

## *“Examine Yourself”*

If you have your Bibles, go with me to the book of Luke chapter 15. I want to dive right into the Scripture this morning. If you are not familiar with Luke 15, it is three separate stories told by Jesus all making one big point. The story of the prodigal son is really a story about two sons. A farmer had two sons, and the younger one came to his father and basically said, “Father you are taking too long to die, I want my inheritance now.” He took that inheritance, spent it in Las Vegas and found himself homeless and without any hope. He came to his senses and returned to his father. The father welcomed him with grace, mercy, and unconditional love. This story is famous for the account of the prodigal son, but I think there is a more powerful story in the elder brother. Let’s pick up in the story in verse 25 of Luke 15:

*25 “Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. 27 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.’ 28 But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. 29 But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; 30 but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’ 31 And he said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live and was lost and has been found.’” – Luke 15:25-32 NASB1995*

Remember that this parable Jesus told was to help us understand the love of God the Father. There were so many things the brother did that were dangerous and wrong. The first is that he was works based. He believed he was the better son because he always obeyed his father. Some Christians believe that is they are good enough; they will get into heaven and receive more blessings based on their good works. **Ephesians 2** tells us that salvation has nothing to do with works but is based solely on the finished work and grace of Jesus. The next thing the elder brother did that was wrong was that he was positionally in the wrong place. The elder brother should have been in the house with the father and the family but instead was in the field with the workers. He consulted with the workers and went to them with his troubles rather than his father. Sometimes in our walk we go to other people rather than the Lord in prayer. Finally, the elder brother could see the fault in others but not in himself. He said to his father, “This *son* of yours has returned.” But notice that the father corrected the elder brother and said, “This *brother* of yours was lost and is now found.”

Today I want to talk to you for a few moments on the subject of “examining your heart.” The Christian life is not about being the elder brother where we obey all the rules and think that by being a good person we will earn favor with God. The true Christian life is about unrestricted fellowship with the Father in Heaven. Checking in on what’s going on in your heart and bringing it to the Lord is a powerful practice we can do as believers. At the end of this month, I am going in for my annual physical. My doctor is so good because I have to go and see her if I want my prescription refilled and she will always say, “Well since you’re here, we are gonna do a full

physical and blood work.” She doesn’t even ask my permission. I like that because I probably wouldn’t schedule a physical on my own. Blood work is so awesome. I remember a year and a half ago or so I drove to Tyler to help my parents move from Whitehouse to Tyler. I was so fatigued and exhausted, I had to take a break almost every 15 minutes. I thought to myself, “What is going on? Why am I so weak all of a sudden?” Meanwhile, my dad was running circles around me. He was even doing pushups at the end of the move. Well, when I went in for my physical that year, I discovered I was dangerously low on vitamin D. The doctor put me on a prescription for the vitamin and I have been doing so much better. I love reviewing my bloodwork. It gives me a real idea of what’s going on and I love the challenge. When I get blood work at the end of this month, I am hoping my numbers are all better. I’ve worked hard to be healthier and rest more. Now, all that is for a body that will one day waste away. How much more should we be evaluating our hearts that will go on to eternity?

Getting blood work done does one powerful thing. It lets me know of things *before* they become serious issues...just like the low vitamin D. I walk in the blood of Christ, so I don’t fear sickness or disease. I claim divine healing in the name of Jesus. However, I am very motivated to get bloodwork done because I never want to get caught off guard with something that will cost me. Our healthcare system is a joke and Americans get robbed. Getting sick means massive debt. So, I work hard to live healthy and avoid ever having to go to the doctor.

My prayer today is to help us discover how we can do a “checkup” not on our bodies but on our soul. You may discover today that you are walking around with something you didn’t know you had. I heard of a pastor who has battled asthma all his life. Sometimes when the season changes or the temperature changes drastically he will struggle and often get sinus infections. He was getting worse one year and went in to see the doctor. They did a scan on his lungs and the doctor said, “You don’t have a sinus infection. You have walking pneumonia.” The pastor said, “What’s that?” The doctor said, “It’s the same thing as pneumonia but without all the external symptoms.” So, he was walking around sick, without realizing he was sick.” Sometimes Christians can walk around sick without realizing we are sick. Sometimes we fall into sin, pride, fear, and other things that hinder our relationship with the Lord and give the enemy a foothold.

