But God-3

"We've Wandered…But God Welcomes Us Home"

Luke 15:11-32 (NIV)

Hey Newsong!
I want to take a moment and welcome our first-time guests and those who are joining us online today…

We're in a series called "But God"...Those are two powerful words that are found in Scripture…

It describes a turning point where God steps into a hopeless, impossible or difficult situation and changes the outcome!

Last week, many of us experienced a "But God" moment, in the area of forgiveness…If you missed it, check out the message "We're wounded…but God heals us"

This morning we're going to look at one of the Parables that Jesus teaches in Luke 15…A parable is a story with a biblical truth…

Now just so we have the context…
Jesus is telling these parables because the religious leaders are criticizing Jesus for hanging out with and welcoming sinners…

So in response, He speaks of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son…

Luke 15:11-32 (NIV)

Pray

Have you ever made a decision that you wished you could take back? It seemed like a good idea at the time…

Derik driving my Chevy Blazer
(It seemed like a good idea at the time)

Some of the decisions that we make have more serious consequences don't they?

You didn't realize it at the time…
You didn't think it was a big deal…
You thought that you could handle it…

And the reality is that you never thought you would be in the situation you're in right now…

And if you look back on the path that you've chosen…you can find that one decision that seemed like a good idea…But now you're wondering "How did I get into this mess?"

This is where the youngest son is in Jesus' parable…

He took his inheritance…wandered away from his father…and wasted everything he had…

He failed big time!

Maybe you're here today or you're watching online and you've made some choices that have led to you wandering away from God…

I want to tell you that your wandering doesn't have to be the end of your story…

We wander…But God still **LOVES** us!

12 The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.'
Something you should know that the text doesn't tell us…In this culture if there were two boys in the family…The oldest would get ⅔ of the inheritance…the youngest would get ⅓

Now Jesus' hearers would have been shocked by this statement because the youngest son asks for his portion while the father is still alive…

This was an insult to the Father…

It's as if he's saying…You're dead to me Dad…Or at least I'm gonna live like you are… So I want my inheritance now!

So he divided his property between them.-Lk 15:12 (NIV)

Let me say this…God will let you leave! He loves you enough to give you a choice…He doesn't want us to wander away…but He's not going to force us to stay!

If we choose to walk away…that choice does not negate God's love for us…God loves us and nothing can change that…

You can walk away from God, but you can't make Him stop loving you!

God loves us even in our wandering…

Now notice where wandering leads…

We never wander towards God…
We wander away from God

13 “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.-Lk 15:12–13 (NIV)

Do you see the progression? He chooses to leave his father’s house…He goes off to a distant country…He wastes what he’s been given on partying it up!

One thing about wandering away from God…it doesn’t usually happen all at once…

Most Christians don’t wake up one morning and say “I think I’m going to deconstruct my faith today”

“I think I’m going to do the exact opposite of what God wants for me today”

No! It usually happens one little step at a time…
One little compromise at a time…

We stop reading God's Word…
We stop praying…
We stop serving…
We stop attending Church…
We stop being accountable…

We even justify it…
I just need a break…There's nothing wrong with taking a break…there's something wrong with taking a break from God!

Wandering begins in our hearts long before we decide to walk away…And here's the thing…

The further we move away from God's direction…the more vulnerable to temptation we become!

James says…

14 Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. 15 These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.-Jas 1:14–15 (NLT)

Maybe you're here today and you can identify with that…You're in this place right now because…

You just wanted to try it…never wanted to get addicted to it…

It was supposed to be a fun experience…You wanted to do your own thing…You wanted to "live a little" but what you thought was freedom has become bondage!

This young man ran off to a "distant land"...where did you run? Where are you thinking about running?

We can run from God's House but we will always run into consequences…

14 After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. 16 He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.-Lk 15:14–16 (NIV)

Sin will always take you farther than you intended to go, keep you longer than you intended to stay and cost you more than you intended to pay-Ravi Zacharias

Maybe you're here today or watching online and you thought it was a really good idea to wander a little bit…

And now you're paying the price…

Please hear me…
You may have wandered away from God, You may be far away from God right now…but you have not wandered beyond His love for you!

If you're a wanderer today…you need to know that God still loves you…

Just because you're facing the consequences of your choices doesn't mean God doesn't love you!

We wander…But God is **WAITING** for us
17 "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! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 20 So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. -Lk 15:17–20 (NIV)

Sometimes it takes hitting rock bottom to wake us up! Jesus says that the boy came to his senses…

Author Dr. Ray Pritchard writes
“Sin is senseless. Sin is a form of temporary spiritual insanity. Turning away from God is insanity because you are turning away from that which is good to that which is bad, from that which is worth everything to that which is worth nothing, from that which has eternal value to that which has no value. You are turning away from living water so you can drink out of the sewer. That is the definition of insanity”

Now why do people wander? Have you ever thought about that? Why wander away from God?

