Craig // Welcome to Mission Hills on all of our campuses. So glad you are here for the start of our last summer miniseries we are calling “Reckless”. For the next three weeks, we are going to be taking a deep dive into probably the most famous parable that Jesus ever taught. A parable often called the parable of the prodigal son. We have chosen not to call the series that, though, because I actually think that’s a little bit of a misleading title.

When we call it to parable of the prodigal son, we are focused in on the idea that it’s a story all about this one particular son, and the reality is that there are three characters in the parable, and each of them is equally important and each of these characters are also equally reckless, which is why we have chosen to call the series that. They are equally reckless, just in different ways and about different things. I should probably explain how I’m using that word. When I say reckless, to be reckless is to do something without caring about the costs or consequences.

It’s to do something without paying attention to what it’s going to cost or the consequences of that particular decision. Sometimes when we are reckless it’s foolish. Sometimes being reckless is honestly, it’s stupid. It’s dumb. We need to pay attention to the costs or consequences, and if we don’t, we are just idiots, okay? But sometimes being reckless isn’t foolish. Sometimes being reckless isn’t foolish. It just looks that way to others that don’t share our priorities.

When we got engaged, Coletta and I were seniors in college. I did the right thing and went to her parents and I asked if I could marry her. They agreed, so we got engaged. We were very excited about it. Then after we were engaged, they asked the very natural question which was, okay, what are you guys going to do for a living? Both Coletta and I had sensed a call to go into vocational ministry. I say vocational because honestly, I believe any time you say yes to Jesus, from that moment on, you are a minister. You are engaged in the ministry. We are called to be on mission with Jesus. Some people are called to do that for a living. That’s what we call vocational ministry.

We both sensed that call in our lives, so we pretty excitedly told them, yeah, we are going into vocational ministry -- and there was not much rejoicing in the house. There was crying. From their perspective -- they are very good people. They raised Coletta in a church, but their priority for ministry wasn’t the same as ours was, and from their perspective, that was a foolish thing to decide. It was a reckless thing, and it was a reckless, foolish thing to do. We didn’t see it that way. We had a different set of priorities. So we said, it doesn’t matter if we are broke -- which we were for most of our 25 years of our marriage. God has always been faithful and all been provided, but some of their fears came true. We didn’t have a lot of extra.

But that was okay because our priorities were different. So it was reckless from their perspective, but it was not foolish because we had different priorities. What we are going to see throughout this parable is that the three characters are each equally reckless but about different things and for different reasons, some of them foolishly so, and at least one of them, not foolish at all. Why don’t you go ahead and grab your Bible and make your way to the Gospel of Luke. We are going to be in chapter 15. The parable we are going to be looking at actually starts in verse 11, but before we talk about the parable itself, we need to understand the context in which Jesus taught it so, so we are going to start in chapter 15:1 where we see this, now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. Tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus.

Now tax collectors and sinners is sort of a blanket phrase for bad people. Tax collectors were bad people because they were taking money from God’s people and giving it to the Roman Empire, so really they didn’t care about God’s people. They were traitors. Sinners, these would be thieves and prostitutes and really bad people in any sense of the word. They didn’t care about God’s commandments. They didn’t care about obeying what God said to do. This is kind of a whole group of bad people. They didn’t care about God’s people. They didn’t care about God’s commands.

In other words, they were far from God, right? These are people who were far from God, but they were drawing near to Jesus, right? They are far from God but they are drawing near to Jesus.

And the religious leaders couldn’t figure that out. They couldn’t figure out why that was happening, and the part they really couldn’t figure out is why Jesus was letting that happen, why Jesus allowing them to draw near to him. They were concerned that he was being reckless. They
thought he was being reckless with his reputation, right? Jesus, if you hang out with these people, you are going to be hurting your reputation with other people, more important people whose opinion really matters. You are being reckless with your reputation. They also thought that he was being reckless with his responsibility because as a religious teacher, his job was to confront sinners. It was to call them to change their lives and to move away from their sin and to righteousness.

And they were concerned that he was being reckless with that responsibility because if you are going to accept them before they have changed, what motivation are they going to have to change, right? Like if you accept them and welcome them and allow them to draw near to you -- what’s going to motivate them to change? So verse 2 says, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, this man welcomes sinners and he eats with them.”

