavenly Father, you never want to live in the wilderness of sin, away from the Father's embrace, ever again.

Living from Grace to Grace

Let's continue talking about the younger son. Does receiving forgiveness and grace from his father mean that he will never fail again? Of course not! But every time

he fails, he knows now that he doesn't have to run away and hide in guilt and fear because he knows his father's heart. This is what it means to live from grace to grace— even if you stumble, it's an upward stumbling. You are conscious of the fact that there is fresh grace each day, in super-abounding measure to swallow up all your failures. This is the goodness of God that leads you to repentance (Rom. 2: 4).

Some people think that repentance must involve crying their eyeballs out. I've seen people do that, but they return home and their lives are not changed. Conversely, I've seen genuine repentance when people encounter God's grace by listening to a message or reading a book like this, and there are no dramatics involved. But when they go back to their families, you realize something in them has changed as days pass. Their thoughts and their beliefs have changed.

This in time brings about a complete transformation in their lifestyles, their behaviors, their attitudes, and their actions as they continue to grow in grace. Addictions start to lose their hold over their lives. Fears, doubts, and insecurities begin to dissolve. They begin to experience favor and succeed in their relationships, careers, and ministries. Instead of envying pigs' food, they now feast at the Father's table of abundance. Instead of living defeated in sin, they now live in the victory of their Father's love. That's what right believing in the Father's love brings.

I would like to share with you an awesome testimony from twenty-five-year-old Nathan, who shared about the breakthrough he experienced when he encountered the Father's love for him. He recounted how, since the age of fourteen, his life had revolved around drugs, pornography, sex, and gang violence. Growing up in such an environment, he never had a chance to see a different way of life. He never enjoyed a proper childhood and never experienced love and acceptance from his family members, who saw him as nothing more than a "war machine." With no father figure in his life except a man whom his mother married and who beat him regularly from the time he was three, Nathan struggled with his identity, his addictions, and his anger.

But his turning point came when he learned that his Daddy God loves him. He shared:

“I heard a sermon about being God’s beloved. I had never heard someone speak about Jesus as someone who died for my sins because He loved me so much. I thought there was no way anyone would die for me if they knew what I’d done. But the love I felt as I listened was something I’d never experienced before.

*I had to know more, so I bought the book *Destined To Reign*, and the Lord’s words through this book changed my life... I’ve dropped every bad habit— everything— in my past and have given myself to the Lord Jesus Christ. Every day seems new to me, and I see life in a different light now. I know that I have a Father in heaven who loves and accepts me. I know that He hears my prayers and won’t be slow to answer them.”*

It is wonderful that Nathan had a revelation that despite his failings, his Daddy God has never stopped loving him. And simply by resting in his Daddy’s love, he has been set free not just from his addictions, but also from the anger and self-doubt that had bound him for almost half his life.

In the same way, I pray you will have a revelation that you are right now loved by the Father and close to His heart. That He always hears your prayers and is more than able and willing to lift you out of every dark pit and set you in His love and light.

In the parable of the prodigal son, both sons were far away from their father, even the older son, who was technically at home with him.

Have you experienced your Father’s love?

Right now, I want you to do something: close your eyes and just say, “Daddy.”

That’s a prayer right there. In fact, that’s the deepest, most intimate prayer you can pray. Call upon your Daddy God because He loves you and cares for you. You never did anything to make Him fall in love with you. And beloved, there is

nothing you can do, nothing you could have done, that will ever take away His love for you.

Already Beloved, Already Qualified

I want you to know today that as a child of God, you don't need to qualify for His love in any way. You are already His beloved. You may feel that you are far away from Him, but your Father sees you. He has been watching and waiting for you to come home, ready to sprint toward you to embrace you. He wants to lavish His love and kisses on you, over and over again.

You don't need to earn your Daddy's love. ALL that He has is already yours. He's not asking you to serve Him in order to earn His blessings. ALL that He possesses has, has already been freely and unconditionally given to you.

