

## The Teaching and Parables of Jesus

### The Lost Sons

#### Luke 15:11-32

Today, we're, closing our series on the teachings of Jesus. At least for now. We'll come back to them in a while. Next week, we're going to start in the book of James. You may recall that I started James here about 11.5 months ago, and I can be pretty tardy sometimes, but we're going to we're going to pick it up from last October next week.

This week we are going to look at the parable that maybe causes some of you to groan. I've heard this from before. I'm just going to tell you that this is really a part of God's Word, a part of Jesus's teaching, much bigger than the so-called story of the prodigal son. It's actually about lost things, lost sheep, lost coins, lost sons, plural. And maybe today we'll spend a little more time even on the elder son. There are unrighteous sons and their self-righteous sons, and I want to emphasize that part today. For now, I'm going to read verses 11 to 23, and then we'll pick up the last portion of text and I'll read it to you in a few minutes. This is God's word.

*He (Jesus) said there was a man who had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father, father, give me the share of property that is coming to me. And he divided his inheritance or property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. He went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing. I'm going to tell you a slightly different translation. The Greek is process...ongoing. He was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one was giving him anything. But when he came to himself, he said, how many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread? But here I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and I'll see them. Father, I've sinned against heaven, and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants. And then he arose and came to his father. While he was still a long way off. His father saw him and felt compassion and ran and embraced and kissed him. The son said to him, father, I have sinned against heaven, and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. But the father said to his servants, bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again. He was lost and is found, and they began to celebrate.*

Let's pray one more time.

Heavenly father, I pray that we will have ears to hear what you're saying. This passage is incredibly rich and spoken on by so many people and so well over the years. Give us, we pray, what we need today and we ask it in Jesus name.

Amen.

I don't know if you're the kind of person that loses things or never loses things. Maybe the person who finds things that other people lose. We hate to lose things. I never lose anything. However, some of my property is for an extended period of time in an unknown location. My wife helps me detect that

location. We hate to lose things. Losing keys is a problem. Losing a person is a bigger problem. You can lose a person a variety of ways. I lost one of my children. At least I thought I had went shopping before Christmas one year. She decided to bury herself in a rack of clothes and hide from me. And I was calling and calling and just on the verge of raw panic when she popped out and said, here I am, laughing. I said, not funny, not funny. I don't want to lose a child. You don't want to lose an adult either. We lose adults sometimes when they have Alzheimer's, they're lost in their own homes, can't find their way to their own bedroom. You could also get lost even while you know exactly where you are. Parents can lose their children. Children can lose their parents. Right in the same house. People aren't quite sure what happened.

Now Jesus is teaching one day, Luke 14, last week. A little bit after that, he's spending time with sinners and rabbis noticed. Pharisees notice that Jesus, whom they considered sort of one of their own, a fellow teacher, would commonly spend time. Verse three of chapter one says, verse two says, with tax collectors and sinners, he would eat with them and receive them and their view. This is a major problem because you see, a holy man is supposed to stay away from unholy things and unholy people. We'd say today you don't expect your pastor, your next pastor, to be found regularly at a bar or a gambling casino. But the truth of the matter is, Jesus might have ended up in a bar or a casino not because he was drinking or gambling, but because he was spending time with sinners. I mean, if you want to talk to sinners, you got to find him. So Jesus did this on a regular basis, and they criticized him for it. And he said, okay, I'll answer your criticism. He answered with a series of stories and the first stories found in chapter 15:3-4, and it's a story of a shepherd seeking a lost sheep. Jesus asks a very simple question. *Suppose a shepherd has 100 sheep. If he loses, one counts 99. At the end of the day, will he or will he not go seek the lost sheep?* And the answer is he most certainly will. He does not say, I've still got 99 sheep. I'm doing great 99%. No, if you don't seek that lost sheep, if that's your attitude towards sheep, before too long you won't have 99. Sheep will have 47 sheep. And that really is a problem. So Jesus cares about every person who goes and seeks a lost sheep. That's his first answer. Shepherds seek lost sheep. I seek lost sinners. Answer number one.

