

THE LONG ROAD HOME

SERMON NOTES

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This guide is to be used in conjunction with *The Long Road Home: How God Forms Our Prodigal Souls* by Earle L. Wilson and Lawrence W. Wilson (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016).

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----- ABOUT THESE NOTES

The Long Road Home by Earle L. Wilson and Lawrence W. Wilson serves as the text for this sermon series. More than two thousand years ago Jesus told the story of the prodigal son, but its applications are still relevant to us today. Everyone can benefit from what transpired in the lives of the three central characters: the Prodigal Son, the loving father, and the resentful older son.

Those who think the grass is greener far from God will see that it isn't. The Prodigal found only misery away from home. Those who are out of fellowship with the heavenly Father will recognize the need to repent and return home.

Parents, whose son or daughter has rebelled and run away from home, will learn from the Prodigal's father the need to be patient, forgiving, and welcoming of the returning child.

Those who piously reject a repentant brother or sister who returns to the heavenly Father, will see the error of jealousy and resentment.

Trust the Lord to enrich your life and the lives of your congregation as you explore how God transforms our prodigal souls.

WHO DO WE LOVE?

1 John 2:15–17

INTRODUCTION

The hymn writer of “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing” recognized that a struggle for a believer’s love and loyalty is real. He wrote, “Prone to wander. Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Here’s my heart, O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above.”

The Prodigal Son not only felt the urge to wander, but he also chose to wander. He gave in to the lure of the world.

The apostle John described God the Father’s character and the world’s character, and challenged us to make the right choice. He urged us to love and serve our heavenly Father.

SERMON OUTLINE**I. A Clash of Characters****A. The Father’s Character**

The Father’s character is marked by love. John mentioned the “love for the Father” (1 John 2:15).

In his gospel, John said God loved us so much that he gave his Son for us (John 3:16). Such sacrificial love deserves our love in return.

B. The World’s Character

The apostle John characterized the world as marked by “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16). The Prodigal Son succumbed to the lure of the world and felt it offered him what he craved.

We need to refuse the world’s appeal if we hope to avoid the disasters it leads to.

II. A Clear Choice

A. Choosing the Way of the World Is Temporal

The world may offer pleasure, but the pleasure is fleeting. The world and its desires will pass away.

B. Choosing the Will of the Father Is Priceless

The right choice is the will of God. It has eternity in it. If we live for things, we will be disappointed because things pass away. If we live for souls, however, we will not be disappointed, because souls last forever.

CONCLUSION

The Prodigal Son made the wrong choice. He chose the way of the world instead of his father's love and presence. What choice will you make?

MISERY AWAY FROM GOD

Psalm 51

INTRODUCTION

The Prodigal Son thought the far country held fun and excitement, which it did for a little while, but soon it held nothing but misery. Moments of pleasure turned into days of pain and remorse.

King David wandered from God. He let down his guard, and committed adultery with Bathsheba. A moment of pleasure led to further sin. As an attempt to cover his sin, he arranged the murder of Bathsheba's husband. Soon, David's sin was exposed, and he cried out to God for mercy and restoration. Psalm 51 contains his heartfelt confession of sin.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Confession of Sin (Ps. 51:1–4)

A. Admission of Wrongdoing

There is a tendency today to blame others for one's crimes, but we need to acknowledge personal responsibility for our sinning. David owned up to his sin.

B. Acknowledgement of Sinning Against God

Surely David had sinned against Bathsheba and her husband Uriah. He had also sinned against the nation, but primarily he had sinned against God (v. 4). Violating God's will is the most grievous aspect of sin.

II. Consequences of Sin (Ps. 32:3–4; 51:8)

A. Persistent Guilt

David experienced persistent guilt after sinning. In Psalm 32:4, he said God's hand was heavy upon him. Even if our sin is "secret," God knows about it, and he will convict us of it.

