

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*What Leads to Repentance?*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 15:11**. Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word.

Luke 15:11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. **12** 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 property between them. **13** 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. **14** And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. **16** And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything. **17** "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!"

You may be seated. Let's pray.

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We are working our way through what is commonly called the parable of the prodigal son.

The son left home with lots of moneyⁱ, but then something happened. Look at **verse 14**...

Luke 15:14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. **15** So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs.

As soon as the money was gone the people who acted like they were his friends were gone as well. At this incredibly low point, things got so bad he had to start caring for pigs. As we talked about last week, this was the lowest point a Jewish person could reach.

Luke 15:16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

We are not told how much the son was paid, but considering he wanted to eat what pigs were eating tells you it was so little he could not afford food.

Do we have anyone here who takes care of pigs?

Do pigs eat anything?

Katie used to have pigs and she said, "Pretty much."

Wanting to be accurate in my sermon, because I know pastors have reputations for inaccurate stories, I studied what pigs will and won't eat. Here's what I learned: pigs will eat just about anything.

Their diets are disgusting and the fact that the son could look at what pigs were eating and be jealous tells you things were incredibly bad for him.

Picture him looking at the food pigs were eating licking his lips. The pigs were living better than him. That's how bad things had gotten. He was starving.

The **Pods** were most likely the wild carob (*Ceratonia oreoethauma*), which only had black, bitter berries, barely nourishing enough to keep pigs alive, say nothing about people.

And he **was longing** to eat these!

The pods were virtually un-digestible for humans.

For Jews to listen to Jesus preach this parable about a Jewish son from a loving wonderful family being in this situation sounded degrading beyond belief.

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Notice the end of the verse says **no one gave him anything**. This probably means he tried to live as a beggar, but there was a famine so everyone was needy and desperate.

Let me ask you: was it good or bad that nobody gave him anything?

It was good. This is one of the best examples in Scripture that sometimes helping people doesn't help. It could be enabling and detrimental.

And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: Sometimes the worst thing to do is give because it can (Part One) be poor stewardship.

Common sense tells us we can't give to every need. Even the wealthiest philanthropists must decide what to do and not do with their money. Saying yes to something means saying no to something else in most areas of life, and it is especially true with our money. If we give to one need it means not giving to another need.

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As a pastor, I've had weeks that I have had more people ask for money than for prayer.

There are some differences in the requests: sometimes it's a phone call, while other times it's a person coming to the church. But one variable that is almost always the same is there's a story that describes the most unfortunate circumstances imaginable; Job looks blessed compared to many of these people.

Dealing with people asking for money is one of the most unenjoyable parts of my job, not because I don't want to help, but because as soon as people can tell that I will not give them money, they don't want anything else to do with me.

In my years pastoring, I can't think of anyone we helped financially who was also helped spiritually. In other words, the money we gave didn't lead to salvation, sanctification, or regular church attendance. Maybe God did do something through our gift, but if He did, it was unknown to me.

Just to be clear, we have never given with strings attached. We are not looking for a pat on the back or any sort of repayment. But because I have seen so little fruit from giving money to people who asked, I'm left wondering how much better of a steward I might have been if I had given that same money to one of our missionaries.

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The next part of lesson one...

Lesson One: Sometimes the worst thing to do is give because it can (Part Two) prevent shame.

Let me explain what shame is, biblically speaking, so we can understand why it's important to experience it...

Genesis 2:25 says Adam and Eve “were both naked...and were not ashamed.”

This is the opposite of the way they should have felt because many verses associate nakedness with shame:

- **Micah 1:11 Pass on your way...in nakedness and shame**
- **Nahum 3:5 I will make nations look at your nakedness and kingdoms at your shame.**

- **Revelation 3:18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen**

Two of these verses are about pagans who aren't prone to experiencing shame, but even they felt shame when naked.

So why didn't Adam and Even experience any?

Shame can only be produced by the knowledge of doing something wrong. For example:

- Imagine you enter the home of people who always take their shoes off, but you don't know that's their practice. You walk around feeling fine until the owner says, "We always take our shoes off." Then you feel ashamed.
- Have you ever started eating only for someone to say, "Why don't we say pray and thank God for the food?" Then you're ashamed.

Because Adam and Eve hadn't yet eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they didn't know there was anything wrong with what they were doing; therefore, they felt no shame.

In Genesis 3:5, Satan said, "God knows that in the day you eat of [the tree] your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

This was true! Satan mixes truth with lies because then the lies are more convincing. They ate, and at that moment their eyes were opened.

Listen to the way it's worded in the amplified...

Genesis 3:7 [Their] eyes...were opened [that is, their awareness increased], and they knew that they were naked; and they fastened fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

In the NLT it says **suddenly felt shame at their nakedness.**

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil gave them the knowledge they were wrong, and they were ashamed.

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What does this have to do with giving?

When we give to people it shows our support. This can prevent them from experiencing shame that can lead to their repentance.

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Which brings us to the next part of lesson one...

Lesson One: Sometimes the worst thing to do is give because it can (Part Three) hinder repentance.

