

Start Timer!

I. Introduction

[Slide 1] We are in a middle of a series called, **Life Change from the Heart.**

This is a series about how God changes us from the heart through the gospel.

How does change from the heart happen? We start with acknowledging our powerlessness to change ourselves. The Bible talks about this as sinful nature that we are powerless to. **[Slide 2]** That's step 1: **We admitted we were powerless over our addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.**

Then, we go on a spiritual quest to seek power greater than ourselves. We made the case that believing in Jesus is both intellectually credible and it restores us to sanity.

[Slide 3] That's step 2: **Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

Then, we come to a point of surrendering our life to God who kisses us with love and grace even when we were all messed up. **[Slide 4]** That's step 3: **Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.**

We said that we are not zapped into life change after we surrender our life to God. Rather, we start the process of cleaning the inside of the cup, our heart. We go through an extensive process of self-examination to find self-indulgence in our heart. **[Slide 5]** That's step 4: **Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**

Then, we confess what we find to God, ourselves, and to another person. **[Slide 6]** That's step 5: **Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**

Then, we repent, change the posture of our heart. We don't just repent of our behavior (our bad habits, our anger, our alcoholism, our sinful lifestyle, etc.); we repent of various ways in which we have self-indulged: self-pity, self-centeredness, dishonesty, sloth, pride, etc. We repent of our heart's biggest idol: self; then, we open our hearts towards God. **[Slide 7]** That's step 6: **Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.** Now, we are on step 7. **[Slide 8]** Step 7 says: **“Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”** **[Slide 9]** The sermon today is entitled, **“A**

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Humble Heart and Extravagant Grace.” How does God remove our shortcomings? Does he just whack us when we ask him to change us? Maybe sometimes. Most of the times, he changes us through his grace. **[Slide 10]** So, here’s what we are going talk about:

1. God is God of extravagant grace
2. Grace changes the heart
3. Grace works through humility

We are going to talk about these things as we look at one of the most famous parables in the Bible: the parable of the two sons and the prodigal father. I know most of us know it as the parable of the prodigal son, but you’ll see why I think it is really more about the two sons and the prodigal father. The word, prodigal means extravagant. The father is the one who is extravagant.

[Slide 11] Let’s go to Luke 15.

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

³Then Jesus told them this parable:

(Remember that Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law when he tells these parables. This is in response to their muttering about Jesus welcoming and fellowshiping with sinner. He tells them three parables in response.)

[Slide 12] ⁴“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

[Slide 13] ⁸“Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ ¹⁰In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

[Slide 14] ¹¹Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property

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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.

[Slide 15] 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.

[Slide 16] “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.

[Slide 17] 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.

[Slide 18] 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.’ ”

II. [Slide 19] These parables tell us that God is God of extravagant grace.

In the first parable, one sheep is lost, and the shepherd leaves the 99 and goes to find the one lost sheep until it is found. Jesus is saying that God seeks the one lost sinner until he finds that sinner. Have you noticed that he said the he leaves the 99 in open country to find the one lost sheep until he is found? If you think about this, this does not make sense. If you think in terms of cost-benefit analysis, no one would do this. Maybe,

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the shepherd should go look sort or around seeing distance of the other sheep, and maybe until dark, at most. But to go after the one that is lost? God's love and grace has no limit. He is after you. He loves you. He will go after you until you are found.

Have you noticed that in your life? Sometimes, we think that we are just one in a billions of people he has to care for. We feel like we are just one of many who are lost, who no one cares for. Not on God's eye! He is looking for you! He will seek after you until you are found! The point of this parable is that he cares for you individually! You are that valuable to God! Think about it. God created the world. He created the vast universe. Yet, he loves you so much that he came down to earth for you. Not only that; he came and died on the cross to pay for your sins. Not only that; he is looking for you. You may have thought that you were completely lost and no one cares about you. You may have thought that you don't matter to anyone. That's not true. God love for you is not based on a cost-benefit analysis. His love for you is extravagant.

Look at the story of the lost coin. Some commentators say that the lost coin was probably part of the whole collection of the coin that she received as her dowry. Whether or not that was the case, the lost coin was personally valuable to her. Jesus is saying that you are personally valuable to God. If you think about it, the world values people who don't seem to be lost, people who seems to have it all together. God values them as well. But, God is specifically interested in people who are lost. He came to find those who are lost. He specializes in those who are lost. This doesn't make sense from the world's perspective. His love for you is extravagant!

Look at the story of the lost sons. The younger son actually had the tenacity to go to his father to ask for his inheritance while the father was still alive! Who does that? He is saying, I don't want you, but I want your stuff. I don't want to wait until you're dead to do what I really want to do. I know people who left their home to do what they wanted but this guy actually wanted his portion of the inheritance! Then he went off to a far off country and lived it up. He wasted all of his wealth in wild living. He is irresponsible, selfish, and disrespectful to his father. Yet, how does the father respond? How does God respond? He gives him what he wants and lets him go. I've often wondered about this.