You are not just letting them draw near. You are eating with them, and in the first century, that was a sign of acceptance. They were like, you are doing this wrong, Jesus. You are being reckless, so in response Jesus told three parables. The first parable was about a man with a hundred sheep. One got lost and he left the 99 and went looking for that one. The second story was about a woman, who had ten valuable coins, and she mislaid one of them, so she tore the house apart looking for that one lost coin, and then he told the story that we are going to be looking at over the next three weeks.

And each of these stories has two similar truths in it. The first one is very obvious in that God is obsessed with lost people. He’s obsessed with lost people. He will do anything to rescue the lost. The second one, the second theme is a little less clear until you understand the context in which Jesus is teaching it. Here’s how I would say it. It’s that God is obsessed with lost people, and He’s angry with those who don’t share His passion for them. He’s obsessed with lost people and He’s angry when others don’t share His same passion. It’s that context, that accusation of recklessness that Jesus is addressing when in verse 11 he says this, Jesus continued. There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father. “Father, give me my share of the estate,” and so he divided his property between them.

That’s some shocking stuff right there. It’s shocking on one level in a way that’s pretty easy to understand. The way inheritance works in the first century is no different than the way it works in the 21st century. You don’t get your inheritance until your parents -- die, right? You are like, are you allowed to say that in church? You are allowed to say that in church. It’s okay. Yeah, you don’t get your inheritance until your parents die, so for the son to say, hey, give me my share of the estate, he’s basically saying, hey, dad, I’m tired of waiting for you to die. I would like my share of your stuff right now, please? That’s a shocking thing to do. Is it not? Unbelievably insulting, and our temptation is to go, maybe he’s driven by agreed or something like that, but the reality is it’s a little bit worse than that. The younger son was driven by self-indulgence. The younger son was driven by self-indulgence.

Self-indulgence is the desire to do whatever we want whenever we want. It’s both of those pieces together. See the money would have been his eventually, and he could have done whatever he wanted with it, but doing whatever he wanted at some point in the future wasn’t enough. He wanted to do whatever he wanted whenever he wanted. He wanted it right then. He didn’t want to wait. Self-indulgence is a powerful tendency, and I think because of our sin nature, we are born with a natural predisposition toward self-indulgence. It looks different in different people. For instance, sometimes self-indulgence can look like acquiring stuff. It can look like this drive to acquire things. To look and go, I like that. There is nothing inherently wrong with seeing something and going, I like that, but then that moves to I love that. Then that moves to I gotta have that, right? Which sounds suspiciously like the sizes at Cold Stone Creamery, right?

[Laughter]

Coincidence? I don’t know, I’m not saying. You and the Holy Spirit deal with that one. But yeah, I like that. Then it’s like love that. I gotta have that, then it’s I’m going to do whatever I have to do to get that, right? I’m going to work ridiculous hours. I’m going to destroy my family so I can get to that point in my career where I have the money to do the things I want to do whenever I want to do them. We lie, we cheat, we steal.

So we can do whatever we want whenever we want. Self-indulgence can look like acquiring stuff. Self-indulgence can also look like acquiring experiences. I think more and more the younger generations have looked at previous generations and gone, you got all this stuff, but you are not happy. Your marriage is a nightmare. You are miserable, so stuff doesn’t equal satisfaction, so I think the millennial generation is a little less inclined toward acquiring stuff, but I see a similar tendency in the millennials, which is to acquire experiences. I’m going to go on that trip. I’m going to go see that thing. I’m going to see that concert. I’m going to be part of this group. And it can have the very same effect. We are willing to do destructive things as long as I get a chance to acquire these experiences.

Sometimes self-indulgence can look like gaining validation from others. It’s doing whatever you have to do to get people to validate you, to respect you, or to admire you or to applaud you in some way. Whatever you have to do to get Instagram followers. For a lot of people, that’s their sense that I’m doing okay. I’ll do whatever I have to do to do that, right? Or if I get to that point where I have that promotion. I sit in that office, then I’ll have the validation I need. All of these things can be driven by this desire to do whatever we want whenever we want it. That’s what’s going on for the son. That’s what’s going on for a lot of us.

