***Living with the Assurance That God Enjoys Us (Lk. 15)***

1. Jesus revealed the Father (Lk. 15)
   1. In Luke 15, Jesus taught three parables that have profound implications for us today. This chapter gives us one of the most significant revelations of the Father in the Scriptures. In these parables, Jesus revealed how the Father pursues, enjoys, shows mercy to, and feels affection for His people.   
      The truth that He emphasized here is that the Father rejoices in forgiving and restoring His people (Lk. 15:4-7, 9-10, 20, 23, 30). He enjoys relationship with His people, even in their weakness.

18“Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity [sin]…because He delights in mercy.” (Mic. 7:18)

23“…may know that You [the Father]…have loved them as You have loved Me. (Jn. 17:23)

*Let’s look at the notes. Typically on Friday nights I teach on John 15 on intimacy with God, but with the ATC here I am going to give one of my favorite messages. I have given this message many times over the last forty plus years. I don’t just like saying it, but I like feeling it in my own heart. It is Luke 15, and the way that I title this—catch this and do not miss the key message—“Living with the assurance that God enjoys you!”*

*We all know that technically God loves us, and of course that is a really big word–that God loves us. However, I like to use the word God “enjoys” us. It is the same thing as He loves us, but I find that many sincere believers really struggle with this. This idea that God loves them, they say, “Well, of course He has to love me. Jesus died on the cross. But God enjoys me at ages thirteen and fourteen and twelve and sixteen? Are you kidding? He actually enjoys me?”*

*Beloved, this truth can change your life in a very dramatic way. I remember I was fifteen years old, which is over fifty years ago by the way. It actually was. I am moving on; I am going to be a hundred in a few years, but anyway. It was 1971, fifty-one years ago, I gave my heart to Jesus at a camp setting kind of like this. What I did not understand in those first couple of years is that God enjoyed me, even in my weakness when I was stumbling and fumbling around. I could not imagine that He actually enjoyed me at that hour. I thought possibly when I am old and mature, if that ever happens, He will. However, I have good news for you, a life-changing message right here in Luke 15 that God actually enjoys us, even in our weakness, even while we are struggling. He is looking at us with a very different emotion than most believers understand.*

*Roman numeral one: In Luke 15, Jesus gave three parables, and each of these parables carry the same message of how the Father enjoys people when they need to be rescued and recovered from their sin and compromise. It is a radical message. This chapter gives one of the most significant insights into God the Father’s heart.*

*Again, I have been preaching for a lot of years, and I find that most believers do not understand this simple and profound message that God actually enjoys us, not just after we mature, but while we are maturing. When you read Luke 15 carefully later on your own, you are going to notice nine times Jesus emphasizes that God rejoices or God enjoys or God is merry or He is filled with joy over these, a part of His family, who are struggling and stumbling in compromise. He is wanting to rescue them. You are going to find that nine times in this chapter is a reference to how He feels while He is rescuing us.*

*Look at Micah 7:18, right there on the notes. This is one of my favorite verses. The prophet is awestruck and says, “What God is like You? Who could imagine that this is what You are really like, that You delight in mercy?” Beloved, He does not just give mercy; He delights to give mercy.*

*When that connects with our heart, and we say, “God, You love giving me mercy! You are not just putting up with me,” the Lord smiles and says, “I delight in doing it and I really delight in it when it connects with you and you have that bright countenance like, ‘Are You kidding, You really feel this way?’” And He says “Yes!” And we smile back, and He says, “That is what I really love in our relationship: when you grasp the truth about how I really feel about you.”*

*Jesus made one of the most dramatic, shocking statements right here in John 17:23. I mean, it is so shocking that we can hardly grasp it. Jesus said, “I want you to know that the Father loves you in the same way that He loves Me.” It is like, “Come on!” Beloved, let me say it again from the lips of Jesus not to mature people; these are young leaders who are all still struggling in their weakness, and He tells them, “In the same way the Father loves Me, He loves you!” Like is that possible? I mean maybe in heaven He will get around to liking us, but Jesus says, “No, He feels that way about you tonight.” And, if you read John 17 in its whole context, right after He said that He said, “And all of you will stumble tonight! All of you will cave into your fear and compromise tonight! But I want you to know My Father loves you like He loves Me even right now.”*

* 1. The way we view God’s heart toward us in our sin and weakness affects how we approach God.   
     It determines whether we run *to* God or *from* God when we stumble. ***Spiritual principal***: If we feel dirty (or condemned) before God, then we will live dirty. If we feel clean, then we live clean.

