

Commitment: Are You All In?
THAT Family
Luke 15:11-32
1/29/17

- Read **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**.
 - o A couple of weeks ago, we looked at that Scripture as the starting point as we are talking about our commitment to our families and our commitment to leading our families in the right direction – toward God.
 - o This is an important Scripture to memorize. It contains the greatest commandment and how to live out those commands and pass them on to those who come behind us.

This morning, since we're talking about families, I thought it would be fun to start out with a quiz to see how well we all know some famous TV families. There should be a couple from at least the last several decades. If you know it, just shout it out. Ready?

The Bradys (The Brady Bunch)

The Huxtables (The Cosby Show)

The Cleavers (Leave it to Beaver)

The Jeffersons (The Jeffersons)

The Addams (The Addams Family)

The Waltons (The Waltons)

The Tanners (Full House)

The Bankses (Fresh Prince of Bel Air)

The Hecks (The Middle)

The Winslows (Family Matter)

The Sanfords (Sanford & Son)

The Modern Family cast

- Maybe some of these shows were your favorites. Some of them were ground-breaking for their time.
 - o The Huxtables, for instance, portrayed for the first time an upper middle class black family. Then, Modern Family portrays a family where there is a nuclear family, a step-family and a same-sex couple family. It has been deemed ground-breaking in portraying all of these various family types.
 - o Did you happen to notice the "evolution" of the family? Shows have gone from families being nuclear families with mom, dad and kids to families being much broader than that now.
 - o Actually, it is pretty hard to find many shows that portray families today. Usually, shows are about individuals, not about families. Does that tell us something about our society today? It's kind of scary, right? We are focusing more on individuals and peer relationships than focusing on the family. That's why we're doing this series.

- For those of us who grew up watching families on TV, we all have different reasons why we have enjoyed watching some of these families. Some TV families are so “picture perfect” that we have set our sights on becoming them. They have become the “ideal family.”
 - Have you ever wanted to be like a certain family? You look at them and think, “I want to be THAT family, THAT kind of family.”
 - During Christmas every year, I see posts from friends who are doing that Elf on the Shelf thing with their kids, they bake Christmas cookies together that all look perfectly decorated because they learned how to do it on Pinterest, and they get their kids matching pajamas to wear on Christmas eve so that they all match for Christmas day pictures, or better yet, they sew matching PJ for everyone to wear.
 - Sometimes, I think “I want to be THAT family.” That together. That picture perfect. Then, I remember that Facebook and Pinterest aren’t reality!

- Or, I watch videos by the Holderness family. Have you ever seen some of these videos by this family? Here’s a snip of one:
 - How cool would it be to be THAT family? I would LOVE it! Sitting around writing songs and moves for our next video. Yes!
 - Then, I remember that our family trying to do that would be a disaster! Could you even imagine Wil and me and the boys doing any of that? It’s never going to happen.
 - Yet, there are times when I wish we could be THAT family – all together, in a house that is clean and organized, singing songs in perfect harmony, agreeing on what special project to do next...

- Yet, when you read the Bible, you can’t look at any family story in it and say, “I want to be THAT family” because you can’t find an ideal or perfect family in the Bible. That’s because the Bible is reality.
 - In the Bible, we find the reality that sin has attacked what God blessed. The family has struggled ever since sin entered the world. How do we process the reality that for most all of us “family” is complicated at times? Even the most blessed family still has imperfect dynamics and dysfunction to deal with and overcome.
 - Let’s look at a story from Luke 15 in perhaps a new light today as we talk about family dynamics and imperfect families. Read **Luke 15:11-32**

- As you may know, this is called the Parable (parable means story) of the Prodigal Son. If you’ve been in church for any length of time, you may have heard this story. It is a story of salvation. Most sermons using this story are sermons about salvation.
 - It is about the generous love of our Heavenly Father who welcomes us back when we have blown it and spent it and wasted our lives. It is about the celebration that takes place in heaven when sinners repent and come to trust Christ as Savior.

- However, being set in the context of an earthly family, I think there is more we can glean from this story than merely a heavenly or salvation implication. I also see that this is a story

about a family that came apart, a family with issues, and the loose ends that remained in them coming together.