So he does this really shocking thing. What the son does is obviously shocking. Sometimes overlooked, is the fact that what the father does is
possibly even more shocking, because the father agrees. His son goes, hey, Dad, I’m tired of waiting for you to die. I would like my share of your stuff right now, and the dad goes, okay. So he divided his estate between his older son and his younger son. That’s crazy. There is a part of us that goes that’s really reckless, right? I mean, clearly, the son doesn’t have his priorities right. Clearly the son is driven by self-indulgence. You are going to fund that? You are going to finance that? You are going to allow him – why would you allow him to do that? There is sort of a mystery at that point. It’s interesting to me how similar that question that we ask about the father here is to another question that I get asked as a pastor a lot. It’s one of the most common questions I get asked.

It kind of goes this way, hey, if God knew Adam and Eve were going to sin, if God knew all of the destruction that would come from Adam and Eve’s sin, why did He create them? Why did He put the tree in the garden? Why did He allow them to do what they did knowing all of the stuff that would happen after that? How many of you have ever wondered that question? Yeah. It’s a good question. It’s a powerful question. This parable, I believe answers that question in an incredibly and profound way, but not today. In two weeks we are going to talk about the father. We are going to see what the parable has to say in answer to that question. I’ll do this. I’ll tease it for you, okay? Here’s what we are going to find out. We are going to find out that only those that have experienced grace can truly know that God is good. Only those that have actually experienced God’s grace can truly know that God is good, and that’s very important for God’s eternal plan, so make sure you are here in two weeks.

If you know anyone that has ever asked that question, invite them to come with you in two weeks. You are going to see a very profound answer, but now, let’s come back to the younger son because what we see is the younger son is driven by self-indulgence, and self-indulgence is inevitably destructive. So we begin to see the destructive nature of this impulse of his. Verse 13 says not long after that, the younger son got together all that he had and he set off for a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth in wild living.

Two things we see that self-indulgence does. First, self-indulgence separates us from those who love us. You notice he left. He got his stuff and he went away. Now he could have done his wild living right there, but he chose not to. He went away. I think what you are seeing there, he had to get away from his family. Partly that was because the way he was going to spend that money, the way he was going to live his life, he didn’t want to see his father’s disappointment. He didn’t want to have to deal with his brother’s disapproval. He didn’t want all of that judgment coming, so he needed to get away from them. I think he also probably felt some sense of guilt and shame. Most of us who are driven by self-indulgence, we have some sense of what we are doing isn’t right, so we want to get away so we are not confronted with that reality on a regular basis, so he separated from his family. He had to get away from them.

Second thing we see is that self-indulgence leads us to spend rather than to invest. Self-indulgence leads us to spend what we have rather than investing on anything that produces long-term good. Jesus said he squandered it. He wasted it. He spent it on lavish parties. He stayed in the best hotels. He had Starbucks two or three times a day.

[Laughter]

That’s meddling. I’m sorry. Understand, there is nothing inherently wrong with parties, or hotels or a good cup of coffee. The problem is the way he is spending his money – it’s all on those things that have no lasting impact. They have no return, so he doesn’t have real friends. He doesn’t have family. He doesn’t have a house with equity. He doesn’t have anything to show for it. He spent it rather than investing in it in any way he could trust in the future, and so, verse 14 says after he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in the whole country, and he began to be in need. He didn’t have anything to fall back on at this point. He didn’t have any stuff that he could sell to make money so that he could buy things that he needed. He didn’t have any friends. All of the people he was hanging out with at the party suddenly turned their backs on him because they weren’t real relationships. He didn’t have a home to go to. He didn’t have anything or anybody. See self-indulgence leaves us with nothing and nobody to depend on. It’s the inevitable result. The problem is, we don’t see it along the way.