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Why does the father do this? God loves him enough to let him go. Do you know why some of you ended up in the situation that you ended up? Why didn't God stop you from destroying your life? Why didn't God stop you from your addiction? Why didn't God stop you from messing up your life? He loves you enough to let you go. God is not interested in keeping you just so that you will obey him out of duty. He wants your heart. He will not force you to stay with him if you don't want to. He will not force your life by his commands if you don't want to. God is not interested in legislating morality so that you will be forced to obey him; he is interested in your heart. Because he love you.

Even after he left, the passage tells us: **“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.**

How did the father see the son come back from a long way off? Because he had been going up to the hill everyday and waiting for his son to come back. He longed to see his son. He loved his son so much that he went up the hills and watched to see if his son is coming. Do you see the heart of God? When the son came back, instead of disciplining him, instead of tapping his feet until he asked for forgiveness, instead of making him earn his keep, the father was filled with compassion for him and ran to his son, threw his arms and kissed him. He was a prominent Jewish man. Prominent Jewish men didn't run. But, he ran! He ran to his son. Even before repentance, he ran to him and kissed him. Do you see the extravagant love and grace of the father? He loves you!

Maybe you are afraid of God and that you came back for scraps. Maybe you came back thinking that anything has to be better than living in addiction and sin. You are sick and tire of being sick and tired. And, you think coming back to God has to be better than where you were. But, listen! God's love for you is so much bigger and greater than you imagined. He completely and utterly embraces you and loves you.

The passage says he put the best robe on him, put a ring on his finger, and put sandals on him. God clothes you with his righteousness. He put the ring of sonship on you. He put sandals on him because he is not a servant, but a son. And he threw a massive party to celebrate his return.

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This is how much he loves his son. This is how much he loves you! His love for you is not based on what you have done. You know, the son thought his father’s love and acceptance would be limited because of what he has done. That’s why he thought maybe his father would let him be a servant. What he came to realize is that his father’s love is unconditional and completely based on grace. The boy didn’t earn anything. Everything was grace, meaning that it was completely unmerited. That’s how extravagant God’s love is for you! His grace is limitless!

III. [Slide 20] Secondly, grace changes the heart.

Imagine how the younger son responded to his father’s love and grace. I think he was completely stunned. I think his hardened heart was softened. The grace of the father shocked his heart. He experienced life change from his heart.

Do you see how grace changes our heart? And through a changed heart, his life was changed. That’s what God wants to do. Only grace, only grace has the power to change us from the heart!

There is a movie called Three Seasons, a Vietnamese/American production. A part of the story has to do with a cyclo driver (sort of like bike and rickshaw) named Hai and his infatuation with an ambitious prostitute, a young woman who is sure she can sleep her way out of poverty into the cool, clean world of luxury hotels near where she works. After winning a cyclo race, he pays \$50 to spend the night with her. He rents a room in the luxury hotel and you would expect him to have sex with her. But, he does not. He simply requests to watch her fall asleep, to watch her rest and enjoy the world she dreams of joining. Slowly, she falls asleep. And he is gone in the morning, having demanded nothing from her except the chance to fulfill her desire to belong. Something snaps in the prostitute, and she finds she cannot return to her old job. It is an amazing and powerful story of selfless, life-changing love. It is a story of the power of grace.

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There is something about costly grace that breaks through the hardened heart and changes us.

Look at the elder brother. There is no experience of his father's grace. He stayed home obeying his father out of duty. While he obeyed his father, his heart was not in it. Think about some of the things he said: **‘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!’**

He feels like he has been slaving for his father. There was no joy in his obedience to his father. He has been white-knuckling his way to obedience. He cannot accept the grace of his father. He is so angered by his father's grace toward his brother. He cannot accept his brother back. He refuses to come into the party.

The elder brother has actually been living a pretty miserable life. He is bitter about having behaved well. There is no joy. There is no love. There is no patience. There is no gentleness. There is no self-control. There is no fruit of the Spirit. Just cleaning the outside of the cup, just trying to live the right life does not change us. He does not see a need for grace in his life. He feels like he deserves what he get and others who don't live up to the standard shouldn't get what they don't deserve. He is full of pride and judgment.

Do you see two different ways to change your life? One is by grace, and the other is by outward performance. Only grace has the power to change your heart, and therefore your life. It is by grace you have been saved, not through works so that no one can boast. Do you see why grace of God is at the heart of our faith? Only experience of God's grace has the power to remove our shortcomings!

IV. [Slide 21] Here's the last point: Grace works through humility.

The greatest friend of grace is humility. And the greatest enemy of grace is pride. If you know you messed up, if you know your heart is dirty and self-indulgent, then grace is your friend. You know you don't deserve it; so, when you get it, it is so powerful.

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That was the case with the younger brother. But, if you stand by your work, if you feel like you have done your share, you don't feel like you need grace. You just want your wages. Grace is an insult to you like you need a handout. That was the case with the elder brother.