There are two big dangers we will fall into if we do not examine ourselves. The first is that we will walk around with something we were never meant to carry. The second thing is that we will become judgmental finding all the faults in others and none of our own. So, today I want to help us understand how we can examine our hearts and realign ourselves with our true identity and walk in the will of God.

The scholar Alan Redpath said this about examining ourselves:

***“Self-examination takes the chill away from your soul, it takes the hardness away from your heart, it takes the shadows away from your life, it sets the prisoner free.”***

I want to give you some practical encouragement so if you are taking notes, please fill out point number one:

**POINT #1 – Go to the Lord in prayer.**

I heard a story from a pastor at a larger church. Every year they would do a staff fun day. They would bring in catered food, have awards, and play different games like “office capture the flag.” The competition got really severe so there were some rules put into place. One of the rules was that you could not start any capture the flag games before 8am. On one of these competition days, the senior pastor got into his office early at 7am to have an hour of study before the games began. What he didn’t know was that another pastor on staff had been hiding in his office closet since 4am. The pastor heard something in the closet and realized what was going on. The pastor then took a chair and propped it up against the doorknob to trap the staff member in. But here’s the thing, the chair was too short. The chair did not work at preventing the door from opening but the staff member didn’t know this. The staff member cried out, “You’re not trapping me in here, are you?!” To which the senior pastor said, “Yes, I am. I’m gonna leave you in here all day until these games are over.” Later that day the pastor comes back to his office to see the staff member coming down out of the ceiling. He never tried to open the door. Step one is to call the bluff. This staff member went through unnecessary suffering because he didn’t do the simple thing to check the door first.

This is exactly how we get into trouble in our lives. Rather than going to the Creator of the Universe in prayer first, we try all other methods. I don’t like that phrase, “All we can do now is pray.” Prayer should be a first priority not a last resort. Think about how many situations we could have avoided if we simply prayed first. The psalms in chapter 139 says it perfectly:

***Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; 24 And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.  
– Psalm 139:23-24 NASB1995***

If you want to examine your life and see if you are in alignment with the will of God, the first thing is to consult the Lord. Go to God in prayer first. Ask Him to reveal the blind spots in your life and give you revelation to walk in faith.

**POINT #2 – Find the lie you chose to Believe.**

Unfortunately, even Christians tell little white lies. We are all guilty. We have all called into work sick, when we weren’t sick. We have all told our kids at one point “I’ll think about it” when there was no thinking and our mind was already made up. Some of us have told even bigger lies. The fact is that all of us deal with sin and sometimes we keep those sins a secret. So, if you were to ask yourself the question “who have I lied to the most in my life” the answer should be *you*. We lie to ourselves every day. We say things like, “I’ll do it tomorrow, it’s not a big deal, I can stop anytime I want, or I’m fine” Look what the Apostle Paul told the Galatians about lies:

***7 You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth? 8 This persuasion did not come from Him who calls you. 9 A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. 10 I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is. – Galatians 5:7-9 NASB1995***

There is a college in northern California that had a unique way of putting in walkways when the college was first built. Rather than laying out sidewalks with logic and in straight lines, the construction crew planted grass and nothing else. They waited until the first semester of classes began and let people walk around on the grass until they created dirt pathways. Then the construction crew came back and laid sidewalks over the dirt walkways. **2 Corinthians 10:4-5** tells us that our weapons are not of the world but divinely powerful to pull down strongholds. Strongholds are lies that you have believed and meditate on. Strongholds are the dirt pathways in your mind. Part of renewing your mind and examining your life is allowing the Lord to reveal the dirt pathways in your mind so that you can repent of them and renew them with truth found in the Word of God. In Luke 4, Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. The devil twisted Scripture to try to get Jesus to bow to his desire. Three times Jesus fought back with the Word of God and finally commanding the devil to go. It should be no different for you and I. Each time the devil attempts to lie to us, we must fight back with the truth, the Word of God and command him to leave. James 4 *promises* us that if we resist the devil he will flee from us. The problem is that we entertain rather than resist.