*Paragraph B: The reason this message is so important—I think it is one of the most important messages that I have literally been preaching for fifty years. I started preaching in high school. I started with the Junior High group when I was sixteen years old. They said, “Get a group of twelve-year-olds and start teaching them the Bible.” I didn’t know the Bible but I started anyway. For over fifty years, when I look back, there is no message more important than understanding this. I wish I would have grasped this at the very beginning. It took me a few years but here it is—****the way that you think God feels about you right after you have sinned is one of the most important realities in your walk with God.*** *If you think that He has put up with you, or that He is finished with you, He is fed up with you, then you will run from God, not to Him. If you think that He sees the cry of your heart and says “I see your stumble but I see that you want to please Me and I enjoy you. I love you and I am going to help you.” If you really believe that, you will run to Him not from Him when you stumble.*

*This is one truth the enemy wants to make sure you never get straight. Again, I have been preaching for a lot of years and most believers who are forty, fifty, sixty, seventy years old still do not have this clear. My thought of twelve-year-olds and thirteen-year-olds being marked by this, it will change the way you relate to God when you are fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen.*

*I remember in my early days when I stumbled, and I was so upset, “Oh! I cannot believe that I did that!”*

*The Lord might have said something like, “Well, there is a lot more of that where that came from! What do you mean, you cannot believe it? That is in your heart!” And the more shocking thing was how God felt about me when I stumbled and when I just wanted to quit and give up.*

*There is a spiritual principle: if you feel dirty before God—meaning you have sinned, and the devil is accusing you: you feel like quitting, you feel ugly and dirty, even though you have repented and you are sincere. You have said to the Lord “That is not what I want to do!”—If the enemy can keep you feeling dirty, you will live dirty. If you feel clean in His eyes, you say, “Well, I just did it yesterday,” and the Lord says, “My grace is sufficient if you will ask Me.” If you feel clean in His eyes, you will live clean before Him over time, even in that area. However, if you feel dirty, you will stay dirty. That is what the enemy knows, and he never wants you to figure out this biblical truth.*

* 1. The greatest emotional need for all humans is *the assurance that they are enjoyed by God*,even in their weakness. We were all created with a longing to know that God delights in us and enjoys us.

*Paragraph C: The greatest emotional need that you have, what do you think it is? We all have a number of emotional needs. God created us with these longings and these emotional needs that He wants to satisfy. The greatest emotional need that you have is that you would have the assurance that God actually enjoys you. We were created to need to be enjoyed. If we feel that God does not enjoy us and that nobody enjoys us, something is really aching and hurting in our heart. We obviously want to get that sense from our friends and family members that they enjoy being with us. That is a beautiful and powerful thing. It is important, but even more important, the Lord says, “Know with confidence that I actually enjoy you. I am not putting up with you. I am not fed up with you. I actually enjoy talking to you.” That assurance will touch the deepest place of your heart.*

*I am praying that tonight and in this season of your life—not just tonight but in this season of your life—that God is going to mark you with this truth and not only mark you with it, but even at age twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, He will make you a messenger of this truth to your friends, because I assure you that most of the body of Christ are not settled on this truth. Many are very sincere, but when they stumble, they want to hide from God, and they want to try and fix themselves before they come and open their heart again. And the Lord says, “No! Do not run from Me! Run to Me!”*

* 1. We can draw near to God with confidence that He receives us with joy. Confidence in love has two expressions—that He loves us even in our weakness and that our weak love for Him moves Him.

19Therefore…having boldness to enter the Holiest [God’s presence] by the blood of Jesus…   
22let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance [confidence] of faith… (Heb. 10:19-22)

*Paragraph D: Now this is a verse with some unusual phrases in it; however, the key idea is the word confidence, the idea of confidence. The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 10:19, “Therefore, having boldness”—put the word “confidence” there—“having confidence to come before the Holiest”– that means the Father’s presence. You can have confidence that when you stumble you can come before the Father, the Holiest of all because of what Jesus did.*

*Verse 22, “Draw near”– come near to Him, do not run from Him, come near to Him with full assurance. That means confidence again. Beloved, the most important thing that you can have in your spiritual life—and you want to get it in your early days, and if you get it in your early days you are blessed—is to have confidence in love.*

*That is a phrase that we use around here a lot: “confidence in love.” There are two different ways in which that is expressed. Number one, “confidence, full assurance, boldness,” use whichever word you want. I like the word, confidence. Confidence that God loves you in your weakness, that He enjoys you in your weakness. However, that is not all. Confidence that when you love Him back in your weakness, God still counts it as real. Sometimes we have the idea that the only love that is real is mature love, and we feel like, “Lord, my love is flawed. It is fragile. It is weak!”*

*The Lord says, in effect, “I want you to have confidence that I accept that love from you and that it moves Me. I want you to have confidence that I love you and enjoy you even in your weakness, and I want you to have confidence that your weak love still moves Me because I see the ‘yes’ in your spirit even with greater clarity than you do.”*

*It says here in verse 22, “Let us draw near with a true heart.” You know a lot of folks, many believers, are sincere. They have a true heart and want to obey. If you have a sincere heart, “I want to obey! I know I blow it sometimes, but deep in my heart I want to obey!” When you have a believer who has a sincere heart to obey, and they have confidence, the devil cannot stop them. Many people have a sincere heart, but they do not have confidence. They do not have this full assurance as it says here in verse 22.*

* 1. There is no condemnation before God for a believer, yet Satan accuses us continually before God. The enemy’s goal is for you to relate to the Father on the basis of your failure instead of His grace.

