



WEEK 2

A Surprise Party
Sept 23_14, 2017
Pastor Jared Herd

LEADER'S GUIDE

1. Have you ever had a surprise party thrown for you? What was it like?

Why do we throw surprise parties for people?

Talk about the different motivations behind surprise parties: to show someone how special they are, to honor someone who usually wants to stay out of the spotlight, to do something unexpected for someone who is usually the planner, etc... Usually intense love is the underlying reason.

2. Pastor Jared said, "We all crave grace. It's the first thing we want when we find ourselves in trouble, but it's often the hardest thing to extend." Why do you think we crave something we know we don't deserve?

Make sure everyone is operating on the same definition. Grace is undeserved kindness or courtesy or favor. Mercy, by contrast, is not getting what you DO deserve while grace is getting what you DON'T deserve. We have a sense of right and wrong given to all us by our Creator, and we also know that wrong actions have consequences. When we've done wrong, whether knowingly or unknowingly, we usually want to avoid the pain of the consequence.

What makes it hard to give?

We grow up wanting fairness in everything. We are told to share our toys, take turns, make portions even, etc. This reinforces the notion that everything in life must be fair. Grace messes with that. But the truth is, we'd be lost in our sins without grace. What God extended to us we understand better by extending to others, so He sends the opportunities our way all the time.

3. Luke 15:17-24. (NIV) 17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’ 20 So he got up and went to his father. “But while he was still a long way off, his father **saw** him and **was filled** with compassion for him; **he ran** to his son, **threw** his arms around him **and kissed** him. 21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.’

What did the son believe was the solution to his problem (verse 19)? How was he mistaken? What did he think his father was like?

The son believed, because of custom and law in Jewish culture (that everyone in hearing of Jesus telling this parable would have understood), that when you have done wrong, you must make restitution, that you have to DO something to earn back your good standing. He didn’t understand the depth of his father’s love; he thought his transgressions far outweighed his father’s love.

4. How far did the son get with what he planned to say? What does that tell us about this father?

The son never got to the practiced part of his confession where he would say he was no longer worthy to be called his father’s son. It might be that the father interrupted him and he could not finish, or the son might have been weeping and unable to continue. In any case the father had the very response the son needed to hear. Talk about what you think happened here in the seconds between what the son planned to say and what his father said. What does this word “worthy” mean in this context?

5. What else do we learn about this father in his response to his son’s homecoming? Look at each of the five action words in verse 20 that describe what this father does. Talk about each one.

- **The father saw him coming.** He was looking for his son’s return. His eyes were trained on the horizon in anticipation. He had not given up on his child.
- **The father was filled with compassion.** The father’s immediate response upon seeing his son was the one least expected by the son or anyone else. And it wasn’t just a

measure of compassion, the father was filled with it. Compassion is deep concern for the sufferings of others.

- **He ran to his son.** Pastor Jared shared what a big deal it was for a man of means in this culture to pick up his robes, expose his ankles, and run. It was a shameful act that would have made the Pharisees listening to this story gasp. This is a perfect picture of Jesus taking on our shame upon himself.
- **He threw his arms around him.** To be embraced is to be drawn close, pulled to the bosom of the person whose arms are around you. Part of this Greek phrase means “to fall upon” or “seize.” This father didn’t hesitate to pull his son to him. Discuss for just a moment the state the son was in, where he had last been, how he probably smelled and looked.
- **He kissed him.** A kiss in every culture is a sign of love and respect and honor and welcome.

6. Consider this quote from Pastor Jared’s message: “Reconciliation happens before rehabilitation.” What did he mean?

The son thought he had to pay for his mistakes (rehabilitate himself) before he had any hope of his father treating him with any kind of respect (reconciliation). To reconcile is to set accounts to right, to **reestablish a relationship** with something or someone that had been broken or separated. To rehabilitate is **restoring something or someone to former privileges** or position after a period of decline or disfavor.

Why do you think the reverse is often what we expect of each other?

Talk about why we often expect someone to clean up his or her life (i.e. start following all the rules) before they are restored to God in a love relationship. For example, if you see someone living in opposition to God’s ways for living, is your first response to want them to change how they live or is your first response to want them to change who they worship?

7. What did Pastor Jared say can happen to our understanding of rules and relationships when we forget this is how God operates?

He told us that when we forget God wants us to reconcile before we rehabilitate is that it puts rules before relationship. We think about the behavior more than the person. Rules become primary and people became secondary. This was one of the biggest problems with the Pharisees of Jesus’s day. Here is another great example from Scripture, if you have time for it, of this concept of reconciliation before rehabilitation:

John 8:3-11 (NIV)

3 The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group 4 and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” 6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

11 “No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

We see this pattern (reconciliation then rehabilitation) modeled in Jesus’s words in verse 11: “neither do I condemn you (reconciliation) “Go now and leave your life of sin” (rehabilitation)

8. How does God care about the rehabilitation piece? What do these verses tell us: Gal 2:20, Romans 6:1-4 and 1 Peter 1:3-8?

A life being rehabilitated by God is a life being sanctified and transformed. It’s a process that begins after we’ve been reconciled to God the Father through Jesus the Son. **Rehabilitation is the evidence that we HAVE been reconciled.** If someone says they’ve been reconciled to God but there is no evidence of transformation taking place, there is cause to wonder if reconciliation took place first. The rehabilitation piece matters to God because it’s the process by which we are transformed into the likeness of Christ. Talk about that.

Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Romans 6:1-4 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

1 Peter 1:3-8 His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. 4 Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. 5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to

knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

MEMORIZE Romans 5:10 (NIV): “For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

MEDITATE: Pastor Jared shared that the same people from this son’s village who would have come to his shaming ceremony would now be coming to the celebratory feast that the father threw instead. What would’ve been your response if you had been a neighbor to this father? This week, think about how quick or slow you typically are to extend grace. Pay special attention to how you interact with people outside your family and close relationships, especially strangers.