

"THE GIFT OF LOVE"

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1 John 4:18-19 *Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love. We love each other because he loved us first.* (NLT)

The story of the prodigal father is really the story of a prodigal God.

Luke 15:11 *"Jesus told them this story: 'A man had two sons.'* (NLT)

Prodigal: Excessive, extravagant, wasteful, immoderate, squanderer

GOD GAVE MAN HIS GIFT OF LOVE WHEN HE CREATED MAN IN HIS OWN IMAGE.

Gen. 1:27-28 *So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."* (NRSV)

The "Image of God"

- a. **Choice** - Man was free to choose to be in an intimate relationship with God (Converse: Man had freedom to reject God's fatherhood and sovereign rule at any time).
- b. **Capacity** - Man was able to love God and others as he freely chooses to be connected to Him within the context of their intimate relationship.
- c. **Connection** - Man could continually connect with God's Spirit.

GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE:

1. God Gave Human Beings the Freedom to Live Their Own Lives, Even Though He Knew That They Would Make the Wrong Choice.

Gen. 3:6 *The woman was convinced. The fruit looked so fresh and delicious, and it would make so wise! So she ate some of the fruit. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her. Then he ate it, too.* (NLT)

Luke 15:12 *"The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now, instead of waiting until you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons."* (NLT)

2. God Already Had a Plan to Restore Sinful Humanity After Their Separation.

Gen. 3:15 *"And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel."* (NLT)

Rom. 5:18-19 *Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone.*

Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous. (NLT)

Luke 15:20 *"And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him."* (NLT)

Jer. 31:3 *"I have loved you, my people, with an everlasting love. With unfailing love I have drawn you to myself."* (NLT)

3. When Sinners Return, God Welcomes Them Just as If They Had Never Left Home.

John 3:16-17 *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."* (NRSV)

Luke 15:21-22 *"His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet.'"* (NLT)

Rom. 3:24 *They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.* (NRSV)

GOD'S GIFT OF LOVE IS FULLY REALIZED WHEN WE CELEBRATE IT IN FREEDOM.

Rom. 8:1-2 *Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.* (NASB)

Luke 15:23-24 *"And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!" And they began to celebrate."* (NRSV)

Rom. 3:25 *For God sent Jesus to take our punishment for our sins and to satisfy God's anger against us. We are made right with God when we believe that Jesus shed His blood, sacrificing His life for us.* (NLT)

Luke 15:28-32 *"The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!' His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day.'"* (NLT)

1 John 3:1 *How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!* (NIV)