The younger brother was humbled through what he did. He knew he messed up. He knew he didn't deserve anything from the father. I think addicts actually have an advantage in experiencing God's grace and therefore transformation by the power of God in their lives. They know they messed up. They know they are powerless. And if they go through the process of cleaning the inside of the cup, the process of self-examination, confession and repentance, they know that they are a sinner in need of God's grace.

Do you see why it is so important for you to go through this extensive process of cleaning the inside of the cup in steps 4, 5, 6 and now 7? Do you see why it was so important to list every resentment to find self-indulgence, confess it to another person so that you can sharpen your confession and see your blind spots, and repent? When you go through this process, you can't help but to be humbled. Your pride has broken. You see the depth of the mess, and the more you see your mess, the more amazing that grace becomes, and the more amazing that grace becomes, the more power you have to change your life. You are changed by God's grace. When you approach God with humility, and ask him to remove your shortcomings, he will do so through the power of grace in your heart.

I want to make one note about being humble. I think most of us know that Jesus told us to be humble. We know that the Bible teaches us that humility is a virtue. Humility is not pretending to be less than what we really are. No, a call to humility is a call to look deep inside of our heart and acknowledge our self-indulgence. It is a call to be real with who we really are on the inside.

If we don't have humility, there is no grace. In other words, if we are full of pride, we can't accept grace. We won't accept grace. Look at the elder brother. You will see that he was as lost as the younger brother was but because of his good behavior on the outside, he didn't know that he was lost. The outside of the cup deceived him to finding

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the filth inside of the cup. He was full of pride, greed, and self-indulgence on the inside. He was as far from his father as the younger brother was but he hid in his good behavior.

It is so easy to become lost like the elder brother. If you think about it, the church is full of elder brothers. I know when we think of Pharisees we think of them as hypocrites, but at the time of Jesus, they were the most respected religious leaders. They prayed regularly, they tithed, and they lived by the rules. They were moralistic people who were respected by society at the time. But, they had real issues.

Now, what are some signs that you have elder brother issues?

1. You're angry about the way things are going. The parable says that the elder brother got angry and refused to go in. You have this feeling that God owes you because you lived such a good life and you get angry when things are not going your way. You have this sense of entitlement with God based on your moral behavior. So, elder brothers tend to be angry and upset. Younger brothers are cooler and they don't get as upset because they feel that they deserve what they are getting.

2. Elder brothers have joyless mechanical obedience. The elder brother said: "I've been slaving for you." That's why some elder brothers explode at the end.

- Their life is very will-power oriented. They don't want to do it but they force themselves to do it. They can be legalistic. Their hearts are not in it, but they force themselves to do it. Because they believe that what they get what they deserve, they work hard to deserve it. But, there is no heart. There is no transformation at the heart. That's why they sometimes explode. I am sick and tired to getting the short end of the stick! I've been slaving for you all these years! I can't believe you didn't bless me with a job. I can't believe this happened to my kid.

3. Coldness to younger brother types. The elder brother in the story definitely felt superior to the younger brother and didn't even want to call him by name. He says to his father when referring to his brother, "this son of yours." You feel morally superior to them and that's important to you. You tend to be homophobic. You tend to be judgmental. You tend to have in your heart of hearts, a holier-than-thou attitude.

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Why wouldn't you? You have been slaving over obeying God all these years and the thief got in at the end right before he died! In many ways, you have a hard time reaching the younger brother types in your evangelism because they sense your judgmental attitude.

4. Lack of assurance of the father's love. There is a sense that he doesn't really know how much his father loves him. He's not sure. How can he be sure when his approval is based on his performance? There might be some of you who have always wondered if God really loved you, it might be because you are measuring his love for you based on your work, morality, and performance. I think you have to stop that!

5. There is an unforgiving spirit. The elder brother didn't want to forgive his brother. If are holding a grudge, you probably think you would never do that—and in some way, you feel morally superior. Be careful! I think people who understand their mistakes are more forgiving. For example, people who are late all the time, are much more forgiving to others who are late. In fact, they might be relieved.

All of these things point to pride, and destroys humility.

Remember, the whole encounter that led to Jesus telling them these three parables started with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttering about Jesus hanging out with sinners, the younger brother types. Who do you think the elder brother represents? The elder brother represents the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. And when the father is pleading with the elder brother to come into the party, to rejoice together. They were too prideful to listen. They were like this because of they focused on the outside of the cup, their behavior. They could not accept grace because they didn't think they needed it. The thing that blinded them to real life change was their external goodness.

I know that when we go through this series, some of you have been thinking, this is for the addicts; it is not for me. I don't have that kind of issue. Maybe you are not an alcoholic, but maybe you are the elder brother. Maybe, you are at a disadvantage because of your behavioral goodness.

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You know, the Kingdom of God is represented by the party. This is a warning that it is the younger brother who made it to the party. The elder brother never made it to the party. The invitation is open, however.

I believe God is calling both the younger brothers and elder brothers to accept his grace. You know, it is not the moral that gets in. It is the humble that gets in. Why? Because without humility, we can't experience his grace, and it is by grace we are saved, not by works.