Answer number two. Imagine a woman who makes it, a woman who goes out in the beginning of the day with ten coins, no coins. In those days, we're actually worth a lot more than coins. Today it'd be about \$150. The coin that he envisions by making \$100 to make life easy. So imagine a woman goes out with ten \$100 bills in her purse at the beginning of the day, and she buys lunch, and she buys a cup of coffee, and she looks in her wallet, and she has \$883 left. Does she say, well, I've got \$883. That's a lot of money. No problem. No, she says, I lost \$100 somewhere. I'm going to go find it. And once she finds it, Jesus says she throws a party for her friends. And just so there is rejoicing in heaven when one sinner repents. But Jesus actually said the same thing about the sheep. There's rejoicing in heaven when one lost sheep is found. So that's answer number two Shepherd seek lost sheep. Women seek lost money. That's what I'm doing. I'm. I'm seeking lost people. And then she says, father, seek lost sons. Well, usually they do these two aren't the best duo. And yet Jesus talks about a father seeking them. And the first son whom we know better now, called the unrighteous son.

The others, the self righteous on the unrighteous son is disrespectful to his father. He says, father, I would like my share of the inheritance. What he means essentially is it's a shame you're not dead yet, but let's pretend you aren't. Give me the money I would inherit if you died. It's extraordinarily rude to say, can I have my inheritance now? But he does it. And sometimes, you know, in those days and today, people will have you give a portion of the family business to a son while the father's getting a little bit

older. Maybe it's a little bit like that. We can see it, you know, 18 year olds ready to go to college. I want to get away from home, go on their own. Tired of teachers, tired of books. Tired of teachers. Dirty looks. Right? Or a 28 year old who's been working for dad in the business, and now he's weary of doing things dad's way. He sees opportunities to expand or do something new. Can I please go off and become independent? And the father says, okay, I will give you your share of the estate, the inheritance, the word that's used there is the boss, which means a life. I'll give you a portion of our family life. We would say today, livelihood. I'll give you your share. The word is usher of the family substance. He's referring to the idea this is a farm. Because most people were farmers. And you build up a farm over the years, you build up the land and you have buildings and you prepare the ground, which has lots of rocks. And I'm not just giving you money, I'm giving you a portion of our life, the life we've created together. And he says, thank you very much. And he disappears. He sells it off. He takes his cash, he goes to a distant country and blows it in dissolute living in a hurry. And then he's in need and there's a famine, so he can't get a proper job, and he must find someone who will hire him. It's a pig herder. Now, I know that you mostly know that pigs are unclean animals to Jews. And so, if you're spending your time with pigs, you're unclean. But it's not just unclean. It's worse than that. He's not getting enough money to live. As I said, it goes like this. He kept he kept on feeding pigs and kept a longing for the pods that the pigs kept on eating. That is to say, every day he fed the pigs and he thought about snatching some of the pig food to fill his own belly. And every day it was just repulsive enough he couldn't do it. It's like working at a kennel in the time of starvation, and you just think I'm scooping out, you know, the dog food, the Alpo, and there's some chunks there at the bottom. It looks like gravy. And I think I'll just sneak some and you're drawn to it and repelled by it, and you can't quite do it. And so you live in perpetual hunger. Perpetual need, perpetual spiritual need. Not just physical need. Because if he wants to go home, he's dishonored himself. He can't even feed himself. How is he going to rebuild the fortune he squandered?

How can he go home and expect anyone to receive him? Now it says he came to himself one day. We say he repented. The text says he came to himself and he began to make a plan. He said, I'm going to rise. I'm going to go to my father, and I'm going to say to him, father, I've sinned against heaven, and before you are no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired men. Now that speech is mostly good. It sounds like a pretty good repentance, but people often question it just a little. First of all, first of all, it's good because he didn't just say he would do it. He did it right. It's one thing to resolve to change your life, another thing to actually change it. He said, I'm going to get up. And he got up and that's good. And we also hear a sort of an echo of things that we hear in the Old Testament. When David repented before God, David said to God against you, and you only have I sinned, done what is evil in your sight. So, it's good that he realizes he didn't just harm his father or his family. He also harmed the Lord. Good. On the other hand, it seems a little bit self-interested, doesn't it? I'm hungry. I'm unhappy. It also seems like he doesn't quite get how dire his situation is because he says, you know, I've done wrong, and I'll make up for it. That's what I'll do. I'm going to work my way back into your favor. That's his plan. It's a very human plan. It's what people do honestly with the Lord. They think I'm just. Please, God. So I gotta make up for it. I gotta work my way back. And it was presence. I'm needy, I messed up. I'll make it up to you. That's what he says. I've got problems. Sin may be involved. That's what he says. That's of course, the way this with us often, isn't it? My life isn't the way I would like it. People been treating me poorly. You reflect a little bit. You think maybe they've been treating me poorly because I've been treating them poorly. Maybe it's not all their fault. Maybe I'm part of it. And so we begin to repent. Our repentance is often mixed, imperfect.