Jesus said, "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Matt. 6: 26). My friend, stop toiling. You are a child of God. You are of more value than many sparrows, and your Daddy even numbers the very hairs on your head (see Luke 12: 7).

He gave up His only Son to die an agonizing death on the cross for the chance that you might one day accept His love.

So come. Come to the Father. Come with all your failings, with all your brokenness, with all your inadequacies.

Come as you are. As you realize that you are the object of His love, I pray that whatever is negative or destructive will be flushed out from your life and you will experience breakthrough after breakthrough like never before.

Chapter Four: Find Rest In The Father's Love

In this last chapter of our journey in discovering Transformation Through The Father's Love, I want to leave you with one simple but critical truth. Even if you forget everything else you've read in this course (of course, I pray that you don't!), memorize this truth I'm about to tell you. Feed on it. Let it take root in your spirit and become an anchor in your life. I promise that you will never be the same again.

Are you ready? Here it goes:

As a child of God, no matter what happens in your life, your Father in heaven loves you dearly and nothing you do can ever change that.

Will you believe that today?

Whether you are going through good times or facing challenging times, you need to know that your Abba, your Heavenly Father loves you. There is nothing that you can ever do to make Him love you more, and nothing that you can ever do to make Him love you less.

Even— or perhaps especially— when you feel like you have failed, know that you will always be the apple of His eye. Always!

God loves you with an everlasting love (see Jer. 31: 3). His love is a love that is the same yesterday, the same today, and the same forever. Feel your Daddy God enfolding you in His embrace right now. You are safe. You are utterly loved and completely accepted. He loved you before you ever knew Him. His love for you has nothing to do with anything that you have done for Him. And that is why you can be secure in the knowledge that nothing you do will ever affect His unwavering, unconditional love for you.

There is nothing for you to prove. You only need to rest. Rest and receive your Abba's love for you. Let your life become established and grounded in a love so perfect that no challenge or adversity will be able to knock you down. If you think that you've messed up, now is the time to turn to your Father. In His loving arms you will find hope, security, and refuge from any storm.

I love how the apostle Paul puts it: "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:35, 37–39).

Beloved, nothing and no one can ever separate you from the love of your Father. Don't you just love that complete sense of assurance in the unshakable foundation of God's promise to you? There are no caveats or disclaimers when it comes to the love of your heavenly Father. The Bible plainly states that nothing shall be able to separate you from the love of your Father in heaven. It's an absolute declaration and promise. "Nothing" means nothing. As a believer, this means that even your mistakes, failings, and sins cannot separate you from the love of your Father. Hallelujah!

In fact, it is the Father's love for you that gives you the power to overcome every mistake, failure, and sin in your life. The Bible puts it this way: "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6: 14). What this means is that the more you experience the love and grace of your heavenly Father, the more you fall in love with Him and out of love with sin.

Like the testimonies you have read throughout this course, you will find destructive addictions losing their grasp over your life. I like how the New Living Translation translates Romans 6:14: "Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace." Isn't that beautiful? Today you are living under the freedom of God's amazing grace— His unmerited, undeserved, and unearned favor in your

life. Grace gives you freedom. Freedom from lack, from fear, from addictions, from the torment of guilt, and from every curse and every sin!

Knowing Your Value Makes a Difference

Did you know that the enemy has no hold over people who know their Father loves them? If Adam and Eve had believed in God's love for them, the devil would not have been successful in tempting them. Unfortunately, they chose to believe the lie that the serpent had planted by portraying God as stingy and selfish, as if He was withholding something good from them.

That's why I want you to be securely established and anchored in the Father's love. You will be unshakable. You will have no desire to touch certain things, go to certain places, or be associated with certain people. You will keep away from negative influences because you trust your Father's heart for you and believe that He only wants what's best for you. You rest, knowing that He is watching out for you to protect you and insulate you from harm.

I've seen that children who are secure in their father's love are able to say no to all kinds of temptations. This is because that vacuum in their lives is already filled. They don't have to do things to win the approval of their friends when they can find absolute security, identity, and approval in their parents' love for them and, most of all, in their heavenly Father's love for them.

In the same way, when we trust in our Father's love for us, we will have the power to say no to temptations. When you have an abiding revelation of just how valuable, precious, and righteous you are in Christ, it becomes increasingly easy to say no to sin.

Let me illustrate this. If you are wearing a nicely pressed white shirt, would you want to play in the mud? Of course not! Why? Because you are conscious that your dazzling white outfit and dirty mud don't go together. Similarly, when you are

cognizant of your righteous identity in Christ, would you want to wallow in the mud and filth of sin? The truth is, the more righteousness-conscious you are and the more conscious of how valuable and precious you are in Christ, the more you will know that your righteous identity in Christ and sin don't go together—and the more you will experience the power to say no to temptation.

You Are Beloved and Well Pleasing

When Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River, the Word of God records that as He came out from the waters, and “the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased’” (Matthew 3:16–17).

I really like the way the Bible describes how the heavens opened to Jesus. I believe that whenever Jesus is preached, the heavens open to Him. This means that when we hear messages that are all about Jesus, we are really standing under an open heaven and all the blessings, favor, and goodness of God fall upon us.

After Jesus' baptism, the Spirit led Him into the wilderness, and the devil came to tempt Him saying, “If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread” (Matthew 4:3). Many years ago when I was studying this, the Lord opened my eyes and showed me that the devil had subtly left out the word “beloved.” Just moments ago, God the Father had just affirmed Jesus as His beloved Son at the Jordan River. However, when the devil came to tempt Jesus, he removed the word “beloved” and simply said, “If You are the Son of God...”.

The Lord showed me that if you are reminded that you are the beloved of the Father, you can never be successfully tempted! Even the devil knew this, and that's why he removed the word “beloved” when he spoke to Jesus. Now that's a powerful truth!

So anytime you are tempted, just remind yourself, “I am God’s beloved child, and my Father loves me.” No temptation can triumph over you when you rest securely in your Father’s love.

I just want to say a quick word to all fathers reading this: it is the father’s approval that will give a child the power to excel. Therefore, when you speak words of approval and affirmation to your children, you are really empowering them for success. They will meet every temptation head-on and will be victorious in life.

Observe Jesus’ reply. He didn’t have to prove to the devil that He was the Son of God. Secure in His identity as God’s beloved Son, He simply replied, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’” (Matthew 4:4).

When I was studying this verse, the Lord showed me: “Study the words that just proceeded from the mouth of God. These are the words that I want My people to live by.”

Do you remember what words the Father just said at the Jordan River? That’s right, He said:

“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” ---Matthew 3:17 NASB

I want to encourage you to personalize this and meditate on it every day! That’s how the Father sees you today. He sees you in Christ, and in Christ you are His precious, beloved child, in whom He is well pleased. Place your hand on your heart and hear your Father in heaven saying these words to you:

“You are My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.”

Would you believe that with all your heart today? If you are struggling to overcome a disorder or addiction, close your eyes and hear your Father saying to you, “You are My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.” Every time you are fearful, every time you are consumed by worry, anger, or depression, hear your Father saying to you, “You are My beloved child, in whom I am well pleased.”

Yes, even in the midst of whatever failures you may be experiencing, you are His beloved child, and He is well pleased with you because you are in Christ.

Keep hearing it and repeating it until you find rest, peace, and joy overflowing in your heart! If you feel like just crying in His presence, cry. He knows what you are going through and He understands— in a way that no one else can— the pain, hurt, suffering, and loss that you are experiencing.

You Are Accepted in the Beloved

But Dr. Charles, I have done nothing to make myself well pleasing to God!

Neither did Jesus. God called Jesus His beloved and said that He was well pleasing before He had even performed one miracle or act of service for Him. You see, Jesus is well pleasing to His Father not because of what He has done, but because of who He is. Did you get that? If not, please read the last sentence again.

Jesus didn't have to do anything or accomplish anything before He was considered beloved and pleasing to the Father. The good news for you and me today is that our Father in heaven has “made us accepted in the Beloved,” and “in Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:6–7).

