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## CORRECTION IS A GIFT

2 Corinthians Series | 2 Corinthians 7:8-13

[PRAYER] Lord, sometimes we get ourselves set in our ways so much that we find ourselves in difficult situations and we need to be jolted out of that. I just pray that we would be able to listen to your whispers and not have to have something bigger that would jolt us out of our complacency or single-mindedness going in the wrong direction. Broaden our understanding and help us to respond to the quiet promptings of your Holy Spirit in our lives. We appreciate, Lord, being together as a church and interacting with each other because often it's the things that we say to each other that prompt that change. And certainly listening to your word is that continual flow into our hearts that broadens our understanding and our thinking. It changes our beliefs about life, about who you are, about who we are, and about your plan for us. So Lord, I'm grateful. Thank you that I'm one of your children and I ask that you continue to grow me and discipline me and change me to be more like Christ.

As we look at your word now, Lord, we ask that you would speak to us directly. You know what's going on in each one of our hearts, the pain that we've experienced in the past, the challenge we're experiencing in the present, and you know what things we may experience in the future even this week. So we ask that you would use all of those experiences to grow us to be more like you and to experience your immense power and greatness. Teach us, Father, as we look at your word. In Jesus' name, amen.

We're going to look at a very important topic today. In fact this is something that any of us can use. But in particular I want young people to be listening to this because this is one of those foundational issues that if we get it, then it will help us for the rest of our lives. It's a life skill. And as a life skill, it will change who we are and it will help us to be the people that God wants us to be.

So to start, we want to read the passage of scripture. Stand with me as I read this passage of scripture. This is the passage we're going to read and then I'm going to come back to you. We're going to go through the passage, but I want you to see what the passage looks like first and then we're going to look for some practical applications for our lives.

*2 Corinthians 7:8-13 – Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings*

*repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged.*

You may be seated.

If you're looking at that passage of scripture, you might feel like me and I'm going, "I think I missed something here in the conversation. There's some story here that I don't really get because I feel like I'm jumping into the middle of a conversation." If you feel that way, then you're right. Because there's something missing. And the something missing is another letter that was written to the Corinthians that we don't have. It was a letter that Paul wrote to challenge them and to correct them.

But let me step back for a minute and give you some backstory to what's happening in this passage. There was a person who did something wrong to an injured party. They'll both be mentioned in the passage. Something wrong to an injured party. We don't know what that was. We don't know what it could be. It could've been meanness, it could've been sexual immorality, it could've been gossip, or pride, or something. We don't know. Something happened between these two people. But that's not the focus of Paul's challenge.

He is writing a letter to the church that was nearby or watching this and they had an attitude of apathy. They weren't getting involved at all. Like "that's not my problem." Or "I'm tired of this. I can't get involved in this anymore." That kind of an attitude. Now that same kind of problem happens in our lives, I think, whether it be in a family or at work where there's some conflict going on and we are apathetic. "I'm just too tired to deal with this." Or "It's not my problem. I'm not going to get involved in this." Or we just got so much to do we're kind of like the not good Samaritans who went right by the path and the guy was hurting on the side. We are just apathetic toward the whole thing. So because of their apathy, when Paul heard about it, he felt like, "I got to do something about it." So Paul decided to challenge them and correct them. He sent this letter that was rather, apparently, firm. Rather straight forward, rather frank, rather blunt letter, apparently, that was sent to them about they're doing the wrong thing and they needed to change.

So put yourself in the position for a moment of Paul, the one doing the correcting. Because as he did his and sent this letter off, there was a little bit of anxiety that he felt about this because he didn't know how he would be perceived. I think you could feel that too sometimes. You know your son is having some trouble, you've got to meet with them and you want it to go well and you know you got to tell it to them straight and you've got to help him see that his ways are wrong and he needs to make a change and you want it to go well. But there's a little bit of anticipation that you have about this as to whether this is going to go well, and so you're concerned about it. Because you know that a person could be discouraged by this. That's the sorrow described in the passage.

They could be so discouraged by this. Or maybe they'll get angry. They'll be some kind of emotional reaction. And so there's a little bit of anticipation that you feel when you have to go and do some correcting or you feel that that's the right thing to do.

