

Coming Home

A photograph of an older man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a light blue shirt, and a patterned tie. He is smiling and gesturing with his right hand towards a person whose back is to the camera. The person in the foreground is wearing a white shirt. They are standing in front of a dark wooden door with a brick wall visible on the right side.

Who says you can't go home again?

If you've ever traveled outside the country, you probably know what I felt like when I returned home from China after staying for months abroad. As fun as it was to visit and experience another culture, it felt nice to get back home. The funny thing is, many who come to America from other countries feel the same way when they return to their homeland. No matter how far away we wander, something in our hearts always seems to call us home. The story of the prodigal son illustrates this nicely.

In the story, the older son stayed home to work with his father while the younger son asked for the inheritance money he would get when his father died, then went "to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living," or what some might call 'the good life' (Luke 15:13). The younger son felt like his father's laws were too strict and took away his fun. 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 carefree sex, and do the things other people were doing, but 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 sow 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 of 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? Tragically, most 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 through drugs, sex, or some other pleasure. 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 son's 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, but he 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 people have the same initial concept of parents. We view parents as the 'bad guys' and ourselves as the enlightened ones. That is, until

we grow up and become parents ourselves. Then 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. 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.

While Samson wandered from God, diverting his life from the path God had laid out for him, at the end of his life, Samson returned, and God restored His power, placing him in the hall of faith (See Heb. 11:32). And God can do the same for you.

Perhaps you have at times felt that the rules were too restrictive or too hard to keep, so you chose to follow your own path, only to find pain, emptiness, and disappointment. Perhaps you found out the hard way that those rules in the Bible were God's walls of protection to keep you safe, make you happy, and give you peace, but now you feel far from God and wonder if He could ever take you back. The end of the story supplies us with abundant hope.

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. He thought of how all the people he thought were friends left him in his hour of need and how all the pleasures passed

quickly away and left his soul empty. Then he thought of the peace he had living under his father's roof and though unworthy, wondered if his father would still take him back. The good news is that the father had been waiting patiently for his son to come home.

Have the pleasures of sin really satisfied the deeper longings of your soul? Have you found true and lasting peace away from God? Maybe you have tried to find fulfillment in drugs, sex, relationships, food, work, hobbies, or filling your life with material pleasures, 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 stop running and come back home? Your heavenly Father is waiting with open arms. 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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