

Gospel Hotspots

Week One: The Father's Heart



🕒 Flashback (10 min)

- What did you experience with God this week?
- In the last few days, did you have the opportunity to share an experience with God and with someone close to you who doesn't know Jesus yet? What did you do? (talk about your faith, pray for them, help them practically)
- Is there an area of your life where you need God's help?
- Pray together: give thanks for your experiences, ask God for help where you need it.

📖 Bible Study (15-20 min)

Luke 15:11-32

- Pray together: that you would discover new aspects of God today and that your relationship with him would be strengthened and deepened.
- On your own: read the passage silently.
 - What words or phrases stick out?
- One person reads the passage out loud.
- Everyone by themselves:
 - What words or phrases stick out now? Are there any differences to what you noticed before?
 - Why do you feel drawn to those words or phrases?
 - What could God be telling you?
- Share in the group.

💡 Specific Questions & Action Steps (20 min)

- How does the younger son view himself? How about the older one? What do they expect from their father? How are the father's actions unpredictable from what the sons were expecting?
- The words "to serve" or "servant" occur several times. What does that tell you about the way the sons think?
- What do the ring and the robe symbolize? And what does Jesus want to tell us about the heart of the Father with this parable?
- Do you feel more like a servant or a son/daughter of God? Are there situations where one of the feelings is stronger than the other?
- Do you believe that your Heavenly Father truly wants you to have what you desire with all your heart (Psalm 37: 3-4)? Are there areas in your life where you doubt that? Take time individually to pray about what you are longing for.
- Pray according to Ephesians 3:16-19 in groups of 2-3. Pray that our Heavenly Father fills you more with his love and gives you a deeper understanding of it.
- Take some time to worship in your group. Sing or listen to songs that express God's love to you and let yourselves be touched by God's grace! (E.g.: "Good God Father" by Chris Tomlin/the Housefires).

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Scripture Comments

Jesus told this parable to unveil something about the heart of our Heavenly Father.

The younger son was convinced that he is no longer worthy to be considered a son by his father. From his perspective, his father had every right to say to him: "Yes, your situation is your own fault. Now learn to serve and work first."

The older son, opposite to his brother, never did something wrong but instead saw himself as a servant of his father. Silently, he was waiting for a sign of recognition and benevolence for doing his work obediently.

This is the "normal" worldly perspective. We are quick to think: if we fail, we've lost and need to redeem ourselves. Whether consciously or subconsciously, we often think that to receive God's favour, to be accepted and loved by him, we need to do something.

But the father corrected both his sons in their thinking. Through this parable Jesus wants to show us that the Heavenly Kingdom has different principles! Unexpectedly, the father said: "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet." (Luke 15:22) His youngest son probably stank severely and wasn't wearing the nicest of clothes and his father didn't want him to feel ashamed walking into the house like that.

The fatherly heart of God is exactly the same. He does not want us to be exposed in our shame. In his eyes we are unconditionally loved, accepted, chosen. As his sons and daughters we have permanent access to his heavenly treasures: "Everything I have is yours." (Luke 15:31; Ephesians 1:3). Be that wisdom, love, strength, forgiveness, healing, joy, comfort, hope, faith or courage, it's always available to us. Remember another heavenly principle: If we ask, God provides happily! (Matthew 7:7-11)

God even gives us the spiritual authority of Jesus in the moment we accept him as his Lord and Saviour. The symbol for that is the ring. This is an important principle in the Heavenly Kingdom. If you know in your heart you are a son/daughter of God, you will be at peace. From this, God's life, love and strength will start to flow. But if you are insecure about God's love for you, confusion, doubt, fear, frustration and sorrows will find their way into your life. Do you see yourself as a son/daughter of God or as a servant?