Paul sends the letter and he waits until Titus comes back. And when Titus comes back, he reports that the church has changed. They have decided to change their way that they're feeling and handling the situation. We'll see some of the words describing their change from apathy to earnestness and this righteous kind of anger that they have. They've moved in their anger significantly, so something has changed inside of them. So because of that, the very last verse, as you'll see in verse 13, is – *We were all encouraged*. So there's this cycle of correction that took place and it turned out good. Whenever it turns out good, relationships are restored, people make changes in their lives, and good things happen.

Now I want to suggest we all need change in our lives. If you think about your own heart, inside of your heart you have this kind of bubble of truth that you believe in. Things that are really important to you and you believe them. And in some cases you believe you're right. You're right and we can get in there and justify our actions and we can defend ourselves and we can rationalize and we develop all these defense mechanisms to prove that we're right to ourselves. Maybe not to other people, but primarily to ourselves we prove that we're right. So that becomes a very hardened place in many of our lives. We are determined. We know we're right. That's a really hard place to be. I believe it takes some real humility to break that down so we can start to make some changes.

One of the ways that that change takes place is through correction. It's just one of God's tools to open up our hearts a little bit because our hearts are locked in. And so someone comes in and tells us that something is wrong and we have to wrestle with that, often, I think, generating emotion inside of us. Sometimes it's sorrow. "Oh I'm so disappointed. I did it again. I keep defending people. I don't realize I'm doing that." So we have this sadness about our experience. But sometimes it's anger. "What are you doing? I can't believe you're correcting me! Look at all the problems you have. How can you tell me..." So we start getting angry about the whole thing. So there's emotion that is generated in the midst of all of that. That's the experience we're talking about.

I think God has designed our hearts to develop this operating principle. But when we get too fixed on ourselves being right and everybody else being wrong, or that I'm not going to listen to what anybody else has to say, then we find ourselves getting into trouble. We build these self-defense mechanisms. It's been said that if one person tells you that you have a tail, then you can ignore them. But if three people tell you you have a tail, you better turn around and look. The idea is that sometimes we ignore the corrections of other people and then we miss out on what God may want to do deeper in our lives.

Now let's go back through the passage and look at it. We're going right back into our passage where we are. Let's take it now. Knowing what we know and what I've just said about the background of the story, let's look at our passage.

*It says – Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while—yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended and so were not harmed in any way by us.*

The person doing a correction or coming and correcting someone, whether it's a small correction or a large correction, takes a risk. Oh I know some people just do it because they're angry and they spout out things and it's not very helpful the way they do the correcting. But usually when someone goes to correct someone, they take a risk. Am I going to harm this person by sharing this information or not? And it's a really good concern that we have as the person correcting. Because we don't want to be spouting out everything we hear and correcting everything we see. Our goal is not correcting things. Our goal is to bring about change in the other person if that's the right thing that needs to happen. The goal is advocacy and building them up. That is the goal.

But I want to take it, not just from the perspective of us being the correcting ones, like I said a moment ago, being like Paul correcting somebody else, but I want us to look today at the passage from the person being corrected point of view. The reason I want to do that is because I think that's what's emphasized in the passage itself. Paul is emphasizing what's happening inside of the person who's being corrected. Since we all are going to experience this correction in life, we need to grasp this idea. We need it.

I would suggest if you're a young person today, you want to be able to be corrected easily, to be able to maneuver and change. Because God wants to grow things in your life. He teaches us in lots of different ways. You can learn things by listening to a teacher. You can learn things by reading a book. You can learn things by googling. Mr. Google always has answers for problems and whatever they might be. But one of the ways that God has designed for us to learn things is through correction. And those corrections bring truths. They penetrate the circle, the bubble inside of our hearts that's fixed.

So regularly as I'm working with parents that have children, children have this bubble. This bubble that says, "Chores are mom's work. I shouldn't have to do mom's work." So we have to educate those kids by bringing some correction in there to help them see chores are not mom's work; everybody needs to participate in that. Some children believe that homework is waste of time. They're just looking at some pieces of homework instead of recognizing the bigger picture and the training that's going on in the midst of that. Often children need their bubble expanded. So a good way of receiving correction is very important.

