**The Love of the Father**

**The Word**

Read together Luke 15

**The Big Idea**

In contrast to the self-righteous judgmentalism of the religious leaders of his day, Jesus presents us with a view of a God who tracks down lost and broken people and celebrates when they come home to him. We are invited to find our home in the Father’s love.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. At the beginning of Sunday’s message, the question was asked: Who is the “God of your gut?” How would you answer that question for yourself?

2. The story of the prodigal son is a very moving picture of God. As we walked through the story on Sunday, what was the most moving or impactful image or idea for you?

3. This picture of God as a “prodigal” father is obviously not the only image we have of God in Scripture. Other images include God as King, Warrior, Judge, Shepherd, Husband, and Friend. How do we fully embrace and appreciate this view of God as a prodigal father without letting go of the other images of God in Scripture?

4. For those of you who took on the challenge to get alone with God this week to write him an honest letter from you to him and also write a letter from him to you, how was that experience? What came out of that experience for you?

5. If you lived every day fully aware of God’s extravagant love for you, what is one thing that would obviously change about how you live your life?

**Digging Deeper: Sermon Outline**

I. Introduction

A. “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The most important fact about us is what we in our deep heart conceive God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.” –A.W. Tozer

B. Who is the God of your gut? Is he gracious or critical? Joyful or somber? Hopeful or pessimistic? Does he delight in you or is he disappointed in you?

 C. Jesus is inviting us into his view of God

II. The “prodigal son” in context

A. Jesus tells 3 stories in response to the Pharisees’ grumbling that he is celebrating with broken, sinful people

B. Together the 3 stories portray a God who seeks out broken and lost people and celebrates when they are found and come home to him (see especially v. 7, v. 10, v. 32)

C. The story is primarily about the father and his “prodigal” (= wastefully extravagant) love for both his boys

III. The story of the father and his two sons

A. The fact that this story takes place in a patriarchal, honor-based society makes the father’s actions all the more shocking

B. The father and his younger son

1. The younger son

a. Asking for his inheritance is tantamount to saying to his day, “you’re dead to me.”

b. The son moves as far away from home as possible and brings shame on his family as he lives wildly in a Gentile land

c. The son hits rock bottom and realizes two things:

1) . His father’s house was actually a pretty great place to live

2). He is utterly unworthy to be his father’s son and hopes to come home as a servant.

2. The Father’s response

a. “while he was a long way off”: the father has been waiting all this time

b. “compassion” for his broken and hurting son

c. undignified running to and throwing himself on his son

d. “This Son of mine.” He re-establishes the boys status as his son

e. Joy, celebration, and a big party

 C. The Father and his older son

1. The older son

 a. “anger” at the celebration for his brother

 b. A desire for justice: “that’s not fair.”

 c. Refusal to join the party

 2. The Father’s response

 a. He actually leaves the party and goes out to plead with his son

b. “My Son”: he reminds the older son of their relationship and of all the blessings the son has as his father’s son

c. He invites the son to join the party

D. The heart of the story

1. This father simply loves his two boys and wants to be with them

2. He celebrates the return of his youngest son and hopes to celebrate the older son joining the party

IV. Conclusion

A. The spiritual journey is a journey of learning to live in the love of God: receiving God’s love, and offering it to others

B. Paul’s prayer that we would be rooted in God’s love (Ephesians 3:14-19)

C. A challenge this week

1. Get alone with God for an hour

2. Reread the passage

2. Write a very honest letter to God about your view of him.

 a. Do you believe he is like this father?

 b. What parts of you are at home in his love? What parts aren’t?

3. Spend some time being silent to listen to what God might want to say to you

4. Write a letter from the perspective of the Father to you

a. What would he say to you at this time in your life?

b. What would he want you to know?