I shared with some of you that I became a believer while in college, and if you evaluated my prayer of repentance, it had all kinds of stuff in it. Some of it was good and some of it wasn't. It was, you know, God, if you're out there, I believe you can show it and prove it. And I believe this history of the Bible. But I'm also very unhappy. I don't know why. And if I believe in you, maybe you'll make me happy. Would you please make me happy? That was part of my prayer of repentance. I needed to repent of my repentance. If I graded my repentance, I would give it a d-minus. But a d-minus is passing. And God said essentially good enough. I accept that. Our repentance. Maybe your repentance may be poor, also self-interested, but there is still this element of true repentance. I've sinned against heaven, and that's what the young man says. And when he gets home now he can expect trouble. He could expect to be banished from the family, quite possibly he could expect to be scolded, to be scorned, to be kicked out of the home. But the father sees him and recognizes him coming a long way off, and it says that he ran toward him, and he kissed him. Now the Greek word for kiss is kind of a strong word. It's kind of like kissed him up or something like that. And you think, well, that's a little bit weird. Yeah, it's a strong word. It's a word that makes people. I see some of you kind of laughing or snickering a little bit. It's a word that makes people snicker. It's too much. And the other thing is too much is the father went running.

Now, today we live in a fitness culture, a running culture and so forth, and we think, oh well, he's 55. He can still run. People in those days did not run. The patriarch did not run. It was embarrassing. So, I'm going to do something that's embarrassing to give you a flavor for it. Imagine in those days what you had to do. And the reason why it was embarrassing - people had two garments, an inner garment, an outer garment to run in your robes. You had to tuck them into your underwear so people would see your bloomers. Now, I'm not going to show you my bloomers, but I'm just going to give you a tiny taste of what this would be like. Imagine that for some reason, I need to go for a run. I need to run somewhere right after the worship service is over, and I might think to myself, you know, my pants really are going to interfere. They're going to be flapping. And so I got to run like this and I got to tuck my pants into my socks and my coat into my pants because this is going to get in the way. So I look pretty good 😊

The father looked a whole lot worse. It's embarrassing. This is not what you do. But the father doesn't care. I do care, so I'm going to get my pants right here for a second. The father does not care. He comes running to him a long way off. He sees him, recognize him. He's running him. He's kissing him. And the father just doesn't care about his dignity. But the bigger point is that he's making a reconciliation. When the father comes and falls on the neck of the boy and kisses him and runs toward him, saying, the joy at seeing my son back overwhelms every other consideration. Everything goes okay. He's back. He's not going to be expelled. Now it's clear the fathers received them. The father welcomes him to himself with clarity and purity and abandon. And then the boy prepares to give his speech. Now, what does it say here? The son said to him, father has sinned against heaven, and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. Remember he said he was in say that, and he did. But he also said he was going to say, I'm not worthy to be your son. Make me like one of your hired men. Hired hands. And he doesn't get to say that. He doesn't get to utter those words. Because the father cuts him off with the embrace, with the actions he takes. You know what he does? He gives him the robe, the family robe, the best robe, the festival robe, and throws it around him. And he gives him the ring, the family ring, the signet ring that gives him authority to conduct business in the family name. He puts sandals on his feet. In the ancient world, if you're really poor, you didn't wear sandals. He. Whether he was a slave or not, he'd been so poor that he declined a level of slave walking who knows how many miles on his bare feet. And the father said, get some sandals on that boy, and get the fattened calf. You know the one I mean, get the

