

# 3 - I Can't Do This On My Own

Luke 15:20

(Play Video)

We aren't meant to do life on our own.

Life is too difficult to make it through on your own. This is one of the reasons I believe God designed the church the way He did... because we need each other. I can't do this on my own. I need you. You need me. We all need each other.

Paul wrote in Galatians 6:2, "[Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.](#)"

Have you ever been in a situation where you needed help? Something you couldn't resolve on your own? Maybe it was with a project where you were way over your head, or you were moving and you needed help packing the truck, or maybe you were in jail and you literally needed someone to "bail you out." ☺

We can be a proud people, right? We don't like to ask for help. We are Americans! We can do things on our own! We got this!

Besides, there are too many disappointments in this life for us to try and do this on our own.

Sometimes we get disappointed in relationships.  
Sometimes we are disappointed in adversity we face.

I was reminded this week of the story of Derek Redmond. Derek was a track star for Great Britain in the 1980's. He set the British record for the 400 meters and began winning championships throughout Europe, with the ultimate goal of looking ahead to the Olympics. He wanted an Olympic medal. He arrived in Seoul, Korea for the 1988 Olympics and was preparing to race, when during his warm ups, he felt pain. You see, injuries had always interrupted Derek Redmond's career. And now, just before he was to begin the opening round of the 400 meters, he had to pull out of the race... a mere 90 seconds before his heat, due because of an injury to his Achilles tendon.

Can you imagine being a minute and a half away from your dream, and you must leave the race? Oh the disappointment he must have felt.

Maybe you've felt that disappointment? You were so close to what you wanted, and then it seemed like it was unfairly taken away from you.

Life is difficult. And because it's so difficult, we need help from others. I can't do this on my own.

There are times in life when we get into a jam, we get stuck, and we can't get out on our own. Sometimes they can be pretty funny, the times where there really isn't a lot of damage. But then

there are times when the stakes are much higher and the damage is incredibly severe. There is so much pain and loss.

## SERIES RECAP

We are in week 3 of our series called Finding Your Way Back to God. During this series we are working our way through the story told by Jesus of the Prodigal Son, which is found in Luke chapter 15. This story is one of the most famous stories in the Bible, and I think the reason it is so well known is because the story of the Prodigal Son is everyone's story. It's my story. It's your story.

We've all had our moments when we were rebellious and wanted to leave home. We've also learned the hard way when the decisions we made trying to fill the needs we felt in life did not bring us to a place of contentment, but rather, took us down a path we never dreamed we would go.

We all have a universal longing to be loved, to have purpose and meaning, but in this journey called life we are learning these needs are only fulfilled inside a relationship with God. And the good news is that regardless of where you're at in your journey, you can find your way back to God and awaken to living a life that matters!

So the first week we talked about feeling like "There's got to be more." It's not wrong to think or feel this because God created us to feel this way. This world cannot satisfy us because there IS more than just what we see. The problem is when we chase fillers that take us farther away from God, rather than bring us closer to Him.

Last week we processed the idea of starting over and what it looks like to repent. Repentance is changing our thinking and returning to where we came from.

This week we focus in on the reality we cannot do this on our own. Oh we will sure try, just like the Prodigal Son in Luke 15... but our efforts take us away from home and away from what our needs truly are.

But that's when we come back to Luke 15 verse 17 and following.

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.'"

When the prodigal son "came to his senses" he decided to turn his life around. Last week we talked about the Biblical word for this: "repentance." Repentance is the realization that the direction we are headed in is taking us far away from God and all the good he wants for us. But "repentance" implies not just turning around; it also means going back to where you belong. After the son came to his senses...

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.

He went home. For us, "repentance" means the same thing. It's the decision to return to the Father...to come home.

This third awakening is a game-changer. It's in this step that we stop trying to fix things ourselves, stop trying to prove ourselves, stop trying to find fulfillment by ourselves. In this awakening we come to realize:

## **"I can't do this on my own."**

It's kind of like the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. Does anyone know what the first step is in the 12 Steps?

**"We admit that we are powerless over our addiction."**

That is another way of saying: "We can't do it on our own." Talk to anyone who has struggled with an addiction or who works with addicts, and they will most likely tell you that 80% of the battle is fought in this first step.

Asking for help isn't easy, is it?

The other day I was sitting in a favorite coffee shop when a mom and her young child came in. The kid was probably 2 ½, maybe 3. After purchasing a drink they turned to leave when the child made it known that he wanted to open the door by himself. He reached high above his head to grab the handle and put everything he had into trying to pry it open. He leaned his weight back, he flexed his toddler muscles, but it just wouldn't budge. I watched the mom standing there with that torn look of wanting to help but not wanting to force her will into the situation. It took several offers of assistance before the child finally relented and welcomed her intervention.

It tends to take us a long time to outgrow this stubbornness, doesn't it?

Maybe today you're tired of pulling on a door that just won't open. Maybe today you're ready to break free and let God help you open the door.

As we've challenged each other to pray during the week, today's prayer is simply this:

## **"God, awaken in me the willingness to turn to You for help."**

Later on in this service we're going to give you an opportunity to do that. We're going to give you an opportunity to come forward and turn toward God for help. But before we do that, let's talk about the reception you'll find when you do. What kind of God do we find when we come back home? What kind of Father is waiting for us?

Let's look at Luke 15:20 again.

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.

Who is waiting for us to return? It's the God who runs.

