

All That I Have Is Yours: The Stunning Love of God

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by S. Michael Durham
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Luke 15:29-32

So he answered and said to his father, "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him." 31 And he said to him, "Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. 32 It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found."

This is a portion of Jesus' parable about a dad and his two sons. The younger was impulsive and adventuresome. He had itchy feet. Home life was boring and he felt the call of the world to come and taste its pleasures. So, he did what was unconscionable, he asked his dad for his inheritance, which would be one third of the father's entire estate. In the culture of the day that was the worse insult a son could heap upon his father. It was the same as saying, "I wish you were dead; you are dead to me, so give me my part of all that you own." Even in our own culture if a son would go to a healthy father and say, "I want my portion of the will now," we would find that very uncomfortable if not rude, how much more in a culture where the elderly was held in high esteem and great respect and honor was to be given to the father.

What was equally scandalous was the father honored the miserable son's demand. He liquidated one-third of his estate and gave the young man the money. With his fortune in his purse, the younger brother took off to see the world and be an international playboy. But soon his money was spent, and with it went all the friends who helped spend it. Starved, humiliated, and fed up with working for a gentile pig farmer, the young man returned home to strike a bargain with his dad. His proposal was simple—"hire me and I'll work for you."

But instead of disowning the wayward boy the dad shocked everyone and showered the returning son with tender affection and overpowering love. It was forgiveness and acceptance to such a degree that Jesus' audience mesmerized and in awe. With gaping mouths and dropped jaws they could not believe their ears. They were stunned by this kind of love with which the dad welcomed back his son. You would have thought the son had come back a war hero.

To celebrate his son's return, the dad threw a huge party. He even had the fatted calf he had been saving butchered and roasted. Then he called all his friends for the party. The whole town probably showed up. Working in the fields that day, the older son came home not knowing that his younger brother had returned. The sound of music and revelry made him ask one of the workers

what was going on. “Your brother has come,” the servant told him, “and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf” (Luke 15:27). He too could not believe what he heard.

He was devastated by the news. The more he thought about it the angrier he became. He decided he would not celebrate nor welcome his brother. Jesus tells us when the news of the eldest son’s reaction reached the father, the father again did something very strange for the culture and the times. In verse 28 we read, “But he [elder son] was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him.”

The customs of the day demanded that the elder brother’s behavior be punished. Any respectable Jewish father would have ordered his servants to seize his son and force him upon the ground, spread eagle, or tie him standing to some post or between two trees and be beaten. This would have been satisfaction for the public humiliation of both guests and host because that is what the older brother did, he disgraced those who attended the party and, most of all, the host of the party, his father. This seems harsh to you and I, strange because it’s not our culture. But it was then.

The father goes to his son. Once again the father humbles himself to reconcile a son. The father acts the part of a redeemer, as he had done earlier that day, seeking his estranged son.

When earlier that day the dad tore through the streets, running to greet his lost son, people followed him. It was so uncustomary for an elder to run through the streets, pulling up his robe and bearing his legs, which was taboo. This time would be no different. The whole house emptied to see what would happen. Surely the father would requite from this young man justice. But they were shocked at what he gave to his son. After the disrespectful and angry words of the elder son, surely every one listening to Jesus thought now the father must and would punish him. Instead they heard entreating words of grace and love.

“And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.’” (Luke 15:31)

The word *son* is from a Greek word that is not often translated son. In the Gospel of Luke the word *son* is found 81 times. The Greek word Luke uses 78 times for son is the normal Greek word for son, *huios*. But here Luke uses the word *teknon*, which literally means child, irrespective of gender. This is a word that engenders affection, tenderness. It’s a very personable and intimate term; you could translate it as, “My child.” This father in Jesus’ parable restrains himself and does not respond in anger, but pours upon the eldest rebel great affection and love just as he had upon the younger rebel.

He assures his son that he will lose nothing but already possesses all.

“Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.”

The problem of the eldest son was the problem of the youngest although it doesn't appear to be. If you know the story, the younger son did something terrible. He had insulted his father in the worst way, squandered the family finances, and here was the son who was good. He stayed home and did all that the father told him. It doesn't look like they have the same problem but they do. Both denied grace and believed in merit. One voiced their denial of grace and their commitment to earning this way, "these many years I have been serving you," the other voiced his denial of grace this way, "Make me like one of your hired servants." They were both saying exactly the same thing. Both rejected the loving grace of the father.

However, there is a big difference between the two. The older son believed he had merited his father's favor, why the younger son knew he had blown it. There was no doubt in the younger son's mind that he had actually terribly rebelled and had broken the father's heart. He didn't deserve the father's love. But the elder brother, ah, he believed he deserved the favor and the kindness and the blessings of the father.

One said, "I never transgressed your commandment at any time." The other said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son." It is this difference in the younger prodigal that lead to redemption and restoration. He recognized he had sinned against the father, while the older brother never understood his sin. Jesus ends the parable with the younger son celebrated in the house in the party and the older brother is outside, not in the party. The curtain comes down in Jesus' parable strategically at this point. This is not a true story, this is a story Jesus invented to make a point and he ends it here because he wants you to see that the elder brother is outside and the party inside. I know this because of the purpose of the entire story. You know it by the first two verses of the fifteenth chapter of Luke. Look at it.

"Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, 'This Man receives sinners and eats with them.'"

Verse two needs to be interpreted. These religious people were saying something was wrong with Jesus. "We hear Your teachings and we see Your miracles. You claim to be a holy man and yet you associate with very unholy people." To sit at a table in that day and have a meal with someone was to be an intimate friend with them. It was to extend intimate friendship with them. And here's the Son of God, God in flesh, sitting at a table with a bunch of pimps and prostitutes and extortioners. Religious people could not grasp this kind of love. They were insulted. They didn't understand. "Don't You understand who these people are? How can You in the name of religion, in the name of God, in the name of all that is holy, associate and identify with such terrible vice?" So Jesus tells this story.

Beloved, I say that it's right here we have a major issue in evangelical Christianity, not to mention other forms. It's that we really do not understand the love of God. The gracious love of God is very difficult for us to understand. I say it this way: We don't know what we know.

We know that God loves us. We accept John 3:16 to a certain degree. We acknowledge the doctrine of the love of God. But we don't know what we know. In other words, we don't believe what we know.

In this story, Jesus states several things but one thing I want you to see through the example and the illustration of this dad, is this:

I. God Loves Us In Spite of Us—Always

A. We Don't Believe This.

My accusation against most of you in this room is that you don't really believe this. I don't mean we don't know about or even accept the doctrine of God's love; I mean we don't put our confidence in it so that it's our living reality. The love of God is not a daily, moment-by-moment reality that shapes our lives and everything we do.

We believe He lovingly approves us when we have obeyed, when we have performed well. And we believe He is irate it's because we have done something. We believe He is angry with us when we have disobeyed and performed terribly. But Jesus shows that the father loves both of these boys in spite of them. Always. What Jesus is really trying to expose is not just the riotous, wicked immorality of the younger son but the self-righteousness of the elder. The same self-righteousness that fills so many churches and often our own hearts, this attitude that causes us not to trust in the grace of God and therefore labor, strive, pray, and do all the things we can do in order to bring ourselves in right standing. No. These two sons equally sinned in different ways. One trusted in his own goodness, the other lived in an immoral and ungodly lifestyle, but both were equally estranged from the father because they would not accept the grace of the father. They could not believe the father loved them in spite of what they did—always.

There's never a moment when God doesn't love you, and there's never a moment when God loves you less.

Both sons had performed miserably and had not obeyed. Both sons had shamed and dishonored and shamed their father, but both sons were equally loved consistently, in spite of what they had done.

B. It is Not Because of Justice That God Wants Relationship.

It is not because of justice that God wants a relationship with you. If it's based on His justice then none of us could come to God or be recipients of His love. The only justice involved in the love of God is the cross. It's not because you're good that God wants to get acquainted. It's not because you're a churchgoer or a professing believer that He wants to have a close relationship with you. It's because He loves you in spite of you—always.

On your best day, in your best obedience to the Lord, He still loves you in spite of you. It will always be that situation. It will never be anything other than that. This is what Jesus demonstrates here.

C. We Sing Amazing Grace But We Don't Believe It Works.

We believe God's grace is only enough to save us. That's about the extent of our understanding of the grace of God. It's good enough to forgive us of our sins and reserve a place for us in heaven, but after salvation we go on probation. The blessings and favor of God are given to us based on our merit and if we are not performing, well then we're on probation. And sometimes He has to use shock probation.

We view God more like a TSA agent at the airport who rifles through our luggage looking for the one thing we are not supposed to have. That's how we view God, as some inspector trying to find one thing about your life that He can write you up on. My dear friends, that's not God. That's not the God of our Lord Jesus Christ and it's certainly not reflected in this dad who represents the love of the Father. This dad had every reason to write these boys up and disown both of them, to reject them, to drive them from the house. Is that what he does? No, he welcomes them in because he loves them in spite of them.