fattened calf. And all the steps of the father make it abundantly clear that the son is completely welcomed and loved. And this, of course, is a picture of the father's love for us, which we sing of at times. I am not worthy of your love as a part of what he planned to say. I've sinned against you, and I'm not worthy. And I'll make myself worthy. The good I've sinned against heaven, against your good. I'm not worthy. I want to earn my way back into your favor by working as a servant. Not good. It's true that he's unworthy. By the way, it's true that we're unworthy. It's true, but irrelevant, of course, are unworthy. I was very easy in a church of achievers and professional people abounding here and there, physicians and lawyers and business leaders and college and graduate students and educational leaders, pastors. It's very easy. People with degrees and credentials to think I'm worthy. I'm a person of significance in this world. And then we realize maybe I'm not worthy. And then we think, well, I mean, I've worked my way to this position in society. Maybe I should work my way to a position of something before God. No, no, none of us is worthy. None of us can undo the effects of our sin in a way that makes us right with God.

Now listen to me carefully. If you commit a sin, you should try to undo it. If you steal something from somebody, you should give it back. If you tell a lie about somebody or judge them falsely or spread a rumor, you should try to undo the liar. Undo the rumor. Absolutely. But you don't earn your way back into God's favor by doing so. The father loves you and welcomes you as you are, with a love that is so strong that it's embarrassing to people. How can God welcome sinners like that?

So, the offer to be a hired hand is bypassed. It's not so much rejected, it's bypassed. It's just this gigantic melting hug between them and an answer. All the questions people might have. This is Jesus picture of repentance. And this is Jesus picture of being welcomed back into the embrace of God. You know, the painting *The Return of the Prodigal* by Rembrandt. The father bends over and blesses his son and says, I love you. You don't need to earn. I give it to you. Now, I don't want to step outside the parable for a minute and say that Jesus is now answer to the Pharisees three times. Why Jesus? Do you spend time with sinners? Why do you eat with them? Receive them, welcome them? Why do you do that? Why should you welcome them? They're the wrong kind of person. You should. You should welcome people like us. And Jesus says, answer number one Shepherd, seek lost sheep. These are the people I spent time with. Jesus says, these sinners, I spend time where they're like my sheep just looking for them.

And when they repent, heaven rejoices and people lose money they look for. And if a father loses a son, he welcomes them back. Three answers to the Pharisees. You're wrong, you're wrong, you're wrong. And the parables could end. They're just correcting the Pharisees. Jesus says, you know, you think you have to be good enough. And I got to tell you, if you're criticizing me for showing solidarity with sinners, guilty as charged, guilty as charged, you accuse me of welcoming sinners. You have no idea. I run to them, I embrace them, I shower them with kisses. I fall on them. I welcome them into my family. That's the good news for everybody who's weighed down by sin. The depths of the love of Christ is embarrassing to people who think you got to do everything and have it all in order.

It's a word we need in a church full of. People who behave well and follow the rules and achieve. We're achievers, but we're also sinful achievers, broken achievers, fallen achievers. Chivas. You know, we haven't achieved as much as we would like to pretend. The parable could end here. You're welcome here. This word of love. Pharisees are wrong. Everybody who's a sinner can come on in.

But he continues the parable and as he continues it, it goes like this. Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants

and asked him what this man? And he said to him, the servant said, your brother has come, and your father's killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.

The older brother comes. What's what's going on? Got a party versus dos music and dancing on a birthday. It's not time to celebrate. It's time to work. Verse 28. *He doesn't like it. He was angry, refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him.* But he answered his father, look, these many years, all these years I served you, that word served the. The Greek word is slaved. All these years I slave for you. And I never disobeyed your command. Yet you never gave me a young goat that I might celebrate. But my friends will stop there. Now, this is quite a speech. Starts out with this word to his father. Look. And it starts with that word. Because he doesn't go in as a party. Everybody's going into the party and he stands outside the party, arms folded, not going in now by the culture of the day, it was essential that the whole family go in. And at least some sources say that the older brother would have been kind of like the master of ceremonies, really important for him to welcome the younger brother back. He stands outside. Father says, I'll go talk to him now. This little speech he gives, this little speech he gives is about as bad as it gets. I don't think my children ever began a conversation with me in which they said, **look**, if they had, I would have said, you may leave the room and come back when you're ready to restart this conversation. But that's what he has to say. Look. All these years, I slave for you, which means the father's a slave driver, which basically means he hates his father. He's been lost and far from his father in that very house. And by the way, this son of yours has come back. That's what he says in a minute. Let's go ahead.

