

“Beautifully Broken – Grace in Jealousy”

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By Rebecca Stacey

Fast forward, and this parable comes to life—through Jesus’ sacrifice, the price for our sins is paid in full. Our jealous Father has won the battle. Grace is all that remains. Like the prodigal, we need only to turn home and receive His embrace. *Nothing is blocking the path home.*

This is grace— it’s not about fairness, but the outcome of God’s relentless love. A love that gives, not takes. He doesn’t ask us to prove our love; He proves His first. It’s a love no fairy tale can capture—it’s not earned, not magical—just pure, undeserved grace.

The father’s response to the older son is worth a closer look. He tells him, *“Everything I have has always been yours.”* The older son was so focused on what his brother was receiving that he didn’t consider what he already had. *Grace is a gift. It can’t be and shouldn’t be measured in fairness.*

It’s Not About Earning—It’s about accepting and then aligning Our Hearts with God’s. If we believe this, then we should be able to grow through the characters in this story. By grace, we have come to faith and turned home like the younger son. By grace, we’ve grown in our faith, but in our humanness, we stumble, like the older brother, jealous of wayward siblings and confused by God’s patience or timeline.

By grace, you’re invited to be the right kind of jealous — longing for a relationship with God above all else. And when that longing takes root, you’ll find yourself lovingly jealous for the salvation of others.

When our hearts are shaped by grace,

we begin to let go of scorekeeping, embrace grace freely, and truly celebrate when someone finds their way home.

Because the truth is—life is hard. People are hurting. We all fall short, even when our intentions are good. But when we ask, Jesus meets us in our brokenness... and He always brings grace.

The story ends with a celebration and a declaration. “My son was lost but now is found.” The Father loved His son with all His heart. He had given him everything—not out of obligation, but from a deep desire for relationship. And when the chance for reconnection finally came, the Father—jealous for that long-awaited embrace—ran to meet him. No roadblocks. No hesitation. Just a grace-filled path home.

This is the heart of the Father. He rejoices when His children come home. And the invitation exists for us.

Where are you standing on the journey? Maybe today, you feel far from home. Maybe you relate to the younger son—wondering if you’re too far gone, if God could really welcome you back. I believe **He is standing in the laneway waiting. He’s so jealous for you, that He has removed all the obstacles, letting Jesus pay the price for you.** Or maybe, like the older brother, you feel grace is unfair. If so, I encourage you to ask God to align your heart with His. **Because grace is not about fairness—it’s about unconditional love.**

That’s the beauty of grace—it’s not earned and it’s not fair. But it’s all we need. And with our God, there’s **always enough.**

Stories have long been told to teach lessons, and often, jealousy plays the villain. From Shakespeare to Disney, stories about jealous royals and their rivals end with moral insight—warning us of envy’s power to destroy.

Think Snow White and her envious stepmother—Sleeping Beauty and a resentful Maleficent, outraged at not being asked to the party. More recent storylines, such as The Lion King portray a bitter uncle/brother, resulting in death and betrayal.

With enough reflection, we can find a “jealousy” plot in almost every story. We attempt to educate and nurture jealousy out of those under our influence with phrases like:

- Comparison is the thief of joy.
- A flower does not compete with the flower next to it. It just blooms.
- Not everything that glitters is gold.
- Envy is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to suffer.
- Chasing someone else’s life will make you lose your own.

Reflecting on my parenting journey, I can say that “jealousy” is one of the first “sinful” behaviours we encountered. The baby is jealous of mommy’s attention elsewhere. The toddler is jealous of a toy being used by someone else.

It doesn’t end as we grow. School-age children are jealous of a friend’s turn or a sibling’s privilege. Teenagers are jealous of a peer’s success, stuff, or freedom. And adults, we’re just as jealous, aren’t we? Jealous of a coworker’s promotion or a friend’s comfortable life stage.

Keeping up with the Jones’ is a real thing – made even more challenging as we shamelessly flaunt filtered versions of our lives on social media. At every stage of life, jealousy reveals our deep longing for something we think we don’t have; an object, wealth, title...love, equality, fairness, belonging.

The Bible is also full of stories marked by jealousy. Even God’s first family was shattered when jealous Cain murdered his brother Abel – envious of Abel’s favour with God.

We seem to be born jealous. But what is jealousy? With a quick Google search, I confirmed that: *“Jealousy or envy is a feeling (or emotion) people get when they want what others have ... Jealousy is caused by lacking self-confidence and judging your abilities. Jealousy is not reasonable.”*

Hmmm. Jealousy is not reasonable. Let’s remember that.

In our scripture reading this morning, Jesus begins His parable by describing, “A man [that] had two sons.” The story isn’t about the younger or the older son, but about both sons.

