

**Christ's Light / Shadow Side**  
**Lord's Prayer: Rooted and Grounded in Love**  
**Luke 15:11-32**

I want to continue our conversation on the False Self, or the Shadow Side this morning.

**So here's what I am going to do.**

**As I read this story I would like you to identify where each character has found their identity.**

**Younger brother & older brother'.**

**Half of church look for identity issues of the younger brother...**

**The other half look for identity issues of the older brother.**

**Luke 15 :11-32**

So how might the younger brother have thought of himself? In his rebellion, not in his coming back to the Father.

What might be his identity?

What might his friends and family have wanted to label him?

- Slacker
- Wanna-be
- party animal
- popular

- rich
- Loser
- Poor
- Forgotten
- Disconnected
- Lost
- Sinner
- Black Sheep

Here's a boy who exemplifies the false self; so does the older brother but his issues are vastly different.

As **Basil Pennington** observes, unhappiness is always a result of not being to do something I want to do, have something I want to have, or concern about what others think of me."

The younger brother identified what he thought was the core of his unhappiness and asked his father for his inheritance and went out to satisfy his every pleasure and want.

This is the core of the false self, placing my value in what I have, what I can do, and what others think of me.

**But the younger brother isn't the only one who's identity was a mess.**

**How about the older brother?**

What might be his identity?

What might his friends and family have wanted to label him?

- Hard worker
- Perfect one
- Obedient one
- Good boy
- Slave
- Servant

**Q: How many of you identify with the younger brother?**

You perhaps grew up with this belief about yourself.

You were the black sheep of the family. The outcast. The one who pushed the limits and boundaries.

Thing about find your identity as the black sheep in the family, even if you want to change, everyone will try to put you back into that role.

Most families need a black sheep, someone they can point fingers at so they don't have to look at their own crap.

**Q: How many identify with the older brother?**

You perhaps were the older child and you grew up with the responsibility on your shoulders to be the responsible one?

You were the good boy. The good girl. Polite. Well mannered. Unobtrusive.

Did what you were told.  
Worked hard.

Did it right the first time.  
Straight A's

Just like the older brother finding his identity as the Black Sheep, and how difficult it is to shed that skin, the older brother could easily find his identity as the good boy.

What do you think the danger would be to own the identity as a Good Boy?

**What's the danger in that?**

- no longer see your need for God's grace
- "I can do it" mentality
- Self made person
- Not aware of shadow side
- Excentuate the need to hide the dark parts of self
- Can't let people close; they might see the warts
- Lonely
- Not known by others
- Be tiring; have to keep up the image in order for people to like you
- Chasing people's affirmation all the time

That's the thing about the false self; you get attached to these things. The false sense of life this provides, to the point where you wonder how you might ever go on without it.

**But this story is talking about more than just our relationships with one another, it's talking about our relationship with God.**

**But they're connected aren't they? Doesn't this tell us**

## something about how we relate to God?

### Story: David Benner's story to illustrate this.

"The root of my false self was the childhood discovery that by being a good boy I could earn love. Of course, learning how to interpret good took some time. A false self is never established overnight. However, over time the interaction of the dynamics of my family and my personality suggested ways of wrapping my naked and vulnerable self with successive layers of accomplishment to secure love.

The problem was that these strategies worked. The more I accomplished, the more people seemed to like me. Consequently I became better and better at being a little performing boy that I thought people would like. This gave me some distance from the abyss of feeling like a nobody. Even more important, it gave me a way of being not just a somebody, but somebody special. Tragically however, it kept me from discovering just how likeable I was without any effort to look good. And it set me up on a treadmill of performance.

Securing love by generating accomplishments leaves one dependant on the potentially fickle response of others.

My longstanding investment in being respected has been an attempt to control my environment and guarantee the sense of specialness to which I have become addicted. The bondage in any false self is the bondage of having to keep up the illusion. I am not simply an overachieving good boy. I am not my own accomplishments. The things I can do or have done do not make me special.

My compulsive pursuit of accomplishments and the respect of people who are important to me suffocates the life of my true self. It binds and inhibits my growth and restricts my freedom. You've heard it said before. I am a human being, not a human doing. My worth lies in who I am, not in what I can do or how I am seen by others."

