

CCC COME HOME TO GOD PART 2

Come home for Christmas

Part 2

We're continuing in our series "Come Home for Christmas". The word "home" is a very powerful word.

We do a lot to our homes to make them look nice and make them feel comfortable but in reality a home is actually temporary. Today as we talk about "Come Home for Christmas" we're talking about something that is not temporary but eternal. Come home for Christmas is about having a relational connection with God who is eternal.

That's what coming home means. It's a picture of the closeness between you and God. What I am talking about today is maybe it's coming home to God for the first time... or maybe it's a reconnect with God.

You maybe thinking and saying to yourself now, Why should I listen to you today, Bill... because life works best when you're connected to God, when you're close to God. See no matter what your temporary situation is in life or no matter what you feel like it is right now, today, you can come home.

The truth is, even if your here for the first time... I think many of us are here because we want to be close to God... Yes, someone probably invited you. And if You're on the outside, if your outside of Christianity looking in, there's some reason you said yes to be here today and I believe you want to be closer to God.

I want to read a story to you, probably the most famous story in the entire Bible. It's a story that Jesus told about the greatest homecoming ever. We call it the

Prodigal Son. And as Jesus was telling this story He was talking to two types of people.

The first type of people who were listening to Him were the likes of tax collectors and notorious sinners, much like we have in the first couple rows here. No I'm just teasing...

The second type of people that were listening were referred to as religious.

But either ones the story was applicable to both. The story of the prodigal son is about a father and his two sons. The younger son does something really wild and radical. The younger son says, "Dad, I want half of my inheritance now." Which, in reality, is saying, "Dad, I wish you were dead, so I could have what was coming to me. But in this story that Jesus is telling the dad does something even more radical. He gives it to the son.

What Jesus is trying to paint is a picture of what God is like. So the father in the story represents God. And the boys in the story represent you and I. So the father gives the son the money and the Bible says the son goes away "to a distant land" and in that distant land he wastes all of his money on foolish living. It depends on what Bible translation you are reading. Foolish living... riotous living... unwise living... parties and prostitutes... however you translate it... it's bad and He wastes the money.

At the time he runs out of money there is a famine that hits the land. Isn't that just like life? When it rains, it pours. Some of it is because of our own doing – he wasted the money. And some of it we have no control over – the famine. The son is in such a bad situation. He doesn't even contemplate going home because he knows he's brought such shame against his family. So he tries to get a job. He

trying to work it all out He trying to make it all good. The only place he can get a job is feeding pigs.

Now as Jesus was telling this story He understands His audience that is listening to him is mostly Jewish people and to the Jewish people in those times a pig was considered unclean. The fact that this boy would go get a job working with pigs, Jesus is saying the guy has hit rock bottom. He was lower than low.

Jesus says *“When the boy finally came to his senses he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired men have enough food to spare and here I am dying of hunger. [In other translations it says “In great need”.] I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Please take me as a hired man.”’ So he returned home to his father.”* How many of you have ever

blown it so bad you’ve had to apologize in a big way? If you’ve ever had to do that you know what this boy was doing when he was walking home. Remember he was in a distant land – he had a long walk. What was he doing? Rehearsing! He was working it out.

But here’s the part that blows my mind. *“While he was still a long distance away, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion he ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.”* The father is representing God here to us. He sees his son coming. Filled with love and compassion that his son is coming home he runs to him and embraces and kisses him. As he does that the son can’t even get out his apology: “Dad, I’m”

The father calls out “Hey, servants! We’re throwing a party! Get me a robe for my son. Put a ring on his

finger, sandals on his feet. Kill the best calf we've got.

We are going to party! My son is home!"

The party is going on but there's another son in the story. The other son is out working and he sees the commotion and hears the noise and begins to walk up to the house and says, "What's going on inside?" One of the servants says, "There's a big party. Your brother's back. Your dad's throwing a party. He killed the best calf. We're eating big! Come on in and celebrate?"

And you know what the response of the brother was? Anger. Jealousy. Can any of you here relate to that? The other brother should have been celebrating but instead he was Angered, he was Jealous. Somebody gets something that you don't get. Somebody else is getting the blessing that you don't get.

But he went to him! Here's a picture of God the Father *running* to the lost son and *going outside* for the son who had become disconnected and was angered and jealous. But notice in both cases the father went to them.

Listen what he says: "*Dear son, you and I are very close. Everything I have is yours.* [Can you even imagine God would say to you "Everything I have is yours. My power is available to you. My presence is available to you."] *We had to celebrate this happy day for your brother was dead and has come back to life. He was lost and now he is found.*" Come celebrate with me.

Whether we are the lost son or the disconnected son there are three things about God's character that I think is important for us to understand as we talk about coming home to God. What kind of God will we be coming home to? Three things. The first is:

1. God is patient enough to not give up.

The Bible says this in 2 Peter 3 “*He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*” Circle “everyone”. He wants everyone to come to repentance. What does “repentance” mean? Repentance is kind of a churchy, theological word that simply means this: Turn around. Turn around and Come home. He is patient. He wants everybody to come home.

