



THE PRODIGAL GOD

THE PRODIGAL GOD: THE HOME WE WANTED

AUGUST 1, 2021

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Luke 15:11-32

Good morning, Doxa. How are we today? My name is Donald. If we haven't met I'm one of the pastors on staff here and you are present for week four of our six-week look at the story of the prodigal son. It's been a good series. We're really trying to kind of dive deeply into the nature of this story and understand what we can about our own discipleship and our relationship with God.

And so, as we start today, I want us to open and think about this question. It's an important one and there's more to it than we probably think. And that's this...where is your home? Is it your street address that you left to come to service today? Is it the place that you were born or the city that you're from? Is it the place where your spouse and kids also live or where your closest friends are? We're going to look at this question today together and through the story of the prodigal son and the elder brother and the prodigal father, we're going to talk about what that possibly means for us, and maybe understand a little bit more about what God has woven through the entirety of the scriptures. In fact, it's one of the most recurring themes in the entirety of the Bible, which is "home" and something I have scarcely heard from any pulpit. And so as we walk through this story, we're going to see home also show up in the story of the prodigal son.

And we're not walking verse by verse today, as we often do here at Doxa. This is far more a day of biblical theology. So I hope that you enjoy that. But I want us to think about where our home

is. And I would suggest that perhaps Christ would answer that question for you a little bit differently than you would, that he wants us to pause this morning and with open hearts and minds, ask him what he would say to us about our home.

So let's pray. Jesus, I pray you would speak through me this morning. I pray that you would challenge and encourage the people of Doxa as we think about what biblical home is and what it means. We have a need for it in us that you have put there in place there. And we know it ultimately can only be satisfied by you. And so help us see you clearly and hear from you. We pray these things for your glory. Amen.

All right, so what does the Bible say about "home"? Well, let's quickly think about the Old Testament and think through the Old Testament, from the perspective of home. Just think of all the times in the Old Testament that home falls apart or is taken away because of the brokenness of this world or because of sin. If you go all the way to the garden, Adam and Eve essentially are kicked out of their first home, right? Because they weren't content to listen to God's words and instead wanted to be the one that gave them the home. Cain killed Abel and what happens? He has to leave home and wander. Jacob cheats his family, and has to leave home. Joseph has to leave home because of famine. The Israelites wander around in the desert for years, without a true home. David is hunted as a fugitive, running from his enemies and unable for a long time to establish a place of home. And then Nebuchadnezzar rips Israel from their home and takes them prisoner in Babylon. I mean, the Bible is full of examples of God's people desperately needing a home and then losing it through either their own sin or the sins of others. And our lives tell much of the same story.

What else does the whole of scripture teach us about home? Well, number one, home just like church is more than a building. Home in the Bible is far more than a roof over our heads or a safe space. And it's certainly more than a well-furnished four bedroom with an HOA. God knows that we need far more than that because we are not just physical creatures with physical needs. Yes, those things matter, but there's more. And the last fifteen months have certainly proven that true home has to be more than just the place that we sleep. I mean, most of us have had more time at home in the last year than we have in the last five combined, right? And we are no more rested or whole than we were before. There's a lot of young families at Doxa and that means that you have an acute understanding that home can be a place of chaos and be a mixed bag. I mean, some days it's moments of true joy and deep connection with the people you love the most. And then the next minute it's a war zone and just absolute chaos. The home of a young family is a lot like a construction site. There's a lot of really loud noises and cussing and food trash on the ground that you don't remember buying. It's a scary place.

So if home is more than a house, than what is it? Home in the Bible is a place of flourishing permanency and uninhibited intimacy. And that's really our big idea for today. I want to say that again, home in the Bible was a place of flourishing permanency and uninhibited intimacy. By flourishing permanency I mean a land, a place there's a fullness of life-having all of your needs met. And uninhibited intimacy means knowing God fully-being known fully without the hindrances of sin. This is the kind of home that our hearts long for. It's a place that can't be

taken away by the bank or by fire or by flood. It's being established and rooted in a place, in a space where you are loved and celebrated and supported. It's a place that meets all of your physical needs, yes, but also your emotional needs, your relational needs, your spiritual needs. And in scripture, home is inextricably tied to the idea of belonging, which is an incredible, incredible force in our lives. It's honestly a topic worthy of its own sermon. And it's why God repeatedly when talking to his people says, I will be your God, and you will be my people. It is a fundamental need in every human heart to belong. So yes, true home is far more than a building.