Read the rest of it. But when this son of yours. He's not my brother. When this son of yours who has devoured your property with prostitutes, how would he know that? Was he sending postcards? Here I am with a group of prostitutes. Kind of doubt. And I think he made that up on his own. You kill the fattened calf for him.

Now, a lot of you here are tempted to identify with the struggle a little bit because, you know, he's the older brother, the older brother, older sister always keeps the rules. How many of you here is an older brother? Oldest brother? Just so I can know. Older sister, you know the way it goes. If you clean toilets, get straight A's and scrub the floor. At the age of 17.5, you can have the 18 year old Buick alternate Thursdays from 7 to 9:15. And then the third son comes by and they say, hey, dad, can I have the Acura or the Tesla? And dad says, sure, but if you don't mind, but just leave a little gas because I might need it at 8:00, if you don't mind. And we think that's the picture we have. The younger gets away with murder, and the older brothers put upon the older sisters put upon. I need to tell you about that idea we have, because it's not found in the Bible. It's a cultural idea we have in America. May be true in America. It's not a biblical idea. Biblical idea.

If there's any template, it's the jealous older brother syndrome. Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Esau, David and his brothers same every time. Talented younger brother, beloved younger brother, older brother doesn't like it. If anybody is reading any template into this, that's what they're reading in. And he's quite a guy. I mean, if the younger brother is bad, take a load of this self-righteous fellow. He's rude. He tells his father, look, he's bitter. All these years I've been slaving for you. I haven't worked for you. I've been. I've been slaving for you. He's self-righteous. I never disagree, disobeyed or transgressed any of your commandments. How about the first one? The first one is honor your father, your mother. And you disobeyed that commandment before you even got going. You're not nearly as righteous as you think. You are self-pitying. You never gave me a go to so I can have a party. My friends. I honestly don't know why he wants to have a goat party. I don't know what he wants to do. Put saddles

on them and ride them around. Have goat sandwiches. He's upset about it. Self-pity? It sounds his brother. He's heartless. This brother of this son of yours. He's not my brother. Now, you know, parables are mirrors for reality. And Jesus puts people in the parables that are like the people in the world. And so the first son, the unrighteous son is the crass sinner who does terrible things that are very clear, and the older brother is the self-righteous person who does nothing clearly dreadful, but has a bad attitude, is self-righteous, is judgmental, thinks they're a lot better than they actually are, and they're both repulsive.

They're repulsive in different ways.

The father goes out to reason with him. He says, son. Son says, look, the father says, son, son, you're always with me. You. You say you've been slaving for me. But I thought we were just together. Can I just say, if you're the kind of person who's worked long and hard in the church and done God's work for a long time, it's very easy to become proud of what you've done, how hard you worked.

I said that from personal experience and from talking with many people, it's very easy to become proud of what you've done and to think you've been put upon. And God says to you, oh, I thought we were together. I thought, we're just working together. You're always with me and all this. Mine is yours. If you want a goat party, have a goat party. You want to have a sheep party? Have a sheep party. You want to kill a fattened calf? Go ahead. It's all yours. We're in this together. It was fitting. That's a translation. Another translation could be we had to. It was fitting in the sense of it's the only way. It's the only right way to do it. We had to celebrate, by the way. We had to celebrate and be glad for this. Your brother, he is your brother was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found now. We don't know what happens next. In most of Jesus parables, we get a clear picture of the end of the story. You notice we don't know if he went in or not.

We don't know if he went into the party or not. Why do we not know? Some of you know the answer. It's so we can finish the story. Now Jesus is telling it for Pharisees saying, this is why spend time with sinful people. He's saying it for them. Listen to what Jesus is doing. He's painting a picture of them that's so ugly that ideally it'll be repulsive to them and they'll say, I'm not like that. I don't want to be like that. I repent of that. I turn away from that. And he's giving a picture of self-righteousness for us. If we're self-righteous and we look at it and go, I don't want to be like that. So repent. He's saying, of course you don't want to be like, this is the last, best chance for self-righteous people to repent.