**POINT #3 – Don’t look for sin, look for Jesus in your heart.**

When we look at the topic of examining yourself the first thing we often think about is “what sin am I harboring in my heart?” It is not bad to look at what sin is in your heart so you can deal with it, but when I talk about examining yourself it is more along the lines of seeing where your faith is in action. Paul tells us very specifically in 2 Corinthians 13:5:

***Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?  
– 1 Corinthians 13:5 NASB1995***

The two words in the beginning of this verse that we need to look at are “test” and “examine.” They are two different words in the Greek. “Test” is along the lines of tempting. This type of test shows what negative aspects come out of you. The word “examine” is a proving type of test and shows the positive sides.

We have to be careful with this verse because some denominations use it as relating to salvation. This verse has nothing to do with your position in Christ but has everything to do with your ongoing sanctification. Paul confirms here that Christ is in you. He is writing here to the Christians at Corinth. What he is saying is that *since* Christ is in you, you should have proof of that coming from your heart. You should have bold faith, evidence of the fruit of the Spirit, and compassion. We examine ourselves to see if those attributes are present.

So how do you test yourself? First you can see how you respond to God’s command. If you are at the store and feel a tugging on your heart to go talk to a stranger about the Gospel, what is your first reaction? Is it paralyzing fear? Is it excitement? Is it a strong motivation to want to please God? If it is fear, then you have just proven that there is fear in your heart that needs to be dealt with. What comes out of your heart when God opportunities arise? What happens when someone does or says something to you that is offensive? Is the response compassion or is it a spirit of

offense? If you lack compassion, patience, love, etc. use those findings in your prayer and study time with the Lord so that you find revelation that brings transformation.

Let me close with this. This testimony proves the power of examining ourselves so that we are the best representation of Christ in this dark world. Last Sunday a friend of mine from ten years ago was in town. He and his new wife are a part of an awesome healing ministry, and they were doing a conference here in Dallas. I don't think I had talked to this friend since I was in California, so we had a lot of catching up to do. We went out to lunch and after we placed our order I said, "Man we haven't talked in like 10 years, tell me your whole story since we last talked, ready, go! They laughed but did fill me in on the whole story. At one point he says, "Ya when I met my wife, she was actually a witch." Then they kept on talking as if they didn't just say "witch." So, I waited for a moment to interrupt and said, "Hold on, I know the power of Jesus to save someone from witchcraft, but what I want to know is what led you *to* witchcraft?" She told me that she grew up in a religious household and attended a Christian elementary school. She was naturally nerdy and into a gothic type of look. All the Christian kids teased her and called her a witch. So, when she became an adult, it was like a self-fulfilling prophecy. All the encounters with Christians up until that point were negative and hurtful. Then she meets her husband who was a devoted Christian. She finds out he is a Christian and is immediately discouraged. She liked the guy but hated what he stood for. They ended up talking until 4 in the morning. He had mentioned the spiritual realm and the unseen aspects of Christianity. She had no idea that Christians could even talk that way. She told me, "People lost in the occult are sincere at seeking the spiritual world for answers. Unfortunately, they are often met with the wrong kind of Christians." When she was met with unconditional love by her husband and his pastor, she gave her life to the Lord, was baptized 4 months later and is now serving the Lord in full time ministry with her husband.

Now imagine with me, what if her husband didn't examine himself and did not give off the unconditional, compassionate love of Jesus? What if my friend was another judgmental Christian. Examining ourselves is not just about making our lives better. It is also so that we can let our light so shine before men that they see our good works and glorify the Father in heaven. Today as we close, I want to invite Andrew back up and I asked if he would lead us in "Wash me" again. I want to give you an opportunity to respond to this message by seeking God right now in worship and prayer. Pray that He would illuminate areas of your heart that you may be lacking. Ask Him to bring revelation so that you look more like Jesus in this dark world.