Along the way we are like, no, no. These people are my friends. This is going to lead to good things down the line, and then we get to that place where everything falls apart and we look around and we realize we have nothing and nobody. So verse 15 says he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. You see, finally, self-indulgence leads to humiliation. Self-indulgence leads to humiliation. For this man, the parties have ended. The friends are gone. He has nothing and nobody. So he becomes a hired hand. He had been almost a prince in his own home. It was clearly a wealthy family. He had position and privilege and prestige -- all those things. Now he’s a hired hand. And so he had been sent into the field to feed the pigs. For a Jewish person, feeding the pigs is the lowest possible job you can imagine.

Pigs were unclean. You couldn’t eat them. You tried to stay away from them. You didn’t have anything to do with them, and now he’s feeding them. To make it worse, to make the humiliation even more profound, as he’s feeding them, he’s looking at the slop that he’s giving them, and he’s going, I wish I could eat that. I wonder if anybody would notice if I took a handful out of the pail and eat it before I threw it into the trough? He’s hit rock bottom. He’s humiliated. The only good thing about coming to that point in your self-indulgence is, it forces you to look up, so he comes up with a plan.

Verse 17 says, when he came to his senses, he said how many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and yet here I am starving to death. I’m going to set out. I’ll set out, and I’ll go to my father, and I’ll say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven, and I have sinned against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.” Let’s just pause for a minute and recognize that
this is a great plan, and I'm not being sarcastic. This is a great plan. It has all of the elements of a good plan for someone in his situation. It has self-loathing. It has a plan to make it right. It has both of those things. Both of those things are so important in the first century, and they are so important, honestly for anybody today who finds themselves in a similar kind of place. You have to have a plan that first off expresses that you're disgusted with yourself. You loathe yourself. You are so consumed by guilt for your sin, right?

He says, I'm going to go. I have sinned against heaven and against you. It's not just you that I hurt Dad. I have gone against God. Like I have done serious bad stuff. I have really sinned. And then he's going to say, I'm not worthy to be called your son. I have lost that. What I have done is too terrible. It's beyond that. There is no way we can fix that. We can't get back to that point. It's too bad. You see, this is self-loathing. It's guilt at its finest, and we have been taught that if you want to get back into someone's good graces, if you want someone to accept you back after you have done something like this, you have to be disgusted with how bad what you have done is. And it has a plan to make it right too. He has a plan for restitution. He says, I'm going to go. I want to work as one of your servants. I think implied in that is I'm going to pay it off. I'm going to pay it back.

Here's my plan. Here's how I'm going to make it right. It's a good plan, and it's a good plan not only when you are dealing with Earthly fathers that have been wronged, it's a pretty good plan on dealing with a heavenly Father who has been wronged, right? We naturally think this is a good plan even when it comes to God. We naturally believe that self-loathing and restitution are necessary if we are going to get right with God. So we go, if I'm going to get right with God, I'm going to have to be consumed with guilt over my sin. We have to have a plan for making it right. I'm going to go to church every single Sunday. I'll download the podcast, and I'll listen to the message twice, right? I'll join a life group, and I'll give money to the poor, and I'll do all of the right things. I'm going to fix it, God. I'm going to make it right. I feel so bad for everything I have done, but here's how I'm going to fix it. I'm going to make it up to you. I'm going to do it the way it should be done. I'm going to make it right.

So we naturally assume that self-loathing and restitution are necessary if we are going to be accepted. So verse 20 says, he got up. I should say this -- it's a good plan except that it's not, right? And there's two problems. Let's just deal with the restitution part first. It's not going to work. This is a rich family. What he has wasted, he's never going to earn back working an hourly wage. He's going to spend his whole life trying, and he's not even going to get close. Spiritually, Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. The wrong we have done, the sin that we have committed, you can't pay that off by balancing doing these good things. Even if we spent the rest of our life never doing another bad thing, which is impossible, all of the good things don't pay off the debt of sin. Restitution is beyond our capacity.