I would just encourage you to receive correction well. Look for ways, young people, to be humble and to take what people have to say and receive them. Yes, it might cause you some sorrow, but notice in the passage that this sorrow leads to repentance.

Now the word 'repentance' is the word for change. Change of mind is the idea here. It affects both the thinking patterns that we have, it affects how we feel, and it affects our will and our choices. So repentance is a word that's really a great word for us. We'll come back to that in a moment.

But let's go to the next verse because I think this is the key verse in the passage, verse 10, which compares two kinds of repentance or sorrow. One is a godly sorrow and the other is a worldly sorrow. Notice what it says. *Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.*

Now what is he talking about there and what does it mean? It has to do with your response to the sorrow that you're experiencing because of some mistake you've made. It could be a mistake or an offense or a sin or some foolishness in your life that you've done. You have to have a plan for dealing with those four things. Mistakes, offenses, sin, foolishness are the four things we have to be ready for in our lives. We have to get them. They're going to come and we have to have a plan for addressing those four things. And so there's a godly sorrow that we can experience that can lead to this repentance that God would have for us.

I can best illustrate this I think by telling you a Bible story. It's a Bible story about Jesus. As He was arrested there were two people in the story who made a mistake. Both of them pretended to be something they weren't. One responded with a godly sorrow and the other responded with a worldly sorrow.

Peter is the first one. Peter denied Christ three times. When the girl asked him, "Aren't you with Him?" not only did he say, "No, I'm not with Him," but he even cursed. "I'm not with Him." He was pretending to be something that he wasn't. After the third time, the cock crowed and in that moment the eyes of Jesus met Peter's eyes. In that moment Peter experienced the natural consequence of lying. Do you know what the natural consequence of lying is? You hurt other people. That is it. People get hurt. When he saw the sorrow in Jesus' eyes, Jesus didn't even have to say anything, but Peter knew what he did was wrong. He was sorrowful about it. He was so upset. The Bible says he went out and *he wept bitterly*. But did it stay there? No. God used that experience in Peter's life to develop in him some beautiful thing.

It's this salvation. That salvation is getting saved, yes, but it's also this sense that God wants to do something to work out that salvation in our lives. And Peter, of course, became this great pillar for the church. This guy who was chosen out of all of the disciples to stand up on the day of Pentecost and thousands of people got saved. Wow. Godly sorrow leads to repentance.

But worldly sorrow is very different. There's another guy who pretended to be something he wasn't. That was Judas. Judas pretended to be a friend of Jesus, but at the same time he was conniving to get some extra money on the side. He was going to sell Jesus out for forty pieces of silver. Well as the story unfolds and Judas realizes that what he did was wrong. He was very sad. Just like Peter, he was very sad. In fact he realized that what he did was wrong and he wants to give the money back. So he goes and throws the money back at their feet, but then what does he do? He goes out and he hangs himself. Worldly sorrow brings death. Now in that case he committed suicide, unfortunately. A wrong response to a mistake. He could've experienced God's grace, he could've received back, good things could've happened, but he didn't know how to handle this mistake, this sin that happened in his life. It's a worldly sorrow.

Now I would suggest that worldly sorrow doesn't always result in suicide. I'm grateful for that. But it does result in some damage that we do to ourselves. Then we end up saying, "Oh I've done so many bad things. God can't use me. I'm just going to attend church and not really be a part of it." Or "God can't really work in my life and forgive me." So we end up doing this worldly sorrow that brings death. Maybe not physical death, but just death of life. There could be so much to life if we would respond well to the correction that comes in, to the sorrow that we experience when something bad goes down.

Think about your own life for a minute. When you do something wrong, a sin, or you act foolishly, or you have an offense of some kind, what happens in those moments? Do you respond well to that?