The Pharisees and people today, and we don't know what he does because you have to finish the story. Now, of course, we wonder why would anybody not go in? Why would the older brother hesitate to go into the party? And the answer is there's some unsavory characters in there. There's some murderers, thieves, liars, swindlers. There's some bad people in that party, and the self-righteous person says, I don't want to spend time with bad people.

One of my longtime friends became a Christian, at the just a little bit after college was over. And he's an elder, he's a PCA elder, has been a godly elder for years now, and he became a Christian and somebody who knew him from his earlier days. I think he was maybe 25 by this time. Somebody who knew him from college heard that he became a Christian, and he said, not Mike Smith. Mike Smith cannot become a Christian. He is too bad. The man was angry that Mike Smith, not his name, that Mike Smith became a Christian. If people like that are in heaven, I don't want to go to heaven. Oops. Because heaven is filled only with people like that. They come in different varieties. There's some crass and terrible sinners, and

there are self-righteous, proud, vain. Pride is not a pretty thing either. Murder is ugly, gossiping and humoring and cutting people down. That's ugly. But so is pride. So is self-righteousness. And that's all there is. And then, of course, is the other person who thinks, I mean, I want to be with God, but surely I've got to do something.

Yes, you get to do things for God, but you don't get to do anything to God to prove your worth, to prove you deserve God's presence. It's just a party. You're invited in. You will always be with him. My prayer, of course, is that we all will live. This parable, that we will live it whether we are. Prodigals, people who look poor and dirty and smell like they spent a little too much time with pigs. I pray that we welcome. And if you see yourself as one of those people that rebelled against God, you say, yep, I smell bad. But Jesus imputed his righteousness to us. I need to I need to receive righteousness first. I don't earn it. I try to live a good life afterward, but I don't earn it. Or younger brothers who need to repent may need to repent of their repentance, and their older brothers who don't want to go in because they think of themselves as achievers. Now look again. This church is full of achievers. But remember, please, that we are sinful achievers, flawed achievers, broken achievers. Whatever word you want to use, we're achievers to a degree.

And we might not want to enter this party. Why not? Why not? Well. Sinners there now. Last week we had 30 some people up here in front, adults joining kids also not fully members yet. And they all did something interesting. They all said we're sinners, which means that they understood that the first condition for joining the church is you say I'm unworthy to join the church. It's the only organization in the world where, in order to get in, you have to say, I'm unworthy to get in. That's what the gospel says you're in if you know you're unworthy of being in, if you know that it's just a gift, let me see it a different way. I remember the saying of Groucho Marx, ***I would never want to be a member of a club that would have anybody like me as a member.***

Remember that one? The church is a club that exclusively consists of people who are not worthy of the club. They entered. You have to accept that it's the way of God. A man named Dom Helder Camara wrote a poem about this. This parable about Luke 15, a man of God. He wrote this.

*I pray incessantly for the conversion of the prodigal son's brother. Ever in my ear rings the dread warning. This one has awoken from his life of sin. When will the other, awakened from his life of virtue? There's a kind of virtue that flaunts itself against God.*

And so let's just remember this great idea. This church has always been founded on the gospel and still is founded on the gospel, and will be found in the gospel, which is we live with God by grace and faith alone. Whether you have committed terrible sins or in the eyes of the world, very few self-righteous, unrighteous, it doesn't matter. God says, come on in the water.

Let's pray for a minute.

Father, I pray that we would see ourselves in this strange and beautiful story, this familiar story that reminds us one more time that we never know quite as much as we would like. Your word is unfathomable in its riches. I thank you for past sermons preached in this church on this passage. The wonderful sermons. I pray they'll be great sermons in the future. But now, Lord, we pray that we would hear the call to repent of sin and to believe that you will welcome us with a love so strong and so rich that people would laugh. They'd be shocked at how accepting you are. Lord, I pray that we as a church



would accept people who are shockingly sinful and not become self-righteous or judgmental. And Lord, for those of us who have been really good our whole lives, or at least pretty good our whole lives, I pray that you would spare us from the dangers and the sins of self-righteousness that we would see if there's something of the older brother, or maybe a lot of the older brother in us, that we would repent and turn to you. And enter your family in your loving embrace.

We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.