

CHAPTER FOUR

Not the Father You Expected



This is all about the father. He is not the father you expect.

Our eldest church member interrupted this teaching conversation (again) with this wisdom, “The father is unpredictable so you better be careful.”

Let’s remember this learned wisdom of 90 years as we try to come to understand the father in this story. He’s not the father you expect.

Father is an imperfect metaphor for God. All metaphors have an imperfectness to them. This one too.

For so many of you, you need to wipe the face of your father from the face of God. We are all bringing our father junk with us for this conversation. So be ready for some surprises.

About the younger son.

The father consents to his younger son’s selfish plan. This is the gamble of love.

The father never disowned the younger son. The younger son always belonged.

Luke 15:22-23 - *But his father said to the servants, “Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast.”*

At the return, the son is immediately affirmed as a son with the ring and clothing--even though the son forfeited those rights. The son left with a scandal but is met with a blessing. The father runs to him before he can bathe or clean up or speak to offer his transaction.

Who here has ever said, “I will try God after I clean up my life a bit.” *Ahem*, notice this restoration.

In the Story of the Two Lost Sons, God is painted as vulnerable by allowing his son to hurt him and to take from him. He could have disowned such a foolish son or closed himself off from such a foolish son. But the story continues with the father watching the horizon day after day after day after day. Because maybe this would be the day his son would return home.

Have you ever thought of God being vulnerable?

Then this father runs toward the foolish son with open arms. That's vulnerable. That's love. There is no wall. There is no shame. There is no proper dignity.

Everything from the father's point of view is about restoring the relationship.

The father restores the relationship even if the son's heart isn't right. His son did decide to return home but he had a transaction he wanted to make. The father still restored the relationship and gave his son worth.

About the older son.

Have you ever noticed this before? The father left the party to go find his other son.

Luke 15:28 - *The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him...*

Begged him? There's that vulnerability again.

Just like the father ran to the younger son when he returned, the father leaves the party to go find his other lost son. The father leaves the party to find you too. God is pursuing you too. And hugs you at your smelliest and in your exhausted, self-righteous angry state.

When the father left the party to find the older son, he gave his son worth too. You good people and rigidly obedient people are pursued until you understand grace. He tells this son yet again, "*Everything I have is yours.*" Luke 15:31.

This return of the younger son is the moment his father has been waiting for, looking every day for. If I'm the father there is no way I'm leaving the party I've waited so long to throw. But the father does, to go find his other son. Because there is another lost boy in this story hiding in the fields alone.

The father finds the older son and the son explodes. He releases his fury, blames, hides, accuses, victimizes. He lets it all out. *Ahem*, maybe you've seen this behavior before?

And the father listens.

Once again, the father does not rush to correct or condemn. He doesn't shame, silence, or demand. He simply stays present, creating space for the older son to name his hurt—and in doing so, to expose the deeper lie beneath it.

Everything is about restoring the relationship.

Then the father speaks, "*Everything I have is yours.*" Luke 15:31. Is the beauty of this verse sinking in yet? Grace says there is enough.

The brother could have always had a party. This brother always had a meal waiting for him. He always had a home and a father who wanted to be with him.

You are invited to the party too.

The son who had stayed the closest to his father may have been the son who was as far away from his father's heart as you can get. The younger son, even as he sat among the pigs, knew his father's generous, lavish love. He knew no matter how far the distance between them was that he could always go home.

The older son, who in his faithfulness hadn't left the father, never saw how everything was always his. He never realized how much his father had missed and grieved the lost son. He didn't feel or share that loss with his father.

When the church is made up of older brothers or Pharisees, they don't feel the loss of who is not in church.

We don't know if the older brother went to the party because God does not coerce. The son is free to choose.

Father God embodies consent and works consensually.

The father consents to the son's demands. The father invites the older brother to the party but doesn't demand.

God's being and nature are consensual. It must be so because love is consensual. True love cannot be coerced, it emerges in participation.

Love is consensual and God is love. (1 John 4:8, 16)

God works in the world with human partners, not in spite of them. God is moved and responds to the free choices

we make, which may feel shocking or surprising to you. (Galatians 5:13, Philippians 2:12-13) God is impacted by the decisions and actions we make. (Genesis 6:6, Exodus 32:14, Psalm 78:40-41)

The Bible shows us repeatedly that God accommodates and consents to us. God works through participation and consent because his deepest desire is for us—for restoration and relationship. (Revelation 3:20, John 15:15, 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Isaiah 1:18)

Another John Lynch quote for you,

“Your God, every moment of every day, is wooing, drawing, calling out your new heart. He is not compelling you to try harder, strain more, prove your love more or even trust harder. Instead, He is drawing you to become daily more and more convinced of His love, your new identity and His power in you to mature you into who He has called you—Righteous. He will not be deterred by your failure, your laziness, your lack of interest, your scheming. He has already made up his mind about you and he will not fail in wooing you to that life he intended for you from before the world began. I know you think you don’t deserve such favor. He will overcome that also... Good luck stopping him.”—John Lynch, one of the authors of *The Cure*, @John Lynch, Facebook, April