

There's no place like home. If you've ever traveled outside of your home country you know what I felt like when I returned home from China after staying for month abroad. While away I was pleased to find little glimpses of America, like Mc Donald's, Pizza Hut, Walmart and even Sam's Club in mainland China! Still, they were far different than the American version. Things in China just weren't the same. The people walked everywhere, ate different food, and spoke a different language and as fun as it was to visit, it felt nice to get back home. After my first visit, I literally kissed the ground upon my return.

The funny thing is, those who come here from China or other countries feel the same way when they return to their homeland. In our hearts we have a longing for home. That's why people indulge in comfort food. Many of us, after we have lived a while, start longing for the things we were raised on. We often have a desire to return to our roots. Whether it's a different nation, culture, or lifestyle, there is something within the heart that just keeps calling us back home.

I recently heard a story in China about two sons who went in search of their father. Their parents had given them up when they were little and they had a longing to discover their roots. This is reminiscent of another story in the Bible, however, in the biblical account, one son stayed home while the other one ran away by his own choice. The younger son asked for the money he would get when his father died, then took off "to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living," or what some might call 'the good life' (Luke 15:13).

While the older son stayed home to work for his father, the younger son wanted to enjoy life. He felt that his father's laws were too strict and took away his fun and wanted to live a little. He wanted to be himself and do his own thing without living under the restrictions of his father's rules. He felt like his father was overly religious and he just wanted to live a little. He wanted to get drunk, experiment with drugs, have sexual relationships. His father was too critical, not letting him cuss around the house or watch certain movies, listen to certain music, or play certain games. The rules were just too strict and he needed freedom. He wanted to sew his wild oats.

Of course, things started out great. I once spoke to a young man who told me he sold his soul to the devil. I told him that Jesus would still take him back and that he could have his soul back, but he replied, "Things are going good now. I'm having too much fun." There is no question that the road down sin is fun and full of pleasure. The Bible refers to "the passing pleasures of sin," but adds, "the way of the unfaithful is hard" (Heb. 11:25; Prov. 13:15). Sin brings pleasure, but robs you of your peace.

Wouldn't it be great if we didn't have to learn things the hard way and yet so many of us have to learn life lessons through pain. Ironically, some then shake their fist at God and cry out, "Why do you allow suffering," when this is often the only way He can get their attention. When things are going good, God is far from our thoughts. We are too wrapped up in the pleasure of sin to think about God, but the pleasures of sin dry up, as they did in the story. Like most of us, the younger son had to learn lessons the hard way.

We are told that "when he had spent all, there arose a severer famine in the land, and he began to be in want" (Luke 15:14). Just reading the words cannot accurately express the horrible situation the younger son was now in. While the pleasures of sin were fun for a while, the results were now wearing on him. The tragic thing about pleasure is that it always dries up, demanding us to continue chasing after it. It's like a drug. Many spend their lives in a continual pursuit of pleasure while real joy, peace, and fulfillment are missing. Their lives consist of one high to the next, whether it is drugs, or food, or sex, or shopping. And yet, whatever it is, it quickly dries up calling us back again in search of more pleasure.

The famine occurred due to a lack of rain. In the Bible, rain is a symbol of God's Holy Spirit, or blessings, which means the famine not only refers to the sons physical want, but it is symbolic of his spiritual emptiness. His lack of peace. When he was living under his father's rules he had peace, but now his life was riddled with guilt and emptiness of soul. He felt the displeasure of God and yet tried to ignore it or disregard it as a fleeting feeling. Still, he could not escape it. And the famine got worse.

Many of us hate and rebel against rules while we are young, but we begin to see their value when we grow up. I recently read a story of a young man

who hated cops until he was watching the news one day. When he saw an officer walking out of a burning building with a child in his arms, willing to risk his life for his meager salary, his whole image of police suddenly changed. Many of us have the same idea of parents. We view parents as the "bad guys" and we are the enlightened ones. That is, until we grow up and even become parents ourselves. Suddenly we begin to see the value of laws and rules.

When we become parents, we begin to see that the rules were never set up to make our lives miserable. They are given out of years of wisdom and experience in order to lay out the safest and happiest life we could live. When we grow up, we begin to recognize that rules are actually "for our good" (Deut. 6:24). God says, "let your heart keep my commands; for length of days and long life and peace they will add to you" (Prov. 3:1, 2). While many rebel against the rules and regulations of the Bible, God promises that if we will return to Him we will not only have physical prosperity, but we will have peace and fulfillment in life. God is offering us the best life we can have. He has laid out the guidelines for our best life and yet many, like the younger son, run away from God because we don't want to follow His rules. As a result, we lose His Spirit and dry up spiritually.

It's a terrible thing to sense that God has removed His Spirit and yet many are not even aware that the Spirit has left us. There is a story of Samson in the Bible who turned away from God and yet "did not know that the Lord had departed from him" (Judges 16:20). Certainly, he eventually became dreadfully aware of the fact when he recognized his life drying up. Tragically, many of us wander from God so gradually that we don't even sense His Spirit departing, but others are able to sense the removal of the Spirit. It is the most agonizing feeling that one can experience when one goes from saved to lost and "fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). The good news is that God will take us back.

Perhaps you have at times felt that the rules were too restrictive or too hard to keep. You wanted to live your own life your way. Have you found out yet that "one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possess" (Luke 12:15). Have you found yet that true happiness, peace, and fulfillment in life do not come from the career you pursue, or

the new car, or having a baby, or getting into a new relationship? Those rules are God's will. They are God's walls of protection to keep you safe and secure. They will give you peace. They are the simple guidelines to offer you the best possible life you could have and yet many of us keep running.

Having tried living both way, I can tell you from experience that the way of sin is hard. Still, some argue that its good to get the wild living out of their system and live while they are young. This is among the devil's greatest lies. Most who start down the road away from God never make it back. Those who are lucky enough to actually make it back, like me, will forever be haunted and clawed at by the sins of their youth. Anyone who has been down that road and escaped will tell you that having "fun" while you are young leaves painful scars.

Fortunately, while suffering under the severe famine, we are told that the young man finally "came to himself" (Luke 15:17). His mind lit up with reason. He started thinking about his loving father. He looked at the reckless path he had traveled and how all the people he thought were friends had left him in his hour of need and how all the pleasures passed quickly away and left his soul empty. He thought of the peace he had living under his fathers roof and though unworthy, wondered if his father would still take him back. The good news is, the father had been waiting patiently for his son to come home.

Have the pleasures of sin really satisfied the longings of your soul? Have you found peace away from God? I'm guessing the answer is no. The only way to real peace is through returning to your roots. God "formed you from the womb" (Isa. 44:2). "It is He who has made us," and He longs to give us peace (Ps. 100:3). Maybe you have tried to find fulfillment in drugs, sex, food, relationships, chasing goals, or buying things and you still feel a void. Will you continue to run until you find yourself in the midst of a spiritual famine, or in physical want, like the runaway son? Why don't you come back home. Find a church or a Bible study nearby where you can sing the old hymn, "I've wandered far away from God. Now I'm coming home."

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