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CEDARCREEKCHURCH

Trusting God's Grace – Nah, I'm Good

August 29, 2022

I'll be honest, the "Parable of the Lost Son" has never sat easily with me.

There's always a flicker of indignation and a sense of injustice whenever I read it. The older brother stayed by his father's side, faithfully working, striving to never put a toe out of line. Yet the prodigal son receives a more lavish party than his brother ever had.

How is that fair?

My struggle to swallow this story reveals something about my own heart—the same thing the older brother and Jonah both wrestled with: an inability to accept both God's judgment *and* his compassion.

This past weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder unpacked the similarities between the older brother in the parable of the prodigal son and Jonah. In the final chapter of Jonah, we see Jonah's petulant response to God deciding to have mercy on Nineveh.

Jonah 4:2

So he [Jonah] complained to the Lord about it: "Didn't I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people."

Jonah didn't trust God's verdict of mercy, preferring to rely on his own view of justice. It's the same complaint the older brother had against his father in the parable.

Luke 15:29-30

²⁹But he [the older brother] replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. ³⁰Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!'

Jonah and the older brother would rather see punishment than forgiveness. They trust their own sense of indignation in the face of mercy. But in their

bitterness, they don't acknowledge the compassion they have been shown. Jonah was saved from the belly of a fish, and the father willingly shared all he had with the older brother.

We can do the same thing. We can render judgment or resist serving "those people" while secretly being glad we're not as bad as them. We can rely on our own sense of justice instead of trusting God's. In doing so, we not only miss God's heart for the lost, we also lose sight of the fact that we were once Nineveh and the prodigal son, in desperate need of grace.

When we remember that we are rescued people, it prevents us from getting stuck in self-righteousness and, instead, invites us to trust God's justice and his mercy.

Questions:

Do you ever resist God's grace when it doesn't fit your idea of justice?

Do you trust God's sense of justice?

Next Steps:

Take time to write out how you first learned about Jesus—who you were before and who you are now.

Read [Jonah 4](#) and reflect on God's compassion.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for being merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry, and filled with unfailing love. I'm so grateful for the grace you have shown me. Please keep me from becoming proud, and instead, help me to trust your justice. Show me who I can help rescue because you have rescued me. In Jesus' name, amen.

This post was written by Sarah Pagel, a regular contributor and editor for the LivingItOut.

Trusting God When It Seems Unfair – Nah, I’m Good

August 30, 2022

Ask anyone in my life, and you will find that I am a Type A personality. It is in my nature to take charge of situations and achieve my goals. While this go-getter attitude has its benefits, it also causes a desire for me to always be in the driver’s seat of my life. Too often, letting go of my own desires and what I think *should* happen in life takes a backseat to trusting God’s sovereign plan.

Jonah knew and trusted in God’s unchanging nature; he knew that he served a compassionate, patient God. However, he still did not trust God to bring about the outcome that Jonah himself wanted. Jonah knew all along that it was in God’s character to invite people to repent of their sins and experience an intimate relationship with him. Knowing this, Jonah was still so resistant to God’s decision to forgive the Ninevites that he would have rather died than watch God have mercy on them and lead them to repentance.

Jonah 4:1-3

¹ This change of plans greatly upset Jonah, and he became very angry. ² So he complained to the Lord about it: “Didn’t I say before I left home that you would do this, Lord? That is why I ran away to Tarshish! I knew that you are a merciful and compassionate God, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love. You are eager to turn back from destroying people. ³ Just kill me now, Lord! I’d rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen.

When first reading the story of Jonah, I quickly became frustrated by his inability to trust God to know what is best instead of stubbornly being controlled by his own will and desires. But then I realized that there is a little bit of Jonah in me—whether that be choosing a college, career, or relationship—things do not always go as we first planned. Even though, in my heart, I trust God and know that his ways are higher than mine, I still *try to be God* and chase after what I think is right rather than what God desires.

Let us not forget that we have a trustworthy God whose ways are higher than our ways, and whose purpose for us is greater than our own plans.

Isaiah 55:8-9

“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”

Questions:

Has there been a time in your life when you resisted God’s will and direction to follow what you thought was right? In what direction was God calling you, and in which direction did you want to run toward instead?

Why do you think it is so difficult to trust God at times, even when we know and have experienced his trustworthiness?

Next Steps:

Prayerfully ask God to help you give up your own will when it contradicts his. Ask him to search your heart for resistance to his will and to develop your trust in his plan.

