

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's bare feet walking on a cobblestone path. The person is wearing light blue denim jeans that are slightly bunched at the ankles. The scene is lit with warm, golden light, creating long, dark shadows on the uneven stones. The overall mood is peaceful and evocative.

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come home

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It's time to come home

I've run away from home twice. The first time was when I was six years old and it went something like this ...

My father was, and still is, the classic home handyman. His motto, if he ever bothered to verbalize it, was something like, "Don't pay anyone to do something you can do yourself". In the winter of 1967, he decided to build a roof over the courtyard between the dining room and garage of our home.

The heart of the job lay in getting the six metre long ironbark beams into place and then nailing them home. Getting them into place was a bit of a trick, but the real problem was the ironbark. The old man may as well have been nailing into concrete. The first nail only went about half a centimetre into the timber before bending at right angles. Five or six nails later, the first nail was finally hammered home. Two beams and two hours later, it became obvious: this was going to take a while. And that was a problem. Dad was a stickler for a schedule and, according to the schedule, all the beams were due up that Saturday. There had to be another way.

In a moment of brilliance, Dad remembered his electric drill. He raced out to the shed and came back, drill in hand. It was just what the doctor ordered. The rate of work accelerated and by 4:00pm all but one of the beams were up.

But the last beam, for whatever reason, proved to be problematic. Dad headed off to the shed to find a solution and there I was, sitting on a stool, waiting for him to come back. That's when I saw the drill lying quietly on the floor in

front of me. You've got to ask yourself the question: What good is a drill if it's not drilling?

Reckless Andrew started whispering in my ear. "Go on, have a go—what could go wrong? Blokes use power tools, don't they? You're a bloke, aren't you? Aren't you?!"

Sensible Andrew replied urgently, "If you touch that drill something will go wrong—it always does—and you'll end up in all sorts of trouble!! Don't do it—don't even think about it! You'll regret it."

Reckless Andrew piped up again. "Come on, you big girl, at least pick it up and squeeze the trigger. You don't have to drill any holes—just squeeze the trigger. What could go wrong?!"

And there it was. With all the polish of a closing statement in a courtroom battle, Reckless Andrew won the day. I reached out, picked up the drill and squeezed the trigger. It was gold. I marvelled at how it kicked in my hand—power in the hands of a lunatic.

I found some wood and started drilling. Then I kept drilling, hole after hole—until I lent the wrong way and the bit snapped. For a moment I froze—like a rabbit caught in the headlights. Dad was not going to be a happy camper.

Carefully, I placed the drill back in exactly the same position on the floor, repositioned the lead in the same configuration it was in before the fateful experiment, beat a hasty retreat into the house and hid behind the curtains in the dining room. Maybe the old man would think he broke it himself. Peering through a narrow gap in the curtains, I waited.

Several minutes later he came back with a spring in his step—he was almost finished. He picked up the drill, bounded up the ladder, positioned the newly modified drill bit on the face of the timber and pulled the trigger.

"ANDREW!!!" he hollered at the top of his lungs.

It was time to consider my options. I could lie and say that I accidentally kicked it as I was walking past—but the off-cut with all the little holes in it was lying directly at his feet.

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Or I could turn and run. Even at that age, I could run like a jack-rabbit and maybe even outrun him. But what would be the point? He would eventually catch up with me. I decided to face the music.

He waved the drill in my face, yelled some things about “other people’s things”, “irresponsible child” and “holding up the job”, gave me a whack on the backside and sent me to my room for the rest of eternity. I retreated in tears, and just sat on my bed until the idea of moving out started to germinate.

I packed a bag, jumped out the front window, and took off up the street. By now it was getting dark and the rain had started falling. I was only three or four blocks away from home when I spotted the familiar dim glow from the headlights of mum’s Volkswagen. Seeing me on the side of the road she pulled over, opened the passenger door and spoke rather calmly.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

“I’ve had enough of him”, I answered. “I’m running away from home!”

“What will you do?” she quizzed.