- Because here's the reality – you can come home, but not come together as a family, right? You can be together, but not really be “together.” Just because you are living together under the same roof doesn't mean you are living as a healthy, loving family unit.
 - The Prodigal Son came home, but the older brother wasn't happy about it. There was division between the brothers. Maybe that is the reason the younger brother left in the first place. We don't know for sure. Maybe he was tired of the house rules. Maybe he wanted to sow his wild oats. Maybe it was a rivalry between the brothers and the younger brother just had to get away.
- There are all kinds of reasons family members make different decisions. The nuances for all of those reasons can't always be understood, but family division is easy to understand. I'm sure we all can understand it. Maybe you have experienced some divisions in your own families.
- When it exists, you can feel it. You can feel tension in the air. You know what it is to walk on egg shells. You know what the hot buttons are. You know how to sugar coat things, how to avoid things, and how to put on the happy face.
- I believe God wants more for our families than just pretending. Do you believe that? The God who speaks of welcoming the prodigal back and celebrating their return is about reconciliation. So, what does God want for our families so we can be THAT family – the kind of family he desires.
- Two weeks ago, we saw that the kind of family that God desires for us all to have as we all are a part of a family in some way, is that he wants our families to be under the authority and Lordship of Jesus Christ. That's what that Deuteronomy passage is all about – loving God with everything and loving each other.
 - What can we glean from this story that might help us know where to start and how to get there together? Let's check some things out.
- First, if our homes are ever going to come together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, love must lead the way.
- Dads, Moms, and Grandparents raising kids...parenting is not for the faint of heart. You know, I was thinking the other day about how when we were struggling to get pregnant, all I was thinking about was having a baby. That's what we think of – we want a baby. But, those babies grow up, right? I was thinking about my boys growing up and I started to get a little teary eyed. I would like to keep them as innocent babies.
 - The reality is that as sure as our kids will bless us and put a smile on our faces, they are also capable of breaking our hearts. They grow from babies to children to teens to young adults who have their own ideas and plans which may not be at all what we were thinking of as parents.

- How are we going to respond when they break our hearts? When our children, parents or siblings break our heart, how will we respond? How are we going to respond when they do the opposite of what we want for them and of what we taught them? We've got to answer that question before it happens rather than in the middle of emotion when it happens because the likelihood of it happening is high!
- We read in this story that a man had two sons. One went one direction and the other stayed true to his upbringing. How does that happen?
 - Perhaps you have asked yourself the same question. How can two children growing up in the same home turn out so differently? How can one choose to walk away, to leave the family, and to walk toward a lifestyle that is contrary to your hopes, dreams and best parenting?
 - How do you process it when your kids waste their potential, squander their resources and wind up hitting rock bottom?
- Maybe this morning, you are dealing with a prodigal who has disconnected because they have made room for alcohol and drugs in their lives and have become addicts. Maybe you are dealing with a prodigal who has explored other faiths and ideologies because they just don't want to accept what has been handed to them by their parents.
 - Some have suffered traumatic life experiences which have caused them to question everything from the meaning of life to the existence of God. Their questions have led them in search of happiness and contentment, but have ensnared them into materialism, sexual exploration or the world's way of thinking.
 - No doubt the dad in this story dealt with a broken and betrayed heart. In that culture, to be asked for your inheritance before your parent was deceased was like making the statement, "I wish you were dead." It was the ultimate act of disrespect. How could a father just "get over that," welcome his son back, and throw a party for him to boot?
 - It can only happen if love leads the way in our homes and if our homes are modeling the love of Jesus Christ as the authority in our homes.
- There is another kind of prodigal, too, and it is the elder brother. He was the prodigal who stayed. He was the prodigal who was there, together with the family, but wasn't really there or together. Instead, he lived self-absorbed and bitter.
 - He was the prodigal who held a grudge. Rather than value family and the reunification of family, he valued himself. He read into his father's reaction as a personal attack against him.
 - But, his father's desire to host a party for the son who came home wasn't a commentary on the elder brother. It had nothing to do with the elder brother, but the older son decided to read into things and twist things and take things personally.

