

# I AM HOME

— Prodigals Welcome —

I Am Home | *This Is My Home* | Shawn Johnson | 9.9.17  
LG Weekly

## START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer the following question:

**What are you watching on TV these days or if you are a reader, what are you reading these days?**

## SHARE

When we hear the word 'home' what comes to mind?

For many that word brings to mind a place of refuge, retreat, a sanctuary where we can be ourselves and leave our socks on the floor. However, for others, the very word 'home' can bring up hurt and frustration in the fact that we didn't have a good home and the things we have experienced in life have distorted what a home should be all about. In this series "I Am Home," we are going to explore the many facets to the story of the prodigal son.

Mark Twain, speaking of Jesus' story of the prodigal son, reflected that it was "the best story ever told." It is a powerful and intriguing story of family turmoil, heartbreak, struggle, jealousy, grace and redemption. It was the best story ever told, because God is the best story teller. It speaks to the heart of man and the struggle between our prodigal hearts and our ultimate search to find home. In God's Kingdom, home is where He is and when we start walking home, the Father doesn't stand on the porch with arms crossed. The Father runs to us and meets us with a huge embrace and an even bigger party. The image of the Father running to the prodigal son and walking him home is at the heart of Red Rocks Church.

We welcome home prodigals.

Shawn began our series with the story Jesus told about the prodigal son. For those who have grown up in the church, the prodigal son story in Luke 15 is one you've heard quite a bit. If that's you, we'd encourage you to intentionally approach this study and this series as if you're

hearing it for the first time. Sometimes, approaching the Scriptures with “fresh eyes” allows us to experience Jesus in a new and beautiful way. Thus, on the flipside, if this is a new story for you, be encouraged to share the thoughts, feelings, and emotions that the parable of the prodigal son elicits in you.

**What initial thoughts and emotions do you have surrounding this story of the prodigal son?**

The parable of the prodigal son was in fact the third short story Jesus told to a group of Pharisees in Luke 15. It’s often called “the parable of the *lost* son,” as it follows the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. You’ll see the trio of stories in your Bible and can begin to imagine Jesus’ intentional strategy of ending with the superlative story of the prodigal son.

Jesus’ audience, the haughty teachers of the law, were upset that Jesus was spending time with a group of tax collectors and sinners. In fact, Jesus overheard the teachers muttering, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them” (Luke 15:1-2). So Jesus pointedly speaks to the heart of the matter with his choice of three parables, the third of which begins in Luke 15:11.

**Read Luke 15:11-13**

**The younger son, with arrogant disregard to his Father, demanded he get his inheritance. How do you think you would respond if you were the Father? How would you respond if you were the older brother?**

**The young prodigal ‘squandered his wealth in wild living,’ what would you say ‘wild living’ is in today’s standards?**

G R O W

Like when we travel to another country and experience culture shock, a similar effect can occur when reading the Bible. In this story, in particular, we lose some of the cultural significance of the impact of the younger son’s request because our understanding of inheritance has evolved so much in the past two thousand years.

Culturally, when the younger son asks for his share of the estate, he is demanding something to which he has no right until the death of his Father. Since his Father is still very much alive and actively in control of the family’s property, underlying the son’s request is an implication that he cannot wait for his Father to die, and moreover, he wishes his dad were dead.

Henry Nouwen describes the younger son’s request in “The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story

of Homecoming,”

The son's "leaving" is, therefore, a much more offensive act than it seems at first reading. It is a heartless rejection of the home in which the son was born and nurtured and a break with the most precious tradition carefully upheld by the larger community of which he was a part. When Luke writes, "and left for a distant country," he indicates much more than the desire of a young man to see more of the world. He speaks about a drastic cutting loose from the way of living, thinking, and acting that has been handed down to him from generation to generation as a sacred legacy. More than disrespect, it is a betrayal of the treasured values of family and community. The "distant country" is the world in which everything considered holy at home is disregarded.

Whether your life's journey includes a sort of defiant rebellion as the prodigal son or it is characterized by subtle rebellions of the heart, this understanding of the son's leaving home helps us to recognize the younger son in all of us. In leaving his home, the son rejected everything that had formed him and in so doing rejected his identity as a child of his Father. Like Shawn said, "being prodigal is not a place on a map, it is a position of the heart."

**Looking at the position of your heart, in what ways (physical, spiritual, mental...) have you "left home for a distant country?"**

**Describe a season when you, like the prodigal son, knew you were distant from the Father?**

M O V E

**Read Luke 15:13-20**

Most of us have experienced difficult times. Some times of struggle just happen to us while other times, we directly contribute to the struggle in which we find ourselves. The question is "what do we do next?"

Though the hearers of the parable saw the writing on the wall predicting the younger son's eventual collapse, the son himself didn't see it coming. The younger son truly believed his riches and wealth would bring him the life he always wanted apart from his Father. But reality struck after the cash was gone, the friends deserted him and he found himself drooling over pig slop. Jesus speaks about how deceitful riches can appear.

Consider this verse from another of Jesus' parables, "As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke

the word, and it proves unfruitful.” (Matthew 13:22)

**How have the cares of the world been keeping you distant from God?**

**What are those cares and how are you going to change how they influence you?**

When the son walked away from the Father, his life fell apart (Luke 15:14-16). Sometimes, however, our distance from the Father doesn't produce a flashing “WRONG WAY” sign in the hallway! In fact, we can coast farther and farther away from the Father by relying on our own control, self-efficiency, perfectionism, or individuality. Suddenly, like the younger son, we wake up and realize we're a *long* way from home.

Implicit in the younger son's “leaving” is his return. But many of us are too proud to do an about face and head home like he did. The son not only recognized he was *distant* from his Father, he knew that he *needed* his Father and couldn't go on without him (Luke 15:17-19). He finally sees that the distance between him and his Father is a result of his actions and intuitively knew that if he were going to keep on living at all, that distance needed to change.

**Read Luke 15:20**

The younger son, moved quickly and humbly toward the father. He got up and went. Though he had no idea whether or not he would be accepted back after what he had done, he knew he had to do something. The son could no longer live the way he was living.

**Is there something you need to do ‘quickly and humbly’ to start prioritizing God in your life?**

P R A Y

As a group, spend some time praying for each other. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men's and women's groups to talk more freely.

T O G O

**Zechariah 1:3**

*This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Return to me,’ declares the Lord Almighty, ‘and I will return to you,’ says the Lord Almighty.*

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