“I dunno”, I shrugged.

“How will you survive?”

“I dunno.”

“What will you eat?”

“I dunno.”

“Where will you live?” That one I’d worked out. I knew exactly where I was going.

“I’m going to the tip to live in the boot of an old car.”

There I was, standing on the side of the road—hungry, tired, miserable, angry—looking for all the world like a drowned rat. It didn’t take much persuading from the old girl to break my resolve. I jumped in the back seat, closed the door and we trundled home.

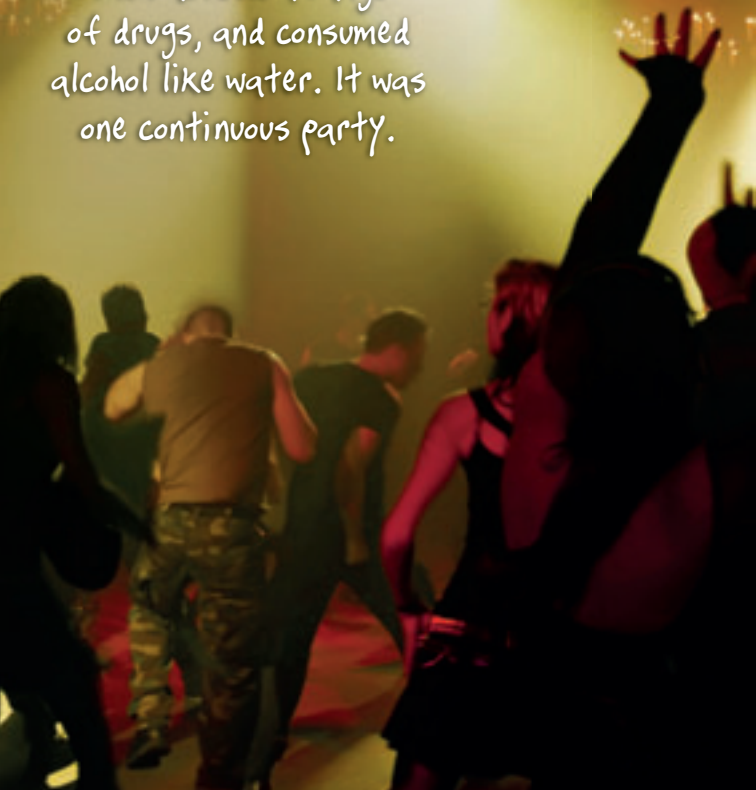


That was the first time I ran away from home.
The second was much later and very different.

The second time I ran away from home, I was like the man in a story that Jesus once told about a lost son. In that story, a young man (the younger of two sons) comes to his wealthy father, demands his inheritance early, takes off with a sizeable fortune, squanders the lot on wild living and ends up completely broken.

Why was I like him? Well, firstly, because of the way I treated my family. The most awful thing about Jesus' story is when the young man goes to his father and asks for his share of the inheritance. The family fortune involved land, livestock, property and holdings. He was asking his Dad to cash it up and make it portable. But that wasn't the worst of it. You're not supposed to get the inheritance until someone dies. The younger son basically looked his father in the eyes and wished him dead. He wasn't leaving home

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to get married and start his own family, or to start his own business, do a trade or study for a profession—he just wanted to escape. He said, “See ya later, pal. I don’t wanna know ya!” There’s no suggestion that the father was abusive, reckless or uncaring. The son was simply a selfish brat.

Now, I never asked my father for my share of the estate. In fact, such a thing would never have occurred to me. But when I left home, I wasn’t simply leaving the nest—I was trying to escape, too. I was tired of my parents’ standards, their way of life, their morals and, sadly, I’d become ashamed of them. Without much of a goodbye, I packed up and left.

Like the man in the story, I moved to a foreign country—from Carlingford, in Sydney’s north-west, to Darlinghurst in the inner city. It wasn’t geographically very far, but culturally, it might as well have been a thousand miles away. And like the man in Jesus’ story, I squandered everything I ever earned.