Someone might be thinking, *Pastor, you've got to be careful. You need to exercise some caution because some poor soul here might think you're saying it doesn't matter how they live and that God loves us in spite of our sins and you can still sin all you want and God will still love you.*

My answer to you is that you heard me correctly. That's exactly what I said. I am saying that God loves you always in spite of you. I can prove that all of your sin doesn't keep you from loving you. I can prove you sin all you want and He still loves you.

How many times have you sinned when you didn't want to? What's the answer? Never once. Nobody ever put a gun to your head and made you do it. You sin because you want to. You've always sinned because you wanted to and as much as you wanted to and has He stopped loving you? No! A thousand times no! He loves you in spite of your sin—always! This is the scandalous part of the love of God that we find it difficult to accept in our fine church buildings and our respectable pews. We do sin all that we want to and He still loves us.

But none of us should dare believe that means it's okay for us to sin or that we now have a license to do so. No, those who have experienced the love of the father like the young prodigal did, repent. I may sin every time I want to and God still graciously loves me, but His gracious love makes me to want to sin less. The love of the father broke the younger son; he wanted to be restored to the father. The love of the father transformed him. If you've experienced the love of God you don't love your sin, nor do you excuse it. You rejoice that the love of God is greater than our sin.

Do you really believe in the gracious love of God? Or do you view God that you must somehow prove your love to Him and earn it?

II. God's Love Suffers Our Sins

What will you and I do that we could suffer in probation and penalty that will outweigh the suffering that God has already felt for our sins? Here's the justice of God. The love and justice of God are not opposed, they are both attributes of the same person, the same God. They're not opposed to one another. God's love is very judicial and on Calvary's cross He suffered your sin. S-I-N, which is the totality of your S-I-N-S. All of them. Every one of them. Not one of them has been left undone.

A. The Father Suffered the Sins of His Sons.

God has already suffered your sins in His Son. He suffered the penalty of our sins, the heart brokenness of our sins, the rebellion of our sins, all of that the Son took upon Himself. He became our rebel, our prodigal. There He is on the cross, the outcast, He hangs there as one who had disgraced His Father and dishonored Him, only He had not done so, we did. "The iniquity of us all was laid upon Him," there on the cross the justice of God was placed on Him. Friend, Jesus has already suffered all there is to suffer for your sin! Believe in the gracious love of God and receive it!

Come out of your gloom and your condemnation, reject it. It's contrary to the cross of Jesus Christ. It's another Gospel that cannot save.

B. God Suffered Our Sins.

Just like the father suffered the sins of those two boys. If you would have been with us at Solid Rock Baptist Church a few weeks ago, I explained how the father suffered the humiliation and the rejection of the whole community on behalf of the younger son who returned. And then with the older son, the father goes to him, receiving the humiliation, trying to restore this young man before all of the guests, without one penalty being extracted or charged to the boy.

But here's the rub.

III. The Difficulty Receiving Grace

We find it very difficult at times to receive God's grace.

A. The Elder Son Was Opposed to Grace.

Read these verses and put yourself in his shoes.

“So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’” (Luke 15:29-30)

Do you hear what He’s saying? He opposed grace because he believed he was good. Those who believe they are good always oppose grace. They never quite understand grace because they don’t see their need of it. “I’ve never disobeyed you, father, I have worked from sunup to way past sundown for you without complaint. I’ve never dishonored you. Whatever you required I’ve done. I didn’t go out partying like this son of yours. You owe me your goodness. If you’re going to have a party, it should have been for me because I’ve been good and obedient and an honorable son. You didn’t have to kill the fatted calf, I would have taken a young goat. But it should be me you’re celebrating.”

Good people cannot understand grace. They don’t see their need of it. There are a lot of people who claim the name of Jesus and they’re good people. They’re just like the Pharisee, who this older brother represents. Jesus doesn’t scold the Pharisees and say, “You hypocrites.” He does in other places but here He portrays them as faithful sons who have done what the father commanded them but they still couldn’t understand the loving grace of God, the gracious love of a father who loved them in spite of them, because they believed they were good.

Then there are others who oppose grace because they believe they are no good. They don’t deserve God’s love, they’ve blown it, they’ve sinned too terribly, they’ve done wicked things, they’ve committed all kinds of indecency under the shadow of darkness that they would be embarrassed if it was brought to the light. They know there is no way God could be good to them or could love them because they don’t deserve it. Therefore they oppose grace. Maybe you’re here and you’re just like that. Maybe you can recount all the mistakes and reasons God shouldn’t love you or accept you through Jesus Christ and therefore you cannot wrap your mind around grace and you will not let your heart receive, accept, or enjoy it.

What may shock you is that I think there’s a lot of Christians like that. Their faith was enough to believe that God could forgive them of their sins but they’re not sure God still loves them as much as He did the day He saved them. Or, maybe He doesn’t love them as much now as when they were really on fire for Him.

