

If I Could Tell You Just One Thing... Don't Be a Pharisee!

Message 5 of 7 in the series: "If I Could Tell You Just One Thing"

Introduction:

- What is a Pharisee? A Pharisee was a member of a Jewish religious group known for strict adherence to the Law of Moses and to oral traditions. The Pharisees were influential in Jewish society during the time of Jesus and the early church. While many were sincere in their devotion, Jesus often rebuked them for hypocrisy and spiritual pride.
- How do you become one? No one wakes up and decides they want to be a Pharisee. It's always accidental. It's like eating dinner at Denny's—no one planned to, but here we are.
- What did Jesus say about the Pharisees? He once called them a "brood of vipers" among other things. In Luke 15, Jesus taught three parables to the Pharisees: The Lost Sheep, The Lost Coin, and The Prodigal Son. The first two end with joy, and the last ends with resentment.

"Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" Luke 15:25-32 (ESV)

IMPORTANT: Jesus wasn't just inviting sinners in—He was calling Pharisees out.

1. Ritual vs Rhythm

Older Brother: Faithful in ritual, but out of rhythm with the Father's heart.

"...but he answered his father, 'Look, **these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command**, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.'" Luke 15:29 (ESV)

Father: God desires not just obedience, but intimacy and alignment with His joy.

Rhythm: Worship, Groups, Conversations, Eating, Serving, Celebrations, Recreation (We GET to!)

Ritual: Worship (What do we HAVE to do now?)

Life Application: When our hearts are aligned with the Father's heart, our actions become more of a rhythm than a ritual.

"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20 (ESV)

2. Reputation vs Reality

Older Brother: He was focused on how "righteous" he looked. However, he was filled with bitterness, pride, and comparison.

"But when **this son of yours** came, who has **devoured your property with prostitutes**, you killed the fattened calf for him" Luke 15:30 (ESV)

Father's Reality: He actually had two lost sons. One ran away in rebellion, while the other was filled with resentment. He always loved each one and desired a relationship with them.

Life Application: God is loving and patient with both the rebellious and the "righteous".

"The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, **not wishing that any should perish**, but that **all should reach repentance**." 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

3. Religion vs Relationship

Older Brother: He only focused on how he performed and what he didn't have. He viewed himself as a servant—not a son.

Father: He had to remind the older brother that he was a son.

"...Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." Luke 15:31b (ESV)

Note: Heirs wear robes, not uniforms.

Life Application: Don't let religion blind you to the relationship available through grace.

“When your output exceeds your input, your upkeep becomes your downfall.” - Shane Segars

WARNING: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘**I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.**’” Matthew 7:21-23 (ESV)

4. Resources vs Rescue

Older Brother: He thought the younger brother should have to earn his way back—restitution for what he lost.

Father: He provides a robe, a ring, shoes, and a celebration—full reconciliation with no conditions!

“**It was fitting to celebrate and be glad**, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”
Luke 15:32 (ESV)

Jewish Culture: The Kezazah was a ceremony that a Jewish village would have in exactly this situation—someone had left home, rejected the community’s principles, lost all his or her possessions to the gentiles, and then returned. The villagers would break pottery at the feet of the individual, symbolizing that they were no longer in community with the returning person. They were breaking relations with him. It was a way of shaming the individual, of making him feel completely empty. Importantly, the ceremony would take place on the outskirts of the village before the individual could make his way back home.

IMPORTANT: Jesus came to redeem us, not to demand repayment.

“waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.” Titus 2:13-14 (ESV)

Life Application: The gospel isn’t about paying back—it’s about being brought back.

Conclusion:

Jesus left the story open-ended. Will the older brother come inside?

The same invitation is extended today—to come join the celebration, not stand in condemnation.

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