

God the Benevolent Father

A story is told of a man whose boat sank, leaving him stranded on a deserted island. He desperately prayed for God to rescue him. Days passed, and finally, he built a small hut to protect himself from the elements. One afternoon, a bolt of lightning struck the hut, burning it to the ground. In tears, the man cried out, "God, why have You taken this from me?" Hours later, a rescue ship arrived. The captain later told him, "We saw the smoke from your fire and came to investigate." God's benevolence is at work even when His provision looks like destruction. He often uses the trials of life to orchestrate our ultimate rescue.

Luke 15: 11 – 31

1) God gives us the freedom to fail

- After the nation of Israel had wandered in the wilderness for forty years and were preparing to cross the Jordan river to take possession of the Land that the Lord had promised them, He gave them instructions and choices through Moses.
 - Deuteronomy 30:19-20 This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- The Father allowed his son to choose to take his inheritance prematurely and go off on his own knowing that he would mess his life up by making the wrong choice.
 - Does this mean that God isn't benevolent or is selectively benevolent?
 - No, it means that God's love isn't controlling and He gives us the freedom to make our own choices.
 - The first choice that He gave mankind was to eat of the tree of life or the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, He also gave the warnings of the consequences if they made the wrong choice and ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- In His benevolence the Father warns us of the consequences of making the wrong choices beforehand, but always gives us the freedom to make them because love for Him and to do what is right in His sight is only true love if it comes from the heart of our beings and not by force.
 - If God forces us to do what He wants us to do against our wills, then He isn't being benevolent, but a dictator.
 - His love gives us the freedom to love Him or not to love Him, but desiring that we love Him with an unforced love
- When we make the wrong choices in life and things go wrong, don't blame God for our bad choices
 - Don't blame him if you're in a bad relationship with someone who you shouldn't have been in a relationship with in the first place
 - Don't blame God if your life is a mess because you decided to get drunk or take drugs
 - Don't blame God if you had a child out of wedlock because you decided to have a moment of pleasure
 - Don't blame God if you got fired for corrupt dealings or bad work ethics at work.
- Of course, our hardships in life aren't always because of our own bad choices, but sometimes because of someone else's bad choices
 - Someone gets fired for refusing to do what is corrupt in a company and so the corrupt boss fires them
 - A woman is raped and has a child out of wedlock leaving her with emotional trauma as well as the responsibility to raise a child on her own.
- Even in those they aren't the doing of God, but the doing of people making bad decisions driven by malintent, personal gratification, thoughtlessness, or their own personal problems that they haven't dealt with.

2) Misconceptions of the Father

- The son in this parable highlights some misconceptions that he had about the Father
- Misconception 1: We can demand whatever we want from God and we'll be in His will because He's given it to us
 - Luke 15:11-12 Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons.¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.
 - The son demanded his share of his inheritance from his father, which his father gave to him. He went out and squandered it, which was outside of the will of the Father.
 - God gives gifts to His children and they can move out of His will by moving into a sinful lifestyle without losing the gifts that they've received.
 - Giftedness is then not necessarily a sign of being within the will of God.

- Misconception 2: We can earn God’s forgiveness with self-centred remorse
 - Luke 15:17-19 “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! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’”
 - The son wasn’t sorry about what he’s done. He was sorry that that his inheritance had run out and that he was in a difficult situation without even food to eat. He wanted to go back to the Father for what he could get out of it and not to make right with his Father.
 - True repentance is when we realise how our actions have hurt the Father, and others, and a desire to come back to change whether we get anything more from the Father or not.
- Misconception 3: We can manipulate the Father to get our needs met.
 - Luke 15:28-31 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’”
 - “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.’”
 - We can’t manipulate God and neither do we need to.
 - Matthew 5:44-45 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

3) The benevolent Father

- The benevolent Father eagerly waits for His children to return to Him and doesn’t cast away anyone who comes to Him
 - John 6:37 All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.
- The benevolent Father treats those who come to Him as His children and not as slaves.
 - John 1:12-13 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God — children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.
 - Galatians 4:6-7 Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.
- The benevolent Father lavishes His love on His children
 - Luke 15:22-23 “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.’”
 - 1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!
- The benevolent Father rejoices and celebrates the return of His children to Him
 - Luke 15:23-24 Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.
 - Zephaniah 3:17 The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.”
- Knowing God as our benevolent Father
 - We can approach Him with confidence
 - Hebrews 10:19-22 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.
 - We will be content in life knowing that He has already given us what we need
 - Hebrews 13:5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”
 - We won’t look for satisfaction in the world as our satisfaction is in Him
 - Psalms 16:11 You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.