It dawned on me Friday morning at our staff prayer meeting that I’m ashamed of my need for grace and I don’t think I’m alone. We would rather have God congratulate us than console us. We want to stand up for God and not have to have Him prop us up. It really bothers us to always be needy and not complete, weak and not strong. We are irritated that we don’t have life all together and the longer we live the less we seem to do so. How many times I have prayed, “Lord, I should know better by now. I ought to be further along than I am. God, surely You are as disappointed in me as I am.” We believe God is as disappointed in us as we are with ourselves. Oh, how we need grace but we would rather not have to need it, that’s how much we need grace. We’re so sinful that we despise the need for grace.

We want to be independent, self-sufficient, needing no one, altogether righteous, lacking nothing. But who does that sound like? Who is the only one truly independent, self-sufficient, needing no one, altogether righteous and lacking nothing? God. And that's our problem—we would rather be our own god than require God's grace.

So we struggle with this thing, always believing God is as ashamed of us as we are of ourselves. Does anybody understand what I'm saying? Does this relate to anybody, or am I simply expressing the struggle of my own heart? You want God to be proud of you. Why? Pride.

Now we're getting to the root of the problem. We're exposing the heart. Pride doesn't like grace. It either thinks it's good and has already earned the goodness of God or it believes it's too bad to deserve it.

B. Pride Demands Signs.

The older brother wanted to be stroked, he wanted to be shown that he had won the approval of his father. Pride demands signs of the father. Listen closely because I think I'm getting close to hitting a nerve in some of you. Pride demands signs of the father's love. Listen to the older brother. How many of us are just like him? We need God to give us some sign of His love, which really means His approval and acceptance. Listen to what the brother says.

“So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat (a sign of your love, your approval, your acceptance), that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’” (Luke 15:29-30)

He was angry the fatted calf had been killed for the other son and not for him. Here we are, most of us, wanting the Father to give us some sort of a sign of His love and acceptance of us, and if we don't receive the tangible sign, we are frustrated and eventually worry if God loves us and we aren't truly His.

But what if the Lord gives us a real indication of His love and grace what happens? What if it's a tangible thing? He does that sometimes. How long before we have forgotten it and are begging for yet another sign? Yet this time the sign has to be greater because we no longer trust the last memento of love. And by this our faith dies a thousand deaths until we wonder why we can't trust God.

The Pharisees were always asking Jesus for a sign and what did He call them? An “evil and adulterous generation.” Adulterous? To ask for a sign is adulterous? Yes, it is. I've counseled numerous couples over the years, many who don't go to our church or never came to our church. One of the spouses had been unfaithful and until repentance comes, the guilty spouse is always trying to make the innocent spouse feel guilty, as if it was somehow partly their part. “Jesus, if You would just give us a sign we would believe, but You don't give us a sign. It's Your fault we don't follow You.”

Pride! Pride demands a sign. “God, do You really love me? Am I really Yours? Do you really approve me? Am I doing a good job? I don’t need You to kill the fatted calf, just give me a goat!”

Grace requires absolute faith, a faith that trusts God because He said He was trustworthy. If God has said that He loves His child, then faith says it is so, even though it the believer may not feel it is so. Do you know what God’s grace demands of you? Surrender of your autonomy, meaning your self-sufficiency, your independence. Grace demands surrender of your autonomy and the proof of such a sacrifice needs no reassurances of God’s love and acceptance. When you can quench the hunger for the proofs of God’s love, then faith is proved. You are no longer walking by sight but by faith.

‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.’

Since God has chosen that we receive His grace by faith, then the thing that He must desire from us more than our prayers, our service, and even our sacrifices, is our belief in that He will save us freely because He loves us freely. But let’s admit it, often it’s difficult to believe God loves us as we truly are and not as we should be. Here’s my struggle. It’s hard for me to accept that God loves me just as I am and not how I should be. But that is the love of God. He loves you just as you are. There are many in evangelical Christianity that I love dearly, even some reformed brothers who would find that statement offensive. Grace is offensive to pride. In this parable I see nothing but undeserved love. Always.

‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours.’

Even though you shamed me in front of my guests, you’re still here and everything I have is yours.

If God fell in love with you not because you were good, then tell me why do you still wrestle that if you would just be better you could get more of His love? Friends, it doesn’t work that way. “All I have is yours.”