Besides that, the money is not the problem, right? The money is not the problem here. The problem is that he has rejected a relationship with his father. I mean, let's imagine that he didn't waste it. Say he said to his dad, hey, I'm tired of waiting for you to die. Give me my share of your stuff now, and then he went, and then he heard about a little stock called Amazon, and he bought Amazon stock, and it went crazy, and now he comes back and says, I have ten times what I took from you, Dad. Is everything okay? No. Because the problem wasn't the money. The problem was that he rejected his relationship with his father, and no amount of work can revive our relationship. No amount of work can revive our relationship. But it's the best plan he's got, right? So he rehearsing it and verse 20 says he got up and he went to his father. Probably as he goes, every step along the way he's rehearsing. Okay, I'm going to say this. I'm going to pour on the guilt. I'm going to pour on the self-loathing. And I'm not suggesting for a moment he doesn't actually feel it. I believe that it's deep and it's genuine. He loathes himself at this point. He's thinking, here's how I'm going to say it. Here's what I'm going to say about how I'm going to make it right, and then we get this word, "but."

And that might be the most important "but" in the whole Bible. But, while he was still a long way off, his father saw him, and he was filled with compassion for him. He ran to his son. He threw his arms around him and he kissed him. All of those are signs of acceptance. All of those are welcome signs. The kid is coming, but while he's a long way off -- he probably hasn't even seen his father on the porch yet. While he is a long way off, his father sees him. Maybe he recognizes something about the walk or something about him. He's like, that's my son, and he runs to welcome him. He runs to accept him. We'll get to the father in a couple of weeks, so I don't want to push in too far yet, but we have to acknowledge at least three things here.

The first one is this -- his father welcomed him without any proof of how guilty his son felt, right? His father has no idea how guilty his son feels at this point. For all he knows, his son actually could be coming back to ask for more. He has no idea that his son actually feels guilty, and yet he welcomed him back. Second, his father welcomed him back without hearing his son's plan to make it right. He has no idea his son will say this -- it's a good plan except that it's not, right? And there's two problems. Let's just deal with the restitution part first. It's not going to work. This is a rich family. What he has wasted, he's never going to earn back working an hourly wage. He's going to spend his whole life trying, and he's not even going to get close. Spiritually, Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. The wrong we have done, the sin that we have committed, you can't pay that off by balancing doing these good things. Even if we spent the rest of our life never doing another bad thing, which is impossible, all of the good things don't pay off the debt of sin. Restitution is beyond our capacity.

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I say even further because his father is humiliated at this point. In that culture, in that community, in that very tight-knit village, everybody knew what had happened. There is no way that he missed it. When his son said, hey, Dad, I'm tired of waiting for you to die that was being tweeted out immediately, okay? That was on Instagram moments after. Everyone knew what his son had done, and then his father shocked them all by doing it. And then his son packed up and left, and they had heard rumors. They knew what this kid was doing. They knew about the self-indulgence. His father was humiliated, and his father humiliates himself even further to welcome his son back. He sees his son. He picks up his robes. I don't know if you have ever tried to run in robes? It's not easy. I have a lot of experience. Trust me.

You have to grab a hold of them, you have to hoist it up and then you can see your ankles and your skinny little legs, and it says he ran. He didn't
go. He didn’t march out, he ran to welcome him. He’s racing down the street with his robes hiked up, and the thing is in the ancient world nobody ran except small children and servants. Servants were told go this and do it now, they ran. Nobody else ran. And for the respected father of this estate, for the respected pillar of the community, or at least the once respected pillar of the community to be racing down the street with his robes hitched up to welcome back this son who had humiliated him so profoundly makes no sense. It makes no sense.

But he did. He raced down. He threw his arms around him. He kissed him. He said welcome back. He accepted him home, and here’s the part that I actually find the most interesting. I try to put myself in the son’s place and I don’t know what I would do at that point. I had a speech prepared. I had a plan laid out. Here’s how I’m going to get acceptance. I’m going to pour on the self-loathing, which I actually feel, and I’m going to tell him how I’m going to make it right, and I’m serious about it. I’m going to do that. That’s how I’m going to get my father to accept me, and now my father comes and accepts me before I lay out the plan. What do you do at that point? I think he does what I would do, you fall back on the plan because you don’t know what else to do.

So verse 21 says, the son said to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Although he’s already been accepted, he falls back on the plan because he has no idea how else to handle it. He has no idea what to do with his father’s welcome which we would call grace.

