“A Journey Into A Far Country …"

Caring for Prodigal Children

Rev. Ken Wilgus, PhD

Part One: Family Expectations And Spiritual Reality

Family Expectations And Spiritual Reality

Made in God's image

> *"...he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth… that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for "'In him we live and move and have our being'…"* - Acts 17:26-28

- Seeing God in human relationships:
    - Marriage - Christ and his church
    - Parenting - God as father

Family Expectations And Spiritual Reality

Sin - distorted images

> "*Our nature, by the corruption of the first sin, [being] so deeply* ***curved in on itself*** *that it not only bends the best gifts of God towards itself and enjoys them… but it also fails to realize that it so wickedly, curvedly, and viciously seeks all things, even God, for its own sake.*" - Martin Luther

- The Bible is a book about God
    - We find ourselves in Him

Family Expectations And Spiritual Reality

The power of Jesus' parables

- Based on the “stuff” of life - wine & wineskins; building; soil; treasure etc.
- Powerful in relation to human relationships - servants & masters; host & guests; tenants & owner etc.
- “The Prodigal Son” (Luke 15) is a story of human relationships but the third in a series of parables of “lost & found”
- Responding to Pharisees complaints that Jesus “receives” and “eats with” sinners.

The Parable of the “Prodigal Son”

How this story helps understand relationships with our own children

- “Prodigal” - spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant
    - Profligate - wildly extravagant; completely given up to dissipation and licentiousness : shamelessly immoral
- **“The Father And His Two, Estranged Sons”**
- The younger son is “lost and then found” (following the two previous stories)
- Now Jesus includes another character - the older son
- **Jesus is not addressing anyone who fits the role of the father**

The Parable of the “Prodigal Son”

Our expectations for our family vs. God's perfect will

*“**Neither son loved the father for himself**. They both were using the father for their own self-centered ends rather than loving, enjoying, and serving him for his own sake.”* - Tim Keller

- **The spirit of the younger son**
    - Desiring God’s riches but not his presence
        - What we call “prodigal children”
        - “Soft atheism” - “spiritual but not religious”

The Parable of the “Prodigal Son”

Our expectations for our family vs. God's perfect will

“Neither son loved the father for himself. *They both were using the father for their own self-centered ends rather than loving, enjoying, and serving him for his own sake.”* - Tim Keller

- **The spirit of the older son**
    - God “owes” me

        “…It’s a shocking message: Careful obedience to God's law may serve as a strategy for rebelling against God.”
        - Tim Keller

The Parable of the “Prodigal Son”

Our expectations for our family vs. God's perfect will

*“**Neither son loved the father for himself**.”*

- **The “younger son” parent**
    - Proud of successful child regardless of faith status
    - “Prodigal child” is my fault
        - “Happy family” was among the riches they expected from God, now they must have squandered it
        - Constantly on the road back rehearsing their speech

The Parable of the “Prodigal Son”

Our expectations for our family vs. God's perfect will

*“**Neither son loved the father for himself**.*

- **The “older son” parent**
    - Ashamed of their estranged child
    - Resentment toward “prodigal child”
    - Resentment toward God - “My prayer life is a bit flat”
    - God “owed” me “good” children - “I did the best I could”

The Parable of the “Prodigal Son”

The Fire and the Knife

- “We will worship and return to you”
    - “Worth-ship”
    - Raised from the dead

> *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”* - 1 Peter 1:3-5

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Part Two: Practical Interventions With Our Children

Practical Interventions With Our Children

Assessing the struggle

- Estranged from God
    - vs. “struggling financially”
    - vs. in another part of the "big, Christian tent”
    - vs. political category

Practical Interventions With Our Children

Assessing the struggle

- Estranged from you
    - practical assessment of your relationship with child
    - power and control
    - money
    - mistakes you've made

Practical Interventions With Our Children

Intervening with our children

- PRAYER
    - Most important - most forgotten
        - Diagnostic
            - "prodigal parent" - "my fault"; "this is my punishment" etc.
                - prayer feels "too late" or "not deserved”
            - "older brother parent" - resentful of this wayward child; "I taught them better than this"
                - resentment toward God hinders prayer

Practical Interventions With Our Children

Intervening with our children

- RESPECTING THEIR ADULTHOOD
    - Overvaluing our own parenting
    - Makes us the center of our children's story
        - v. Luke 15:17 “… when he came to himself…”
    - Respect the distance they want from you
    - Adult children's worldview

Practical Interventions With Our Children

Intervening with our children

- REVEALING OUR GRIEF
    - vs. “power moves”
        - Money - “… give me the share of property that is coming to me.” - Luke 15:12
        - “Not welcome in my home”
    - vs. “above it all”

      "*Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye is wasted from grief; my soul and my body also. For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing*"
      - Psalm 31:9-10

Practical Interventions With Our Children

Intervening with our children

- PROTECTING OTHER CHILDREN
    - Protecting younger siblings
        - Gentleness in sharing with estranged child
        - Hiding truth from young children vs. adolescents
    - Preparing other children as they mature

Practical Interventions With Our Children

Intervening with our children

- SURRENDER TO THE SPIRIT'S WORK IN YOUR LIFE
    - Christian faith is NOT an ideology
    - This is not a "glitch"
    - Struggle is the foundation of ministry

> “For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”
> - 2 Corinthians 12:10

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