Number two, our need for home is hardwired. One of my first jobs out of high school was an internship that I took at a job with the government in the Bay Area in California. I worked at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory and I'm dating myself a bit here, but at the time the human genome was not done being mapped. And so I worked on the human genome project as an intern. And I was a new believer, and I was actually really surprised to learn as I got to know some of the absolutely phenomenally brilliant scientists on that project, that a good portion of those scientists were also believers. I had been raised to know, or at least understand that God and science were mortal enemies and not on the same team. And so in those conversations, one of them said something to me that has stuck with me for a long time. And he said that when science has done right, it's man's discovery of how God has ordered and built things in the world. I love that. I love that. And so photosynthesis, right, is our discovery of how God made plants to get food from the sun, right? Anything we learned about gravity is our discovery of figuring out how God wants to keep everything attached to the earth, right? And so on and so forth. And as science studies the physical body and the health of the mind, they continue to see that a sense of home and belonging is absolutely vital to human flourishing.

So why is that in us though? Why do we all have that in us? Because that question has not really fully been answered by science. But the Bible can because it's in God's design that we have been coded and wired to not just gravitate towards, not just desire, but desperately need a place to belong, a place to call home. Because we're wired for flourishing permanency and uninhibited intimacy. Because we're wired for that all the imperfections that you and I have experienced in our lives in homes have left their mark on us. And the way that we all experienced or missed out on healthy home shapes us more powerfully than almost anything else on earth. If you were able to form healthy attachments to other loving and attentive people when you are little in a peaceful environment, that is a major shaping force on you. If you are prevented from forming those attachments, that is a major shaping force on you. And for many of us, a healthy sense of home is a foreign concept because of neglect or abuse or divorce or other means of experiencing brokenness in our homes when we were growing up. We were robbed of the opportunity to lay the first bricks and the foundations of understanding the meaning of true home. Some of us grew up constantly transitioning from home to home, and that disrupted our sense of permanency, how we form relationships, how we choose to or not to attach to others. And the more that we begin to understand how the brain works, the more we realize what a big deal this is.

John Bowlby is a scientist that essentially did the greatest initial work around what's known as Family Attachment Theory. And I won't get too much into the weeds here, but here's the big idea. He did an extensive study watching what happens when infants are removed from their parents. And he essentially figured out that those infants fall into one of three categories. Category one was what he called Secure Attachment. And that was basically that the kids got a little bit upset when they were separated. And then they were comforted when they rejoined their parents. That was category one. Category two was the Anxious Resistant Attachment. And this was a smaller portion. And they had really high anxiety when they were separated. And then interestingly, when they were rejoined with their parents, they wanted to be comforted but they also tried in some way to punish their parents for leaving. You can probably see where I'm going with this. Category number three-these were the Avoidant Attachment and the kids, the infants in this third category showed minimal stress upon separation. And then when the parents came back, they either ignored them or actively avoided them.

Now here's why we're talking about this in church- because discipleship is largely about the quality of your relationships. And adult relationships as they discovered in this study are directly related to the attachment styles you received as kids. Many of you are right now sitting next to one of those three infants. And you know which one for sure that you're married to. Some of you are dating one of these three infants right now. As Christian counselors and therapists really dive into the heart and understand the way God has made us they identify three primary questions that show up in every human, regardless of race, gender, nationality, personality, or status: Am I safe? How am I doing? And this last one, where do I belong? Where do I belong? Where is home? That's a question you may have never actually said out loud with your lips, but I promise you that question echoes in your heart. And our need for home isn't going away. It's how he made us.

