

2 - I wish I could start over

Luke 15:17

(Play Video: Jason Lowe story)

If you don't know anything about Restoration, there is one thing I want you to know... and that is simply this: You matter to God. It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done, you matter to God.

So as we get into the second week of our series "Finding Your Way Back to God," I think it's important to make sure people hear that no matter where you've been or what you've done, you matter to God.

Last week we discussed the universal longing we have that makes us declare: There's got to be more! It isn't wrong to feel this way, in fact, you are supposed to feel this way. This is how God designed us. The world cannot completely satisfy us. There's got to be more. We've got to find love, meaning and purpose in this life. There's got to be more!

Of course, the problems happen when in our quest for more, we try to satisfy those longings with things in this world that take us farther and farther away from God. We may even get to the point we hit rock bottom, just like the Prodigal Son we read about last week did.

And if you've ever hit the bottom, I'm sure you would have said or thought this next statement:

I wish I could start over.

Our attempts to find love, purpose, and meaning have lead us to an endless cycle of longing and regret. What we think will answer the needs we have only leaves us more and more empty. Eventually we find ourselves thinking, "I wish I could start over."

I know I've been there.

My guess is you have too.

But wouldn't it be great if we could just have a do-over? You know, we could take a mulligan and go back to the moment where we made that foolish decision, take it all back, and start over? Wouldn't it be awesome to do that?

I wish I could start over.

I've been there...

My guess is you've been too.

In fact, I'm willing to bet some of us in this room are there right now.

Last week we began reading in Luke 15 the story of the Prodigal Son. It's a story of a rebellious son who wanted his inheritance so he could leave home. He told himself, "There's got to be more." So he went out looking for more. But...

His longing for love wasn't satisfied in other women.
His longing for purpose wasn't found in partying.
His journey left him asking all kinds of "Why?" questions:
"Why didn't this turn out like I thought it would?"
"Why am I so lonely, broke, and empty?"
"Why did I end up in a place like this?"

And when this young man finds himself working on a hog farm, so hungry that he wants to eat the pig slop, you know he had to be thinking: "I wish I could start over."

That brings us to Luke 15:17, which happens to be my favorite verse in this entire chapter.

17 **"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!**"

When he came to his senses... I love that verse! He realizes there has to be more to life than just eating and partying, binging on Netflix and doing it all again the next day. There has to be purpose and meaning to life.

His choices to leave home and chase after "more" have only left him more empty and broken. And while we don't know exactly how long he was gone from home, whatever he did, he finally woke up.

Have you ever been there?

At the tail end of a bad decision...your friends, family members, spouse and co-workers have all been praying for you to come to your senses.

Maybe they've confronted you before, sat you down, explained in vivid detail how your life was spinning out of control, but you didn't want to hear any of it. Despite all the warnings from others, you didn't see it.

Have you been there?

But then, one day...you finally wake up. You come to your senses. You look behind at the wreckage left in the wake of your bad decisions, and you are filled with regret.

This is such an important part of the story for all of us. We can't find our way back to God until we come to our senses and "wake up."

How many of you have ever heard the word "Rumspringa?"

Rumspringa literally means "running around," and it is a word used to describe the Amish practice of allowing youth to "sow their wild oats" as it were.

Not every Amish community does this, but the ones that do, allow this “freedom” for kids around 14-16 years of age. This freedom grants these teenagers permission to leave the community, go out on the weekends, and experiment with the world outside in whatever way they choose. It comes with an understanding that when the youth come back, they have a choice to make:

- 1 - they can choose baptism within the local Amish church, or...
- 2 - they can leave the community permanently, turn back on their family, and choose to live in the world for good.

Now, as I look around the room today, I think it’s safe to say that few, if any of us, are Amish. I always like to tell Amish jokes online because they can’t read or hear them anyway.

So even though we aren’t Amish, that hasn’t stopped us from having a “Rumspringa” of our own, has it?

We may call it...

“Freshman Year - Springa” or

“Spring Break - Springa” or

“Buying-a-new-mower-without-asking-your-wife-springa.”

And perhaps some of us are on a Rumspringa right now?

We’ve been running around?

Experimenting a little here and there?

So let me ask you: How’s that working for you?

In a documentary about the Amish practice of Rumspringa, most of the kids had two reactions when faced with the decision to go back home: One group said I don’t want anything else to do with this, it’s not healthy, it’s not good, I just want to go home. But the other group said I’ve done too much, I’m never going to be welcomed back where I was, I can’t go home.