I was in a band, and we did gigs in a wide variety of Sydney’s more illustrious nightspots—everything from pubs and RSL clubs to exclusive nightclubs. Man, what a blast. We lived like lords, did as we pleased, flouted the law, dabbled in and then abused a range of drugs, and consumed alcohol like water. It was one continuous party. We thought we were ‘cutting edge’, even though the whole ‘sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll’ thing had been a well-worn cliché for several decades by the time we arrived. But hey, when you’re on fire, who gives a toss? Proud and arrogant, we burned the candle at both ends and in the middle, and laughed it off.

At first, none of it seemed to matter. We were young and fit, and early on there were no apparent effects on our health. We joked, even bragged, about the millions of brain cells crucified every night, the women we’d had, the bar-room brawls we’d been in and the laws we’d broken. But at some stage you have to pay the piper. You can’t get away with it forever. Ultimately, two of the guys died of heroine overdoses and another suffered a stroke that left him partially blind. I was

still alive at 27, but my life had become a train wreck. Morally, emotionally, spiritually, physically and financially bankrupt, I was utterly broken—a hollow, empty shell of a man. Years later, after I'd recovered, I calculated that I had spent enough on booze and dope over those years to have bought outright an average-sized house in an average suburb of Sydney.

So when I read the story Jesus told about a guy who'd done pretty much the same thing, I was all ears. Eventually the young man in Jesus' story sank so low, he couldn't even eat as well as the pigs he fed. Destitute, he came to his senses and decided to return home.

It's a big call, isn't it? After he'd treated his father and family with such scorn, how could he even entertain the idea of returning home? To his credit, the young man could see what he'd done, and he knew that he couldn't hope to go back and expect to be accepted by his family. So as he trekked home, he worked out what he'd say to his father: "I have sinned toward God and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your employees." In other words, he knew that the only way back was to crawl in on his belly and attempt to pay, somehow, for what he'd done.

In the meantime the father, broken-hearted and filled with grief, continued life as best as he could. He worked on his farm, looked after his household, and wondered what had happened to his son.

Then one day—perhaps he'd developed the habit of searching the horizon each evening before returning home from the fields where he worked—he sees a lone figure trudging wearily up the road. He can't make out any of the features, the distance is too great, but the gait is unmistakable. He drops his hoe and runs as fast as he can to meet his son. The servants are hot on his heels. When he reaches his son he stops, trembles uncontrollably with rage, and screams at him, "You disgraceful, snivelling little snot! How dare you show your face around here!"

That's what he says, right? No, of course not! The son starts

in with his little speech, but he only gets a few words out before the old man throws his arms around him, kisses him and orders the servants to dress him up in the finest robe, slaughter the best side of beef and stoke up the barbecue. There is no reprimand, no criticism, no denunciation, no word of condemnation; just a heartfelt welcome from a man dying to be reconciled to his son.

Meanwhile, the elder son, working on a different part of the property, gets wind of his brother's return and the subsequent feast. He's furious.

"For goodness' sake, Dad, how can you welcome him home? Look at what he did to you! Look at how he treated you! Look at how he wasted everything you worked so hard to build up. He's destroyed the business and treated us all like dirt. Besides, how can any of this be fair? I have never left your side, yet you've never thrown a party like this for me!"

He makes a pretty good point, doesn't he? But the father makes a better one.

"My son, everything I have left is yours—a substantial fortune! But more importantly, your brother was lost and now he's found. He was dead and now he's alive. It's time to celebrate!"

It's a great story. It has all the elements you might expect in a high-class miniseries: treachery, hatred, love, riches, poverty, reconciliation, forgiveness, a rich patriarch, a dysfunctional young man with a chip on his shoulder—what more could you want? But of course, Jesus didn't tell this story just for our entertainment. He told the story to teach us an important truth.

The father in the story is God, the source of life and love, and the one who supplies everything we need. And the son is us—humanity. We take everything God gives us—our very lives and whatever riches and possessions we might have—but we treat him with utter contempt. We turn our back and walk away saying, "See ya later, pal, I don't wanna know ya!"