- I am sure the father was thinking, “Really? I have prayed so long that my estranged son would come home, and now that he has, my son who has been at home has become estranged!” His heart was broken...again.
- Parents, we have to remember that our job is to demonstrate the unconditional love of our Heavenly Father to our children. Sometimes it is extremely difficult. Sometimes the best way to love our kids is to tell them, “No.” Sometimes it is to welcome them home after they have betrayed our hearts.
 - The prayer of every Christian parent needs to be, “Lord, help me love my children the way You desire for me to.” Listen, our kids learn about love from our example. What are we showing them?
- The second thing we can glean from this story is that if our homes are ever going to come together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, prayer must pave the way.
 - In this story, it is said when the son was still a long way off, the father saw the son coming and ran to him to welcome him. But, let’s read between the lines. The son was still a long way off. He hadn’t rang the doorbell. He wasn’t even close enough to call out to anyone. He was a long way off. Yet, the father saw him.
 - That’s because the father was waiting! He was watching and waiting. He was scanning the landscape day by day. Waiting and hoping. Every day.
 - You know what that says to me? It says that we can never give up hope that our families can be restored. We need to be watchful and prayerful and waiting for God to answer the prayers we pray for our families.
- Prayer is the anchor of our hope. And, we need to pray about everything! Not just about the big or immediate things, but everything.
 - We need to pray that bad moods will become cheerful. We need to pray that people will look for ways to serve each other and encourage each other rather than be selfish and self-absorbed. We need to pray that our family members will be respectful and responsible.
 - We need to pray that our kids will date and marry Christians. We need to pray that our kids will say “no” to drugs and premarital sex. We need to pray that our kids will be leaders and not followers, that our kids will demonstrate the love of Christ and help be peacemakers in their schools. We need to pray that our homes will be places where the truth is spoken in love, where it is ok to admit we are struggling, and where we spend time praying for one another.
- We pray with our kids every morning on the way to school and every night before bed. The praying before school was really prompted by Josiah’s behavior at school. We were at our wits end with some of his behavior. So, we started praying with him on the way to school and, literally, praying the blood of Jesus over his life and mind and to help him behave.
 - I believe with all my heart that those prayers made a difference. I have seen it. I know it has made a difference in that our kids know that they can pray about things that they are facing. It has made them pray-ers.

- And, I have watched God answer the prayers of those little boys. I have watched Josiah cry out to God, “God please make me brave!” when I was trying to pull a tick off of him and he was scared. I have heard Josiah pray, “God, please make it stop raining so we can have outside recess today because I need to get my energy out to be good at school.” And, then I have watched as clouds pulled back and the sun started to shine during the four minutes it takes to drive from our house to the school and have heard him exclaim “Look Mommy! God answered me!”
 - And, after dropping Josiah off at school, I have heard from the back seat, another little voice, Stephen, saying “Mommy. Pray for me.” See, I wasn’t praying as much for him and his behavior because I didn’t need to like with Josiah. But, he knew in his little heart that he still needed prayer!
 - Pray for and with your children and see what God does!
- We need to pray for better communication and increased intimacy in our marriages. I’ve counseled many married and engaged couples over the years. In that time, we talk about communication and conflict resolution. Those are the two top things that couples struggle with.
- But, the best communication and conflict resolution comes through the vehicle of prayer first. You can follow the best communication style and conflict resolution technique and it can fail when you don’t couple it with prayer.
 - Pray for your husband or wife. Pray with your husband or wife. Pray for your heart to be softened toward them when you are mad at them. Pray for their heart to be softened when they are mad at you. Pray for your ears to be open to listen and to understand. Pray that God will give you the wisdom you need. Pray that God will intercede in the middle of an impasse, a conflict that has no resolution.
- I have been transparent that Wil and I have had our issues in our marriage. The first few years were hard. There were good times, but there was more conflict than peace. There were times where both of us didn’t want to come home to face or deal with the other or deal with the tension.
- Prayer preserved our marriage. Holding on to hope preserved our marriage. One time, during a big blow-up argument, we were laying in bed, both just fuming in silence. Wil reached over, took my hand and started to pray. The tension between us eased. The problem wasn’t resolved, but we still found peace.
 - There have been times where we have been in unhealthy conflict when one of us has said, “Satan is trying to destroy our marriage.” It makes us stop and pray.
 - The next time you are in a conflict with your spouse – take a time out to stop and pray. Could it make them angry? It might. But, they’re already angry so what do you have to lose? You could have everything to gain!
 - Pray for your spouse and for your response to your spouse. Don’t just pray that your spouse will stop being a jerk or that God would strike them down for being so unreasonable and stupid. That’s what we want to pray, right? But, pray also for the jerky parts in you and for your response to be kind, loving and open. Pray that your

love for your spouse will increase – even if you aren't particularly feeling gushy love for them. Pray that your love will be unconditional.

- As long as you are praying about your family struggles, you are exercising faith and hope that things can change. Don't stop praying.
 - o Keep watching over the horizon for God to do something to bring your family together in Him. We don't know how long the younger son was estranged, but the text seems to indicate it was more than a few weeks.
 - o You won't always see instant results. But, don't give up! Don't get discouraged! God is working! You are never without hope as long as you can pray.

- Next, if our homes are ever going to come together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, each person must realize they are accountable to one another and to God for how we respond to one another.
 - o Coming together as families is going to involve love and prayer for sure, but perhaps one of the most healing choices individual family members can make is responding in repentance, being sorry for their part in creating division in the family.
 - o In verse 21, the younger brother told his father he was sorry for how he had acted. He understood that how he had behaved was serious. He said that he had sinned against his dad and against heaven. He was accountable not only to his family, but to God for what he had done to the family.
 - o Repentance was what truly showed that this boy came home differently than he had left. There was a humility to his attitude. There was a tenderness about him. He didn't come home demanding anything. He just wanted to come home.