Read the Parable of the Lost Son ([Luke 15:11-22](#)). Reflect on how the stubbornness of the older son relates to Jonah’s (and our own) tendency to resist God and, instead, trust in what we believe is the right and just outcome of the situation.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for allowing us to experience an intimate relationship with you. We make mistakes on our walk with Christ every day, yet you still extend us your compassion and mercy. Thank you for being our sovereign God and not leaving us to deal with the outcomes of our decisions on our own. Please help us to give up our own selfish desires and truly listen to you, giving us the desire to go where you are calling us instead of resisting your will. In Jesus’ name, amen.

This post was written by Isabelle Billnitzer, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.

By His Grace – Nah, I’m Good

August 31, 2022

God gives us what we need, not what we want.

This can be a tough pill to swallow at times. There are plenty of times when we ask God for a new car ... a nicer house ... more money ... (insert your want here). When life is going great, we have the tendency to become complacent in gratitude for the things that God has already given us.

I am reminded of when my dad passed away from cancer. I was so angry with God for taking him. I ran from the pain any way I could back then and, in turn, ran from God—just like Jonah did when he got on that ship to Tarshish.

I remember wanting to talk to my dad so badly after he was gone—to tell him about his new granddaughter and all the good things that were happening in my life. It caused me to suffer from depression for a few years, especially when it came to holidays and parties where my dad should have been included. I was sitting in that hot desert like Jonah—*miserable* and only thinking of myself—upset that I couldn’t have what I wanted.

If I hadn’t found CedarCreek and accepted Christ as my Savior, I would have never known God’s grace. In the oddest way, my dad’s death led me to Jesus, and *he* welcomed me with open arms.

Luke 15:22-24

²² “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. ²³ And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.”

My dad wasn’t a spiritual man, but he did accept Christ before he passed, and I know we will meet again. Even death can have purpose. I have come to realize that even as I ran from the pain (and God), God never stopped pursuing me. Lead Pastor Ben Snyder said, “You can’t go where God can’t reach you.” We can’t outrun God! No matter what we are facing in life, we shouldn’t run from God—we should run toward him because he is running after us, all the time.

I think my dad unintentionally lived out this week's bottom line: **rescued people, rescue people**. My dad was rescued, and I was rescued through him. I accepted faith because of the huge impact his death had in my life.

God showed me grace even when I was rejecting him.

Ephesians 2:8

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.

Questions:

Have you ever been so mad at God you ran from him? Does the book of Jonah show you that even the most wicked can be redeemed through faith?

Next Steps:

Read the book of Jonah, and put yourself in the story in his place. Journal what it would have looked like if you were in the story. Enjoy the grace that God graciously gave you.

Prayer:

Father, thank you for your precious gift of grace. I don't deserve it, but you give it to me anyway. Please allow me to show your grace through me and my actions. In Jesus' name, amen.

Definition of Humility – Nah, I’m Good

September 1, 2022

What is humility?

Our world teaches us it’s having a sense of unworthiness, or not focusing on ourselves. You hear about it everywhere: A fighter’s devastating loss humbled him. Or the popular girl wearing a zit in her prom photo gave her a sense of humility. It seems to me that those scenarios are more humiliating than anything else.

Lead Pastor Ben Snyder mentioned there are many misconceptions about humility. While it’s often assumed humility is about making yourself small, others define it as “not just thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less.”

In Hebrew, however, they teach a different meaning of humility.

Humility (*Adavah*): Occupy your God-given space in the world.

We shouldn’t try to play the role of God, whether it be for our own benefit or to fix the lives of others; rather, we need to step into the role he has uniquely called each of us to. This requires trusting God and his invitation to be a part of his work in our world. We can be confident that he runs to both the rebellious and the self-righteous. God both welcomes us into his arms and invites us to do his work regardless of where we are on that spectrum. But it takes humility.

You offer or accept humility when you step into God’s invitation—you humiliate yourself when you don’t.

In [Jonah 4](#), we see Jonah’s anger at God for showing mercy to Nineveh. He threw the worst temper tantrum, wishing for his life to get snatched and crying about a plant's death.

Jonah 4:10-11

¹⁰ Then the Lord said, “You feel sorry about the plant, though you did nothing to put it there. It came and died quickly. ¹¹ But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, not to mention all the animals. Shouldn’t I feel sorry for such a great city?”