B. Physical Distress

Before confessing his sin, David was weak and hurting. Sin often causes us to feel physically distressed. We need to confess our sins and find forgiveness.

CONCLUSION

Like the Prodigal Son who turned away from the father and encountered nothing but misery, so we will encounter misery if we turn from our heavenly Father. It is best to stay close to him, because in his presence is joy and eternal pleasures are at his right hand.

LONGING FOR HOME

Philippians 1:21–25

INTRODUCTION

Undoubtedly most of us have taken a vacation far from home only to learn there is no place like home. Perhaps, after a week or so, we longed for home. We could hardly wait to end our vacation and return home. For the Christian, the world is a far country and we long for heavenly home.

After living at a very low level in a far country, the Prodigal Son longed for home, but so did the apostle Paul after living for Christ. Our heavenly home outshines whatever we find in this life.

SERMON OUTLINE**I. Paul's Desire (Phil. 1:23)****A. To Depart**

Paul used the word *depart* to refer to death. To depart meant to fold the tent, the body he lived in, and to break camp with life.

This life is fleeting, and we live in the tent of our bodies for only a short time. Someday we will break camp and go to heaven.

B. To Be with Christ

The best thing about heaven is the fact that we will be with Christ. Paul strongly desired to be with Christ.

When a Christian dies, he or she goes to heaven, into the presence of Christ (2 Cor. 5:8). Seeing our Savior will erase all the pain and sorrow associated with this life.

II. Paul's Decision (Phil. 1:24–25)

A. To Remain in the Body

It seems Paul was convinced that his lengthy courtroom trial would not end with a death sentence. He would be released, and would have further opportunity to live for Christ. He considered his extended years would benefit the Philippians.

Why has the Lord left you on earth? Isn't the reason to benefit others?

B. To Help the Believers Grow in the Faith

The acrostic JOY can stand for Jesus first, others second, and yourself last. A selfish life leads to loss of reward, but a life lived for others leads to gain.

CONCLUSION

As we serve others on behalf of Christ, may our longing for our heavenly home intensify.

THE WAY BACK TO GOD

Isaiah 55:6–7

INTRODUCTION

Isaiah's generation professed to worship the Lord, but it had actually wandered far from him. Isaiah called the nation back to God. He extended God's invitation to find forgiveness. Like the Prodigal Son, each wayward person in Isaiah's generation shared responsibility in finding forgiveness.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. The Prodigal's Part (Isa. 55:6–7)

A. Seek

If you need to turn to the Lord, seek him now. When his judgment falls or your eyes close in death, it will be too late to seek him. Seek him "while he may be found" (v. 6).

B. Call

The Bible promises that whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. It is pointless to call on anyone but the Lord for forgiveness.

C. Repent

To repent means to change one's mind. In turning to the Lord, we must change our minds about our sin and see it as God sees it. The Prodigal Son had a dramatic change of attitude about life in the far country.

II. God's Part (Isa. 55:7)

A. He Will Have Mercy

Mercy is the flip side of grace. Grace is the bestowal of what we do not deserve. Mercy is the withholding of what we do deserve. God will withhold judgment from those who seek him and repent.

B. He Will Pardon

Micah 7:18–19 describes God as so pardoning that he casts “all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.” Our sins are gone, buried in the deepest ocean.

C. He Will Pardon Freely

God will pardon completely without demanding any payment. He forgives freely.

CONCLUSION

We cannot equate our nation with Israel, but God invites us to find forgiveness. Religion cannot save us. Israel had tons of religion, but lacked a relationship with God. If you have wandered far from God, isn't it time to return to him? His arms are open to receive you.

THE FATHER'S HOUSE

John 14:1–6

INTRODUCTION

The Prodigal was finally home. How different it was from the far country! We too are in a far country, but we will all be home someday.