- Something about this story that I think we as families need to keep in mind is that every person in our family is responsible for their own choices. Repentance shows that you are taking that responsibility and that you are turning from the way you have responded to the way God wants you to respond.
 - o The father was responsible for how he was going to act when the son came home. The prodigal was responsible for his choices to have left in the first place and chose to humbly repent. The elder brother had a choice to make about how he could help the family come together. Unfortunately, he made a different choice, one that kept the family divided.

- You are responsible for how you act and respond. You are accountable to the others in your family and to God for your actions and responses. You can't be responsible for the actions and responses of others. Neither can you blame your responses or actions on anyone else. You are responsible for your actions and responses.
 - o If your actions and responses are wrong, you need to repent to the family member you have wronged and to God. Repentance is so hard for most of us, though. Pastor Wil talked about that last week. We are more likely to say we're sorry to a stranger than we are to repent to our spouse or our children.

- But, you are accountable to them and to God. Repenting to your spouse or your children for something wrong you have done to them or a harsh way you have responded to them is powerful in restoring the relationship and strengthening your relationship. Refusing to repent is pride and pride will bring division
- Yet, don't just say you are sorry. Act differently to show that you are repentant. Being sorry is temporary. Being repentant calls for a permanent turn in action or response. Being sorry is just words. Being repentant is action.
- Finally, if our homes are ever going to come together under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, we are going to need to see things from God's perspective and let grudges go so that healing can come.
 - The older brother wasn't happy about the homecoming celebration for his little brother. Instead of rejoicing that little brother had come home and that their family was back together, he made it all about himself. He refused to come to the party.
 - He talked about how it wasn't fair that someone who didn't follow the rules got a party, when he had stayed home, followed the rules and had never even been allowed to have his friends over for a get together let alone a full out celebration with all the fixins.
- He was missing the point! Do you know that according to Jewish law, the elder brother would have gotten 2/3 of the estate while the younger brother received just 1/3 (Deut. 21:17)? He had already been blessed by the father. He already had received more than his brother. He hadn't squandered his inheritance. He still had all of his money.
 - His brother was coming home with nothing. Yet rather than be thankful for what his father had done for him and for what he still had, the older brother chose to hold a grudge against his brother and became jealous that his dad wanted to celebrate his homecoming.
 - Life wasn't going to be easy for this younger brother who was coming home with nothing, and instead of making it easier, the older brother was going to make it harder.
- The older brother was going to nurse his grudge. He was going to pout and keep the division between them.
 - We can understand why he might have been angry. When his brother left him as the only son, it meant he had to do more work at home on the family estate. We can understand that when one "irresponsible" son leaves home the "responsible" son will have to pick up the slack. We can empathize that it isn't fair.
 - Perhaps he just felt betrayed by his younger brother. Perhaps he was jealous that his father watched for his deadbeat brother day after day while he worked even more! Whatever the reason for the grudge, he sure had one.
- The father in the story wasn't going to let the elder son just pout. He went to him and confronted him about his attitude. He tried to help him see that the most important thing

was that the younger son had come home. Everything else was secondary. He challenged his perspective and tried to help him understand that it wasn't all about him.

- Is God confronting you this morning about a grudge you are holding against a family member? You have nursed your grudge for years. They were wrong, so wrong and you just won't let it go.
 - Maybe they were wrong. Maybe they have never admitted that they are wrong. You, though, are responsible for your heart, not theirs. The only person you are really hurting with grudge holding is you. You are alone in your anger rather than celebrating together. There is no peace when division exists and when grudges live.
- You know, Jesus didn't give us the rest of the story. We don't hear a "Happily Ever After" message about how the two boys reconciled and became BFF'S and how they lived as one big happy family. They had a lot of work to do in order for that to happen.
- Having a commitment that you are all in with your family takes a lot of work. Being a family is a lot of work. Being married is a lot of work – every single day work. Being a parent is a lot of work – every single day work.
- I don't know what family you wish yours could be like. When you say, "I'd like to be THAT family," what is it that is so appealing and inspiring that you want to become like them?
- Instead of looking at other families for your ideal, I would encourage us to see God's reality and desire. His reality is that no family is perfect. But, we can still be THAT family – THAT family that God desires.
 - So, be THAT family where love leads the way. Be THAT family where prayer paves the way. Be THAT family where each person is accountable to the family members and to God for how they act. And be THAT family where grudges are let go so that the family can heal. Be THAT family.