So number three, our hunt for home here on earth is frequently disappointing. Well, why is it so disappointing? Because we carry brokenness in us and we bump into it constantly outside of us, because this world is not the long play, right? We live in this sliver, this little speck of time in between paradises-the paradise of the garden and the paradise of the New Earth and heaven's-our forever home. And there's something that's deep inside of us that has not forgotten that. It refuses to accept that this life and the shadows of home that we all get to taste is all there is. And so we remain unsatisfied. I mean, our homes can be disappointing. And I'm saying that to the Eastside, some of you have very nice homes. But nobody hears that their water heater has failed and gets excited, right? Nobody discovers mold in the attic or a cracked tile, or has an appliance poop out and watches this recent heat wave, completely scorch your landscaping, nobody sees that kind of thing and says, yes, that's awesome. I mean, do you remember how happy you were for some of the older folks in here when you moved into your first place? Do you remember the bliss you felt moving into your first place? And then do you remember how excited you were to get out of that place? Some of you are in that moment right now. Five or ten years ago you moved into something and it was a dream come true. And now you cannot get out fast enough. Some of you have a hard time shaking that haunting feeling that you should live someplace else, work someplace else, date somebody else, further from the city, closer to the city, more land, more quiet. And that might be God leading you into a new season,

but it also might just be the restlessness that is in all of us because we cannot shake that feeling that we need something better. And the truth is, the vast majority of the time as soon as we actually grab that new thing, we savor it for a hot minute and then we feel empty again.

So yeah, our homes, it can be disappointing. Our bodies can certainly be disappointing. Many of us feel our bodies war against us in the ways that we gain or lose weight, in the way we have to avoid certain foods or environments, and the ways that we get injured, and the ways that our body deteriorates. I mean, COVID has not yet taken the life of any members of Doxa, and this is, I know it's heavy, but cancer is coming for many of us. Heart failure statistically is happening to many of us. And yes, it's genetics and life choices, but above all else it's because these bodies are not meant to be our forever home. First Corinthians says that these bodies that we have now are perishable and weak and he's comparing them to the ones we get later, which we'll talk more about in two weeks. So our hunt for home is frankly a bummer a lot of the time because we carry this brokenness in us. We add to the things that are broken out there and we bump into it constantly. So let's recap. Home is more than a house. It's coded into us and it's frequently disappointing.

Now, let's talk some good news. And the good news is really good. So number four, in Christ our forever home is available. Listen, church, if you struggle with feeling discontent and restless in this life, I'm here to tell you that Jesus Christ is the home you're looking for. The idea of home being found in Christ is so strong that at times in the scriptures it even poetically refers to Christ as our home. And I know it's poetic, but it just further reinforces what is true of us. This is why the poetry of Psalm 91 says, "I will say to the Lord, my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust". He's referring to God with language of architectural buildings, right? He's calling God his refuge and fortress. This is precisely what First Peter is hinting at when he says that Jesus Christ is the cornerstone and foundation upon which our spiritual homes are built.

Church, Jesus is a better house. Jesus is the only one that does not wear down with time. Jesus is the only home that never needs repair from use. In fact, the longer you live in it, the stronger the beams become. Jesus is the only home that gives rest to your soul and not just your body. Jesus is the only home that can't burn down with fire, blow away with wind, or wash away with water. Jesus Christ is the only home that death cannot sever. Jesus is the only home that has no mortgage payment or bank that can come for you because your spot has been paid for in full. I have no doubt in my mind that one of the primary messages of any biblical prophet sent to the Eastside by God would be some version of Matthew six, the passage that speaks about having two masters- you cannot serve both God and money. And another way to say that would be, you cannot live truly in two houses at the same time. You cannot find your home in Christ while doing everything you can to find one in the world.