We have no idea what to do with grace. I mean the Bible says this is grace, that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Not when we had poured on how guilty we felt about our sin. Not when we told God, I’m going to do these things. I’m going to make sure I have this plan in place. That’s how I’m going to earn Your acceptance and He said okay, fine. If that’s the plan, if you will stick with it, then I will take care of your sin. Then I’ll die for you. That’s not the way it worked. While we were yet sinners running from him, he died for us. That’s grace. And we don’t know what to do with it. Like this young man, we have no idea what to do with it. Grace is so counterintuitive we often find ourselves falling back on old strategies, right? Even though we have been accepted by faith, by grace, we often find ourselves going back. But God, I do, I feel awful. I need to, right? I need to feel just so terrible about the sin that I committed in the past and the sin that I still have?

Grace is so counterintuitive that we fall back on this old strategy time and time again. We might have been saved by grace, but we find ourselves living by guilt. Because honestly, we intuitively believe it has to look like that, right? If we are really going to experience God’s acceptance, there has to be guilt, and there has to be a plan to make it right because we don’t know what to do with grace, and I love the father’s response. His son chokes out the plan. He doesn’t know what to do with it. He’s already been accepted, but he begins to choke out this plan, and I love verse 22. But the father said to his servants -- he basically cuts his son off mid-sentence. He says quick, bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate for the son of mine who was dead and is alive again. He was lost and he is found, and so they began to celebrate. I love it.

He interrupts his son. His son has two parts. He’s going to pour on the self-loathing and then he’s going to tell him the plan. His son imagines to choke out part of the self-loathing. He’s like, yeah, yeah. Shut up. He interrupts him. He doesn’t even let him finish the plan. You heard what his son said, he said I’m not worthy to be called your -- what? I’m not worthy to be called your son, and what does the father say? He said for this son of mine -- this son of mine. He’s completely ignoring the son. He’s like, yeah, yeah. Your plan sucks. I’m sorry. You can’t say that in church. I know. Your plan’s terrible. It’s awful. You are still my son and I’m just so glad that you turned back. He was dead and he’s alive. He was lost and he’s found.

And honestly, you might be in a place right now where you go, honestly, that feels a little premature, doesn’t it? It feels like the father is being a little bit reckless. I mean, after all, the son has demonstrated a tremendous capacity for self-indulgence, and horrible priority, and poor decision making, and the father is going to lavish more gift on him without proof of his guilt, without evidence that he’s really changed? That’s reckless. What’s to keep him from taking the new gifts and wasting those too? Shouldn’t the father wait until he’s seen whether or not the change has really taken place before he accepts this kid?

Shouldn’t he? Apparently not. And remember, Jesus is teaching this to a group of people who are going, hey, Jesus, you’re being reckless. You are eating with these people. You are accepting all of these people before they have proven that they have really changed. You need them to work for your acceptance. Jesus seems to be saying, no, I want them to work from my acceptance. Not work for my acceptance by changing. I want to accept them, and I want my acceptance to become the foundation. I want grace to become the solid ground from which real transformation happens, and it lasts for eternity, so no; I’m not going to wait. And really, the heartbeat of this is so clear. It’s counterintuitive. It’s hard for us to grasp. It’s so different from the world that we live in, and honestly, the way that we have experienced other people in our lives, and honestly, probably the way that we have shown other people the way they need to respond, but the message is very simple. It’s this -- God is on the front porch waiting for the first sign that you are ready to come home.

God is on the front porch waiting. He’s waiting on the front porch for the first sign that you are ready to come home, and the first time there’s a sign, He’s going to come to you, and He’s going to accept you, and His acceptance of you will be the foundation of lasting change, and not the requirement for it. So Jesus says, you think I’m being reckless? You don’t understand grace. And honestly, we don’t, right? There is a big part of me that looks at what the father did in this parable and I think that -- I don’t think that’s wise. I don’t think he’s done enough. Here’s the thing, and if you are feeling that same way, I’m telling you, I feel that same way. What we need to recognize is that we have a lot of the older brother in
Question number one, how much of myself do I see in the younger brother? How much of the tendency of self-indulgence do you see? I think we all have it. We dress it up. We call it other things, but we all have it. Some of you, you are going, I am the younger brother. That’s how I have been living my life. You have to call it what it is. Second question is, do I believe the depth of my guilt is the key to being accepted by God? Do I believe the depth of my guilt is the key for God’s acceptance for His love for His grace? Because that’s a lie. It’s a lie from hell, but it’s a lie that’s deep in our souls. Some of you right now, you’re going, yeah, I’m the younger brother and I believe that. That’s why I haven’t come to Jesus. That’s why I have never given my life to him because I don’t know that I have enough guilt yet. I don’t know that I have a plan for making it right. I don’t know that I have made enough progress. I honestly, I don’t know that I feel that bad about my sin yet.