1There is…now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus… (Rom. 8:1)

10…the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night…(Rev. 12:10)

*One of the great thunderous statements from heaven is: There is no condemnation for those who relate to God the Father through Christ Jesus. When we confess our sin, He removes it from the conversation. There is no condemnation.*

*Well, you will find here in Revelation 12 that the devil accuses us night and day, which is the same as saying he condemns us. He accuses or condemns; use which ever word you want. Why does he accuse us night and day? Because he knows we can feel condemned about what we did yesterday, what we did last night, what we did today, what we said, and we just feel ugly about it! And when the devil comes and whispers in our own thinking, he uses our own thinking, and he even uses the words of other believers. He accuses and says, “You are a liar! You are a hopeless hypocrite! You are not even real! You do not even believe these things!”*

*You respond, “Lord, I am wanting to, I am trying to! I do not believe it as much as I want to, but I am really wanting to lock into this!”*

*And the Lord would say, “Good, I want you to repent of it. When you repent, let it go and stand before Me with confidence.”*

*The devil says that you are a liar. He accuses you of being a hypocrite and of being fake. That is the accusation. He accuses you of not being real with God. Or you can use the word condemnation; he condemns you, “Guilty! Guilty! Remove him from God’s presence!”*

*But I have good news for you: “No condemnation for those who relate to God through Jesus!” This news is so glorious and so dynamic that people really struggle receiving it because it seems too good to be true! Satan wants you to have wrong ideas about how God views you in Christ.*

* 1. The view of many is that *God is mostly mad or mostly sad when He relates to us*. One of the most important questions of our spiritual journey is: how does the Father feel when He looks at me? David described God’s heart as full of joy and pleasures (Ps. 16:11).

11In Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forever. (Ps. 16:11)

*Paragraph F: The view that many people have is that God is mostly mad or He is mostly sad when He relates to them. I mean most believers that I know. When I ask, “Tell me how you think God feels when you talk to Him,” I hear the reply, “I think He is kind of mad at me.”*

*Why? “Oh man, I have these gaping holes in my character, thought I don’t like it!” I am talking to sincere believers, but they still have these struggles and failures. Though they do not want to camp out and just get into them, they have not found their way through yet.*

*“How do you think God feels about you?”*

*“I think He is really mad at me, to be honest.”*

*Or another guy would say “Well, I do not think He is mad, but I think He is always sad. He looks at me and says, ‘Oh poor little Billy over there just cannot get his act together. He just grieves Me all day long!’”*

*I have good news for you! He is mostly glad when He relates to you. The enemy wants you to believe that He is mostly mad or mostly sad, but the Bible makes it clear right here in Luke 15 that He is mostly glad when He relates to a sincere believer.*

*Again, beloved, if you get this right, that you think rightly about how God feels when He looks at you when you have had your worst day—I mean when you have done things that shock you, and you say, “I just cannot believe that my heart went there!” and there are a hundred different ways to go there!—I have good news for you: He feels very different about you than the enemy wants you to believe. Even when “religion” will preach at you and tell you how angry God is at you and how grieved He is. In my early days I would think every time I came to Him, He would say, “Oh, there is poor Mike again. Poor little guy just cannot get his act together!” I did not want to come to God. I just wanted to go get fixed and then come to God.*

* 1. Jesus walked in the anointing of gladness more than any man in history (Heb. 1:9). His personality is filled with joy and gladness. Jesus’ leadership and His heart for His people flows from gladness.

9God has anointed You [Jesus] with the oil of gladness more than Your companions. (Heb. 1:9)

*Paragraph G: Hebrews 1 says that God anointed Jesus with the oil of gladness more than any other man in history. Now, that is a strange phrase, “anointed with the oil of gladness.” What? Jesus, as a man, had the anointing oil—just think of the anointing oil, it is a word picture—he is saying that gladness was in Jesus’ heart more than all of his companions, which means more than any other human being. Jesus had more gladness than any man in human history, more than any person.*

*His personality is really filled with gladness. This is a gloriously shocking truth. He is mostly glad when you are talking to Him. He knows your sin. He knows your failure far better than you do, and He knows where it is going far better than you do, but He says, “I look at you, and you are Mine! I came for you!” And, beloved, if the Lord marks your heart with this, it is not a one-time marking. I mean I have been preaching this message for forty or fifty years or for however long, and I still love to say this. When I drive home tonight, I will say, “Yes! Thank You, God! I love it!” I love the feeling of God’s gladness towards my life.*

* 1. The Lord delights in and rejoices over His people (Deut. 30:9; Isa. 62:4; Jer. 32:41; Zeph. 3:17).