### Personal: My own false self.

In my own pain as a young man I hid my pain not behind a suit of armour but a suit of muscle. By the time I got to Bible College I was well armoured. Unbeknowst to me people found me intimidating. That's what they saw. That's how they experienced me. But once they got to see my heart their view of me changed. They began to see a glimpse of my true self.

**TS:** Interesting that in the prodigal son story the older brother only knows His father as his hired servant.

"All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to do."

All he knew was his works.

He saw his father as his owner, his boss, but not his father.

The younger son's choices to squander his inheritance and leave his father's side was very much a falling out of intimacy.

But so was the older son. One has to wonder if he ever knew his father's love at all.

His identity was an obedient, good little boy, but not the son of the father.

Servant yes, but not beloved son.

We see here that his false self as the good boy kept him from experiencing true intimacy and love in his relationship with his father.

Scripture tells us that the older son refused to go in.

Such a stark image. The father beckoning him to come in; come in, share the intimacy we share, the child of the father...but he refused to go in.

I am convinced that our false self keep us from so much love. Love from one another...and love from the Father.

**TS:** I wonder if you have ever thought about what might be your false self? Do you know your shadow side? Did you know you even had one?

This is what the Light of Christ came to dispel. Shine His Light in our hearts. Expose our deep need in Him...dispel our darkness.

I've been giving this a lot of thought over the years; especially lately as Kenda and I are going through something called Soul Formation.

We are reading some great books...

### **Sacred Rhythms and Gift of Being Yourself by David Benner.**

My old Youth Pastor Morris Dirks wrote this book I'm into now called Forming the Leader's Soul: An invitation to Spiritual Direction.

Good read.

In it he talks about the shadow side of full time ministry where we as pastors can have unhealthy attachments like ...

- The Need to Be Liked and Working Hard to Keep Others Happy.
- The Need to Succeed – working hard to win others' approval.
- The Need for Perfection – working hard to make things right. To fix.

**I can see a lot of myself in the last one.**

**I grew up in a home environment where I felt it was up to me to fix, or to counsel my parents.**

**That's where I learned to listen, to counsel. In my home.**

**Early on in my dating life I dated girls who needed fixing. And I thought I could do it.**

**I'll never forget the first time God began putting his finger on this area in my life.**

**It felt like God was giving me a crushing blow.**

**My identity was found in this role**

**My role as fixer was an unhealthy attachment. It gave me a false sense of life, but was robbing me of a true sense of life found only in Christ.**

**But this isn't just the issues of a pastor. We all have a shadow side.**

**What might be your shadow side, where Jesus wants to shine his light?**

**By God's grace we begin to become aware of our false self. He often uses people and circumstances to uncover..poke holes...shine a light.**

For the younger brother it was perhaps growing up in a wealthy family. With an older brother that does everything right. For the older brother it was the return of his younger brother.

Maybe you're having a difficult time making connections to what this might look like in your own life.

**Here's some examples of how you might detect your own false self.**

**David Benner says, "Pettness and touchiness is the most stable characteristics."**

The things that bother us the most about others – our pet peeves – also point to the falsity in our own self.

"The speck that bothers me in the life of someone else is almost always the log in my own eye."

**David Benner gives a comical example but so right on.**

The writer gives an example of the fact he dislikes it when people call him Dave. To the point where he corrects people who call him by that name.

He likes "David."

He would tell himself, what's the big deal. Get over it. Why am I making such a big deal out of this?

But no matter how hard he would try, it would bother him.

The answer points back to the core of his false belief.

David fits better with the image of seriousness he wants to project.

He wanted to be known as one of those "Important People."

Dave seemed too common and ordinary – he wanted to be known for importance.

His false self wanted to be important and unique and smart.

Helps us better understand the Pharisees doesn't it?

How easy it would have been for them to find their identity in their brilliance, their smartness, their importance, their roles as the spiritual guides of Isreal.

**This text is meant to be a mirror for you and for me isn't it?**

**I can see a little of myself in the older and younger brother.**

**So how do you recognize your own false self?**

**Here are some examples:**

- Defensiveness. The more prickly a person is, the more likely they are investing in the defense of the false self.
- Maybe they bristle really easy when they're not taken seriously, thus betraying a need for others to see the self-importance that is obvious to them.
- Some take themselves too seriously, perhaps being unable to laugh at themselves.

These are outward displays of annoyance, but some just struggle with inner annoyances.

These inner irritations, that come out when we're tired and hungry, and stressed, can reveal the presence of the false self..

- If laziness in others is what really bothers me, there's a good chance that discipline and performance form a core part of the false self that I embrace.
- If it's playfulness and spontaneity in others I find most annoying, then seriousness may be the central part of the self I protect and seek to project.
- If it's moral disregard that is particularly irritating in others, my false self is probably built around moral rectitude and self-righteousness.

- If emotionality in others is what I despise the most, emotional control is probably central to the script I have chosen.

Perfection may be desirable if welcomed as God's work in us, but not as an outcome of relentless effort people tend to expend to produce it.

Being OCD is often tied to this unhealthy perfectionism.

Some hear this list and say, I'm all good. I don't relate to any of these. I've got this love thing down pat.

Then maybe you relate to this..

- Love is certainly also unquestionably good, but the compulsive effort to always be loving that characterizes others reflects denial of their humanity and always comes at the expense of being authentic.

We ant to be a church that is known by love, a church that lives by faith and a voice of hope...

But as soon as we are no longer able to speak the hard word, or ruffle feathers if we need to, then we've fallen prey to this in unhealthy ways.

**So what's the answer to our false self?**

The answer is found in the same place the younger son found his true self.

Relationship with the Father.

It's where the younger brother found his true self wasn't it?

Scripture says he finally came to his senses and said to himself...

"I will go home to my father..."

That's where each of us find our true identity isn't it?

Most amazing thing is in this text is that he rehearses what he's going to say ..

"Father I have sinned against both heaven and you... (Good true statement)

"I am no longer worthy of being called your son" – admitting the consequences of his choices

"And to please take me on as a hired servant."

So he approaches his home and scripture says the father sees him while he is a long way off...his father is filled with love and compassion and comes running to him...

He embraced him and kissed him...and calls him son.

Profound that the father lets him go through his rehearsed speech.

I have sinned against you...

I am no longer worthy...

But the father doesn't let him say that he will be nothing more than a hired servant.

He reinstates him and calls him son.

Such a picture of intimacy.

That our identity is found in Him. We discover who we are in Him.

This is what it means to embrace our false self.

Not hide. Pretend...but confess.

Come to the Father as you are.

Hard to do isn't it...we want to bypass this part.

It's hard to embrace the false self; come to terms with what we're hiding.

Yes Jesus calls us to nail our sin to the cross...

That is an important last step, but not the first step.

Nail it to the cross. Carry it no more.

But I wonder if we're bypassing something critical in the process. I wonder if Jesus wants to meet us at the cross and invites us to stay a while.

What it means to embrace our false self. Our shadow side.

**David Benner** says, “Coming out of hiding requires that we embrace the vulnerabilities that sent us scurrying for cover. As long as we pretend that things are not as they are, we choose falsity. The first step towards the light is always a step towards honesty with our self. Coming out of hiding and stepping into the light is accepting God on God’s own terms. Doing so is the only route to truly being our unique self in Christ.”

Before we nail it to the cross, I think we’re called to take time to sit at the cross with Jesus.

All through scripture God is in the business of giving his children new names.

Abram to Abraham

Jacob to Israel.

Saul to Paul

Rev 2:17 says...and on that stone a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it.”

In Christ you have been given a new name.

What it means to grow in Christ is to embrace more and more who this true self is...hidden with Christ in God.

**Pray**

**Application:**

1. **First ask God to help you see what makes you feel most vulnerable and most like running for cover. It may be conflict, maybe failure or pain. Allow yourself to feel the distress and listen for God’s invitation to come out from the darkness – step out and let God embrace you as you are.**
2. **Second, prayerfully reflect on the image of yourself to which you are most attached. Consider how you like to think of yourself, what you’re most proud about yourself. Ask God to help you see the ways you use these things to defend against feelings of vulnerability. Ask God for help to let go of your personal style that might not be you.**