It’s easy to focus on the younger son — after all the story is often called the Prodigal Son. He’s the one who ran away, squandered his inheritance, reached rock bottom and eventually realized that he could return home. This younger son was jealous, envious of the world beyond home. He was desperate to experience a different life. He didn’t care about his dad’s feelings or the impact his choice

would have on his brother. In his mind, it was reasonable to enjoy wealth and privilege in his youth.

The story of the prodigal son is a welcome parable for those who are discerning or are new to their faith. It doesn't matter how far we've strayed! That young man likely broke every 'thou shalt not' on his journey. **Jesus teaches that grace is real—that no matter how far we've strayed, we are welcomed back when we turn toward God.**

But what about the older brother? His story is also lined with jealousy, although he seems somewhat more reasonable, perhaps a little more justified. If we're honest, especially once we've come to faith, many of us start to relate more to the older brother. It's easy to shake our heads at the younger brother—reckless, wasteful, selfish.

The older brother was faithful, dutiful... and bitter! He was jealous of his brother's carefree life. He envied that his little brother didn't work as hard as he did. He begrudged the adventure and even more so the return that was met with open and forgiving arms. **By all accounts, it wasn't fair.**

The older brother was the responsible one. The one who stayed, not strayed. He followed the rules! He was hard-working. And when his younger brother comes home and is met with a feast – the older brother is resentful and jealous. He stands outside, arms crossed, refusing to join the celebration. "It's not fair," he protests. "I've been faithful. I've worked hard. And yet, I never got a party like this."

That phrase—"It's not fair." It's the

slogan for jealousy - isn't it?

Have you ever whispered those words? *God, I serve you, so why do bad things keep happening to me? Why do good people suffer while others who make terrible choices seem to get rewarded? It's not fair.*

Jesus knew we would be perplexed by the Father's grace in this story. It doesn't make sense to us. It doesn't sit comfortably with us. The unprecedented welcome that the rebellious son received would have also shocked Jesus' audience!

The prodigal son had messed up so badly. You can't behave that way, and then go home, can you? Imagine the scene. Put yourself in the shoes of that young man travelling home. He was returning from a life in ruins. He'd been walking a long time, and his speech was likely well-rehearsed. How could he have been so foolish? He'd lost it all. He had nothing left to offer. His stories would mortify his family. He was broken and completely out of options. He was hoping for, at best, to live as a servant.

He's scuffling along, head low, rehearsing. Then, before he can even get the carefully rehearsed speech out, *to beg for servant status*, his father embraces him and welcomes him home. There was no confrontation. No accusations or demands for an account of the money. He was met with a welcome embrace, a robe, a ring, and a feast – his place in the family restored.

This is grace – receiving much more than we deserve. You see, this story tells of God's jealousy for us. That's right – jealousy.

There are at least 35 references in the Bible describing God as jealous. Encountering this description of God throughout the Old Testament has challenged many and caused some to turn away from faith altogether. How can the loving Father Jesus describes, be the same jealous God we read about in Old Testament?

- Exodus 34:14 "Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."
- Deuteronomy 32:16 "They made him jealous with their foreign gods and angered him with their detestable idols."
- Zechariah 8:2 "This is what the Lord Almighty says: I am very jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her."

When we try to apply how we experience jealousy to a description of God's character, it doesn't fit. But in Scripture, God's jealousy isn't petty—it's passionate. It doesn't mean He's envious of what we have — it means **He's fiercely protective of the relationship we were created for.**

God has a long-view game plan. He is patient and has persisted through every rebellion we've thrown at Him, fuelled by His jealousy to win us back for eternity.

Human jealousy is selfish, insecure, and resentful. When we're jealous, we are tempted to take from others. **Conversely, God takes action.** God's jealousy resulted in self-sacrifice. God's jealousy is protective, loving, and rooted in His deep desire for an *exclusive* relationship with His people—one that is so important to Him that He was willing to suffer and

sacrifice to make it possible. He loves us, even at great cost to Himself. The ultimate expression of this love is Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Rather than destroying His rivals (false gods, idols, and sin), He lays down His own life to win back His people.

Let's step back to our scripture reading for a moment. On the day that Jesus told the parable of the Prodigal Son, **"...tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the Teachers muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." Luke 15:1-2**

You can picture it, right? The "sinners" gathered close, and the Pharisees lurking in the back. The tension between these two groups is what makes the parable so powerful. The tax collectors and sinners, the average people, would likely have identified with the younger son—lost, broken, but welcomed home by the father's grace.

The Pharisees, on the other hand, at least those who were truly listening, would have noted that Jesus was comparing them to the older brother—obedient (following the laws) yet resentful of the grace given to the "undeserving."

By telling this parable, Jesus is speaking to both groups: offering hope to sinners while confronting the self-righteous with their hardness of heart.

Through the story of the prodigal son, Jesus also introduces His entire audience to the grace-filled side of God that they may not have recognized or have seen before.