

Luke 15:11-32 This describes a young person like so many others today who wanted to escape the life he had. He was running away from responsibilities, or maybe authority, and wanted to do his own thing. Runaways are nothing new. It is estimated that 2 million kids run away from home every year, half kicked out, a third prostituted in the first 48 hours. It is a slow form of suicide. Runaways are not only teenagers. Divorce is running away from one another. Drugs, sex, the party scene... are all ways that adults run away from life as well. Running away is epidemic in the world today with people constantly on the move, running away from one thing or another, while trying to get something that will satisfy the longing of the heart. Even religion can be a way that people avoid things. The French philosopher and mathematician, Blais Pascal said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every [person] which cannot be filled by any created thing, but only by God the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ." The only way to true happiness is to come to Jesus Christ and follow His way.

Matthew 15:8 Jesus said, "*They serve me with their lips but their hearts are far from Me.*" In fact, most of you here today have been baptized, confirmed, gone to church, or even walked an aisle, but for some there is an emptiness inside and you are not sure that if you died today that you would go to Heaven. Are you sure you are ready to meet God? Ready to meet Jesus Christ? Running from something? Searching for what can fill your heart and satisfy your soul?

- The only thing that will satisfy that hole is a relationship with the Father.

Luke 15:11-32 This young man leaves his father, goes to the city, and a depression came. A young Jewish boy so full of himself, yet in the end he is in the most despised of all places for a Jew, even lower than that of the bars and nightclubs that he had run to. He found out what real life was all about. Are you experiencing real life today?

This young Jewish boy became sorry... truly humble. He said, "*I will arise and go to my father and be a servant because even his servants are better off than this.*" The son says, "*I have sinned against Heaven...*" He realized that sin was not just against his father, but in this moment of truth, he knew his sin was against God. He did not justify his actions. He did not blame. He confessed his sin. He throws himself at the mercy of his dad. There must be a change - a turnaround – repentance. It means to go the opposite way. The prodigal arose; he got up; he left the pig pen.

King David had a story much the same. He was living a double life. He finally cries out in repentance in **Psalms 51:17** *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.* The Father doesn't want our religion. He doesn't want our attendance record, our list of good deeds, or even our reputation. What the Father wants is our heart... broken and poured out, humble and fully submitted to His ways.

Luke 15:20 "*While he was still a long way off, his father saw him, ran and embraced him and kissed him.*" Now that is a father worth knowing! Every day that Dad must have stood on that porch and looked over that hill, remembering the last time he had seen his boy. And that day, his prayers were answered! Do you know that our Heavenly Father longs to see you come His way too?

- God the Father loves us; He longs for us to return to Him; He wants to give us guidance in our lives; He will never leave us nor forsake us; He wants us to have peace, joy, and assurance of His love; He gives us the Holy Spirit to guide, teach, and speak to us; He want us to know without a doubt that if we died we would go to heaven.

Make no mistake about it though... there is a coming Day of Judgement. Someday, we will stand before God and we will have to give an account of what we did with Jesus Christ. It is personal. Have you made it personal?

- God the Father sent His Son, Jesus, to die for you! He sent His Son to shed His blood for you! He wants to put His arms around you and receive you back to Himself! He will love you, forgive you, take you back, and be your friend! He is a God of love and mercy.

Know that... He's willing to forgive us today. He's not wanting anyone to perish. Today is our chance to go from a slave of sin sitting in the pig pen, to a child of God living in the Father's house. Today, the Bible says, is the day of salvation. By the cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has provided a way for you to have peace, and joy, and happiness in your heart. Today is the day of salvation for all who would come, not because we deserve it, but because of what Jesus did on the cross. God's promise is that He will live inside of us, speak to us so we will know how to live and know how to avoid the pigpen.

Romans 6:23 *The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Peter 2:24* *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.*

The Lord's promise to us is that He will not leave us alone but will be a faithful Shepherd and Guardian to us throughout this life if we will come to Him in true repentance. The Bible says that you can only come when the Holy Spirit convicts you and draws you to God. And when that conviction, that guilt comes on you that you can't shake, some will say, "I know I'm on the wrong road but I'm not tired of it yet – I'll repent and come back to God some other time." But know that the further you travel down the road away from God, the harder your heart gets, the less you think you've done something wrong, and the less you think you need to repent. **Proverbs 28:14** *but one who hardens his heart will fall into disaster.*

Some of you think you are too bad to come to God, or have gone too far, or have done too much. But if you feel the tug of God on your heart, you come! You are not here by accident; the Lord has brought you. He has wooed you. God saw to it through a series of circumstances that you would hear this message today... don't harden your heart!

Repent. Repent means to change your mind and change your direction. Repentance says, "God, You are right and I am wrong and I admit I am a sinner. I need You! By faith, I receive you into my heart and life." We need the power of God through Jesus Christ to change your life.

Jesus told them that there was great rejoicing in Heaven when only one person repents. When that prodigal young man returned... The father smothered him with tears and kisses. He ordered that the best clothes he had reserved for his son be brought out and placed on him. Before he even got to the door, all of this was in motion. The father didn't take him back as a servant but as his much-loved child. And that is what God will do for you.

Billy Graham got a letter in 1992 from a young 18-year-old girl from Scotland after the crusade he hosted.

"Before you came to Glasgow I was a very angry girl with a big chip on my shoulder. I thought God owed me so much. I thought no one loved me. I thought there was no meaning to life. I was going out and just having a lot of fun. I was going out with the guys and getting drunk.

I hated my family and felt so unloved. To be honest I still feel unloved, even by my family. They think I am just a loser. One of my brothers used to sexually abuse me, the other beat me up. I feel like I have it rough with very little love in my life before this week. I'm no angel, in fact I'm a totally awful person.

A few months ago I was expelled from school and I was blaming drugs. My parents are still mad at me. My dad is a doctor and my mom is a teacher. They say it looks bad on them having a daughter like me. I don't fit in with my family.

I heard you were coming to Glasgow and I said I would not go! But where I work, I was told that I was assigned to do first aid every night at the crusade. And I was not happy! I went on Tuesday and I mocked you. I laughed at you. I said, what does he know anyway? Doesn't he know God doesn't care for us? But I guess I was listening.

On Wednesday I said I don't deserve God's love. I never cared if anyone saw me or cared what anyone thought. I felt loved for the very first time and on Thursday night, I came forward and received Christ as my Savior. I want to know this God who loves me more than anything. I feel love as I write this letter. I have been received home."

That could be our story today - right now.

Are you sure that Christ is in your heart?

Describe some ways that we run away from God today?

How are you running? How do you need to turn?