

BACK TO GOD
"Longing"
September 11, 2016

Longings we all have:

- We long to be loved.
- We long for purpose.
- We long for meaning.

"...the younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living." Luke 15:13
(NLT)

"He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything." Luke 15:16 (NIV)

For some, it's all about finding your way back to God as a life-changing moment

For others, it's all about finding your way back to God as a life-growing process

3 things that will help you in your spiritual journey:

1. Come to church the next 4 Sundays
2. Find a Life Group
3. Pray this prayer for the next 30 days:

"God, if you are real, make yourself real to me."

Leadership Tip!

One of the most important ingredients to being a successful life group is to balance your focus on the people and the content. Strive to create an environment that emphasizes authentic sharing and relationships in your group.

FINDING YOUR WAY BACK TO GOD – *Awakening to Longing***STARTER QUESTION:**

How would you describe the difference between a longing and an urge?

What were some things you got out of the sermon this week?

MAIN IDEA:

Everyone has a strong persistent desire or craving that we call a “longing”. These days the word itself is not used very often, but it is still very descriptive of the feeling that everyone gets at one time or another. One characteristic of longing is that it often feels very personal, because it is personal. It’s sometimes difficult to know what will satisfy it. This can make fulfillment seem very distant. In the story of the prodigal son, in the book of the Luke, Jesus details not only the feeling of longing, but how true fulfillment is found.

KEY SCRIPTURE:**Luke 15:11-13 (NIV)**

“Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living.”

What is the first thing that the younger son tried to do to fulfill his longing?

What was the next?

What was the last thing he tried?

Why do you think Jesus used these three particular things in His parable?

Even the briefest moments watching TV or listening to most radio stations will highlight the influence that things can have on us. Our culture wants us to fulfill the longing in our lives with stuff.

What are some of the things you long for to satisfy your desires?

The problem is none of this stuff satisfies us. The longing always returns and we are constantly thinking to ourselves, “Is this all there is?” Deep down we know that there has to be more. There’s that moment when we realize there has to be more to life. That is “an awakening to the longing!”

In Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son, we can see this awakening happen in verse 17.

Luke 15:17 (NIV)

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’”

After everything the son had done he was left with an emptiness that he describes as starvation!

It is amazing how other people in the Bible made the same type of reference. A quick search of the Bible on the word “longing” can find over 8,000 references to people describing their longing as extreme hunger or thirst, or both.

In the book of Psalms, King David wrote often about his longing;

Psalms 63:1 (NIV)

“You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.”

King David wrote this Psalm when he was driven into the wilderness and pursued as an outlaw. His life was at a low point. It is usually at these times when people are most likely to start to become aware of a deeper longing.

Can you relate to the longing that David was feeling? Why or why not?

In Jesus’ parable, you can see in verse 14 the prodigal son began to feel in need. He was getting desperate.

Luke 15:14 (NIV)

“After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need.”

Much like the prodigal son, when we look at Job’s life we see similarities. With Job we see it happen after he was stricken with one disaster after another:

Job 6:8 (NKJV)

“Oh, that I might have my request, That God would grant me the thing that I long for!”

Why do you think people are more likely to realize their longing when they are in need?

It takes time for an awakening to happen and unfortunately it seems like we have nothing but time when we are in need. When all other distractions are gone, the awakening starts.

God designed it to happen that way and by the way, God has longing too!

But God’s longings are not based on a need He has. They are based on our needs that can only be fulfilled by a relationship with Him.

Matthew 5:6 (NIV)

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled.”

Jesus blesses those whose focus of their longing is for God, because true lasting fulfillment only comes from God.

FINAL THOUGHTS:

How do you relate to the longing in this parable?

The parable of the prodigal son was told to a group of people who believed people get the consequences they deserve from their actions. They viewed the longing of the wayward son as suffering that he deserved.

That idea has not diminished over time. Many people still think this way about their own longing; it is suffering that they deserve. But nothing can be further from the truth. The reason Jesus told this parable is to set the record straight. Our Father is always waiting for His kids to return to Him. God says what you deserve is forgiveness and fulfillment, not because of what we have done, but because what Jesus did for us.

John 3:16-17 (NIV)

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

If you are in a spot in your life and you are thinking that somehow you deserve this emptiness that you are feeling, remember the hope of an awakening to the longing of returning to our Father. This parable that Jesus told over 2000 years ago, is about you and about me. We all need the fulfillment that only God can give.

How can our group pray for you?

CLOSE IN PRAYER