Understand, this is a big deal. You see, in the first century in the Middle East, to see a father running would have been an undignified and humiliating thing.

First of all, to run, the father would have to pull up the bottom of his robe exposing his naked legs. That, in itself, was culturally shameful. But even more than that, grown, important, respected men didn't run anywhere in that culture. People came to them, not the other way around.

It isn't very different for us today. Think about how odd it would be to see the President climb down the steps of Air Force One and take off running across the tarmac to meet some world leader? It would be shocking. It would seem undignified. Important people don't run.

And there's something else significant about this running father. As Jesus tells this story, his audience would have had a hard time imagining the scene he's painting. You see, in their day, a boy who had taken his father's money and squandered it among the Gentiles would have experienced a very different reception as he made his way home. Typically, the people of that town would have intercepted him at the town gates and preformed a ceremony called the 'KESAHAAH,' and this is how the ceremony would go: They would not let him in the village, but outside the gates they would take a clay pot like this (hold a clay pot up and smash it on the stage) and they would smash the pot in front of the boy. They'd say something like: "You have broken our community, you are now cut off from us, never to return."

That is the reception the son would have expected. Maybe that is the reception the son deserved.

But the father didn't care about any of that. Day after day he scanned the horizon hoping to catch a glimpse of his son. His friends were probably telling him, "Forget about that worthless, ungrateful brat." Most probably encouraged him to move one.

But he wouldn't stop watching, longing, waiting for his son's return.

And when he sees him on the horizon? He takes off running. He humiliates himself in front of his neighbors and runs to his boy to protect him from the 'KESAHAAH.' Before anyone can say, "You are cut off from us," the father envelops his son in an embrace and showers him with kisses.

Let me ask you... Do you understand that this is the God who waits for you, too?

When we come to the point where we admit we've blown it and recognize "I need help," this is how God responds to us, too. This is the God we'll find. The God who runs to meet us with open arms of acceptance, kisses of love, and tears of joy.

Do you remember the Olympic athlete Derek Redmond that I mentioned in the beginning of the sermon? He injured his achilles tendon a minute and a half before his race was to begin. Well, Derek Redmond did not give up being an athlete. He had surgery and worked hard to get to the point he could compete again. His goal was the Olympics. Yet, before the 1992 Summer Olympics, he had undergone eight operations due to injuries.

Incredibly, he qualified and made it to Barcelona. Derek was in good form at the Olympics. He posted the fastest time of the first round, and he went on to win his quarter-final. But it was during the semi-final run, that Derek became part of the Olympic legend.

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You see, things began well in the race for Derek, but in the back straight about 250 meters from the finish, his hamstring tore. He fell to the ground, in pain. While he knew he would not win, he knew he had to finish the race. Redmond jumped up and began hobbling forward despite the pain he felt. It was at this moment that one of the most touching things I've ever seen happened... a man ran from the crowd onto the track and helped Redmond.

The man who ran to help? It was Redmond's father.

Friends, I have no idea who actually got the gold medal in the '92 400m race, but I will never forget that scene, a scene of a father running to his son and carrying him to the finish line. God is the Father who runs.

## Help has a Name: It's Jesus

We don't just learn about God from the father in the story, we also learn about God through the storyteller. The most important step in our "Awakening to Help" is to meet the narrator of our story. The whole reason Jesus told the Story of the Prodigal Son was to help us find our way back to God, and the reason he knows so much about finding God is because he is God.

He's not some remote God who is "out there" and doesn't really care about what's going on in our lives, but a God who is present and active. He is a relational God who longs to be close to us.

You see, when we "Awaken to Help" and decide to come home; we will discover that help has a name. It's Jesus.

Jesus is the God who is with us. He was sent by God and lived among us and was one of us—fully God and fully human.

As C.S. Lewis once said, "The only way Hamlet could discover anything about Shakespeare would be if Shakespeare wrote himself into the play."

And so God wrote himself into our story by coming in the person of Jesus. If we want to know what kind of God is waiting for us when we come back to him, we find him in the person of Jesus. In him we find:

A God who is present promising to never leave us on our own.  
A God who is full of grace, refusing to condemn us even when it's deserved.  
A God who is humble, bending down to care for our needs.  
A God who is for us, sacrificing himself when we were helpless to save ourselves.

Help has a name and it's Jesus.  
What kind of God is waiting for us when we come back to him? The God we see in Jesus.

The conclusion for today...

## **Come home.**

Maybe for you, today is the day to find your way back to him. Now is the time to come home.

Perhaps you've been in a far off country doing some expensive living. You've chased a lot of things looking for the love, purpose, and meaning you long for, but all you have left at the end of the day are regrets.

Maybe you've been hesitant to return. Pride has kept you from admitting that you can't do it on your own.

Or perhaps it's been shame, knowing where you've been and what you've done. You've been telling yourself that you can't return.

I want to say as clearly as I can today that you can always come home. There is a God who is scanning the horizon, watching for you, who took the shame and humiliation of our sin on himself on the cross, who longs for us to return.

If you choose to come home today, he will run to you. He will welcome you with open arms. You will find that help has a name and it's Jesus.

## **COMMUNION**

The Father threw His arms around His child, shielding the child from any rocks or abuse that might be thrown his way. And this is what Jesus did on the cross, opening His arms and taking the punishment we deserve.

Let's take time to remember and give thanks for His sacrifice.

(Video after prayer)