And honestly, maybe you are here today going, I want to want to feel that bad. Honestly, I don’t feel that bad, but I know that I should. I wish I felt as bad as I know that I ought to, but I don’t, it’s just that I want to want to feel that bad because you believe that, that’s the key to your acceptance. I want to tell you, that’s enough. That’s plenty. Recognizing sin for what it is is all that’s really necessary. The question is, can you get rid of this idea that the depth of your guilt is not the key to your acceptance to God so that you can turn around and look back toward the porch.

Maybe as followers of Jesus, you are continuing to struggle with this. You have given your life to Jesus, but you are continuing to say, if God is really going to love me today, if I’m going to continue to experience God’s blessing, I have to feel awful about all of the things that I have done, and the things that I continue to do, and the sins that I continue to struggle with. Do you really believe that your guilt is the key to His acceptance? Because Jesus says you’re wrong.

Third question, am I living for my Father’s acceptance or from it? Am I living for my Father’s acceptance, or am I living from it? Do I think transformation is the key for Him accepting me? I have to do these things. I have to pile on this stuff so that God will love me, or do I recognize the truth that God is a Father waiting on the porch for the first sign that we are ready to turn back and He races to us. He embraces us. He loves us. He drenches us in grace. And it is from that place of acceptance that transformation really begins to happen. Are you living for your Father’s acceptance, or from it?

Would you pray with me? Lord at all of our campuses, as followers of Jesus, we come to You today, and we say thank You. Thank You for loving us in spite of our sin. Thank You for loving us even when we didn’t have as much guilt as we feel like we should have. Thank You for saving us even when we were sinners and even when we had no plan for making it right because honestly, there is no way to make it right, but You made it right for us. You sent Your Son. He died on the cross. He for gave our sin. It’s simply by trusting in him, we were forgiven. We were set free. We were brought into your family and we were returned to a relationship with our Father. Lord, would you break all of the lies that keep us from embracing this reality, and allow us to live from grace, in Jesus name. Amen. I’m going to ask everyone to continue in an attitude of prayer. I believe right now at all of our campuses and in church online, there are people listening here going, you know what? I see a lot of myself in the younger brother, because I am the younger brother. That’s where I am.

And right now, it may be that you’re hearing, and it’s connecting for the first time that your guilt is not the key to being accepted by God, that your plan to make it right is completely useless because it can’t be done, and it’s not necessary. If that’s you, and it’s connecting for the first time, and you are going, I’m ready to turn back. I’m ready to look back to the porch. I’m ready to be accepted by my Father, that’s incredibly good news because the reality is that your Father loves you. He loves you so much that He sent His own Son to die for you. He took your sins upon himself, and he paid the price so that you wouldn’t have to. And it’s simply by giving your life to Jesus, by putting your faith in Jesus, you will be accepted. You will be forgiven, and you will be brought into a relationship with God for all eternity. If you are ready to do that, if you are ready to turn back to your Father sitting on the porch right now, would you just slip your hand up? That’s fantastic. That’s awesome. If you are watching online, click the button right below me. If you are watching on Facebook, type in the comment section, I’m ready to turn back.

Then wherever you are right now, if you will just say this to God in your heart, God, I have done wrong, and I am sorry. Thank You for sending Jesus to die in my place. Jesus, thank you for rising from the dead to show me that you have new life to offer. I need that new life. I need that forgiveness. I need my Father’s acceptance. So Jesus, I give you my life, and I receive forgiveness and new life and my God’s acceptance back. Jesus, I’m yours from now and forever, in Jesus name. Amen. Can we just celebrate those who turned back today?

[Applause]

Fantastic.