I want to tell you what I believe to be a true story. Many would doubt it because of the person who told it. In his book, *The Furious Longing of God*, Brennan Manning tells of a patient dying of Hansen’s disease, better known as leprosy, in the only leprosy colony in the continental United States, southwest of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The facility was closed in 1999. Brennan Manning is someone whom I would not want you to seriously embrace all of his theological distinctives. There are some things he taught that I don’t agree with but I don’t doubt that he was a believer, a *ragamuffin* kind in his own words, meaning a disreputable kind. I believe this story to be true and thus I tell it to you.

Approaching the hospital to minister to the patients Manning was confronted by a nurse that ushered him quickly to a patient’s room. The patient was named Yolanda; she was dying.

Yolanda was thirty-seven years old who five years earlier had contracted leprosy. Manning looked at a picture of her in the room taken before the disfiguring disease. He said that she was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen.

Any resemblance to her former self was erased by the savagery of leprosy. Manning described her in her present conditions this way:

. . . her nose is pressed into her face. Her mouth is severely contorted. Both ears are distended. She has no fingers on either hand, just two little stumps. . . . Two years earlier, her husband divorced her because of the social stigma attached to leprosy, and he had forbidden their two sons, boys fourteen and sixteen, from ever visiting their mother. The father was an alcoholic, complete with frequent violent mood swings. The boys were terrified of him, so they dutifully obeyed; as a result, Yolanda was dying an abandoned, forsaken woman.

He anointed her with oil and prayed for her as any minister would do. But something happened as he turned around to put the cap back on his bottle of oil. Again Manning's description is as follows:

. . . the room was filled with a brilliant light. It had been raining when I came in; I didn't even look up, but said, "Thanks, Abba, for the sunshine. I bet that'll cheer her up." As I turned to look back at Yolanda—and if I live to be three hundred years old I'll never be able to find the words to describe what I saw—her face was like a sunburst over the mountains, like one thousand sunbeams streaming out of her face literally so brilliant I had to shield my eyes. I said, "Yolanda, you appear to be very happy." . . . I then asked her, "Will you tell me why you're so happy?" She said, "Yes, the [Father] of Jesus just told me that He would take me home today." I vividly remember the hot tears that began rolling down my cheeks. After a lengthy pause, I asked just what the Abba of Jesus said. Yolanda said:

COME NOW, MY LOVE. MY LOVELY ONE, COME.
FOR YOU, THE WINTER HAS PASSED,
THE SNOWS ARE OVER AND GONE,
THE FLOWERS APPEAR IN THE LAND,
THE SEASON OF JOYFUL SONGS HAS COME.
THE COOING OF THE TURTLEDOVE IS HEARD IN OUR LAND.
COME NOW, MY LOVE. MY YOLANDA, COME.
LET ME SEE YOUR FACE. AND LET ME HEAR YOUR VOICE,
FOR YOUR VOICE IS SWEET AND YOUR FACE IS BEAUTIFUL.
COME NOW, MY LOVE, MY LOVELY ONE, COME.

I don't know if you recognize those words, they are from Song of Solomon 2:10-14. Six hours later Yolanda left this world to follow the beckoning of her Lord who said to her, "Come now, My love, My lovely one, come." But what Manning did not know at the time but learned after Yolanda's death was that Yolanda was illiterate making it impossible to have read the Bible. And he

writes that he never recited or read that passage to her on any of previous visits. “Come now, My love, My lovely one, come.” Her husband didn’t want to look upon her face, but Jesus said, “I do.”

In the Bible leprosy is an illustrative code word for sin. It represented sin like no other picture of the terrible ravaging nature of sin. Any who contracted the disease in the Bible was an outcast and unclean. They could never participate in the worship of Jehovah. They were tainted and forever banned from His presence.

But what do we see in Jesus as He deals with the lepers? He called to them. He touched them. He embraced them, He cleansed them and healed them. Some of us have made up our souls with spiritual cosmetics to cover the blemishes and we have deceived no one but ourselves—we are still contaminated, we’re still unclean. But Jesus knows and He still loves us. He still reaches for us, and He still embraces us. He is not afraid of your sin. He’s already died for it. He has already suffered for it. He suffered everything that sin required. He has nothing to fear. Don’t let your pride silence your hope that you could be His beloved.

*Come My Son.
Come My Daughter.
you are always with me,
and all that I have is yours.’*

Come. There is only one thing that will keep you from coming: your pride to humble yourself and receive stinking, lowly, embarrassing grace. It offends you so that the Father could love you so much and look on you and your distorted soul, stained and ravaged by your sin, nothing pretty to look at, nothing beautiful to behold, and yet He looks at you and says, “Come, come My lovely one, come. I want to see your face.”

We have a Father that loves His children in spite of His children—always. And we’re always with Him and all that He has is ours. Amen.