I love Augustine. There's interesting portions of St. Augustine's and my story of how I was raised in the Catholic church and how I met Jesus. And one of the most popular Augustine quotes of all time makes exactly this point. You've probably heard it before, "Thou hast made us for yourself, Oh Lord." He's saying you made us for you. "And our heart is restless until it finds its

rest in thee." What does that mean? It means there is no substitute for Jesus. So real home is available to you and to me, and it's found in Jesus Christ. Not only is it available, but lastly, number five, in Christ our forever home is secure. Boy, if you ever want to have a good cry, just fire up YouTube and start looking at the videos of kids when they find out that they have been adopted, ripping, open the paper, right? Reading the document and recognizing in that moment that they have finally found their forever home. You watch those kids lose every ounce of pretense they have in their being and just start weeping, squeezing those grownups with every ounce of their being, because they know they have finally found their home. Do you know why that rings in us? Why does that affect us? It's because we're made for that. We're made for a place to call our own. We're made for a people to call our own.

And church, we cannot get kicked out of the father's house. We can wander off, but he is always on the road, just scanning the horizon, waiting for us and not to chastise us, right? This is the beauty of the story of the prodigal son. He does not come back to the father to be rebuked or chastised. He comes back to celebration. And for some of us, that's the hardest part of the gospel to receive. That God is not just waiting like a winding rubber band waiting to explode on us. And you might say, I've never known anything different in this life. And I understand that believe me. But that is all the more reason for you to walk back into the home, back into the party, to truly experience and not just hear about the great reckless love of God.

Some of you, "younger" brothers and sisters, and when I say "younger" I'm referring to the last few weeks of this series and talking about what the younger brother and this story really symbolizes. Some of you younger brothers and sisters have spent this last season of life wondering if the father would ever actually take you back if you went home. In fact, when you look at the painting that we've referenced, this Rembrandt painting, you feel pain when you look at that picture, because the cold stares of the older brother on the right you've seen that face. You've seen that closed posture. You've experienced that from people who call themselves Christians. You know exactly what the younger son means when he says in verse 19, "I am no longer worthy to be called your son". Listen, I don't care if you've ignored every word I have set up to this point, verse twenty says, "but while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion". You can with 100% certainty this morning, know that the answer is yes, you can come home. You have been preparing your "I'm sorry" speech, and probably coming up with some kind of strategy to find your way back into good graces. But God says, drop your plans, drop the speech. I just want you home. Come home.

Some of you have never really known a true home in the first place. You've never let God forgive you and embrace you and tear down all of the reasons that you've kept your distance. You want to know why you have this latent memory of a place that you've never been it's because you are made for eternity. And there is no amount of earthly stuff that can fill that in you. There is no amount of "temporary" that will cover the gap. So come home. Come home and find out how deep the well of mercy is. In Christ your home is secure.

So the older brothers and sisters here in this church-I think it's possible that some of us have forgotten that we didn't always belong in the house of the father, at the table of the father, in

the presence of the father. I mean, you may have been a Christian a long, long time, but you were not born in righteousness. You were born in sin and at some point Jesus transformed you. Jesus entered the scene. He called you his own. He made you belong. Maybe you never blew through your inheritance, but maybe a father that spends recklessly on his other kids just doesn't sit right with you. In the depths of your heart you resonate with verse twenty-eight when it says that he was angry and refused to go into the party. To all the older brothers and sisters here at Doxa Christ has looked at your self-righteousness and your self-reliance, and he has paid the price for that in full as well. And maybe the craziest thing that God could ask you to do this week would be for you to run down the hill and hug a lost brother, hug a lost sister. Figure out the restoration plan later. Listen for the "I'm sorry" speech later. Just embrace them and receive them and call them home.

I want to close with just a few last thoughts, because I know that as we talk about home, the truth is many of us in this room feel some form of homelessness. Maybe spiritual home has been hard. The last decade has been a fascinating and disorienting time for the American church. I mean, spiritual home for many of us has been chaotic and rife with conflict, lots of deconstruction happening, lots of spiritual homelessness happening. And it's easy to call out the things that are wrong in the church, because frankly it's a hot mess most of the time. You can spend your whole life deconstructing the church and pulling those bricks out one by one. You can even monetize tearing the church down. There's such an audience for that. You can pay your bills by writing and blogging and tweeting about how awful the bride of Christ is.

