



SERMON REFLECTION QUESTIONS for the week of September 26, 2021

“Perfectly Wrong”

Alix Riley

Theme/concept

We often mistakenly believe that God demands perfection, and either punishes or rejects us when we fail, as we inevitably do. When we have an unrealistic view of God’s expectations and an anemic view of God’s grace, we tend to engage in one of two unhealthy behaviors: reckless disobedience or joyless perfectionism. But God loves us in spite of—and even in the midst of—our failure, and can use our struggles to open us to new life in Christ.

Icebreaker (for groups)

What is one area of your life (or perhaps a certain task, a hobby, or an activity) where you tend to be a perfectionist, and why?

Reflections on the sermon

How did the sermon change your perspective on the way God responds to our failures?

Scripture

Luke 15:1-2 (New International Version)

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Luke 15:11-32 (NIV)

¹¹ Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

¹³ “Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he

began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

²² “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

²⁸ “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

³¹ “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

Reviewing the Scripture

1. In verse 11, what does the younger son ask of his father? How does the father respond?

2. How does the younger son’s situation go from bad to worse in verses 13-16?

Going deeper

1. List the people who hear Jesus' parable (Luke 15:1-2). How might the group in verse 1 have received this parable? How might the group in verse 2 have reacted?
2. How does the younger son violate the cultural/familial/religious norms of his day in verses 12-16? How does the older son act in ways counter to social expectations in verses 28-30?
3. What does the father's action in verse 20b have in common with his action in verse 28b? Why is this significant?
4. How is the father's love for both sons illustrated in verses 31-32?

5. Where do you see evidence of God's grace in this passage?

6. How does the focus on restoration and celebration in this parable affect your perception of God? How does it change the way that you believe God feels about you?

Closing prayer

Loving and gracious God, we confess that the way we see you is often perfectly wrong. We have allowed our distorted views of you to shape our attitudes and behaviors in ways that often are contrary to your intentions for us. When we fail to grasp how wide and long and high and deep your love is, we can easily go astray—either through reckless defiance or joyless compliance. Thank you for the way you continue to run toward us, showering us with grace and inviting us into joyful companionship with you. Help us to see you as you truly are, filled with endless care and compassion. We pray all this in Jesus' name.