There are all kinds of reasons that people have, but when you get down to the root of it we realize that it's kind of in our nature isn't it?

Ever since Genesis chapter 3 people have been wandering from God…

Adam and Eve disobeyed God…they sinned…they wandered away from His Word…and that has infected the whole world ever since…

We have a sin nature…
Paul puts it this way…
12 When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned-Ro 5:12 (NLT)

In Galatians Paul explains what it looks like to live according to our sinful nature…

19 When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, 20 idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, 21 envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God. -Ga 5:19–21 (NLT)

So we all have this sinful nature…And if we choose to live by it, it will destroy us

Turtle & Scorpion

It doesn't make sense…it's just our nature…
This young man comes to his senses…

The words aren't in the text…but this is a But God moment!

18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

This is repentance…He's turning from his life of sin and turning back to God!

But it's also confession…He's admitting that what He's been doing is wrong…It's sin!

8 If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. 9 But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness-1 Jn 1:8–9 (NLT)

The word confess means that I'm saying the same thing about my sin as God says about it!

I'm going to see it the same way…And I'm going to repent…turn away from it!

The reality is that God is faithful even when we're not…He's ready to forgive us…The question is are we ready to confess our sin?

Have you come to your senses yet?
Are you ready to come back home?
Your heavenly Father is waiting…

You don't have to stay where you are…You do what this young man does…He got up and went back to his father!

And it's interesting how in the story…The Father who was waiting and watching for His son…ran out to meet Him…Something that older men didn't do in that culture…It was considered shameful for an older man to run…

So why did the Father run?

I love Warren Wiersbe's explanation…
"One obvious reason was his love for him and his desire to show that love. But there is something else involved. The wayward son had brought disgrace to his family and village and according to ***Deuteronomy 21:18-21****, he should have been stoned to death. If the neighbors had started to stone him, they would have hit the father who was embracing him! What a picture of what Jesus did for us on the cross"*

The father was willing to take upon himself his son's guilt, shame and punishment because he loved him…

The same goes for us! Jesus took our sin, our guilt, our shame and punishment for us…because He loves us!

We wander…But God **RESTORES** us

21 “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ 22 “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Now think about it…the best robe in the house would belong to the father…***Put a ring on his finger*** more than likely a signet ring which symbolizes authority within the family ***and sandals on his feet.*** In this culture only a servant would not have any shoes on their feet…The father is restoring him back to sonship!

By the way these are all things that we receive when we are saved…We’re wrapped in the robe of the righteousness of Christ…We’re adopted into God’s family and given sonship…

Our feet are fitted with the readiness that comes with the gospel of peace…so we’re prepared to walk in the ways of holiness!

23 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. 24 For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate. **LK 15:21-24 (NIV)**

What could have easily become a funeral…becomes a celebration…That's the grace and mercy of God! God doesn't give us what we deserve..that's mercy…

And gives us what we don't deserve…that's grace!

If you've wandered away…I want you to know that God's grace is greater than your sin! You can come running back to Him and He doesn't make you earn your way back into the family!

He will forgive you…and restore you!

Now the story doesn't end here…

And these last few verses are a reminder to all of us who are “in the family”

25 “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 27 ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’ 28 “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. That would have been an extremely disrespectful gesture***So his father went out and pleaded with him.*** Again…very disrespectful to his father…***29 But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours*** (notice he doesn’t say this brother of mine? It’s this son of yours…he won’t

acknowledge him as his brother) ***who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' 31 " 'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' "-Lk 15:25–32 (NIV)***

Now, these last few verses are obviously aimed at the Pharisees…the religious leaders who wanted to know why Jesus associated with sinners…

But there's a lesson here for the church…this is that old sinful nature at work…***hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division,***

The older brother starts complaining about what he doesn’t have instead of being grateful for what he does have…

He doesn't care about his wandering brother…He doesn’t have a heart of compassion…

Instead of celebrating that his wayward brother is back home…he’s criticizing…

It’s possible to be in the Father’s House but not have the Father’s Heart!

May we be a church that is doing whatever we can do to reach people who are far away from God…

May we be a church that is always welcoming the wayward saint…seeking to reconcile and restore…

And may we be a church that always celebrates when a lost person comes running back to the Father!

As we close today, I want to talk to those of you who have been spending your time wandering…

I want to let you know that God will meet you right where you are…When you return to the Father you won't get a door slammed in your face…You'll find your heavenly Father will welcome you and restore you!

Maybe you've been backsliding for a while…It's time to turn around and come home…

Run back to the Father and receive His mercy...
Run back to the Father and receive His grace…
He loves you…
He's waiting for you…
He will restore you!

What’s the Holy Spirit Saying To You?
Altar Time