

L 9 ... When You've Wandered Away From God

[Luke 15:11-25](#)

Have you ever wandered away from God? Do you know someone who has? This parable is usually called “The Prodigal Son.” However, the main teaching of the parable concerns the reaction of the father—who represents God—when his prodigal son returns home. A better name might be “The Forgiving Father.” This wonderful parable teaches us how our heavenly Father reacts when we come back to Him.

There are **three** things to consider **when you’ve wandered away from God**.

Contemplate the Results (15:11-16)

In this parable, a father has two sons. The younger son tells his father: *Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me* ([15:11-12b](#)). In essence, he is saying, “Old man, I can’t wait for you to die; I want my inheritance now.”

The father, who represents God, divides his property between his two sons. The younger son gathers all he has, which probably means he converts all his inheritance into cash. Then, he takes *his journey into a far country* ([15:12c-13b](#)). In other words, he goes to a non-Jewish country filled with pagan religions and sexual immorality. There he squanders his inheritance in *riotous living* ([15:13c](#)).

The phrase **riotous** (**asōtōs**, **uh-so´-toce**) literally means “loose.” He lives a wild life, spending his inheritance on drunken parties, sex orgies, or whatever he chooses.

What does his bitter, older brother later tell his father about the younger son’s behavior ([15:30b](#))?

This all happens because the younger son wants to live his life his way. So, he rebels and distances himself as far as possible from his father and his family. In its essence, sin wants us to live at a distance from our heavenly Father. **Sin is fun! Sin is appealing because it is fun—at least for a short while.** The devil can lead us into sin if we only think of the temporary pleasures and forget the long-term pain. We need to think like Moses.

What does [Hebrews 11:25](#) record about him?

Sin is fun for a short season; if it weren’t, no one would want to sin. Rebellion against God always starts out with fun, friends, and fantasy. However, like the prodigal son’s outcome, sooner or later the consequences arrive. After he spends all his money, a terrible *famine* hits the entire country. To keep from starving, he hires himself out to *feed swine*. He is so hungry he wants to eat the *husks* he is feeding the pigs because no one will give him anything ([15:14-16](#)). This is the ultimate indignity for a Jewish boy because pigs were unclean and not to be eaten or touched ([Lev. 11:7](#); [Deut. 14:8](#)).

Have you seen a hog pen or “slopped” hogs? There is not a filthier, more stinking place than a hog pen. Referring to people who rebel against God, what warning is found in [Hosea 8:7a-b](#)?

The prodigal has sown his wild oats and hoped for a crop failure. But now he is reaping his *whirlwind* harvest. When his money runs out, so do his friends. He never intended to end up like this. No one ever does. Over and over again, God warns us about the results of sin because He doesn't want us to end up like the prodigal son.

For example, in [Numbers 32:23c](#), what warning does God give through Moses to some of the tribes of Israel?

Sin will find us out in our family, finances, consciences, health, and other places. God doesn't want us to suffer the consequences of sin, but when we rebel, we distance ourselves from Him.

When you wander away from God, **contemplate the results** and...

Articulate Words of Repentance (15:17-19)

In the "pigpen" of consequences, the prodigal son comes *to himself*, which means he comes to his senses ([15:17a](#)). This is just another way of saying he repents. In the Bible, the word "repentance" translates a word meaning a change of mind that leads to a change in behavior. Repentance is more than being sorry for sin; it turns away from sin and lives for God. It always results in a changed life.

How does [Matthew 3:8](#) express this?

Like the prodigal son, sometimes people have to live with "the pigs" for a while before they come to their senses and repent. Finally, he says to himself: *How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! (15:17b)*. Here is an important saying: "You don't change until the pain of continuing as you are exceeds the pain of change." Sometimes, God lets us endure the pain of the "pigpen" for a long time before we come to our senses and decide to change.

Finally, the prodigal son realizes he is responsible for his actions. He doesn't play the "blame game" and say, "This is my father's fault; he was just too religious and strict." He doesn't blame his pagan friends. He does what is always in keeping with true repentance; he accepts full responsibility for his sin, with no excuses.

After coming to his senses, the prodigal son says to himself: *I will arise and go to my father (15:18a)*.

What does he know he must say to his father ([15:18b](#))?

The prodigal says three of the hardest words in the world to articulate: ***I have sinned***. You don't have to go into details; the Lord knows all about your sin. But you must be willing to sincerely say, *I have sinned*.

Our **pride** causes us to do almost anything to avoid saying those three words. Also, not only does the prodigal son acknowledge he has sinned against his father but also *against heaven*, a euphemism for “God.” The Jews often used the word *heaven* in place of “God” to avoid ever using God’s name in vain. How does [Jeremiah 3:13a-b](#) sum up repentance?

The prodigal’s repentance is clearly seen in his changed attitude when he decides to say to his father: *I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants* ([15:19](#)). He left home saying “give me” and returns saying *make me*. This pictures what the Bible calls “repentance.”

When you wander away from God, **contemplate the results, articulate words of repentance**, and...

Anticipate the Reception (15:20-24)

It is hard to go back home, but the prodigal gets up and goes to his father ([15:20a](#)). The best he hopes for is his father taking him back as one of his *hired servants*. However, while he is still a long way off, his father sees him coming home and feels *compassion* for him ([15:20b-c](#)). Now, we come to one of the most beautiful word pictures of God in the Bible. The father, who represents God, runs to his prodigal son, throws his arms around his neck, and kisses him ([5:20d](#)).

Apparently, the father has been on his front porch, watching and waiting for his son to come home. When he sees him, the father—who represents God—runs to receive his son. This is the only time in the Bible that God is pictured as being in a hurry.

If you have wandered away from God and want to come home, the good news is right now God is on His front porch, watching and waiting for you to come home.

How does God describe the reception in [Isaiah 44:22](#)?

The prodigal son, no doubt stunned by the compassionate reception, begins his well-rehearsed speech. However, the father interrupts just as his son is about to ask to be a hired servant ([15:21](#)). The father tells his servants to do four things.

First, *Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him* ([15:22b](#)). His son is wearing old clothes that smell like pigs. The father doesn’t just ask for clean clothes, he asks for *the best robe*, which was always given to the guest of honor at a party or banquet.

Second, the father says: *put a ring on his hand* ([15:22c](#)). This *ring* was not just a piece of jewelry, but a symbol of authority and being in good standing with the family ([Gen. 41:42](#)).

Third, the father says: *and shoes on his feet* ([15:22d](#)). Slaves and servants usually went barefoot, but family members were never without sandals, or *shoes*. This is what the Negro spiritual means by the words, "I got shoes, you got shoes, all God's children got shoes."

Finally, the father orders: *And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry* ([15:23](#)). A *fatted calf* was kept for very special celebrations.

What does the father want to celebrate ([15:24](#))?

In this parable of the forgiving father, Jesus promises that no matter what you have done, if you will repent and return to the Lord, you will receive a wonderful reception ([Jn 6:37](#)).

When you wander away from God,

CONTEMPLATE THE RESULTS,

ARTICULATE WORDS OF REPENTANCE, AND

ANTICIPATE THE RECEPTION.