



Series: You're Invited  
Sermon Title: You Belong Here  
Date: 4/12/2026

**Big Idea: God welcomes you before you fix yourself.**

In Luke 15, Jesus is surrounded by two very different crowds. Pressing in around Him were tax collectors and sinners - the people everyone considered either traitors or the lowest of humanity. Standing at a distance were the religious leaders, grumbling because Jesus kept welcoming the wrong people. So Jesus tells three stories back to back, each one building on the previous. In **Luke 15:4-10**, a shepherd leaves ninety-nine sheep to find one lost, and a woman searches her whole house to find one lost coin. In both cases, the lost had no ability to return on its own - it needed to be found because it was valuable. Then Jesus tells a third story. This time the lost one can come home. He is not a sheep or a coin. He is a son. He has a choice. And Jesus wants you to understand - these stories are about you.

### **1. We Create the Distance**

In **Luke 15:11-16**, the younger son asks his father for his inheritance while the father is still alive - in that culture, essentially saying "I wish you were dead." He takes the money, burns through everything, and ends up feeding pigs - for a Jewish person, as low as it gets. Then in **Luke 15:17-20**, he came to his senses, looked around at where his choices had landed him, and decided to go home. He rehearsed his speech the whole way - don't treat me like a son, just let me work for you. He understood he was disqualified from the relationship and was not coming home expecting to be restored.

That is exactly where many people are with God. Not because they have outright rejected Him, but because life happened and the gap got wider than they planned. There is a quiet place underneath where they are still not sure the Father's welcome actually includes them - still carrying the

same assumption the son carried all the way home: I have lost my place, and the best I can do is try to earn something back.

## 2. The Father Longs for Us

While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him, was filled with compassion, and ran. In that culture, a man of his standing would never run - it was undignified. But the father didn't care. He got to his son before the speech was even out of his mouth, accepting him before he had any details, before the son said a single word.

God already knows your full story - every detail, every decision, every moment you would rather forget - and He still runs. **Romans 5:8 says that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Not after we proved we were serious. While we were still in the far country, God moved toward us. **Romans 8:1** says there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus - not once you get yourself together, but now, today, as you are. **Hebrews 4:16** tells believers to approach God's throne of grace with confidence - not with your record, but confident you will receive mercy and grace. God moves first.

## 3. Belonging Changes Everything

Before the son could finish his speech, the father called for three things. The **best robe** - a visible declaration that his past is gone and his shame covered completely. A **ring** - full restoration, not as a servant but as a son. And **sandals** - because servants didn't wear sandals. When the son asked to be made like a hired servant, the father directly rejected that request. You are not a servant here. You belong to this family. Before the son demonstrated a single thing, the father had fully restored him.

Belonging changes the way you pray - you don't have to clean yourself up before you talk to God. Belonging changes the way you relate to His people - when you know God accepts you fully, the assumption that everyone else has it more together than you do loses its grip. Whatever has kept you at a distance - whether you don't know enough, whether you've done things you're ashamed of, whether you're not sure you fit - the offer is the same. Not partial restoration. Not on probation. Full welcome. The robe, the ring, the sandals. God welcomes you before you fix yourself.

## Discussion Questions

1. The son rehearsed a speech the whole way home, expecting to earn his way back as a servant. In what ways do we approach God the same way - assuming we need to fix ourselves before He will welcome us?
2. The father ran before he knew the full story. God already knows your full story and still pursues you. What does that tell you about the nature of God's love?
3. Romans 5:8 says God moved toward us while we were still sinners. How does it change things to know the cross happened before any of us turned around?
4. The father's three gifts - the robe, the ring, the sandals - each meant something specific. Which one means the most to you right now, and why?
5. The Big Idea is: God welcomes you before you fix yourself. What has been keeping you at a distance, and what would it look like to come home?