

YOU CAN COME HOME ANY TIME

Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found'" (Luke 15:11-32).

This is the story of a young man weary of the restraints of living at home.²⁴

Things came to the point that he decided he had to get away. His wealthy loving father gave the lad his inheritance, and he left for a place he thought he would have freedom to do whatever he pleased. He had the money to satisfy every desire. Because money attracts company, he soon had a group of friends to help him spend his wealth in high living.

But the hopes and dreams he had nurtured while a boy at home soon sank into oblivion, along with the stability and security of his spiritual upbringing. His inheritance squandered, he applied for a job and was assigned to look after hogs. For a Jew, nothing could have been worse. Jesus' Jewish audience understood the pits of degradation and humiliation He was describing. The young man, determined to find liberty, instead found himself a virtual slave. Friendless, starving, and sick at heart, he forced himself to eat hogs' food to survive.²⁵

In this narrative we see an amazing picture of the hopelessness of a life divorced from God. It may take time for us to realize how poverty-stricken we are when we separate ourselves from the love of the heavenly Father, but that day will come. All the while, God is desperately seeking to find ways to influence us to return home.

The young man ultimately came to his senses, realizing that the servants in his father's house were better off than he was. In his misery, the boy remembered his father's love. And the memories of that love began to beckon him home.

Finally, he made the decision to head back and to confess his waywardness. He decides he will tell his father, "I've sinned against heaven and you; I'm not worthy to be called your son, but let me be like one of your employees." Weak from hunger in a land of famine, with only rags left for clothes, he finally left the pigpens and set out for the place he grew up as a child.²⁶

The runaway had no conception of the sadness that had overwhelmed his father when he left. He never dreamed of the shadow that came over the whole house when reports filtered back of his wild partying. And no one could have convinced him that every day his father sat, watching, waiting, for his son's return. Yet now, with weary and painful steps, he turned eagerly toward home to beg for a servant's position.

While still a considerable distance from the house, the father recognized his son and ran to meet him, hugging him in a long, clinging, emotional embrace. To protect his son from being observed in such a destitute condition, the father took off his own beautiful coat and placed it around the boy's shoulders.²⁷

Overcome by such a loving reception, the young man began to sob his repentance speech. But the father would hear none of it. He had no place in his household for a servant-son; his lad must have the very best the house could

provide. The father told his servants to bring the finest clothes and a ring for his hand, to find fine shoes for his feet and to prepare a feast so everyone could celebrate. And there would be a theme at this celebration: “The dead son is alive; the lost son has been found.”

What a vastly different perception this boy now had of his father! He had always thought of him as rather stern and severe. But no longer. In his great need he saw the true character of his father. Which is what this story is all about. In our rebellion, we often think of God as severe and stern, demanding in His requirements. But when you have been away a long time and are spiritually hungry, dressed in the rags of sin and guilt, then you’ll see how fully loving and accepting the heavenly Father really is. When you take even one step toward your Father in repentance, He will run to wrap you in His arms of love. He will forgive your sins and never remember them again (Jeremiah 31:34).²⁸

Don’t wait or try to clean yourself up so you can be good enough to come to Jesus. If we waited to be good enough, we would never come. Jesus is waiting for you, calling you, yearning for you. All heaven will celebrate when you come home.²⁹