Let's go on to the rest of the passage. It says – *See what this godly sorrow has produced in you?* Now remember we talked in this story about how they were apathetic. No emotion when this other conflict was going on. Notice the change that takes place in them. *What earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.* All of a sudden they become alive. They realize that what they were doing was wrong. Their apathetic response of "I can't get involved right now. I'm too busy. We got so many things going on. Just leave it to them. That's their problem," was the wrong response. So they get involved and now their whole attitude toward this kind of a problem has changed.

*So even though I wrote to you, it was neither on account of the one who did the wrong nor on account of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are. By all this we are encouraged.*

So he says, "I'm not speaking to the person who did the wrong. I'm not even speaking to the injured party right now." I'm sure there are messages that could go out to them that could help them know about what to do in their situations. But Paul says, "I'm zeroing in on you guys. You guys who are the church. You're the ones who should be eagerly concerned about what's happening in this kind of a situation and you've responded well, and so we're all encouraged," is what he's saying.

So that's the passage. What I want to do is I want to take you into this idea of repentance a little bit and try to understand this concept so that we get it. Because I think it ought to be a normal part of our lives, that we understand what repentance looks like. So if we were going to go through Repentance 101, the first point is that we all need it continually for growth to take place. We all need it. We all need to change.

I was imagining this week of a river that's flowing through that provides fresh water. That's what we need. But I think sometimes we dam it up in a place where the water can't flow and the alga grows and we start to stink. That's what I'm imagining happens in our own hearts sometimes because we don't let the water flow through.

It's very interesting to me that the scriptures say that as a tool it's a corrective tool. In 2 Timothy 3:16 it says that *all scripture is profitable for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, and for*



*training in righteousness.* There's this flowing through that the scriptures do. That's why it's very good for us to be opening God's word regularly. And as we do, God does something to burst our little bubble to say, "Oh. You know, maybe I should go and apologize to that person. Oh yeah. You know what? Maybe I ought to be more eager in this particular area of my life." Whatever it is, God's word speaks to us and it causes this little bubble that we have to open up a little bit. So we aren't just blaming people for everything or rationalizing ourselves, but we're moving forward. We all need correction and repentance for growth to take place in our lives.

The second one it's often painful, depending on how far away you are from the truth. So I think we tend to drift in our minds. So if you don't allow new truth to come in then you still believe that the earth is flat. There are some people that still believe that's just an illustration. In their own hearts they're still believing something old that changed now based on the new information in their situation. So we must experience that. Now some people have drifted away from the truth so far that when correction comes in in one way or another then it's painful for them to make the change.

When I think about driving, when you're driving there's a lot of correction you do every few seconds. You're moving that steering wheel back and forth to stay within the line. That's what I want in my life. Lord, just help me with the small corrections in my life. Because if you kind of start looking away for a minute and you're not paying attention, what happens? You drift over into that vibrating thing on the side of the road and you got to get back. It's a bigger correction and if you don't pay attention to that, of course, something even bigger happens.

I don't want the bigger things to happen, but they're painful when they do. So the smaller corrections are very important to be able to pay attention to. It's often painful depending on how far away you are from the truth. Sometimes that pain is in the sorrow side; sometimes it's in the anger side. But it's painful and we need to be able to address it.

There are times when I'm working with parents and they're afraid because their children get angry when they correct them. I said you don't have to be afraid of your children's anger. When the child's angry, that's because heart work is going on. They're wrestling with something in their heart. It's okay. It's okay. You just tell them, "You need to take a break and settle down." "I don't want to take a break!" "It's okay. You need to take a break."

So we're teaching children because we want them to realize that they need to make a change. So parents can't be afraid of their children's emotion.

Now it is important for us to be careful that we're not pushing kids into that emotional experience on a regular basis, but the point is emotions are often a part of change. So it's okay. If you're really sad about some change that's taking place in your life, that's okay. It's heart work going on and God wants to bring some new thought, thinking patterns into your life so that you can embrace that change that needs to take place.

The third truth is that God uses people in situations, many of which are uncomfortable. I would be fine being corrected by people I really love and admire. It's when I'm corrected by people I

don't respect very much that I get really irritated. I don't like it when that person corrects me. They've got enough problems. How come they're correcting me? And why would God use that?

I think about the story in the Old Testament about Balaam who is riding on this donkey. The donkey could see that there was an angel with a sword getting ready to kill Balaam, but Balaam was so locked into his own kind of worldview and he couldn't see the angel. So the donkey goes off the path into the field. And so Balaam beats him, "Donkey, get back on the path." So he gets back on the path. They go a little bit further and they're in this narrow area and the donkey moves close to the wall and crushes the guy's leg and hurts him. And he beats the donkey. So they go a little further and the space is so narrow that the donkey kneels down and won't go. So the owner, Balaam, is beating the donkey.

At that moment the Bible says that God opened the mouth of the donkey and the donkey says, "Why are you beating me?" Now because Balaam was so wrapped up in his line of thinking, he talks back to the donkey. This is so bizarre. This is a true story. We know it's true because it's in the Bible. (That's what I say to my grandchildren: This is a true story. We know it's true because it's in the Bible.) So he says, "Because you're hurting me." And the donkey says, "No. I'm not." And then God opened up his eyes so Balaam could see the angel there and he changes his ways.

I'm telling you if donkeys didn't correct me, I'd be fine. I don't like it when donkeys correct me. I would suggest that sometimes it's the person we'd rather not have correct us that does. It might be that a child corrects a parent, or a parent corrects a child, "I wish that parent wouldn't keep correcting me," or maybe it's someone who has a problem and they come and correct. It's just all a part of the process and I think sometimes God uses people or situations we don't like to bring about that training that He wants in our lives. So that's the third point. God uses people and situations, many of which, are uncomfortable.

Point number four is that correction is a gift. That's what I'm going to title this sermon. Correction is a gift. I tell parents that correction is a gift, just to get them thinking differently about it. But I say: Here's what you're doing. If your son is having a hard time being corrected, what you want is the next time he's doing something wrong, say, "Son, come over here. I want to give you a gift." And then when he comes over say, "Son, I need to correct you here. Because that is a gift."

Let me show you a couple scriptures, this first one reveals this idea. I love this passage in Proverbs 6:23. It says – *For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is a light. Correction teaches you the way of life.* It raises the bar for correction. If you tend to think that correction is that bad thing that you don't want anybody to see, you don't want to experience, you're inadequate if someone's correcting you, "oh I'm a bad person," then you've got the wrong idea. Correction is a gift. And when someone gives you the gift it is a treasure that you want to receive.

Another verse that I like and I share this with kids because this is the stupid verse in the Bible. Now we don't use the word 'stupid' in our family. But I like to tell kids there's a stupid verse in the Bible. In fact when I'm counseling with children, sometimes I'll say to a child, "Next week I'm going to tell you the stupid verse in the Bible." They're going, "What?" because those words



don't go together – stupid and Bible. Right? And many of us don't use those words. I think it's good not to use the word 'stupid', so I think that's valuable. But the Bible uses it when it says – *Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid.* So I say to kids, "Why does the Bible say *he who hates correction is stupid?*" So we talk about that and the child will often say, "Because if you aren't corrected you'll keep doing the wrong thing and look like you're stupid." That's a good answer! We need correction in our lives. Proverbs 12:1, a great verse for us to keep in mind.

Well those are four points about repentance that we need to know. But a fifth one is that humility develops the assumption that you need change. If we walked around in life and there was a disagreement and we always assumed that we were the ones first who have a problem, we would get much further in relationships than saying, "That's your problem?" and we blame the problem on someone else. But if we would come with the assumption that we need to make a change, I think good things can happen.

There are times when people leave a church, for example. And when someone leaves our church, one of the questions I ask of myself is, "Is there something that I could or we could have done differently or better to minister to this person so they didn't feel they had to leave?" Now people leave churches for all kinds of different reasons. I'm not saying anybody is even offended sometimes when they leave a church, but I think it's a good question for us to ask. The first question is, am I wrong here? Is there something I could change? Well really another person is 90% wrong. Well that's fine. I want to look at my 10% because if I can look at my 10% then maybe I could learn something about how to avoid my 10%. Because maybe I'm provoking their 90% by my 10%.

So that's certainly in ministry, but I would say also in our own homes it would be great if we could assume that we're wrong instead of assuming that we're right all the time. That takes humility to assume that we don't have the answers. To assume that the way we're working in family life may not be the best. Maybe we need to change. Or maybe the right thing we're doing isn't the best thing. Did you ever think of that? Maybe it's not that we're doing something wrong. Maybe we're doing a good thing, but it's not the best thing. Or maybe it's not meeting that person where they need to be met, and so correction is just a great way for us to learn. I think this idea of humility is essential in order to get us out of our little bubble that believes that everything inside of the bubble is correct.

There's another way to look at the repentance and I just call it the ABCs of repentance. I think this might be helpful for some. The *A* is to admit failure, weakness, sin, offense or mistake. Admit failure, weakness, sin, offense, or mistake. That's the *A*. The *B* is to be sorry about your failure, both for yourself and what it does to others. That's the *B*. And *C* is to change your direction. Fix it. Apologize. Live differently. So if we use those ABCs, I think we encapsulate what this idea of repentance is.

So I just want you to know, repentance is not a stop sign; it's a U-turn sign. It's not like "pause for a minute, I did the wrong thing." No. It's a U-turn that says now I'm going to go a different direction because I've learned something now and I feel something different (hopefully) and I'm going to move in that right direction. So keeping that in mind I think would be really helpful.

I want to tell you one more story. I want to tell you a story about a problem Jesus had. Because when He was working with the people He had a lot of meals with tax collectors and sinners. Luke 15:1 says He was eating with the tax collectors and sinners. Now that wasn't really His problem because they were responding to the gospel and they were learning more about what it means to change, to repent. Many of them were getting saved. And basically when you get saved it means I'm going to change all my ideas about religion, I'm going to change all my ideas about who I am and about how great I am, and I'm going to recognize I have sin in my life, and I need a Savior, and I want to ask Jesus Christ to come into my life.

Jesus had these productive meetings with the tax collectors and the sinners because they knew they had a problem. But Luke 15:1 says there was another group of people looking at them and watching them that were kind of critical. These were the Pharisees who were saying to themselves, "He's eating with tax collectors and sinners!" Do you see? As if they were better somehow.

So Jesus had a problem. How is He going to address this problem of them perceiving themselves in this little bubble? The Pharisees were perceiving themselves as self-righteous, the ones who had the answers, and that other people weren't worth their time. But they had the righteousness, the spirituality, they had a problem, and Jesus wants to pierce through that. He had a great technique about doing his. He often told stories. He tells a story that we all know, and I'm going to tell it to you again. It's the story of the prodigal son.

It really shouldn't be called the story of the prodigal son; it should be called the story of the loving father. Because that's the emphasis that Jesus is making to them. He's helping them understand that there's a loving Father that wants to receive these people.

The story goes like this: The young man, thinking that he had it all together (in other words, he had his mind made up inside of his little bubble that he could handle himself well in life), says to his dad, "Give me some money, part of the inheritance. I'm going to go do this." And he goes out to live within his little bubble. So Dad let him do that. I think there's sometimes when we're working with people that sometimes they have to hit bottom. Right? They have to go out and do what they have to do in order to get where they need to be in the place where their bubble bursts and they're ready to make some changes. That's not an easy thing for a parent to do, as you might imagine. But Dad says, "Here you go," and he gave him some money.

He goes out and he lives this great life that he imagined. The wild life that he thought he was going to live, he lived it. It was great...for a while. But then the money ran out, all his friends are gone now, and he finds himself in a place where he doesn't have any food. So he finds himself wanting to hire himself out. He hires himself out to a pig farmer. You've got to be kidding me. If you're Jewish, you know you don't go anywhere around pigs. That's so dirty. So this is about the lowest job you could get. It's like working at McDonald's or some place like that. I mean it's one of those hard jobs that you've got to do where you're working for the public and so on.