This is true for any believer of Jesus. The moment you received Him into your life, God the Father made you accepted in the Beloved. We know that the word “Beloved” here is in reference to Jesus. So why didn't God just say “accepted in Jesus Christ”?

That is because God wants you to be conscious that you are now part of the family and you are beloved to Him the same way that Jesus is. Furthermore, the word “accepted” in the original Greek is a word far richer in meaning than the English

translation can convey. It's the word *charitoo*, and it means "highly favored."³ This word is used only one other time in the Bible, when angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored [charitoo] one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" (Luke 1: 28).

So you and I are not just accepted in the Beloved, which is already fantastic, but we are more precisely highly favored in the Beloved, Jesus Christ. In fact, the Greek scholar Thayer says that *charitoo* also means we are surrounded by favor.⁴ That's why I like to proclaim and declare that we are highly favored, greatly blessed, and deeply loved. It's a powerful declaration and an important reminder that you are not alone and left to fend for yourself in life. You have a Heaven Father who loves you, favors you, protects you, and watches over you and all your loved ones.

His Love Makes a Difference

I just love to hear heartfelt praise reports I want to share one from a lady named Gina. Listen to how she has been transformed by the love of the Father:

"I have been a Christian for about thirty-four years. Since discovering [these] teachings, I feel like I have been released from thirty-four years of being in a prison of Christian legalism, rules, and lists of things I had to do to get God to help and bless me. Before hearing the unadulterated gospel of grace, I had all but given up on my life as a Christian. Yes, I still believed that I would go to heaven, but just barely. I didn't even pray anymore because I felt I had so many problems that I would probably not be praying right anyway, so why bother? I hated reading the Bible because to me it was just a reminder of all the things I was doing wrong and all the stuff I had to do if I wanted God's help.

³ NT: 5487, Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.

⁴ NT: 5487, Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Electronic Database. Copyright © 2000, 2003, 2006 by Biblesoft, Inc. All rights reserved.

But now I can't get enough of God's Word because I see it as a love letter from God rather than a book of rules that I can't keep. I also can't get enough of listening to these sermons...and feel like I have been given healthy, nourishing food after spending thirty-four years eating junk food. I listen to [these] sermons over and over again. I find myself spending more time in the Word because it is FINALLY really and truly GOOD NEWS that I am hearing. I want to know more about who God is for real.

For the first time in my life, my kids, who are in their twenties, are EXCITED about God too. ... Recently I was thinking about the God whom I now know as my Abba Father, and I felt overwhelmed by His love for me. I started to say, "I love You." Suddenly I realized there are just no words to adequately convey the love I feel for Him now. Those three little words just don't cover it. Sometimes I feel like my heart will burst from the love I feel for Him now because I finally believe He feels the same way about me!

Additionally, things that I have been trying to quit for DECADES are now beginning to just fade away as I rest in God knowing He's going to keep loving me no matter what. Who knew that NOT trying to "be good" would bring about a heart change and then change me on the outside too. I cannot believe all this has been available to me all along. I am so happy now that I can't even describe it. Yes, I am still having my share of challenges, but things look so much different when you know that God not only CAN handle it, but He WILL handle it when you just rest and let Him be the Daddy to you that He wants to be. . ."⁵

Don't you just love reading about how lives are changed and transformed when they encounter the love of the Father? I love what Gina shared about how she now knows God as her Abba Father. Isn't it amazing that you could have been a Christian for more than three decades and yet not have had the opportunity to encounter the Father's love? I am so grateful and humbled that God has given me the honor and privilege of unveiling the Father to this precious lady and her family.

⁵ Ibid, p. 338-339

I pray that you too will experience what she has experienced. In her letter, she is literally brimming over with love and joy, and it warms my heart greatly to see her family touched by our loving heavenly Father too.

Believe the Father's love for you. See His grace. Come boldly into His throne room of grace and receive help in your time of need. In her praise report, Gina shared there were things that she had been trying to quit for DECADES but couldn't. However, the moment she began to find security in our Abba Father's love for her and had the revelation that God was going to keep loving her no matter what, transformation effortlessly began from within her and those things began to fade away.

When you see and believe the Father's love shining on you, darkness fades away. Depression fades away. Eating disorders fade away. Suicidal thoughts fade away. Fears fade away. Destructive addictions fade away. The more you place yourself under His grace, the more sin will have no dominion over you. Temptation will have no power over you when you are saturated with the Father's love, approval, favor, and acceptance. All this freedom can be yours when you truly believe that:

You are His beloved child, in whom He is well pleased.

This is my prayer for you, my dear brother or sister. I pray that you will begin to comprehend and believe the width and length and depth and height of your Father's unconditional love for you. Rest in your Father's love for you and not in your love for Him! And may you experience victory over every fear, every sense of guilt, and every addiction in your life.

Closing Words

My Dear Student, thank you for taking this journey with me in the Dear reader, thank you for taking this journey with me into God's Love For Us. You've been a wonderful and attentive travel companion, and I pray that you've been blessed by the truths shared in this course. While there is so a great deal of emphasis on God's Love in some circles, I am concerned that it is a very poorly understood subject among believers today. I trust you are beginning to see that there is transformative power found in believing right about how much we are loved by God. If you can change what you believe, you can change your life.

There were some surprises when doing the research for this commentary. Like many, I assumed that the topic of God's Love For Us was a fairly well understood subject. It was quite surprising to find how little most Christians (including myself) actually know about the subject.

The topic of God's Love For Us and its effects on people has been and remains a poorly understood subject. It is my prayer and hope that we may find that rediscovering the Biblical teachings about Condemnation can enrich our lives and our ministries.

Throughout this course, I have endeavored to show you the gospel of Jesus Christ through the Scriptures as well as through the testimony of others. Because of Jesus' finished work at the cross, He will never be angry with you nor rebuke you even when you fail. So don't ever forget the main clause of the new covenant, which says that your sins and your lawless deeds, He remembers no more!

Many believers are defeated today because they do not know the God of the new covenant of grace. I believe with all of my heart that because you took this wonderful journey with me you saw for yourself, all the things concerning Jesus Christ and His finished work, your heart would now burn with His extravagant

love for you. Jesus truly puts the “amazing”, the “wonderful” and the “marvelous” back into grace!

Today, God is all about blessing you with His grace — His undeserved, unearned and unmerited favor — in every area of your life. Stop trying to deserve and earn your own acceptance before God with your own works and efforts. It will only frustrate the grace of God and nullify the effects of the cross in your life. My Dear brother or sister, Jesus already finished the work! Believe with all your heart that it is not about what you need to do today, but about what has already been done and accomplished on your behalf.

My Beloved brothers and sisters, I have proclaimed to you the gospel of Jesus Christ and am fulfilling the commission He gave me to bring Jesus back to central place in the church by rolling away the stone and opening people’s eyes to reveal more of Jesus and His finished work. I know that if you have believed this good news of His grace, your life has begun to be radically transformed, together with the countless believers around the world who have already been impacted by the Gospel Revolution. I pray that this course has torn down the fences of controversy that the enemy has erected around the teaching of God’s grace and the gift of righteousness, so that you may indeed receive not just grace, but the “abundance of grace”, and receive not just righteousness, but the “gift of righteousness”, and start reigning in life. Start reigning over sin, over sickness, over condemnation, over financial lack and over the curse of the law through the ONE, Jesus Christ.

All that I have shared works most powerfully and effectively within the environment of the local church. These truths are for the greater good of the body of Christ and should never result in you becoming a law unto yourself. Beloved, I want to see you enjoying the safety of the covering of a local church where there is accountability and submission. This is where our blessings are tremendously multiplied.

I thank you for taking this journey with me and for giving me the opportunity to unveil more of Jesus to you. You have been a wonderful traveling companion. We should do this again soon! In the meantime, until the next course begins, BE BLESSED!!!

In His Grace, *Dr. Charles.*

I look forward to hearing from you about how our Lord Jesus has touched and impacted your life with His amazing grace.

It is all about Jesus and His finished work!

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