



The Way Forward Series Guide

Sept. 27: Towards Joy

Welcome for the group and Check-in

"I am feeling..."

Psalm 23 Rhythm

- Slowly read as a group twice.
- Make observations about your experience of the meditative reading of Psalm 23
- What part resonates or creates an allergic reaction within you as we read the Psalm

today? **Group Prayer:**

"Good Shepherd, thank you for pursuing us, providing for us, and protecting us. Continue to refine our thoughts of you and your ways. We open our lives to receive your care, and the joy that comes from the truth that you are with us. Help us to joyfully take the way forward with your Spirit that is resident in us. Amen."

Group Discussion about The Way Forward: Towards Joy

Overview of ideas the sermon explores:

1. If our reaction to a call for repentance, or a sacred assembly focused on repentance, feels condemning that may be an indicator of how we falsely perceive ourselves.
2. Pastor indicated that our understanding of sin as simply what we did or failed to do misses the greater problem, the greater harm, which is our distance from our loving Father.
3. If our focus is mostly on what we're saved from instead of saved for, we'll miss a life motivated by joy.
4. If you truly believe that the Father is compellingly beautiful, joyous and eagerly awaits your movement toward him – then nothing you've done, or failed to do, or done to you will keep you from the way forward.

Reading of passages from the sermon: **Luke 15:1; 11-24**

Group Discussion:

In verse 1 we see why Jesus told this parable. The Pharisees had a conviction that God hates sinners, His holiness creates walls to separate himself from sinners. Therefore, the Pharisees believed Jesus acted scandalous when he would eat with, socialize with, be close to sinners. So, Jesus told these parables to show exactly how God feels about sinners.

1. Based on the parable how do you think God the Father feels about you?
2. The lost son cared more about what the father could give him than the father himself. In what ways do we care more about what the Father can give than the Father himself?
3. A call towards repentance or a movement toward a sacred assembly is a bold reminder of being a sinner, how does that make you feel? What are the voices in your head saying?
4. One author writes, "Sin hunts in the dark", sin moves us towards isolation. Thinking about that, what strategy does sin have? How can you mitigate sin's strategy?
5. Again, reflecting on the parable, the lost son's motive in returning to the father is self-serving, but the father doesn't care about his motive, only his presence. Seems like the lost son gets restored, forgiven without remorse – what do you think about that?
6. After the father's embrace his next action is to restore the son's identity and position in the family. Your identity significantly impacts the quality of your life. Your temporal identity is that of sinner, your eternal identity (includes now) is that of loved, accepted child of the Father. Describe how you think about yourself, and how that directly impacts your day.

Take away practice for this week:

The way forward is about movement toward the Father and one another, down a path towards repentance. Pastor said - If we're holding back, not motivated, it's most likely because we don't believe the Father is compellingly beautiful, joyous, wanting us to join his party. With a close friend describe your view of the Father, how do you imagine Him? Discuss how your perception impacts your motivation?

Closing Prayer:

From Richard Baxter (1615 - 1691)

Loving God, breathe into our hearts and minds at this time your loving and guiding word. Inspire us by your Spirit, that we may hear, and later do, what you would have us hear and do. Lift us up by your still small voice within and grant us the blessing we need and we seek. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.