Jonah, the blessed prophet of the Lord, wanted his pride more than he wanted to trust in God. This reminds me of a quote by Paulo Freire: “No one can be

authentically human while he prevents others from being so.” Instead, we should set aside our pride and clothe ourselves in humility because rescued people rescue people.

James 4:6

And he gives grace generously. As the Scriptures say, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Philippians 2:3-4, 8

³ Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. ⁴ Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. ... ⁸ [H]e humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

Humility isn’t putting yourself down to build others up. Sometimes, it’s pulling others to your level and propping them up, and sometimes, it’s allowing others to pull you up. It’s all part of being human.

Questions:

Does your pride get in the way of trusting God? How are you helping others build a relationship with God?

Next Steps:

Read “Have the Attitude of Christ” in [Philippians 2:3-4, 8](#).

Focus on building relationships with non-Christians. Invite those new friends to church and talk about joining a [Group](#). Open yourself up to also living life outside of CedarCreek so others can see what you’re all about.

Prayer:

[I’m living proof of what the mercy of God can do.](#) I am thankful that my steps continue to move toward the invitation God extended. Lord, I am equally grateful for your running toward me when my doubts, hurts, and pride steer my feet from the path. Thank you for promising to never give up on me and for the people you’ve put in my life who lift my spirits when the days seem too long. Amen.

This post was written by Jaron Camp, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.

God's Greatest Desire – Nah, I'm Good

September 2, 2022

Every day I pray for my loved ones and other nonbelievers to surrender their hearts to Jesus and become his followers. Spending eternity with Jesus, my loved ones, and all his children is the biggest desire of my heart. It fills me with peace and joy, knowing that our God's greatest desire is for all of us to be saved.

Last weekend, Lead Pastor Ben Snyder finished up the book of Jonah in the amazing series, *Nah, I'm Good*. Jonah's story shows how great God's love and forgiveness is for all people. Our God desperately wants to save every single person, and he will do almost anything to accomplish this purpose.

The "Parable of the Lost Son" ([Luke 15:11-32](#)) is another example of God's great love and forgiveness. We are going to focus on the father and the second son, who was spoiled and selfish. He had the audacity to go to his father and ask for his share of his father's estate *while his father was still alive*. This would be similar to telling his father, "I wish you were dead." I imagine the father was deeply hurt, but he gave his son the inheritance, and the son left.

The father waited patiently for his son to come to his senses and return home. I am sure he would have been praying for his son. I imagine the father went to the city gates every day, hoping to see his son again.

Meanwhile, the son wasted all his money on wild living. A famine struck, and the son hit rock bottom, starving. He got a job feeding pigs and was so hungry even the slop he fed the pigs looked good to him. One day, he came to his senses. He remembered how loving and kind his father was to his servants, and he was ashamed of the way he behaved. He decided to return home.

Luke 15:18-21

¹⁸ "I will go home to my father and say, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you,'¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant."²⁰ So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.²¹ His son said to him, 'Father I have sinned against both heaven and you and I am no longer worthy of being your son.'

After all that the son had done, the father ran to him and embraced him. The love the father showed his wayward son was highly unusual in that culture. It would have been considered humiliating for an elderly man to run. The son's behavior had disgraced the father so badly the son probably wouldn't have been allowed back in the city gates, and the community would have disowned him.

Yet, the father ran to his son so that he would be allowed back into the community, demonstrating great love, mercy, and grace. He was so overjoyed that his son had returned, he threw him a welcome home party.

Like the father, our God is so full of grace, mercy, and compassion for us. He will forgive and restore us if we return to him with a repentant heart. He wants us all to be saved. He waits patiently for us to return. He will do almost anything to bring us back to him, yet we each need to make that choice for ourselves. He doesn't force it, but there is a huge celebration when one of his lost children returns.

Luke 15:7

"In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven't strayed away."

Questions:

What have you learned about God from this series? What did you learn about God from the "Parable of the Lost Son"? How will you live out what you have learned?

Next Steps:

Read [Jonah](#) and [Luke 15](#). Meditate on what you learn about our awesome God. Pray for unbelievers in your life. Invite someone to church. Join a [Group](#).

Prayer:

Father, thank you for loving all of us so much. Lord, I praise you for saving me. I am overwhelmed by your grace and mercy. Use me to bring others to you. Help me listen and obey you. All glory to you, our amazing and loving Daddy. Amen.

This post was written by Marsha Raymond, a regular contributor to the LivingItOut.