

FATHER SENT HIS SON

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Last Sunday, Linda Pierce spoke of the father's lingering love — how he waited for his son to return and completely forgave and received him when he did.

Many of us could relate to the characters of that story. Does it sometimes seem that your sordid past is still so present with you, separated from this moment by only the thinnest veil of activity? If someone talks about repentance and the shame of past deeds, your cheeks may still flush red, even though you repented of those deeds long ago.

The Father has received us, but many of us still have not received the Father's love. We're still trying to prove ourselves to be changed, to be good, to be earnest, to be diligent. Challenged by God's piercing eyes and the question, "Why should I let you live with Me in Heaven?", many of us would immediately default to a response like, "I have tried to be good and to do what you would want me to do."

For all the Gospel preaching we have heard, we're still stuck on ourselves and our efforts to deserve to go to Heaven.

But some have learned to say, "I deserve nothing for all my efforts. I am an unprofitable servant. But I trust in the sacrifice that Jesus made for me. I have a Savior who has given me a great salvation. I have been made a child of God. Now I live to help others know Him."

Then What?

Today, I want to address what happens after that. Think of this as the sequel to the story of the Lost Sons.

Fathers challenge their sons to adventure and teach them to develop skills. Fathers give their sons work to do — work that will carry on beyond their own lifetime.

¹ *John 4:14* *Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that **the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.***

Jesus had a unique mission; there is only one Savior of the world. But the act of sending continues from each generation to the next. As Jesus Himself said...

John 20:21 *"As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."*

Regardless of how you may feel about it, or what you may or may not know about it yet, if you personally know Jesus, He has sent you.

Not to do the same work as He did, but in the same manner: that the Father may be glorified and His will (for your life) may be accomplished.

Sent to do what? Some tasks we all share in common — to grow our faith by practice, and to tell others about Jesus. Some tasks are uniquely yours, based on your personality, spiritual giftings, abilities, passions, and experience.

Five Realities

In terms of preparation for your task, what I am about to share is true for everyone of us who are sons and daughters of God by faith in Christ. Here are five realities on which we may depend.

1. God is confident of His work in you

Philippians 1:6 *I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue his work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*

God does not begin by trusting people, but He trusts what He can do in and through them. You, too, may trust what *He* is able to do, whether in your life or in someone else's.

2. God has chosen you

John 15:16 *You didn't choose me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit.*

You did not stumble into this relationship; God chose you. Even your desire to know God was instilled in you by God Himself. And He has chosen you for a purpose. He is looking for the appropriate results.

3. God equips/qualifies you

None of us comes to God with all the qualities or abilities necessary for our purpose in life. But God makes up the difference. In your weakness He shows His strength. And He develops your abilities in three ways:

a. By His grace

Colossians 1:10 *Live a life worthy of the Lord...¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*

By His grace God qualifies the unqualified, wiping away the record of sin that stood to defeat you. He is the great Restorer.

b. By His Word

2 Timothy 3:16 *All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.¹⁷ God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.*

God's Word equips you with knowledge, understanding, and wisdom to pursue His will for your life. Through the Bible's stories and principles God teaches you His ways of doing things.

c. Through godly leaders

Ephesians 4:12 *Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.*

God has appointed godly leaders for the very purpose of guiding and equipping you to fulfill your divine destiny. We are not here to *do the ministry for you*, but to teach you to do the work yourself in ways that honor God and remain interconnected with the rest of His body.

4. God has anointed you / given you His Spirit

1 John 2:20 The Holy One has given you his Spirit, and all of you know the truth.

1 John 2:27 The anointing you received from him remains in you.

If you are a committed follower of Jesus, you already have an anointing sufficient to meet every need and occasion of service. You don't need to *get* another anointing; you need to *depend on and release* the anointing you already have.

5. God has filled you with His love

Romans 5:5 God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

The wondrous thing about the love God has poured into our hearts is that the more you give it away, the more it grows!

Matthew 5:43 "You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. ⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! ⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. ⁴⁶ If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. ⁴⁷ If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. ⁴⁸ But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

If we are to become spiritually complete, we will become complete in our expression of God's love. That's what we're shooting for.

These then are five realities on which we may stand; five truths to encourage our response to God's sending. For a response is required from each of us. Some of you here have already made your response. Others have imagined making a response, but have not "sealed the deal" yet. Some may not yet have given it any thought. Let the Bible offer some good advice.

Biblical Advice

1. Tale of two sons

Matthew 21:28 "But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, 'Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.' ²⁹ The son answered, 'No, I won't go,' but later he changed his mind and went anyway. ³⁰ Then the father told the other son, 'You go,' and he said, 'Yes, sir, I will.' But he didn't go.

³¹ "Which of the two obeyed his father?"

The lesson is simple: A "repentant negative" is better in God's sight than a "phony positive" (and that's just the opposite of the "religious" point of view). Good intentions unfulfilled pave the roadway to hell. The Father is speaking to you; listen and obey.

2. Would-be disciples

NKJV Luke 9:57 Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go."

⁵⁸ And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

⁵⁹ Then He said to another, "Follow Me."

But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father."

⁶⁰ Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.”

⁶¹ And another also said, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house.”

⁶² But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

The lesson here (taken from the last two encounters) is: You cannot say “Lord” and “me first” in the same sentence! When God calls, set everything else aside, you will lose nothing — He will see to it.

Matthew 19:29 Everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or property, for my sake, will receive a hundred times as much in return and will inherit eternal life.

3. Pass it on

2 Timothy 2:2 You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.

What you have received from the Lord — by teaching or by experience — is not for you alone. Somewhere down the road of life, you will have opportunity to pass along your discoveries to others for their security and edification, as Paul suggested:

2 Corinthians 1:3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. ⁴ He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.

Be ready to pass on what you’ve learned about God and His ways when the Holy Spirit prompts you.

But this word of advice is more specific. It says, “teach these truths,” not just share them. Remember the ladder by which you climbed to your present stature in life and be prepared to instruct others how to follow. Remember the stumblings, the “accidents,” the lessons learned and share your struggle openly with those whose hearts are set to follow.

“Teach... other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on.” Teach transferable concepts. If you simply tell your experience, those who hear you will have only an anecdote, an illustration, to share. But if you distill your lessons down to the transferable concepts — the essential truths — others can apply them to their own experience and also pass them on to others.

Clearly, this is an intentional application. It takes thought to distill the truth from the experience. You must peel away the superficial, the personal, the cultural — all those things that will be unique to who you are — to get down to the universal truth.

At one time, my father and I wore the same size shoes. He had a pair in very good condition that he no longer wanted and he offered them to me. They were high quality shoes and I was excited to receive them. However, I discovered that he had worn them often enough to create an impression of his foot in the inner soles of the shoes. Even though our feet were the same size, they were not identical, and the shoes were uncomfortable for me to wear.

When we pass along anecdotal information about God (truth heavily layered with our personal experience and point of view), it may be just what someone needs, but it’s likely to be a poor fit for their soul. Distill from your experience the essential truth about God, and anyone will be able to put it on.

Too often, the church has concentrated on sharing true experience in the place of truth. We’ve passed along our cultural baggage and left it for others to sort it out. The Gospel message — and the

truths associated with it — are universally applicable. They are appropriate and workable in Zanzibar or Iceland or America.

Fathers, we've got work to do to prepare our sons for God's fields of harvest in their lives!

And, sons, we have been sent, so we have work to do for God, too!