Jesus had gathered his disciples into the upper room to tell them he was going away and to alleviate their concern. Where was he going? To the cross, to the tomb, but also back to heaven, where he would sit on the Father's right hand. He assured the disciples they would see him again, for he would come again. We share the disciples' prospect of seeing Jesus and spending eternity with him in heaven.

SERMON OUTLINE**I. Heaven Is an Actual Place (John 14:2)**

Several personal-account books have been written to assure us that heaven is real, but our best guarantee of heaven's reality is Jesus' words: "If that were not so, would I have told you?" (v. 2). We can surely trust the words of the one who is the truth.

II. Heaven Is an Attractive Place (John 14:2–3)

Jesus described the Father's home as having many rooms, and he said he was going to prepare a place for us. Although many big, attractive houses adorn our rural and urban landscapes, none of them are nearly as attractive as what Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth, is preparing for us. The apostle Paul identified heaven as "paradise" (2 Cor. 12:4). Paradise was used to describe a Persian emperor's magnificent gardens. Heaven is truly a beautiful place. It is also attractive because we will be with Jesus there (John 14:3).

III. Heaven Is an Accessible Place (John 14:4–6)

Many people hope to go to heaven but don't know how to get there. Some think, when they die, God will weigh their good deeds against their bad deeds, and if the good deeds outweigh the bad, God will admit them into heaven. Others think church membership is their passport into heaven. Still others think God is so loving he will allow everyone to live in heaven. However, Jesus made it clear that there is only one way to heaven. He is the way (v. 6).

No matter how deserving of heaven we think we are, we can never access heaven by our own efforts. The Bible brands us all as sinners (Rom. 3:23), deserving of eternal death (6:23), but Jesus died in our place, fully paid for sins and extends an invitation to receive eternal life by believing on him.

Jesus made it possible for us to receive a title deed to heaven as a gift (Eph. 2:8–9). Have you received this wonderful gift?

CONCLUSION

It is wonderful to know that our heavenly home is attractive, but we must not hoard the message of heaven. Pray for the Lord to reveal someone who is far from him and love that person.

----- FAMILY FEUDS

Colossians 3:8–14

INTRODUCTION

Family Feud is a popular TV show that pits two families against each other in friendly competition for a chance to win money. However, members of God’s family sometimes participate in family feuds that are not the least bit friendly. Paul warned the Galatian believers that by feuding they might actually destroy themselves (Gal. 5:15). Let’s consider some of the things that fuel family feuds and also things that help to end them.

SERMON OUTLINE

I. Fueling the Feuds (Col. 3:8–9)

A. Anger, Rage, and Malice

It doesn’t take much for some Christians to get angry with other Christians. A vote to remodel the church’s kitchen might infuriate the opponents. A believer might become angry if someone gets elected to an office he or she wanted to hold. Anger smolders. Rage erupts. Malice harbors ill will toward another. It is the attitude that says, “I hope something bad happens to that person.”

B. Loose Tongues

Perhaps the most volatile fuel that ignites family quarrels is a loose tongue. Colossians 3:9 mentions lying, but other sins of the tongue are also notorious for stirring up hard feelings. Gossip, criticism, and backbiting can tear a church apart if not stopped.

II. Ending the Feuds (Col. 3:11–14)

A. A Change of Clothes

Putting on the virtues associated with new life in Christ is a powerful way to end feuds among believers. As God's holy, beloved people, we need to clothe ourselves with "compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" (v. 12).

B. A Spirit of Forgiveness

If someone hurts us, we ought to forgive the offender, remembering that Christ forgave us although we did not deserve his forgiveness.

C. An Application of Love

Of course, the greatest attribute is love. First Corinthians 13:4–5 says, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs." Just as water puts out most fires, so love can put out the burning resentment that accompanies family feuds.

CONCLUSION

A forest fire does not start big. Usually it starts from a spark or an unattended campfire. Similarly, feuds among Christians usually start over something very little, but left alone they can become blazing infernos that destroy relationships and congregations.

Let's put out the fires when they are small.