4…But you shall be called Hephzibah…for the Lord delights in you…5as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. (Isa. 62:4-5)

17“…He will rejoice over you with gladness…He will rejoice over you with singing.” (Zeph. 3:17)

*Paragraph H: I had a very dramatic dream years ago in 1995. I mean that was like a hundred years ago, but, whatever, a long time ago. November 1995. I remember it vividly. In this dream I was up on a platform, with ten or twenty thousand young people in the room. So in this dream there were thousands of young people there and the audible voice of God like thunder said, “Call them Hephzibah! Call them Hephzibah, for I delight in them!”*

*In Isaiah 62, God calls His people Hephzibah which means in Hebrew, “I like you.” So He was saying, “Call them ‘I delight in them’!” I just woke up and the power of God was resting on me. The Lord showed me in the dream that “You proclaim this over young people and it will change their emotional make-up, for some people dramatically, even overnight.” I mean, mostly it is little by little, but some will get really shaken and shifted even in a short amount of time when this truth hits their heart.*

*Some of you know that for almost eighteen years we had the big conference downtown each year just after Christmas called the Onething conference. Many times we had twenty thousand young people, and every single time I would say, “Hephzibah!! I am going to prophesy that over you!”*

*To some folks that seemed weird to them, “I do not get what that guy is doing up there!” For other folks, it really touched them, and others did not know for sure, but I am going to pray this over you all in a few moments, that you would have the knowledge that God calls you, “You are one that I delight in!” Because I want that audible voice, that thunderous voice of God in that dream to speak to you, where the Lord showed me, “I will change their emotional make up by this truth. The devil calls them hopeless hypocrites. The devil calls them fakes. The devil calls them liars. I call them by the name, ‘I like you, I delight in you!’”*

*Zephaniah 3:17—look at this—“God rejoices with gladness” over us? Lord, do You have all of the information on us? Really? He says, “I rejoice over you,” because God sees the yes in your heart and the yes to obey Him even before it is walked out fully in your life. He sees the cry of your heart to obey Him, and that moves His heart, and that is real to Him. God does not just take the cry of our heart serious when it is fully manifest in mature character. Even in the journey He rejoices with gladness!*

*I have good news for you: God likes you a whole lot more than you like you. He delights in you more than you delight in you. He really does. He knows your heart more than you know your heart. We think, “Oh, He knows my heart and how wicked I am!” No, that is not the part I am talking about, I mean He does but that is not the part I am emphasizing. He knows the cry in your heart to obey Him when you think, “Oh, I am just so tired of failing!”*

*The Lord would say, “I see your heart, I see a cry in you even more than you see it in your own heart.”*

1. The parable of the lost son (Lk. 15:11-32): the prodigal son

*Now we are going to look at the third parable for just a few moments. In Luke 15 there are three parables. There is the parable of the lost sheep. That is the first one in verses 4 to 7, then the lost coin, verses 8-10, and then the lost son, verses 11-31. And so there is the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. They all have the same message. The message is when they are lost, the Lord says, “I am coming after them. I am not angry, but am coming after them with delight in My heart and I am going to shock them with how I feel about them!” That is the message that Jesus is giving in Luke 15.*

*A number of you are going to be teaching and discipling young people, and you might say, “Well, I am young! I’m twelve, I’m fourteen!” but in a minute you are going to be fifteen and you are going to be teaching the twelve-year olds and maybe even having little Bible studies of two or three. I want to give you a tipoff: if you become really familiar with Luke 15, you will change the life of the people you are wanting to encourage in the Lord. I want to encourage you to take a long time on Luke 15. I have never graduated from Luke 15. I mean, it is forty, fifty years later, and I am still preaching on it. I just cannot get past this chapter. It is fantastic! It will change the lives of the people you are reaching to impact, and you do not have to wait until you are twenty or thirty to do it.*

*Again, I got saved when I was fifteen, and when I was sixteen, my youth leader said to go start a Junior High group. I asked, “Well, how do you do that?”*

*“Go get ten people and just have a little discussion Bible study and start teaching them.” Well, I did not know anything! So I got my ten or twelve, and we met every Tuesday night. Okay full visibility, I had to take them out to Dairy Queen afterwards to get them to come to my meeting. I am admitting it, but they came! I taught them and do not know if they got anything, but I know one thing: it changed my life because when I gave these words to them, I thought, “Wow! Man, I think this is good for me!”*

*However, do not think that you have to be twenty or thirty before you start this. And do not wait for some leader gives you a Bible study, asking you, “Will you take it over?”*

*My youth leader said, “Just go get five or six of them from the junior high school and begin to talk to them and invite two or three to a Bible study, and eventually they will bring a friend or two, and eventually you will have ten.” That was seemingly weird to me because I had never heard of anyone that did that, but our youth leaders made all of us do it, and I am so glad I did it these many years later. So, Luke 15–man, I started pounding this over and over, but I was the one getting changed, though I hope a few of them got changed as well.*

*Parable number three: we are not going to look at the first two parables, but I want to tell you to go after them, study them, sing them, say them, pray them, and teach on them over and over and over and over. Never graduate from Luke 15. In chapter 15, Jesus is telling sinners, people who are failing, how God feels about them. Jesus knows more about how the Father feels more than any other person that ever walked the earth, and this is His concentrated revelation. He puts them all in one chapter and says, as it were, “This is how My Father feels and you can count on it!”*

*Well, we are going to skip the parable of the lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin and we are going to go to the parable of the lost son. We are going to just look at a little bit of it because, for this to really get you, you have to study it and talk about it and read it over and over, so I am not trying to do it all in one night. I am more pointing to this chapter to say, “Hey, take the next fifty years—that is my secret—and go after this chapter.” I am so glad I stumbled into this chapter many, many years ago.*

* 1. This parable shows us how the Father responds to a son who rebels against Him.

11Then He said: “A certain man had two sons. 12And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me’…13…the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living.   
14But when he had spent all…” (Lk. 15:11-14)

*Paragraph A: Verse 11, most of you know the story of the prodigal son. The word, “prodigal,” is a fancy word for the son who compromised in a really serious way. A prodigal, meaning he knew better, and he really did bad stuff for quite a while. That is what prodigal means here.*

*Verse 11, Jesus said “There is this wealthy man.” It is a certain man, and we find out he is a wealthy man. He had two sons.*

*Verse 12, the younger son said to the father, “Hey, Father, I know that we are really wealthy, and I know that when you die I am going to get millions of dollars in my inheritance because I can see we have a big farm and everything is going good. However, there is only one problem. Father, I love you, but I do not want to wait until you die before I get my money, so would you give it to me now?” The younger son said, “I want my future family inheritance. I want that bank account now!”*

*And the father said to the younger son, “Okay.”*

*The younger son, verse 13, went to a faraway country, of course. If he was eighteen or twenty years old—I am making up that age as we do not know—and he has a couple million dollars, well, you do not want to move down the street if you are going to spend it in a bad way. Go far away. And he did and just partied his brains out, millions of dollars. Verse 13, look here, “he wasted all of it.” He went through all of the cash in prodigal living. One translation says, “riotous living,” I mean really perverse things.*

*Verse 14, the time came when he had spent all of it, and he had nothing. This is tragic! He wasted all of it and had nothing, but, beloved, that is not the end of the story at all. The enemy wants you to think that the story ends there when you wasted all of the inheritance, when the truth you have, all of the testimony that you have, is that you wasted it all. Verse 14, and when it was all spent, he had to decide, “What am I going to do now? Am I going to go back to my father or am I going to just go the other direction and just hope I can make it?”*

*This is when the devil lies to you and says, “You have gone too far! You wasted all of it! You have gone too far!” Beloved, you have never gone too far! That is a lie! And it is not only a lie for you but it is a lie that I want you to identify when you speak to other people because you will have friends that think, “I have gone too far!” And you can say, “The devil is a liar! You have not gone too far. I can tell you what the Father is like, Luke 15!”*

* 1. The son repented (15:18) and prepared three statements to say to his father (15:18-19).

17“But when he came to himself [repentance], he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough…18I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, “Father, I have sinned…19I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” (Lk. 15:17-19)

*Paragraph B: Well, the son, after he had wasted it all, did not know what was going to happen. Verse 17, he says, “Okay, okay!” Verse 17, “He came to himself.” That means he came to his senses. He said, “That was really wrong what I have done the last couple of years!” It was not just a bad summer. He had quite a while out there, but he came to his senses. Jesus is describing how he is deciding he is going to get right with God. He said, “Well, let’s do the logic. How many of my father’s servants have bread? I have no money! Yes, I went through a couple millions dollars and spent it on the drugs, the partying, everything, and I wasted all of it!” And he said, “Even the guys that are working for my father have plenty of food and have a nice place to live. I will tell you what I will do,” verse 18, “I am going to arise, and I am going to go back to my father.”*

*Beloved, it is a glorious day when a believer comes to his senses! He comes to himself and says, “I am going to go back to my heavenly Father with all of my heart.” Even though a lot of times this passage is used for the unbeliever, Jesus is talking about somebody who is in the family already, someone who grew up in the family inheritance. This is applied to believers, not just the drug and gang leaders who got saved that one day. This is talking about us. It is a glorious day when it comes to our heart, “I will arise and go to my Father!”*

*So he says, “Here is my sermon. Here is what I am going to tell my father. I have three things.” Now, I want you to catch all three of them because in a minute, just one minute from now, I am going to show you that he does not get to say all three of these to his father before his father interrupts him. So you have to catch this. He says, “Number one, I am going to tell my father that I have sinned.” That is important.*

*When I stumble and fall over the years, I don’t make up some rationale like, “Well, that’s not that bad!” No, I say, “I sinned! I did it! I didn’t mean to do it, but well, yeah, okay I kind of did for a few minutes, but then I did not want it!” Call it sin. Do not find some Bible verse to dress it up somehow. “Father, I sinned!”*

*He made three statements, and the first one was a good one. Verse 19 was the second statement, and it was a good one too. “I am not worthy to be your son! I do not deserve your favor.” That is true. We do not deserve the favor. However, the third statement is the tricky one. This is the false one. This is the one that in a moment you will see that when the son returns the father will not let him say it, the third statement. He was going to say, “Father, I sinned. I am not worthy, and I do not deserve the family inheritance anymore. I tell you what, make me like one of your hired servants.” In other words, “Let me earn what I get from you. Let me work for what you give me.” But the father is not going to let him say that.*

*Beloved, the enemy wants you to relate to God on the basis of how much you have struggled in the last week or month or year. The enemy wants you to return to the Father based on how you are going to earn the Father’s presence. “Let me earn my way back into your favor,” and you are going to see in a moment that the father would not let him say that third statement. The enemy wants you to relate to God based on what you deserve. But the good news is that you do not deserve it, and that is the good news. That is what is so stunning about this.*

* 1. Jesus was describing how His Father responds when His people repent. This parable is not first about a son who lost his inheritance, but about a father who lost his son and then restored him.   
     We pray, “Father, let us see what You see and feel what You feel when You look at my life.”

20“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.” (Lk. 15:20)

*Paragraph C: Verse 20—oh, this is my favorite verse of Luke 15, verse 20, oh my goodness!—“And so he arose.” He has a long way to go home. Let’s say it was, you know, a few weeks or a few months, I do not know, but he was a long way away, so he was thinking about it quite a bit. “And he arose,” verse 20, so put a little mark by it. Verse 20 is key. If you are sharing this with someone else, if you only have five minutes, get right to verse 20. Skip the other stuff and get right to verse 20 as that is where the glory is, right at verse 20. This is the revelation of what the Father is like. “He arose. When he was still a great way off, his father saw him. His father had compassion on him and his father ran to him. His father fell on his neck.” That means he hugged him. He embraced him. “And the father kissed him.”*

*There are five different verbs here that are very powerful, and we are not going to break them all down, but I wanted you to know that each of these five verbs describes how God feels and what He does. You could have a message on each one of these in its own right. My point is not to take all night and break it all down, but a lot of you have a Bible foundation, and you have the time to go search these five things out in God’s heart.*

*And so let’s look at it again. The boy is a far way off, and the father is out on the farm, this beautiful wealthy farm with servants, and I mean it is a beautiful place. He sees him from a great far away, and so the boy is walking, and the dad is way over in the horizon and says, “That is my son! Look! That is my boy!” And it says that he saw him. This is important–the father was out on that porch—You are not going to find the porch or the patio in Luke 15. I am just putting that in there just so you know. You might ask “Where is that patio verse at?”—The father saw him because he was on that porch day after day, thinking, “I know he is coming back to me. I know he will. I know my son. He will come to the end of himself.” And so the father was watching. Beloved, when we are struggling, the Father is watching, even longing, for the response of our heart, and He knows it is going to be coming.*

*The father is not angry. He has compassion. He feels tender. He does not look at him and say, “Well, there you go! You just lost a couple million dollars of the family inheritance and now you want back in? No!” That is what religion says. The father said, “Oh, oh, that is the son I love!” So tender. Nobody acts tender like this, like God the Father does, but it is a revelation. There is no world religion that has a tender God.*

*Then—now this is a little surprising—the father jumps out of his rocking chair—I picture him in his rocking chair on the porch on the big farm—and he runs. Now in the ancient world, fathers did not run to their sons. They would stay on the porch and let the sons come and bow down to them. No, he gets up. He is running. The kid is thinking, “I am not sure where this is going! He is running!”*

*Beloved, you take one step and the Lord will take ten steps, He will come after you because He has enthusiasm. This father is running because his father’s heart is fully gripped with tenderness, and then he embraces him. He starts hugging him, and the son says, “Dad, wait! Wait, Dad! I wasted all of the money. There is none left! I blew it all! I did everything different from what you taught me!” Then the father started kissing him.*

*Now this falling on his neck and kissing him shocked this boy. In my prayer—I am going to pray for you in just a couple of moments and we are going to be done—I am going to pray God will shock some of you tonight. And I am going to pray that God is going to use you to say this message to others and that it will shock them the way God, the Father feels about them when He looks at their life.*

* + 1. ***Saw***: The father was earnestly watching for the return of his son.
    2. ***Compassion***: The father had tender feelings, not anger, toward the prodigal son.
    3. ***Ran***: The father had enthusiasm; it was unusual for a father to run to a rebellious son.
    4. ***Fell on his neck***: The father embraced him instead of being disgusted and angry.
    5. ***Kissed***: The father’s kiss signified the restoration of favor.
  1. The son only mentioned two of the three statements that he had originally planned to say (v. 18-19).

21The son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.” 22But the father said…, “Bring the best robe…”   
(Lk. 15:21-22)

*Paragraph D: Now remember the three statements: I sinned; I am not worthy; hire me and let me earn favor in the family. He says in verse 21, “Father, I sinned,” he says for the first one That is good, we want to acknowledge it. Number two, “I am not worthy. I do not deserve your kindness!” That is true.*

* 1. The father interrupted his son (15:22), preventing him for asking to be a “hired servant” who earns what he receives. Seeking to earn God's love is the essence of dead religion and condemnation.   
     The father gave the best robes, the family ring, shoes, and a feast to celebrate the return of his son.

22“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; 24…my son was dead and is alive again…’ And they began to be merry.” (Lk. 15:22-24)

*Paragraph E: Now the son wants to make the next statement, “Hire me!” but what happens is the father breaks in and will not let him say, “Hire me!”*

*He interrupts him and says, “Bring the best robes!”*

*“Wait! No! Hire me, and I will live in the garage for a year or two and earn my way back in!”*

*“No. Bring the best robes!” he interrupts him, “Put a ring on his hand, put sandals on his feet”—verse 23—“Bring the fatted calf. Kill the calf. Let’s have a big barbeque! Let’s all be merry. Let’s celebrate together, for my son was dead, but he is alive again!” And they all began to be merry with delight, rejoicing and celebrating.*

*So the son said, “I sinned!” Verse 21, “I am not worthy!” He was going to say “Hire me,” but the father said, “Stop! Bring the best robe out right now! Bring the best robe!”*

*Well, the best robe was saved for when an honored dignitary from a faraway land came to visit. You would give them the best robe to that dignitary, the noble person. And the other brother, the older one—most of you know the story—the older brother was pretty mad at this, and said, as it were, “Bring the best robe? Are you kidding? We put that robe on the governor when he visited last year! We are not putting that robe on my scroungy little brother who spent all of the family inheritance!”*

*But his father said, “Well, I want the best robe put on him!” and that is what the Lord does with us. He said “Give him the ring!” Do you know what the ring is? Now this is intense. The family ring was, “Give him the family credit card! Let him have access to the family bank account!” The ring, the signet ring, was not just an ornament. It was the authority to use the family wealth. A signet ring is what they called it. He said, as it were, “Give him the family credit card again!”*

*And the older brother said, “Are you kidding me? Give him the card?”*

*“Yes, he is going to be one of my partners. He is in. He is all the way in!”*

*“He cannot be all the way in! He needs to be on probation for a few years!”*

*“No! He is my son! I have seen the truth of his heart. He is back with me, and we are going full blast today!”*

*The enemy wants us to put ourselves into spiritual probation, in time out, for maybe a couple of months or a couple of years till we get it all right and we earn our way back. The Lord says, in effect, “No! Put the ring on your finger now! Begin to pray for the sick today! Use the authority of the family! Go witness to your friends tomorrow! Do not wait a month or two. You are in the family. Start using the authority of the king right now!”*

*“Well, I cannot pray for somebody. I really messed up last week!” What? Are you thinking that your ability to pray for people or prophesy or lead them to the Lord is because you are so amazing the last few months? No! No!*

* + 1. ***Best robe***: God provides us with the garments of salvation (Isa. 61:10; Zech. 3:4).
    2. ***Ring***: Authority was entrusted to him to represent the family business.
    3. ***Sandals***: Slaves did not have sandals; only family members received family privileges.
    4. ***Fatted calf***: A calf was killed on special occasions to show honor to important guests.
    5. ***Be merry***: The father rejoiced and enjoyed the prodigal on the day that he repented, even though he still had many areas in his life that needed to be changed.

*Number four: The fatted calf—celebrate!—that is the celebration, the big barbeque, because they did not kill the fatted calf unless it was a really special event. And the older brother was very upset, but the father said, “This is a special event! Your brother has returned, and he is fully in the family!”*

*Number five, “We are going to rejoice together!”*

*Beloved, there is a new beginning for some of you tonight. Now, I am not prophesying this over you, but I have been a pastor for a lot of years and know that some of you are going to need this message in a minute or two later, not tonight. So tonight is not the big night. You might be saying, “I am doing great tonight!” but you might hit a wall and do some things that might surprise you. This message is for all of us. There is a new beginning day after day.*

*The Father feels gladness when his sons and daughters will say, “It is sin! I am putting it aside and I am running to You!” Even the Lord knows that there is going to be more stumbling, but there is a returning and a returning again, and He knows that that area is going to be diminished in your life. You are going to overcome it, so stay with it. However, if you run* ***from*** *Him instead of* ***to*** *Him saying, “I will run from Him and get fixed up,” you will never have the power to get fixed up. The way that we get fixed up is that we hear the message, “He delights in me now!” Well if you are like me, we love being with people who like being with us.*

*Go be with a friend that is mad at you, and it is like, “Augh, hey, how are you doing?”*

*“What do you mean how am I doing? What do you care about how I am doing?”*

*It is like, “Whoa! You know, I do not know. I will come back later.”*

*Or you walk in and say, “Oh, it is you! Oh, you are my friend! I will just stay here and just have another piece of cake here. Let’s just enjoy this!” We love to be loved. We are made that way.*

*When we see the Father this way—the thing that is really striking is that he gives him the best robe and the ring and the big barbeque on the day he returns, not a year later, on the day he returns—this is like, what? I mean at least let me suffer for a while! Some people feel good about feeling bad. They think, “If I feel guilty for a month or two, then maybe God will know I am sincere.”*

*And the Lord would say, “I already know that you are sincere. Push delete, repent, and be a first-class citizen today. Stand before Me as My beloved. Use the family authority even now.”*

* 1. ***Summary***: God feels gladness over His returning “prodigals,” and restores them to His favor. We see this in the way the father gave his son the best robe and family ring *on the very day he returned*.

*Well, amen and amen! I am going to end with that and I am going to have you stand before the Lord. Hey, by the way if you come next year, I am going to preach the same thing. I love this message. Now, I will say it differently and use some different stories. I like to preach this like five times a year because I can’t get over it.*

*I want you to say it. I don’t mean preach it on a microphone. I mean, that is cool if that happens, but I am talking about the conversations with two to three people. Most teaching in the body of Christ across the earth is done in conversations and in living rooms and dorm rooms. It is not only on a microphone on a Sunday morning. A little bit of it is, but most of it is not, as all of us are called to bring the word to other people.*

*So Father, here we are before You.*

*I am going to ask the Lord to mark your heart tonight, to shock some of you. I am going to ask Him just to mark you because some of you, again, are feeling pretty good right now, but there might be a day when you think, “Oh man, how does this work again? Where are those notes?” We all need this message for our whole spiritual life.*

*Here we are before the Lord.*

*You can stay where you are at, or you can come up, either way. You can touch God here or there, and you can pray for the person next to you. We are just going to have a kind of living room before the Lord right now. I am going to ask the Lord to shock you about how He feels about you. Some of you are fifty or sixty. I am talking to the fourteen-year-olds, but some of you are sixty and saying, “Man, I wish I had heard this thirty years ago!” You know what? It is never too late. It is never too late. It is never too late. This is the good news!*

*Father, here we are before You, and I ask for the Spirit of grace to mark hearts. I ask You to raise up messengers right here at ages twelve, thirteen, and fourteen that You will make them messengers to their own school, to their youth group and to their family even.*

*Some of you will speak these words to your parents. It might shock them, but they might need to hear it even from you. I am going to ask the Holy Spirit to release dreams and visions to you in this next season of your life.*

*Lord, I ask for the Spirit of prophesy to come on them. I ask You for dreams and visions, Lord, about the beauty and glory of Jesus. I ask that they could see the glory of this message. The overwhelming, reckless love of God. Holy Spirit, come and mark hearts. Come and give new beginnings to everyone in this room tonight!*

*Beloved, it is never too late. You have never gone too far, The devil is a liar. There is no condemnation. I want to invite anyone in the room who wants to pray to come up here and pray for these young people here. You do not have to be old people over twenty. You can be twelve-years-old and come and pray for people.*

*Lord, I ask You for cleansing, for revelation, right now. Tonight, cleanse hearts.*

*The Lord is coming after you! He is running after you. There is no wall He will not kick down. He wants you! He wants your brothers and sisters and your parents! He wants your cousins. He wants your youth leader and your best friends who are stumbling! He is coming after you.*

*Lord, come and shock hearts tonight, I ask.*