Anyway, he goes in and he's working in this pig farm and he's wishing that he had enough food to eat, but he doesn't. So he's eating some of the pods that are there for the pigs. The Bible says that at that moment he comes to the first step of repentance. It says *he comes to his senses*. He starts thinking differently and he remembers. He remembers that his father's house has servants and they always have more food than they need. So now in the midst of all his emotion, he's willing to make a change, so he adjusts and he says, "Okay, I'm going to go back and tell my dad, "Dad, look I know I'm not worthy to be a son anymore, but can I just be one of your servants? Because they eat better than I'm eating over here." So he goes back to his dad. The Bible says that the dad is there with his arms open, seeing him from afar, waiting for him to return. He's so excited for his to come back, and welcomes him back into the family. It's the story of the loving father.

He's trying to illustrate to the Pharisees that their mind is stuck on something that isn't true. They've got their mind in this circular fashion stuck. They need to open it up a little bit and see who God really is because their understanding of God they're missing who God is. If they would understand how big God is, they would welcome in these tax collectors and sinners.

So He's telling this story. The story could end there, but Jesus doesn't stop the story there because there's another part they needed to hear. It's the story of the older brother. Because the older brother has got his own little bubble where he's thinking, "Oh I can't believe this. I'm not going to go and rejoice with them." So because he doesn't show up at the party, Dad goes and says to him, "Hey, what's going on? How come you don't come out here and celebrate with your brother? He's come back. He's changed. He's changed his whole life. He's come to a new understanding of life. This is so exciting." And the brother says, "Oh I can't believe this," and he starts mumbling and grumbling. He says, "I've always done the right thing. I don't have a party for me." So he's inside of his bubble. He's stuck. And that's where the story ends.

We don't know what happens to the older brother. Because Jesus is pointing to the Pharisees who are like the older brother, who are stuck. Will they change? Will they accept this new information into their little bubble so they can expand it and respond to God? That is really the story of the loving father or the prodigal son.

I would suggest that we are all the older brother. I just want to suggest that. We're all the older brother. We've got this kind of bubble that needs to be opened up. We can't assume that we have it all figured out, even when it comes to godliness and spirituality, like the Pharisees, or we become like a Pharisee. We have to assume that we don't know what we don't know and God wants to make some changes in our lives.

Now I do believe that we can be confident in the fact that things are in scripture and God tells us that we're saved and so on. I'm not trying to ignore that whole idea about confidence that we can have. The point is we need to be able to continually be receptive to the new information God wants to share with us from His word, from His Spirit, from those around us so that we can continue to grow. We are only human. We are only human, and our tendency is to be locked into whatever is in our heart. God wants to do many things. He wants to do big things. Not just little things. He wants to do huge things and it starts in our hearts when we're open to what God wants to do.

So when I say at the beginning of a worship service, “Let’s open our hearts to the Lord through worship,” what I’m saying is let’s let God in to our little bubble. Because He wants to do big things. And when He does, great things can happen.

I would suggest if you’ve never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, then you’re stuck in a bubble and that bubble is causing you to miss some of the blessings that God has for you. I don’t care what church you grew up in or what your background is or what church offended you. It doesn’t make any difference about those things. Set it all aside, open up your heart, and say, “God, what is it you want for me in my own heart in my own life.” Because the key word is repentance. It’s a word used to describe a change of mind. That’s what the word means. A change of mind. I’m going to change my mind and I’m not going to be conformed to the pattern of this world. I’m not going to allow all my past experiences to affect my experience right now. Right now I’m going to ask Jesus Christ into my life. I’m going to receive Him in, and I’m going to allow Him to do something powerful right now.

If you’re stuck in the bubble then you’ll say, “Oh yeah. I know all about that. I grew up in church. I went to catechism.” If you don’t have the personal relationship with God, you’re missing something really important. God says repent. Open your heart. Receive what He has to say, He’ll come in, and amazing things will happen on the inside.

Amen? Let’s stand together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we come before you now and ask you to show us where you want us to repent in our lives. We ask that you would bring about change where change needs to take place. Change our thinking patterns. Make us open to relationships in ways that we haven’t before. Teach us how to respond to sorrow we experience or anger in ways that are productive. And we ask, Lord, that you would do some amazing things inside of us. We ask this in Jesus’ name, amen.