

the RETURN *of the* PRODIGAL SON *the YOUNGER SON*

Day 1 — READ Luke 15:11-13

leaving home

"Yet over and over again I have left home. I have fled the hands of blessing and run off to far away places searching for love! This is the great tragedy of my life and the lives of so many I meet on my journey. Somehow I have become deaf to the voice that calls me beloved, have left the only place where I can hear that voice, and have gone off desperately hoping that I would find somewhere else what I could no longer find at home."

Henri Nouwen - *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, pg 39

Can you relate? Nearly all of us leave our home spiritually or figuratively. We ask ourselves questions like, "Who am I? Is there someone who really loves me? What's out there that awaits me?" Or we tell ourselves, "Home doesn't satisfy. Money will make me happy. Someone else will make me happy. Driving the latest vehicle, a bigger house, being smart, being beautiful, a promotion, knowing all the right people, sports, food, sex, power, success, alcohol, drugs will make me happy." And so we set out in search of all those things we believe we're lacking. Sometimes it's a slow drift and sometimes an intentional choice.

"Leaving home is living as though I do not yet have a home and must look far and wide to find one."
Henri Nouwen, pg 37

If you've been a prodigal in some way, WRITE down your story. Why did you leave? What did you hope to achieve? Would you consider sharing your story with someone? Who?

Day 2 — READ Luke 15:14-16

living lost

If you have lived lost, at what point did you realize that you had spent everything? What slipped through your fingers? How much did you lose? What were the circumstances you found yourself in? What were you disconnected from? How lonely did you get? JOURNAL about your feelings at this point. What did you do?

Day 3 — READ Luke 15:17-19

coming to our senses

Have you ever said to yourself, "I can't live this way anymore. Something's got to change. I hate my life and who I've become. I don't want to be this person anymore. Where do I turn?" We have two choices to make at this point—choosing life as a child of God or choosing to continue trusting in our best efforts.

We often overextend ourselves and are forced to come to our senses. More so, we're forced to admit we cannot *do* everything or *be* everything. Humility grows in us in moments such as this. This is when God has an opportunity to save us and show us just how much He loves us. DESCRIBE a time when you've come to your senses.

Day 4 — READ Luke 15:20

coming home

Spiritually speaking, have you ever returned home after being away for some time? What was that like? How did it feel? How were you received? How had you changed? How far have you come since then? What has the journey been like? Do you believe you can still return home and be welcomed as a child of God? What will keep you from coming home?

Day 5 — WHAT'S in the PAINTING?

LOOK deeply at the painting, especially at the prodigal on his knees. NOTICE his shaven head and worn clothing. What do you see in his face? IMAGINE the long journey home. SEE the father's hands. FEEL his embrace. EXPERIENCE the acceptance and love of the father.

ASK yourself these questions.

- In what way am I a prodigal today?
- Do I truly want to be totally forgiven so that a completely new way of living becomes possible?
- Do I trust the love of the Father?
- Will I break away from my deep-rooted rebellion against God and surrender myself so absolutely to God's love that a new person can emerge?

We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

T.S. Eliot

NEXT STEPS

READ *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Henri Nouwen.

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