

## Kingdom Culture

### Church as Family: Knowing God's Fatherhood

In our first session looking at the Culture of Family we explored:

- How the world has understood the church
- How the Father, Son and Holy Spirit model family relationship and unity
- How Jesus prays in John 17 that we (the church) might live as the Trinity do together.

Heaven's government is all about family; so this is primarily how the church should exist. Heaven's government is not about protecting 'the rules', but is best expressed by us living as family in a culture of love, grace and empowerment. The church family is the secure base where, and from which, we discover who we are created to be, and what our calling and destiny can be.

### Father – heart of God; an issue that can cause emotional conflict and pain

Families work best and experience great security when there is a father who is exercising his role with love, care and compassion. We are living in times where this is getting less common. If the church community is to successfully experience and model family (as it is in heaven), she needs an on-going and powerful experience of the Fatherhood of God and leaders who model fatherhood as they exercise their roles.

Sadly, it's 'authority figures' who abuse their roles that can cause the most damage to our personal security (often causing rejection) and create a damaged view of God as Father. Part of the role of church leadership must be to lead God's people into deeper understanding and experiences in the love of the Father. God, like the church, has been and is badly represented and portrayed.

### Story of the Prodigal

A great story illustrating the Father heart of God: Luke 15:11-31

(Reading with images)

*"Jesus is showing us [in the story of the two sons] the God of Great Expenditure, who is nothing if not prodigal toward us, his children. God's reckless grace is our greatest hope, a life-changing experience," (Timothy Keller, The Prodigal God).*

Prodigal = Reckless extravagance, lavishly abundant (profuse)

God's 'reckless grace' – Jesus

## What does the story show us about Father God?

- We are created in His image, originally part of His family but He gave us the freedom to choose (Genesis 1:27, 2:15-17)
- He is our provider (1 Timothy 6:17, Matthew 6:25-27)
- He is looking out, longing for our return (Luke 15:4-7)
- He is compassionate (Psalm 103:13)
- He is a Father who runs towards us as we move toward Him (James 4:8)
- He loves us (1 John 3:1)
- He kisses us despite our condition (Song of Songs 1:2)
- He affirms our son ship, we are part of His family – children of God (Romans 8:12-17)
- He welcomes us back into His arms (Deuteronomy 33:26-28)
- He gives us significant gifts\* we are undeserving of (2 Corinthians 9:15)
- He celebrates (Luke 15:7)
- He is gracious and merciful – to both sons. He doesn't give us what we deserve (Ephesians 2:5)
- He is redeemer and restorer (Psalm 23:3)
- He is a good, kind and compassionate Father; God is in a good mood! (Romans 2:4)

Video of the Prodigal:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxfdChYCKYA&feature=youtube\\_gdata\\_player](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxfdChYCKYA&feature=youtube_gdata_player)

**\*What is the significance of the gifts (sandals, a coat, and a ring) the father bestowed on his son after his return home?**

According to the parable, the father ran out to embrace his son the moment he saw him. The lesson we can learn from this is that as soon as a sinner's face is turned *homeward*, even though he may still be far away, our Father in heaven recognizes this change of heart, and bounds out to meet the child He so dearly loves. God doesn't say, "Let this sinner come to Me and beg for my mercy." On the contrary God moves quickly with delight when He sees a child return to Him.

Additionally the father fell on his son's neck and kissed him (v 20). Consider what must be taking place here. The son was unquestionably filthy. The smell of garbage and pig slop must have been intense. But did the father care? Of course not! His son was a WONDERFUL sight to Him and nothing could diminish that.

### **Four exquisite Gifts**

When the prodigal returns in tears to his father, he begs him to allow him to work as a servant on the family estate. But the father would have none of this. His reaction speaks volumes about how God views genuine contrition and repentance. This wonderful patriarch provides his son with exquisite gifts—each of which tells an extraordinary story of distinction and honor.

#### **"Put sandals on his feet"**

The sandals picture freedom. Slaves at that time were barefoot. And although the prodigal wanted to be a servant, the father saw him as much more. He was a son and his father cherished him greatly. It is interesting that although God's people are referred to as servants (Rev. 7:3), they too are much more. At the end of His life Jesus called His disciples "friends" (Jn. 15:15). Ultimately they will be His bride.

### **"Put a ring on his finger"**

The Bible also indicates that God's people are to hold positions of great distinction in His kingdom (Rev. 5:10). They will actually sit on thrones and govern the entire world (Rev. 20:4). This wonderful truth is also captured in the story of "The Prodigal Son." When his repentant son returns, his father gives him a ring. A ring is a symbol of power and authority (Est. 8:10). It actually carries the weight of the one who gives it. Pharaoh bestowed such an honor on Joseph (Gen. 41:41-42). And God Almighty will do the same to His bride.

### **"Bring him the best robe"**

In addition to giving his son sandals and a ring, this loving father directed his servants to bring him a coat. But not just any coat. It had to be the very finest for his dear son (Lk.15: 22). The scriptures speak prolifically concerning the significance of garments. Bestowing such a gift was not only a sign of distinction and honor, but also a reflection of intimacy and affection. Jacob set his son Joseph apart from his other children with an exquisite garment (Gen. 37: 3). Hannah, the mother of Samuel also brought her son a coat every year when he served in the temple under Eli (1Sam. 2: 19). Mordecai was also given this distinction (Esther 8:15).

But why would the father give such an important gift to a son who had brought such great shame on the family? This is a question that must have been on the lips of older brother. The reason can only be that the father saw a state of heart in his son that was worthy of honour. The book of Zechariah records that God does this very thing to the priest Joshua (Zech. 3:4-5). Although we may not fully grasp God's desire to raise up the fallen, it is a part of His nature never the less.

He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap; he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour. For the foundations of the earth are the Lord's; upon them he has set the world. (1 Sam.2: 8)

### **A Great Feast**

The last gift the father bestows on his son is a great celebration. The joy of his return just had to be shared with others. Now consider the significance of this act as it pertains to those who repent and appeal to God for mercy. The book of Revelation provides a brief glimpse into a wonderful celebration given in honor of Christ and His bride.

And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all you his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thundering's, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigns. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come and his wife has made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he says to me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb.

This great wedding is a celebration of redemption's victory over sin. It is arguably the happiest moment in history. Although the scribes and Pharisees could not grasp how the bride makes herself ready, Jesus could. Those sinners who sought out the Messiah took a monumental step in that direction. Jesus knew precisely what was taking place when He received these prodigals that sought Him. He also knew that His Father in Heaven was preparing a wonderful array of gifts for them. Included among these gifts was a ring, a beautiful garment, a pair of sandals and a great feast.