

SESSION SEVENTEEN: How can I come back to God? *Luke 15 v 11-24*
Quick, Slower and Full Route

1. The son wants his “share”; his inheritance of all the father has. In other words, he wants his father’s possessions, but not his father: he wants to live as though his father is dead, and he wants to use the “share” for himself.

This is like our attitude to God. We love enjoying the gifts he gives us (life, love, possessions, friends, etc) but we don’t want to know and live with him. We would rather God didn’t exist, and we live as though he didn’t, wasting his gifts by using them for our own ends.

2. The father lets the younger son use his share in that way. He lets the son leave the estate and live without reference to him.

God doesn’t force us to let him be God in our lives. He gives us what we want: life without him.

3. Life was awful. What had promised to give him fulfilment, satisfaction and joy delivered only poverty and regret. Jewish people considered pigs “unclean”, so to say this son ended up feeding pigs (v 15) is a way of saying he’s hit rock bottom.

4. Life lived apart from God promises much but it doesn’t deliver. Sooner or later most people realise that what they thought would make them happy and contented, doesn’t.

5. He “came to his senses”: he actually thought about how his life had turned out—and he realised that life in his father’s house (even as a hired hand) was considerably better than the life he’d made for himself outside his father’s estate.

6. He feels he can return to his father and admit he’s sinned against him. He knows he can’t be his son anymore after what he’s done; he hopes he can live as a servant of his father’s.

7. We need to accept that life lived our way without God hasn’t worked. We need to accept that in our attitude towards God, we’ve sinned. We need to accept that we don’t deserve anything from God.

8. He does what he’s decided to do. He returns to his father, and he tells his father that he knows he’s sinned and he knows he doesn’t deserve to have a relationship with him anymore.

9. We must come back to God. We must do so admitting that we’ve sinned and don’t deserve anything from him. We do it just as this younger son did—by talking, by praying.

10. The father is filled with compassion and leaves his house, running to his son and hugging him (v 20). In the society Jesus was living in, this would have been hugely

humiliating for a landowning man; the father is giving up his reputation and dignity in order to welcome his son back.

The father won't accept the son back as a servant; he welcomes him back as his son (v 22). He gives him the best he has (v 22), and he organises a party to celebrate the son's return (v 23).

God welcomes us back as his children when we return to him and admit we've sinned. He lets us live with him, giving us the best of what he has, and he loves it when we return.

11. As though we were dead, and are now alive again; as though we were lost without him, but now we're found, secure and safe with him again.

The language is deliberately strong. Life without God is like being dead: that's where it leads to. Life with God is real life, for ever.