

REPS
DAY FIVE
**A GOOD,
GRACEFUL
GOD**

READ

LUKE 15:11-32

EPHESIANS 1:15-
2:10

REFLECT

Grace doesn't make sense. We live in a world that says you reap what you sow. If you show up to practice, play by the rules, pay your dues, stay loyal to your team, and put in the work, you earn your spot in the lineup. Success and belonging are determined by your own effort and will to perform within the system. Conversely, laziness, arrogance, disloyalty, and unreliability are traits that usually lead to exclusion. Can you imagine if players on your team or in your sport exhibited these undesirable traits and were still allowed to compete? What would you think of the coach who allowed such a thing to happen? Of course, you'd probably start by thinking that they didn't care about winning. Additionally, you might feel resentful if you were one of the ones who did everything right – did all your hard work just not matter?

It's tempting to think that the life of faith operates in the same way that we've been conditioned to think about sports. It creates a simple binary: performance and piety equal worth and belonging while failure and sinfulness equal shame and rejection. The problem is that people aren't simple binaries. No matter how hard you work, at some point you will falter.

Jesus tells the story of a father and two sons. The younger son brazenly rejects the father while the older quietly remains obedient. When the younger son realizes his error and returns to repent, the father welcomes him lavishly and with open arms. When the older son sees this, he is angry and resentful. What would the neighbors think? Weren't the younger son's actions selfish and shameful? Doesn't the father care for the loyal older son too? Indeed, not much of this story made sense in Jesus' time, nor does it still to our modern sensibilities. But one of the many things we can glean from this story is that this father is unlike any other authority figure we have come to expect. Instead of using the younger son's laziness, arrogance, and disloyalty as reasons for exclusion, he takes on the shame of his son's errors in order to fully restore him. And lest the father be accused of being blatantly unfair, he pleads with his older son, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours." In other words, the older son could have had a party just like the younger, all he needed to do was ask. As it turns out, this story has less to do with the actions of the two sons and everything to do with the extravagant generosity and grace of the father. Both sons saw their dad as caring about them only for their performance and merit, but in reality, the father cared about them simply because he loved them.

In the same way that the father almost foolishly showers grace on his sons and loves them, so too does our Father in heaven shower grace on us. And he proves this through the gift of his son Jesus, who took on the shame of our sins on the cross. We don't have to try to understand it or work to earn it, it's just who God is. What a wondrous mystery!

RESPOND

So much of our mentality as athletes can bleed into how we see the world at large, especially regarding worth.

- In what ways have you aligned your way of life around a framework of merit rather than a framework of grace?

Merit certainly does have its... *ahem*... merits, but if it's the only game in town, then the world would be a brutally depressing and unforgiving place.

- Why might it be hard to see God as a good and loving father who gifts you grace?
- How might you also conform to God's image by being a vessel of love and grace to others, such as your teammates?