This is called sin. It involves our moral failure, but it's more than that. At its core, sin is about rebellion—it's about ignoring God. We know that God's there, we know that everything we have comes from him, but we refuse to listen to him or treat him as God. We tell God to get lost so that we can run our lives on our own without him interfering.


How should God respond? If you ask me, he'd be quite within his rights to respond like the older son in the story and tell us to take a hike! But he doesn't. Instead, he responds just like the father in the story. When we return to him he simply welcomes us with open arms, forgives and even celebrates our return.

Let me finish by asking two questions:

Firstly, if the son never returned to the father, would they ever have been reconciled? The answer, of course, is no! The Bible teaches that if we don't come back to God in this life, we will remain estranged from him forever. We've made a declaration of independence. God honours that decision and lets us have it. The downside is that it means an eternity of not knowing him—an eternity where all his goodness and love are absent. This is an unthinkable result!

Secondly, who paid the cost of the son's return? Make no mistake—forgiveness costs. Sometimes it doesn't seem like it because a misdemeanor might be relatively insignificant. But it does cost. It may mean letting go of hurt, resentment, hatred, bitterness, hostility. It may even mean taking a financial loss. One way or another, it always costs something to forgive. Remember how the son wanted to pay for his own return? "Make me like one of your employees." But the father will have none of it. He wears the cost himself—he never expects the son to pay.

God is the same. He pays the cost himself. In the greatest act of love the world has ever known, Jesus paid for our



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WELCOME

rebellion when he willingly died on the cross. He died the death that our treachery deserves. When we accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour, our rebellion is paid for and forgiven.

Christianity is not about fancy rituals and ceremonies. It's not about having rules for the sake of having rules. It's not about elaborate buildings and luxurious furnishings. It's not about stale surroundings and mind-numbing chants. It's about being back in right relationship with the one who gave us life—and that is all. The heart of the matter is that it's a matter of the heart. Christianity is simply about coming home.

Don't you think it's time you came home?

Sample only

Here's the story about the young man as Jesus originally told it:

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the inheritance". The father then divided the property between the two sons. Soon afterwards, the younger son collected everything together and travelled to a distant land, where he squandered his inheritance on reckless living. After he had spent everything, there was a great famine in that land, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that land, who sent him out to his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to feed himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; yet no-one gave him anything. Then he came to his senses and thought, "How many of my father's employees have an abundance of food, and yet here am I dying of hunger! I'll get up and go to my

father and say to him, 'I have sinned toward God and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your employees.'" So he got up and went to his father.

He was still some distance away when his father caught sight of him. The father was deeply moved, and running to his son he embraced him and kissed him. The son said, "Father, I have sinned toward God and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick, bring out the best robe and dress him in it; put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's eat and celebrate, because this son of mine was dead but now is alive again; he was lost but now is found." And they began to celebrate.

Now the elder son had been in the field, and as he drew near the house he heard music and dancing. And calling one of the hired hands, he asked what this was all about. He replied, "Your brother has come and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has got him back safe and well!"

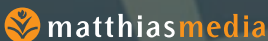
The elder son became furious and refused even to enter the house. But his father went outside and pleaded with him. He answered his father, "Look! I have been slaving for you for so many years, and I have never disobeyed your command. Yet you have never given me even a goat so that I could have a celebration with my friends. But when this son of yours, who has squandered your estate on prostitutes, comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

But his father said to him, "My child, you are always with me, and everything that is mine is yours. But we must celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead but now is alive, and was lost but now is found." **(Luke 15:11-32)**

In our broken world, homes
aren't always perfect.

But there's one home where there will always be a welcome—God's home. In this booklet you'll find the stories of two men who discovered that God wanted to forgive them and welcome them home in spite of everything they'd done to mess up their lives. As you read their stories, you'll find that God wants to welcome you home too.

This was given to you by:



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