Some of us today need to see God in that light.

You’re in a distant land or you’ve disconnected and you need to see God. Let me encourage He’ll be there when you turn around to and come home. He’s waiting patiently. Some of you aren’t runaways but you’ve jumped on a short bus ride called Disconnect. He’s never going to give up on you.

2. The other thing we learn about this story that Jesus told is that God is passionate enough to show extreme love.

verse 20 is probably my favorite verse in this story, “*The father saw him a long way away and he ran to his son.*” Circle “he ran”.

Why did he run? Because he was passionate enough to go to extremes to say to his son he loved him regardless of his past. Then it says in verse 20 he threw his arms around him and he kissed him. This is extreme love. He just came out of a pigpen. But still the Father throws his arms around him and kisses him.

And notice there is no lecture from the father. He doesn’t say anything about the boy’s past. In the absence of words he says a lot. In the absence of words he says everything. God communicates in silence. Those of you

waiting for God to talk to you before you change, that he's going to talk to you verbally. God speaks in silence. One of the things that I've learned is I never have to question whether God loves me or not.

I have found that as a father and now a grand father extreme love doesn't always need words. You never have to worry whether God's going to love you or not.

We might question whether humans love us or not but you never have to question God's love. The Bible says in Psalm 145 *"The Lord is loving toward all He has made."* He made you. He loves you. He shows it in extreme and passionate ways.

3. The third thing we can know about God based on this story is that God is forgiving enough to accept me.

I've met a lot of people who say, "I like this whole God thing. But before I come home to God here's what

I'm going to do. I've got to stop doing 'this' and I am going to start doing 'this'. Basically they say I've got to clean my act up. I've got to get it all together then I will come home." That's the same attitude the son had. Verse 21 *"I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I'm no longer worthy."* I'm not worthy of that patience. I'm no longer worthy to be your son. If that describes you, if you're sitting here today going, I'm no worthy of that extreme love. I'm not worthy of that forgiveness." You're right. You're not worthy and neither am I and that's what blows me away about God's love. He showers us with patience to change with an extreme love to experience a forgiveness that sets us on a new path.

See many people think they have to clean up then come home to Christ. Let me ask you a question when go fishing do you clean the fish before you caught them. No

you caught it first then you go about cleaning it. The son came home and then the father got him cleaned up: let's get him a robe, let's get him some sandals, let's get him a ring, let's throw a party. God forgives you enough to accept you the way you are but He loves you too much to let you say that way. That's where the change comes in. That's the forgiveness that sets us on a new course. Again, this is tough to understand because we don't forgive people like this. With his forgiveness we're getting something better than we deserve.

You want to know what the boy really deserved when he came home? He deserved to be an outcast. And what did he get? He got a party. Daniel 9:9 *"The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving even though we have rebelled against Him."* Every one of us has rebelled against Him and He's forgiving.

Now were at the, So What stage? "You say, "That's nice." Thanks for helping me see God a little bit better but so what? What does this mean to me? How can I come home? How can I create that closeness with God?"

Since it was Jesus' story about how to come home and how to get close, let's just follow the steps of the son. What did the son do?

1. You come to your senses.

Verse 17 *"When he came to his senses."* My father's hired help eats better than me and has a better life than me. He came to his senses. In the New Century version it says, *"When he realized what he was doing."* This first point is the wake up call. For some of us it's the "Ah-ahh! That's what I need to do." Sometimes it's surrounded by pain and it's not the "Ah-ahh!" it's the "Oh, no!" A wake up call.

What about you? Where are you in this? Who are you most like? How do you have to come to your senses? My encouragement to you is don't put this off. Don't put the evaluation off of your own life. Hold up the mirror. Why do I say this...? Because the Bible says time is running out.

Romans 13 *"Another reason for right living, for coming to your senses, is you know how late it is. Time is running out. Wake up. Don't miss out on that closeness you can have with God."* You can come home and be intimate with Him.

Then what did the boy do?

2. You come clean.

He says, *"I'm going to say 'Father, I have sinned.'"*

That's coming clean. This is where you expose to God your sin and ask for forgiveness that you know He'll give. It's not only to expose your sin to God and ask for

forgiveness but I would encourage you to express it to somebody else for accountability. Someone you have trust and comfort in...

It saddens me; no let me say it this way it concerns me that I meet a lot of people that are more concerned with getting caught than getting help, then coming clean. The Bible is so clear about this. Proverbs 20:8 *"People who cover over their sins will not prosper. But if they confess and forsake them they will receive mercy."*

You need to come to your senses. You need to come clean.. Share in the context of a small group or a Christian friend for a little accountability.

3. Come home.

Verse 18 *"I'll set out and go back to my father."*

Remember *"He's waiting for everyone to come to repentance"* which means to turn around and come home.