I wonder how many of us are responding like the second group?

The Prodigal Son looked around the pig pen... wishing he could be treated like a pig.

Have you ever thought about that in this story? He wanted to be treated like a pig and eat the pig slop. That’s how bad it was for him. But he isn’t a pig. He’s a man... a human being... the son of a wealthy and powerful man.

So we look at Luke 15 verse 18:

17 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’”

Coming to our senses and acknowledging that our decisions have taken us to places we could never have imagined is the first step towards a new life.

Many of us know this truth all too well. Maybe today is a wake-up call for some of us; it's time to acknowledge our life is heading in a direction that's a far cry from where we want it to be, but today, the Rumspringa is over, and it's time to come home...

You see, the first step in starting over is coming to your senses. You change the way you are thinking. But the second step in starting over is just as important, he made the decision to come home.

Verse 20 says: 17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 20 **So he got up and went to his father.**

The first step is coming to his senses... he changed his thinking.
The second step was making the decisions to get up and go to his father.

What the son did by going back to see his father is what some of us call "repentance." Have you ever heard that word?

Repentance is a church word that sometimes gets a bad wrap because the church has done a terrible job of explaining the meaning of repentance over the years. Usually we hear, "Repent or perish! Turn or burn baby!" It's always associated with whether or not we're going down, down, down to a burning ring of fire.

But repentance is actually an amazing word.

Take a look at these two words:

Metanoia (Greek): μετάνοια

Teshuvah (Hebrew): תשובה

Metanoia is the Greek word for repent, and we find it throughout the New Testament in the Bible. Teshuvah is the Hebrew word for repent, and we find it in the Old Testament section of the Bible.

Let me show you what these two words mean in their original language:

Metanoia: "Changing one's mind"

Teshuvah: "To return"

So...

Repentance means to change your thinking and to return from where you came.

When Jesus tells the story, he says the son finally came to his senses and decided to return to his father.

Today at Restoration we say it like this: Repentance means finding your way back to God.

Paul wrote to the church in Rome and shared these words with them:

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

There are two steps we must take in order to start over.... The Prodigal Son illustrates them for us perfectly.

When he came to his senses...

And

I will set out and go back to my father...

My guess is a lot of us have come to our senses. We recognize the decisions we've made have led us to places where we wake up with regret. Maybe they're financial decisions, or relational ones, or they were decisions we made in the moment that made us feel good even though we knew in the moment it was wrong, and we've woken up to regret many, many times.

But we've never made it to this 2nd step... returning home. We want to change, we want to start over, we want a re-do; but shame, guilt, and a healthy dose of fear stands in our way.

Will they accept me?

Will they take me in?

Could God ever forgive someone like me?

These are some of the questions running through our head. And so rather than returning home, we go back to this never-ending "Sorry Cycle" of longing and regret, longing and regret. Truth is, some of us have been stuck in this "Sorry Cycle" for years.

Please hear me on this: All that can change today! You can go home!

Listen, the Father in this story from Luke 15 represents God, our Heavenly Father. And while we are going to talk about this more next week, I can't wrap up the sermon without sharing the end of verse 20 with you...

17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' 20 So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

We have a loving Father who cannot wait for us to return home.

There are two steps to begin starting over...

When I came to my senses... I changed my thinking. I repent.
and...

I set out to go home to my Father. I got up and took action.

It reminds me of what Peter told the crowd on the Day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. Peter had finished his sermon, telling the people they were guilty of killing Jesus. But even though they killed Jesus, God had raised Him from the dead. They were so convicted they asked Peter how they could be saved. How can we start over??

38 Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

They came to their senses... they set out to go home.

Last week I mentioned Pascal's wager, asking everyone to pray, "God, awaken in me the ability to see that You are what's missing from my life."

Today I want to challenge every single person in the room to pray this prayer:

**"God, if you are real, make yourself real to me.
Awaken in me the possibility that with you I could
start over again."**

Can we all just sort of whisper that prayer quietly together?

"God, if you are real, make yourself real to me. Awaken in me the possibility that with you I could start over again."

The story of the Prodigal Son is your story, it's my story, it's our story. Today I hope you hear an invitation from God Himself whispering, "Come home."

Today can be the day you come to your senses. Today can be the day you decide to return. Come home.

If you need to make a decision this morning, please come meet me down front.