





## **DISCUSS**

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Read Luke 15:25–32.

The older brother was a hard worker. He even thought of himself as a slave to his father. Yet he feels like he has not been appreciated for all of his hard work. **Have you ever felt like God has treated you unfairly? How so?**

In verses 28–30, the older brother says that his father was not just unfair, he was wrong. The older son felt that his father had sinned against him and did not love him.

**What evidence did the older brother use as proof of being unfairly treated?**

The older brother shows no signs that he is excited for his brother's return. Instead, he is consumed with jealousy. Go back to Luke 15:24. **Why was the father excited for the son's return? In what ways does the older brother's anger keep him from celebrating this with his family?**

He could have enjoyed the feast. He could have greeted his brother. He could have celebrated with his father. But the older brother could not get beyond his own pride.

**How does pride keep us from enjoying God's blessings?**

The older brother's pride turned him into a jealous and uncaring person. His pride relationally separated him from both his father and his brother. **In what ways can pride damage relationships in the church?**

Many Christians struggle with the lie that says their hard work earns them favor with God. But this religious pride damages our relationships with God and with other Christians. When we focus on the goodness of our own works, we forget the greatness of God's. When we think that we have earned God's love, we become jealous and upset with Christians who, in our eyes, haven't earned that same favor. **What can you do to protect yourself against religious pride?**

**Note:** To learn more about the God's covenant of love, see Go Deeper section 1 at the end of this study.

While it is important to know that our good behavior does not earn us God's love, it is equally important to know that our prideful and entitled behavior doesn't make God love us any less. Look at how the father responds to his son's



## **GO DEEPER**

The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where the following segment could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use this section as a short devotional to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

### **1. God's Covenant of Love**

It can be difficult for Christians who battle legalism to understand that God's promises to us are based in his love, not our performance. Even though we have received God's grace, we can still think that our work earns his love and our lack of effort causes God to love us less.

Our work has earned us something, though. Read Romans 3:23. **What have our actions earned us?**

The only thing we have rightfully earned is the penalty for our sin. God has given us his Son, a gift we have neither deserved nor earned, as a clear expression of his love. But even Christians who are completely forgiven and completely loved by God still sin. Read the following verses and note how God behaves when his people fail: Hosea 11:7–9; Malachi 3:6–7; 2 Timothy 2:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24.

**How does God treat his people when they sin? What stands out to you most about God's love in these verses?**

**In what ways has God demonstrated his ongoing love for you when you've sinned?**

Legalism tells us two things: 1) the only way for us to be forgiven and loved by God after we sin is to do better, and 2) the only way to overcome our sin is to try harder. **If you struggle with legalism, how have these lies shaped the way you view God? How have they shaped the way you view yourself?**

God is our loving Father, and nothing we do can make him love us any less. Likewise, no effort can make him love us more. He loves us fully and completely right now.

**What can you do to rest from your effort and trust in  
God's love for you this week?**

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