Let me share a testimony that was meaningful to Katie and me early in our marriage...

We were attending a church and a nice-looking young man was the guest worship leader. We thought he did a great job with the music, and it turned out he was also there to share his testimony.

He said that he had been addicted to drugs. After numerous warnings his parents finally had to kick him out of the house. One day when he was particularly hungry, he returned home to get some food, but his mother told him that if he did not leave, she would call the cops. He said he would leave, but first he asked if he could have a taco, but his mother wouldn't even give him one.

To be clear, he was praising his mother in this testimony for loving him enough to not give him anything at that time. He acknowledged that to have done so would have hurt him instead of helped him.

He had to reach rock bottom, and when he did, he got his life turned around.

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If we give to people at the wrong time, it can shortchange the work God wants to do in their lives. They can be prevented from experiencing the consequences of their actions.

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The prodigal son's misery moves us with sympathy, but it was this misery that led him to repent and return to his father.

If well-meaning people "helped" him, it could've hindered his repentance.

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Mark your spot in **Luke** and turn three books to the right to **Romans 2**. Luke, John, Acts, Romans. We will come back to Luke.

Romans 2:1 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the very same things.

We're inexcusable – or without excuse – when we judge others because we're showing that we know what they're doing is wrong...so we have no excuse when we do the same thing.

This is what Jesus meant when He said...

Matthew 7:1 Judge not, that you be not judged. 2 For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

These are probably the most misunderstood verses in the entire bible. People love to quote this as though you can never say anything is wrong.

But that's not what Jesus was saying!

He was saying if you judge something as wrong, you're showing that you know it's wrong, so make sure you're not doing it yourself...because you're going to be judged with the same standard you use in judging others.

Romans 2:2 We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things.

In other words, God Judges rightly, which is to say He is going to punish everyone who does these things...which leads to Paul's question in the next verse...

Romans 2:3 Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?

Should we expect to be able to avoid God's judgment when we commit the same sins that we recognize are wrong for other people?

The answer is no.

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At this point all of Paul's readers are convicted, so he tells them to repent, and look what he says should lead them to repent...and we've been building up to this verse...

Romans 2:4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

We are not judged at the moment we sin because of **God's kindness**...and this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: (Part One) God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance.

In **verse 3** look at the question Paul asked...

Do you think you will escape the judgment of God?

Why did Paul ask this?

Because they weren't presently being judged for their sin, and when we are not immediately judged it can lead us to think we won't be judged at all.

We can think that:

- God doesn't care what we are doing.
- He must not be upset with us. If he was, if He was, He would punish us.

But the truth is God is simply being patient so we have time to repent.

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This is exactly what is communicated in...

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish.

This means slow in keeping His promise to judge. He's simply giving us time to repent so He doesn't have to judge us.

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Now do you want to see what I believe is the best example in Scripture of being drawn to repentance because of kindness?

Please keep your spot in **Romans 2**, because I have one more verse to show you in this chapter, and look back at **Luke 15:17**...

Luke 15:17 "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!'

What drew the son to repentance?

Thinking about the father's kindness.

This is a picture for us of God's kindness leading us to repentance.

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When we are thinking of repenting, what is our concern?

- *Will God really forgive me?*
- *Have I done too much for Him to be able to love me?*
- *Would God ever want a relationship with me again?*

People have these questions and then they end up concluding, “I have been too bad,” so they don’t turn from their sin to God, which is what repentance is.

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It is thinking about God’s kindness that gives us the confidence that we can repent and God will forgive us.

Last Sunday’s sermon was titled, “Prone to Wandering from God the Father.”

God’s kindness convinces us that God will receive us back after we have wandered away.

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Let me share part of an email with you that I received on June 8th from someone I don’t know. I think this man’s concerns capture what we are discussing...

“Good evening, Pastor. I’m asking for prayers for myself. I’m 60 years old. I spent my entire life believing in God but not living a life that glorified Him. I’ve been married a second time for 25 years after destroying my first marriage. No worst sinner I knew than myself. I lied, cheated, drank, and used drugs. I have surrendered myself to Jesus and accepted him as my personal savior. I’ve confessed everything that I can to God and asked for His forgiveness. I’m on my knees praying. I don’t want anything. That’s not what I pray for. I want God’s forgiveness and a personal relationship with His Son Jesus Christ. I know that my salvation is only by God’s mercy and grace and that my sins were covered by Jesus dying on the cross. BUT I WORRY. WITH SUCH A WRETCHED PAST IS THIS TOO MUCH TO FORGIVE? Thank you for listening.”

Now what does someone in this condition already broken over their sin need to hear about?

God’s wrath...or God’s kindness?

God’s kindness can convince him that God will forgive him following his repentance.

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Now let me be clear about something...

The Christian life is a constant struggle to avoid ditches. Often it feels like we are trying to avoid one ditch, and we overcorrect and find ourselves in another ditch.

And we can find ourselves in a ditch regarding this topic...

We start talking about God’s kindness leading to repentance, and we end up in a ditch that ignores His wrath.

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The man who emailed me was broken over his sin and needed to hear about God’s kindness.

But what about people who are not broken over their sin? What about people who are comfortable in their sin?

- Do they need to hear about God’s kindness, which could cause them to feel even more comfortable?
- Or do they hear about God’s wrath, which could cause them to fear and repent?

God’s wrath, and this brings us to the second part of lesson two...

Lesson Two: (Part One) God’s kindness is meant to lead us to repentance (Part Two) and so is His wrath.

Listen to this verse, which strikes the balance...

Jude 1:22 Have mercy on those who doubt

This means doubt they doubt God being willing to forgive them, and they need to hear about God’s kindness.

Jude 1:23 save others by snatching them out of the fire.

These people aren't sorry about their sin and are on their way to hell. You snatch them out of the fire by telling them about God's wrath.

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With this in mind, turn back to **Romans 2**.

Back up to **verse 4** for context...

Romans 2:4 Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?

Right when we're about to be in a ditch and think there's no place for God's wrath, look at verse five...

Romans 2:5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

Notice the words **storing up wrath**.

When people refuse to repent, God's wrath isn't just staying the same against them it is actually increasing, because they are showing contempt for God's goodness.

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Paul writes this to cause his readers, including us, to cause us to fear God's wrath, because it can produce repentance.

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I've been talking about others, but this applies to us too...

If we ever start to doubt God's willingness to forgive us, we should think about His goodness:

- Read about the prodigal son
- Read about Manasseh
- Read about the Ninevites

If we ever start feeling comfortable in our sin, we should think about God's wrath:

- Read about the flood
- Read verses about hell
- Read about the Great White Throne judgment

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Let me close by showing you some verses in **Psalm 73** that tie all this together.

I'm going to go through these verses quickly because Jake preached on them a few years ago.

Psalm 73:1 Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

The psalmist knows God is good, but he's having trouble believing it because of something he's seeing.

Psalm 73:2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.

He is referring to his relationship with the Lord and He was starting to stumble spiritually. Listen to what caused this...

Psalm 73:3 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

He saw the wicked prospering, or getting away with their sin, and it upset him enough that he almost turned from the Lord.

Here's the question...

Why were the wicked prospering, or why weren't they being judged?

Because of what we talked about in Romans 2.

You can circle the words **prosperity of the wicked** and write, "Romans 2:4." They are only prospering because God is being kind and giving them time to repent.

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The psalmist reaches the point that he finally says he has been good for nothing...

Psalm 73:13 All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

If the wicked can prosper so much, then why bother living righteously?

Psalm 73:16 But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,

In other words, it was exhausting to even think about.

But then he had one of the most dramatic spiritual revelations in all of Scripture. Look at verse 17...

Psalm 73:17 until I went into the sanctuary of God; THEN I DISCERNED THEIR END.

When he recognized what was in store for the wicked, he no longer struggled in his relationship with the Lord.

You can circle the words **discerned their end** and write, "Romans 2:5."

The psalmist thought about the wicked **storing up wrath for themselves on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment would be revealed** and he no longer envied them.

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He even went on to repent of what he thought...

Psalm 73:22 I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast toward you.

Here's what's interesting...

It was thinking about God's wrath against the wicked that caused him to repent...and – just like God's kindness – it should cause us to repent as well.

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Here's the rest of the story with the man who emailed me.

I wrote him...

"It is not that your sins have not been severe. They have been terrible, just as my sins have been terrible. But Jesus's sacrifice is greater than your sins and mine. It seems to me that you are not thinking highly enough of what Christ did on the cross. I hope that doesn't sound harsh, but if you think your sins can't be forgiven than you don't think highly enough of what Jesus did."

He responded...

“Thank you, Pastor. That’s what I needed to hear. I will continue forward receiving God’s grace and forgiveness more than asking for it. What Jesus did for me and all of us really is the greatest gift and is where my faith should.”

Hopefully like this man we can receive repent and receive God’s grace and forgiveness and recognize what Jesus did for us really is the greatest gift.

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Let me conclude with this...

God is patient, but he is also wrathful:

- If we repent, then his wrath is turned away from us.
- But if we don’t repent then his wrath remains on us...

John 3:36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the WRATH OF GOD REMAINS ON HIM.

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I will be up front after service, and if you have any questions about anything I’ve shared, or I can pray for you in any way I would consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let’s pray.

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ⁱ Let me share a couple verses with you and then I will explain the application to this parable...

Proverbs 18:16 A man's gift makes room for him and brings him before the great.

In other words, if you have a lot to offer people it will make you popular...but for the wrong reasons. You’re going to have friends, but they aren’t real friends. They are simply people who want what you can offer them. If you no longer have anything to offer then they will be gone.

Similarly...

Proverbs 19:6 Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts.

This means everyone likes to be friends with you if you’re rich or you give gifts. But if you run out of gifts, you run out of these friends.

I mention this because the son journeyed to a far country with lots of money in his pocket. He was partying and burning through his cash quickly. I’m sure lots of people wanted to be his friend...or I should say, acted like they wanted to be his friend.