The firestorm is largely aimed at accusing and in many cases, and hear me say this, rightly critiquing the Western church. And God has been cleaning his house over the last few years, we've seen countless examples- so many leaders that have been disqualified or removed and lots of public outcry around the many ways that churches have held more tightly to power and fame and platform than justice and holiness. The ways that some churches worry far more about keeping their consumers tithing than doing hard things that ultimately lead to thriving. The ways that some sheep will willingly trade the skill of a speaker over the substance of a servant.

God knows that spiritual abuse is deadly serious, that he will discipline those who abuse their power because it is first and foremost, his flock. God knows some churches are even dangerous and should be vacated immediately. And I want to be clear that it is not only good but necessary that some of this deconstruction happens. But please church, as you watch these stories unfold, pay attention to your own heart, pay attention to the conclusions that people come to while they're tearing this stuff down. You want to deconstruct celebrity in the church, go for it. You want to deconstruct churches conflating irreconcilable platforms like political party and kingdom living, go for it. But the invitation from the enemy in deconstruction is always to walk away from God and his people. Countless people have taken that invitation in the last ten years. They've seen what Christians are capable of and understandably they've pushed away from the table. They've said, that's not a home I want to be a part of. Some of you are in the room right now. And that's where you are. I mean, you're here, but you're not really here. You know what I mean when I say that? I mean, your body is here, but your heart is out

there someplace because spiritual home has left its mark on you in ways that have frankly felt far more like pain. So you're unsure how you feel about church life. You're a little weary of making home in church again. It's hard for you to even be in this room. And I just want to say, I get that. And for whatever it means to you, I'm sorry for the way that church has failed you, whether that be Doxa or someplace else. And I'm not trying to minimize the pain of how hard and messy it can be to be a part of God's people.

I know that some of you older brothers and sisters in this room have been sinned against and betrayed in spectacular ways by younger brothers. And some of you youngers have chased after sin only to return home to an older brother with crossed arms and no compassion at all. I've spent a lot of hours in the last six and a half years at Doxa talking with people about this. So please hear my love for you when I say this. Not every church deserves your life, but your life deserves a good church. Don't give up on the church. Don't give up on the bride of Christ. You need to deconstruct things? Please know God is not threatened by that. Get the help and the care that you need. Find safe spaces that listen and point you to the arms of Christ, but just don't do it alone. And know that deconstruction is not enough. If you never get around to rebuilding, if you never find out what it means to trust again, what it means to belong again, then you're just forever, spiritually homeless. And you're missing out on a huge part of what God has for you. He doesn't call us just to hold our breath until heaven. And he doesn't give us the freedom or the instruction to step away from the local church forever. That's not in the Bible. So not every church deserves your life, but your life deserves a good church.

So find yourself a church that you feel good about and then invest and belong. And here's why it's worth it to do the work. Here's why it's worth it to take the time to heal and then to re-engage because Christ lifted up in the local church for all of her bumps and bruises and scars and sharp edges that have cut many of us in this room, even despite all that, Christ lifted up in the local church is God's rescue plan for the world. The local church is at its best the closest thing that you and I will experience to our forever home. Now, Doxa is not heaven. No local church is. But God asks every believer to find one they can participate in, one they can contribute to, one they can submit to, one they can enjoy to their own benefit. And I can tell you the stories of some folks in this room right now who have walked that journey, walked that road, that they took time to heal, to get counseling, to talk through that, and then invited others to walk with them. And now they've begun to rebuild spiritual home once more. That is one of the most precious and beautiful things you can watch as a pastor.

So spiritual home has been hard. Lastly, for some of us, biological home was hard. So to all of us that grew up in rough situations, you know, we weren't perhaps raised in the healthiest of environments-this is a big part of my story. A lot of hard things happened in my home, a lot of violence, a lot of abuse, a lack of nurturing. And so to all of us I want you to hear me say this. We are not defined by our past, but ignoring it is a sure fire way to make sure that it haunts you the rest of your life. I want to encourage you. You have everything you need in God to write a new story, a new legacy, a new kind of home. This is so true for our parents. And one of the hardest things that many of us live is experiencing a rough or broken home as a child and then you grow up and now you're responsible for trying to make a place where others can feel all of

the things that you didn't when you were small. I mean, when you think about building a home for someone else, you can feel like you just don't quite have the right tools to get the job done. You ever seen the tool section in a grocery store? It's like snacks and drinks, and all of a sudden there's like one shelf like this with two hammers and some bent nails. Some of us feel like we head into adulthood with those kinds of tools to build a home for others. It's not exactly Home Depot. The only thing I lose more sleep over than all of you, is my own kids that I would not pass along my own brokenness to them, that they would not be punished or forced to face broken systems from their dad because of the brokenness that I lived when I was a kid.

If you're single and you're here today, you desire to be married one day. Listen to me, you would be wise to unpack what your home did to you and talk this stuff out with a gospel-fluent counselor or therapist and work on your emotional health with all the ways at home shaped you. Because all of that is strapped to your back right now and you will carry that into any serious romantic relationship down the road. I can promise you.

So I'll close with this. The good news is that not only will we get to enjoy flourishing permanency and uninhibited intimacy fully and forever in the next life, but that God in his grace allows us to experience a taste of that stuff in this life. We get a taste of that in our own homes when Christ is at the center with dads that lead and sacrifice serving their families, moms nurturing and guiding in wisdom, children being raised according to God's word and good community around them, a place where children know that no matter what happens, they have an invitation to the party and a seat at the table. I cannot tell you how many times it's not every night, but I cannot tell you how many times when I took my kids in, and this has been true since they were tiny, I say, "you belong to me" and they answer, "forever and ever". I want them to understand that no matter how catastrophically they fail, that they still belong to me and that I'm still their dad and I'm still on their team. We taste it in our friendships when you have people that know your real stuff and your weaknesses, and they still move towards you. That is nourishing to the soul. That is a taste of true home. I've got this right now in my DNA. And I'll be honest, DNA for me has taken some false starts and some failed attempts, but I finally have it. And I can't begin to describe how much I need it and appreciate it. Friendships that love fiercely and fight for you, that celebrate the things you care about and show up when you need it. Friends that run down the road to you. That's a taste of real home. We get a taste of real home in the local church. When the local church gathers to sing and praise his name, we work towards and enjoy community and ask how we can add value and not just take, when we serve the body, when we carry each other's burdens, that's a taste of real home. And it's only God's kindness, it's only God's kindness that we get to taste any of this in this life. It is pure grace. You and I have done nothing to earn that, achieve that or deserve that. And yet he gives it to us because he's a kind father and he is for us. And he sees you where you are in your life right now. And everything that you are celebrating or mourning or struggling with, he is for you.

Let's pray. Jesus, I can recognize in my own chest the ways in which I have longed for true home. And even my own willingness to chase down stuff in this world that just does absolutely not do the trick. So help us. Help us as a church recognize the many ways in which you are providing a taste of these things. That while we would celebrate and

embrace good things that you give us, we would also recognize that this world is not all there is. That there's more coming. There's more on the way. That you hang with us in the midst of those struggles, in the midst of the waiting. That you desire for us to have flourishing permanency and because of your sacrifice, that is made possible. That is possible. We have an invitation. I pray for those who feel like you are far off, you are upset with them, you are sitting reclined back with arms crossed. They would recognize that as not your posture, that you come tearing down the hill towards us. That all of us have fallen short and yet you love us still. Help us in small ways experience true home in this life. Help Doxa be the kind of church that creates true home. Help our communities create true home. Help our homes and our families experience true home. Help our singles in their friendships experience true home. And that we would give you all the glory and ultimately recognize that you are the one we long for. We pray these things for your glory. Amen.