I want to be very practical right now. I want everybody to do something. Whether it's your first time here or your thousandth time here I want you to grab one of these little Calvary Response cards where it says "Name, Address, City" the whole bit. I want to know what does Coming Home mean to you today? Let's get practical here. Maybe coming home for you means you have never ever entered into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ. You might know a lot about God. But you've never come home to Him and let Him throw His arms around you and kiss you and embrace you and throw a party. You know a lot about God. You just don't know God. Or maybe you've just been invited to check God out. You'd say, "I want a relationship with God."

I encourage you: in the left hand side of the card check "I'm committing my life to Christ." Coming home.

Some of you in here have already done this. Skip down to the third box that says, "I'm renewing my commitment to Christ." You'd say "I'm not in a distant land," but you are disconnected from God. Maybe there's just something about today or this message or God's Spirit that is working you over and you say, "I am disconnected. I want to renew my commitment to Christ." Mark that box and allow me to say this to you; Welcome back.

Why am I having you do this? Because remember what I said in the last point: You expose to God and come clean. You express to somebody else for accountability. Now we're just modeling it. This week I'll look at every one of these. If you want to put your name on it, great. If

you want it to be anonymous, wonderful. But you're making a commitment, a spiritual commitment.

Maybe you're here and you say, "I'm already a believer, Bill. I already feel pretty connected to God. What's my action step in today's message?" Just write down at the bottom left of this card "Others". Your action step is to point others home. Your action step is to tell others about this God that you are connected with. Your action step is to tell others about this God who is patient with you and loving with you and forgiving to you. The greatest time of the year to do that is this week. Why? Because more people are open to going to church during the holidays than anytime in the whole year.

In your bulletins we gave you some invitations – four of them. There are all the times in there. If you've got it together and you feel like you're pretty strong

spiritually, wonderful! Why don't you point other people here so they can find out about this God that you love whose forgiven you and who you have a relationship with.

Runaways can always come home, when you do just imagine God's presence, His joy, His face. Ephesians 3:12 *"Because of Christ and our faith in Him we can now come fearlessly into God's presence assured of His glad welcome."* Circle "glad welcome". You can be assured that God's saying, "Welcome back! I've been waiting for you. Welcome home!"

The natural result of these three steps is the fourth one.

4. Come celebrate

Celebration is the result of being connected with God. When I am connected with God, it gives birth to an attitude of celebration. I live in the real world with you. I understand pain. But what I'm talking about is the

celebration that rises above your circumstances. It's a joy that is deeper than just your normal happiness. Friends let me encourage you. Please just take this message today as something you just heard... But make the action called for: Celebrate these three things we've been talking about. Coming to your senses, coming clean, coming home. Now come celebrate.

Sometimes I can tell people, they say they're Christians and I believe them, but I can tell that they're not very well connected at the time. You don't see that smile on their face. You don't see that peace about them... You don't see the glimmer in their eye. You don't see the bounce in their step, the joy in their voice. And I want to say so much to them, "If you really believe that Jesus rose from the dead and you really believe that God's Spirit lives in you and God's power is available to you and God's

presence is with you, if you really believe all these things would you please inform your face and your actions."

This coming home that Jesus referred to in His story ends with a celebration. It ends with a celebration. Verse 22-24 *"But the father said to his servants quick, 'Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fatted calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of my was dead and is alive again. He was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate."*

The robe and the ring and the sandals were symbols that he belonged to the father. They enhanced the celebration. Again, I realize that there's a lot of pain in this place. I realize there is a lot of disappointment maybe in your life. But one of the results of being connected with God, life works better when you're connected with Him. One of the

results is an attitude of celebration. When I celebrate, when I throw a party, when I go to parties, I want to be with people that I love and that I like. I want to be with friends. The Bible says that when we come home to God we can be friends with God.

Romans 5:11 *“Now we rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God. All because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done in dying for our sins making us friends with God.”* Underline “friends with God.” That’s what coming home to God is, it’s being a friend of God.

Deepening that relationship.

Prayer:

God, thank You for Your love for us. When I read this story and think about how much You love me I’m overwhelmed. Thank You God that Your love for us is patient, that it’s extreme and it’s forgiving and that You created us and want a relationship with us. It’s incredible.

If you’re sitting here today and you put a little X in the top left hand corner that says you want to come home, you want a relationship with God, you might say something like this in the silence of your heart, “God, I want a relationship with You. I don’t understand everything, but I want to come home. I’ve come clean. Forgive me of my sins. Thank You for sending Jesus to die on the cross as a payment for my sins so that I could have a relationship with You. I want to come home.”

God, thanks for hearing our prayers. Thanks for hearing the prayers of those who’ve drifted that we can come home. And you say Welcome back. God, may we be different people as we all leave here today because we’ve heard Your voice, we’ve sense Your presence. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen