Good morning, Family! Let’s pause to pray: Father God would you speak to me this morning? Be personal! Show me what I need to see and teach me what I need to learn. –Amen.

 This morning, we look again at a parable of Jesus, maybe his most popular one. I like to preach on this story of the prodigal (lost) son about once a year at least. It’s a beautiful reminder of who we are and who our Father is. It gives opportunity to look again at the truth that God’s love and forgiveness can pardon and restore from sin and wrong-doing and trespassing--because all of us, if we are honest, are represented in this story somewhere and because we all have a tendency either to wander from our Father or to fail to appreciate what it truly means to be His child. It is important to remember the audience of Jesus as He was teaching this story (Luke 15:1-3\*). As He teaches this and two accompanying parables, the hearers include nearly everyone in society—tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, teachers of the law. Their presence illustrates the operating principle of the Gospel: I am accepted by God through the work of Jesus Christ; therefore, I obey. The issue with the sons in this favorite tale began with lack of understanding of who their Father truly was. Neither the older nor the younger brother understood the character and nature of the Father-God.

Family, what does it mean to you that your Heavenly Father wants you to know Him? That the Holy, Eternal, Perfect God of Creation has made it possible for us

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\*Luke 15:1-3

1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.

2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” 3 Then Jesus told them this parable:

to know Him (Romans 1:19-20\*; Jeremiah 9:23-24\*\*). When we know Him, we become secure in who we are, assured of our place in eternity. Church, I submit to you that the failure of the sons in this parable stemmed from the fact that they forgot who and *Whose* they were. It is crucial for us to understand the character and nature of our Father, based on who He is according to what His Word says about Him. If our faith and understanding are healthy, we cannot see the character of God based on our feeble, fleeting emotion of the day or on our current circumstance. When we gain a deeper understanding of our Father, we gain an understanding of who we are. And how do we gain that greater understanding? We look into the Word. Look again with me, for instance, at verses 17-24:

*17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!*

*18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.*

*19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’*

*20 So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*

*21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’*

*22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.*

*23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.*

*24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.*

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\*Romans 1:19-20

since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

\*\*Jeremiah 9:23-24

23 This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches,

24 but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD.

20 For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.

The Father maintains affection for His lost son and bears the grief. Timothy Kellar said, “This is the God who wants us to know Him.”\* Listen family, the One who makes it possible to know Him knows us (Psalm 139:1-4, 17\*\*). And, Christians, we should be stewards of His character. Jonathan Edwards observed, “There is a difference between having an opinion that God is holy and gracious, and having a sense of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. There is a difference between having a rational judgment that honey is sweet and having a sense of its sweetness.” The more we know God, the greater is our assurance of who we are. The more we know God, the greater in number and quality are our thoughts about God. And when we think rightly about God, our hearts and conduct will follow suit. When we think rightly about God, we glorify God.

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\*Not only did the father run to meet his son, but he called for the best robe, which Keller states would have been the father’s own robe, calling the gift an “unmistakable sign of restored standing in the family.” Moreover, when the father called for the fattened calf, he was calling for the most expensive meat in a culture in which meat was a delicacy. Of the feast, Keller further writes that it was likely that the whole village was invited.

\*\*Psalm 139:1-4, 17

1 You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.

2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

4 Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely.

Scripture quoted by permission. . . .

17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!

A.W. Tozer once said, “What comes to our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” It is crucial for us to think rightly about God, and we do that by responding to the invitation to know Him—not our idea of Him but who He is revealed in the truth of His Word. In the Word, we find Him and become satisfied in being His, and it makes us to want others to know Him. Family, listen, the more we know our Father, the more we conform to His patterns and character and the less we look like the world. By knowing Him better, our trust in Him increases (Psalm 27, see full text at the end of this narrative). David, the psalmist, exhibits total confidence and security in the Lord. His lines speak of the fearless trust we can have in our Father, when we trust in Him and glorify Him (\*Proverbs 3:5-6, \*\*Psalm 34:8). We can grow in confidence in Him, like the psalmist because of HIS invitation to know Him. When we look again at the beauty of what He has done for us, our hearts turn to Him again. It causes us, as verse 17 of the parable says of the prodigal son says, “to come to our senses.” We embrace Him because He *runs* to embrace us! (\*\*\*Jeremiah 29:13). We can enjoy intimacy again with our Lord—or maybe for the first time. Family, in the times in which we live, it is crucial to cling to the truths of God, to confirm His truth, to live in His Promise. We can then grow in trust, forsake our sin, grow in grace and understanding. Our Heavenly Father invites us to know Him. He has made a way! He forgives our transgressions, clothes us in His righteousness. He offers us pure, white wedding garments! What will we do with this invitation? In His gifts of our salvation, our strength, our confidence, we are stewards of our Father’s character. Trust in the Lord!

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\*Proverbs 3:5-6

5 Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

\*\*Psalm 34:8

8 Taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

\*\*\*Jeremiah 29!3

13 You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Passages in support of this Message

Psalm 27

1 The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?

2 When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall.

3 Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.

4 One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.

5 For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.

6 Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.

7 Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.

8 My heart says of you, “Seek his face!” Your face, LORD, I will seek.

9 Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.

10 Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.

11 Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.

12 Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations.

13 I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

14 Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

Luke 15:11-32

The Parable of the Lost Son

11 Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.

12 The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So, he divided his property between them.

13 “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.

14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.

15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs.

16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!

18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’

20 So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.

23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate.

24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So, they began to celebrate.

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing.

26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

27 ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him.

29 But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

31 “ ‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ ”