



Study 4: God is gracious - so we don't have to prove ourselves

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Scanning

Main Texts: Luke 15:11-32

Other Texts: Ephesians 2:1-10, Romans 3:22-24; Romans 5:1-2; Titus 3:4-5

Have you ever noticed that the story of the “older” prodigal son is left hanging and incomplete? The big brother chooses to stand outside the celebration of grace (v28), brooding about how hard he has worked (v29) and how reckless the Father has acted (v30). How has his misunderstanding of his relationship with his Father caused him to become bitter and hard?

Question: What is the grace of God? Why is God's grace so amazing? Try to hash out a definition that you can all take away.

Going Deeper

1. Have you ever wondered to yourself: “Have I read my Bible *enough*? Have I prayed *enough*? Have I done *enough* as a Christian?” Now ask yourself with regard to those questions: Enough for *who*? Enough for *what*?
2. In your life, what are you trying to prove about yourself to others?
(Ask: What would people need to think about me for me to get inwardly upset or angry? What do I really want people to think about me?)
 - Do you ever get angry or brood because you want to prove you are in the right? (e.g., following an argument or decision that has not gone your way)
 - In what areas do you feel the pressure to perform? Why?
3. Why is the grace of God a vital message for Christians just as much as it is for non-Christians?
4. How does the grace of God free us from having to prove ourselves to God and others?
5. How would you answer this objection: “But if people believe that God's grace totally removes the need to prove themselves...then they won't put any effort into living a holy life or having a good reputation or serving sacrificially!!! They will become reckless like the younger prodigal son!!!”

Applying

6. How does a personal experience of God's grace towards *your* sin change the way that we relate to *others*?
7. Ask God's Holy Spirit to show you if the following quote describes you:

“Christians who are no longer sure that God loves and accepts them in Jesus, apart from their present spiritual achievements, are subconsciously radically insecure persons... Their insecurity shows itself in pride, a fierce, defensive assertion of their own righteousness and defensive criticism of others... They cling desperately to legal, pharisaical righteousness, but envy, jealousy and other branches on the tree of sin grow out of their fundamental insecurity.” (Richard Lovelace, The Dynamics of Spiritual Life).

Final Food for Thought:

“Because our relationship with God frees us from having to justify our own existence, we do not have to prove our own importance, fit in with our peers, mimic the politically correct, or think according to the current ideologies or idolatries. Our minds are captive only to Christ's lordship; the Holy Spirit empowers us...” (Marva Dawn, Reaching Out Without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship).