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Alright, if you are a first time visitor at any of our campuses I want to welcome you right now whether you are joining us from our North campus, Downtown, West, online, or those of you here at Northwest. Are you guys doing well? Give it up for our other campuses. It's good to see all of you here today.

Every summer, usually sometime between Memorial Day weekend and the Fourth of July, the elders graciously grant me five or six weeks kind of devoted to what we call a study break. What that means is that for the next five or six weeks I'll be taking the time I normally invest into weekly sermon prep and delivery and refocusing it onto some other things.

So I'll be in and out of the office and I'll be working on a year's worth of upcoming sermon series, really seeking God's direction in the life of our church, looking inward and making sure my heart is in a good place, and getting away with my family doing a little bit of vacation.

I participate in something called the North American Christian Convention, which is a leadership conference that is open to anybody and everybody who wants to come. It is being hosted at the convention center, right downtown in our own city. I'll be speaking at one of the main sessions. I'd love to invite our whole church fam to come down there and crash that party. It would be great to see you down there.

We're going to be sending you links and stuff so you can get more information on it. Come to any of the conference that you want to—there might be some workshops, some main sessions that you're interested in and all kinds of great, great resources. We'd love to see you there.

Next weekend, you're not going to want to miss it, a good friend of mine who leads a great church in the Los Angeles area call Radius Church is going to be here to share with us. God has gifted him in unique ways to be able to speak powerful truths. So you're going to want to hear that.

And then in a couple of weeks our very own Jake Barker is going to be back with us. Go ahead and give Jake a hand. If you do not know who I am talking about, Jake served on our staff for about a decade and we sent him out about six months ago to the mission field of Santa Barbara, California. So he's roughing it out there for Jesus. He'll want to be able to share with you some of the exciting things that are happening out there.

Today I'm excited to kick off our summer sermon series we're calling *Stories that Change Everything* because nothing speaks to the heart like a good story. I could stand

up here and give you some truth statements that would be very, very true. You might say, "That's really good and I should apply that to my life." But if I tell a story that speaks to us in a very different way, because stories are the language of the heart.

I don't know if any of you saw this on the news a few years ago, but there is a 45-year-old lady by the name of Christine Tallady who was reunited with her 22-year-old son, a guy named Steve Flaig. She had been separated from him for his whole life. She gave birth to him in October of 1985. She was a single mom and could not take care of him, so she made the gut-wrenching decision of placing him in an adoption agency. She left the record open in case he ever wanted to get in touch with her.

So 22 years go by. Steve is actually living in Grand Rapids, Michigan working at a Lowes store and he decides he want to get in touch with his birth mom. He had a couple of attempts at trying to do that and he was unsuccessful. Finally he went to the adoption agency one day and put in all of his information and her address pops up less than a mile from the Lowes store he works at.

So he goes to work that day and is telling his boss about it. He says, "My mom's name is Christine Tallady." And he goes, "Do you think that could be Chris Tallady, our head cashier?" For the last several months he had been working side by side with his birth mom at Lowes and didn't know it.

He's kind of like, "Okay, how do I tell her this? How do you do that? Do I slip a little note in her lunchbox in the break room, surprise I'm your kid? Do you do that? When she calls for a price check on a gallon of paint do you run up there like, "I'll get that for you, mom." It's like, how do you do that?

There was a volunteer at the adoption agency who said, "I'll setup a proper introduction." The two of them meet and this is a picture of them in their Lowes uniforms. It was an amazing story and Christine would say, "It was a complete shock. I always thought he might seek me out one day, but I didn't know when and where. I certainly didn't think it would be like this. This is the perfect gift."

Now I could stand up here and give you some truth statements like, "There is nothing greater than the bond between a mother and her child," and that would be true. I could say things like, "All of us feel a little bit like an orphan sometime in our lives, all of us want to be loved, all of us want to be found." I could say those things to you and you might mentally say, "Yeah, I agree with that." Or I could tell you a story and it speaks to us at a whole new level.

Stories change everything. Jesus knew stories were the language of the heart. It was one of his favorite ways to teach. In fact, in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, which record Jesus' life and ministry, whenever Jesus had something significant to say he would often tell a story.

When the crowds or the disciples would ask Jesus a question, when the Pharisees or the teachers of the law would make an accusation against him, when he would see some sort of an injustice or something that ran counter to God's heart for people, Jesus would often tell a story. These stories contained powerful truths that changed everything.

So over our summer sermon series we're going to be walking through many of these stories Jesus told. They are called parables. And today we're going to look at one out of Luke 15. It's called the parable of the prodigal son. And if you have grown up in church, you're probably very, very familiar with this parable.

Even if you're relatively new to Bible study, or you haven't been in church for a while, you've probably heard something about this parable. Oftentimes it's one of the most misunderstood parables because we're so familiar with it. In fact, the temptation for some of you in the room right now is to say, "I know this parable," and you might check out.

Here's the thing about Jesus' stories. They have new layers of application and they have a fresh message for us today. Don't check out. God has a powerful message from this story. Let's look at it together in Luke 15 starting in verse 11.

"Jesus told them this story: 'A man had **two sons.**'" For starters, we often call this the parable of the prodigal son in the singular, but the way Jesus tells it there are two prodigal sons. One is lost because he strays from home and, as we will see, one is lost even though he stayed home. "The younger son **told** his father, "I want my share of your estate now before you die.'"

The poor guy, he is confused. He doesn't know how inheritances work. He's hit his head and is not thinking clearly. An inheritance is when your family member passes away. An attorney calls you and then they arrange the inheritance. He wants it now before his father dies, which is basically him saying, "Dad I really want you out of the picture. I don't want you in my life anymore." It's incredibly disrespectful no matter what culture you are in.

The way the inheritance would work, because they didn't have trust funds and savings accounts during that time, all of the family inheritance was wrapped up in the family property. So the older boy would have been entitled to two-thirds of it, and the younger boy would have been entitled to one-third of it. So he basically says to his dad, "I want my share of the inheritance now and what I intend to do with it is sell it off."

What we need to understand is that the family's property is the family business and he is threatening to bankrupt the family business by liquidating 30 percent of the assets to go and have a wild weekend in Vegas. That's essentially what he is saying. And now we begin to understand why his older brother is going to be so irritated with him.

What's even more shocking than this young man's demand is that the father actually gives it to him. "So his father **agreed** to divide his wealth between his sons. A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a **distant land**, and there he **wasted** all his money in wild living."

So you get the picture. He goes to the Las Vegas of his day and hits the finest restaurants, goes to the finest nightclubs, and shops at the most exclusive stores. He throws some money around and immediately it gets him a bunch of false friends, people who will help him spend the money. Prodigal means lost, but it also means this:

prodigal: reckless spendthrift ... to spend until you have nothing left

And that's certainly what this young man does. It says in verse 14, "About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. **But no one gave him anything.**"

His friends were no longer around. The economy falls apart, the housing market takes a nose dive, and unemployment skyrockets right at the exact moment he spends the last dime of his inheritance. The best option he has in front of him as a Jewish boy is to feed Gentile pigs. And he is embarrassed, demoralized.

It says in verse 17 that he came to his senses. "When he finally **came to his senses**, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a **hired servant.**"' So he returned home to his father."

Now my personal opinion is this right here might look like remorse and repentance, but I'm not sure he is there yet. I think this is desperation, not regret. I think he is looking at all his options and says: The best option I have on the table is for me to go home and tell my dad that I messed up. Hopefully he'll have enough grace and compassion for me to give me a job.

If you notice, never once does he say: I'll ask for his forgiveness. He says: I'll go home and confess I messed up because that's probably what he needs to hear for him to give me a job. He'll just probably pass me off to one of his supervisors and hand me an application. I'll just be treated like one of his employees.

For his son to do this, it's a significant cultural risk. It's not just up to his father as to whether or not his father will accept him back. It's also up to the community. The community was a tight knit Jewish community and anytime there would have ever been a young man who disgraced his family in this way, the community would oftentimes take matters into their own hands.

If a young man like this would have ever come back home, they had a ceremony called the Kezazah, which basically means cutoff or exiled. Which means that, if the young man came back, the community would rally together and they would take a large jar filled with burnt corn and nuts—why I have no idea, but I wonder at times if that’s where we got our snack Corn Nuts—and they would take this jar and break it in front of him and say, “You are exiled. You are cut off.” That is what’s waiting on this man when he got home. So I am wondering if he is thinking: If I can just get there before the community gets to me and ask my dad for a job, I’ll just blend in as part of his workforce.

And what Jesus says next in the story to you and me, if we are familiar with the story, is sort of lost on us. But to this first century crowd who is listening to Jesus tell the story for the first time their jaws would have been on the ground when Jesus says this.

“And while he was **still a long way off**, his father saw him coming.” This more than implies his father was looking for him. Every single day he is on the front porch scanning the horizon. “Filled with love and **compassion**, he **ran**,” and actually the Greek word for run here is a footrace. He is trying to get to his boy very quickly. And he ran “to his son, **embraced** him, and **kissed** him.”

Everything that is said here is shocking –the fact that the father would run to his boy... How many of you have ever had someone in your life who hurt you in a significant way, and you really cared about that person? It could be any kind of relationship in your life. He seeks to reconcile with you, he asks for your forgiveness, and you know deep down inside at the end of the day you are going to extend forgiveness to him, but you want him to sweat it out a little bit. Have any of you ever been there? We call that marriage. It’s like, “I’m going to forgive you, but not so easily. I’m going to let you sweat it out a little bit.”

It could be your friends. It could be your kids, a coworker, a schoolmate, whatever. They send you a text message saying, “I’m so, so sorry,” and you’re like, “I’m not responding to that this week.” Or they send you a voice message saying, “Please call me. Please call me.” And you’re like, “I’m not in a rush for that.”

You know you’re going to forgive them. At the end of the day you will. It’s just not going to come that easy. And yet Jesus says the father is scanning the horizon. As soon as he catches a glimpse of the silhouette of his boy, he knows that’s his boy because he recognizes the walk, he hikes up his garments and runs to him. If I would have been this father I would have been like, “It looks like the boy is coming home. I’ll be in the backyard. Let him ring the doorbell a little while,” and then I might come out. And I’ll be kind of cool and nonchalant about it.

But this guy runs to him. And he says it was like a footrace, which implies it was a sprint. Now how many of you have ever seen a grown man over the age of 40 sprint? I’m

over 40 so I can say this. It's ugly scary. There is stuff jiggling all over the place. Things are threatening to break off. It is not a good thing.

Here is this guy and men of his stature during this particular time period would have moved in a slow and honorable fashion, but not him. He runs to his boy. The question you've got to ask is: Why? Now I think the immediate response or answer to that is: He missed his boy.

I think that's true, but I think it's more than that. I think the father knew that if the community got to his boy before he did, he is exiled. So he's like: I've got to get to him before the community—it's that whole crazy burnt corn and nut thing—I've got to get to my boy, embrace him, and accept him and we'll face whatever consequences together.

Jesus wants you to know the heart of your heavenly Father. This brings up a really important question that I think we need to consider today:

How do **you** see God?

When you envision God, how do you picture him? Because the way you picture God actually will be a large indicator of the way you live your life, as well as determine the health and the quality of your other relationships. What is your impression of God and what he thinks about you, the decisions you have made, the way you have lived your life, and some of your greatest mess-ups, mistakes, and failures.

We all have a picture in our mind, likely shaped by our past experiences in relationships. Some of us have been told some things about God that just simply are not true. Some of us have imagined things about God that are not accurate. Some of us have been the victim of other people's dysfunction, and some of that dysfunction we've experienced in a church. As a result it has distorted our view or understanding of God.

Some of us maybe see God as a college professor. So we think what it means to believe in God is: I've just got to know all the right answers or memorize all the right content. And if you see God as a college professor, you likely see me, as a pastor, as a teacher's pet. You know, the annoying guy on the front row always raising his hand and offering God to grade the papers. That's sort of how you see me.

We imagine that, in order to be accepted and loved by God, we've got to know all the information. And the information seems so daunting, so confusing, and so unfair that we just don't think we'll ever be able to do it.

Maybe you don't see God as a college professor, maybe you see God as a traffic cop. And God is out there and sets the speed traps up and he's going to nail you on your violations. He's out to get you. He's black and white and wants to get all these violations against you. If you see God as a traffic cop you likely see me, as a pastor, as his inept deputy who is reporting back to him.

This is always made so clear to me when I am traveling and I sit down next to somebody on an airplane. We begin to have some small talk and then maybe they say some interesting things, or use some colorful language. And then they drop the question, “So what do you do?”

“Well I’m a pastor.”

Then you can just see it all over their face—busted. And they either apologize for all the things they’ve said or they miraculously clean up their language 1950’s style. Like a second ago they were dropping F-bombs, and now they are saying things like, “Good gravy.” And you’re just like, “What?”

When you think about God, do you think about a straight jacket? That God just wants to smack my hand at all the wrong things I am doing. Yet, it is interesting that in 2 Corinthians 3:17 it says, “Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” That doesn’t sound so much like a traffic cop to me.

Maybe some of you see God sort of like an absentee dad. Some of us had a really bad example of an earthly father. And even if your earthly father was good, he still was fallen, he still had some flaws. It’s easy to take those flaws and project them upon our heavenly Father. You just, maybe at times, struggle with that whole concept—maybe even cringe a little bit when you hear me say God is your heavenly Father. You maybe never had a good example of an earthly one.

And if you’re just sort of exhausted trying to put on a performance for him, or trying to get his attention and you think, “He is preoccupied with someone or something in the cosmos, and he doesn’t have time to spend on me,” I want you to understand that Jesus told stories to help us understand the heart of our Father.

He could have said: Listen to me. God is love, and God is gracious. He wants you back. Maybe you could believe that, but maybe you wouldn’t. And if you did believe that, then maybe all of a sudden when life just sort of hits the fan, and it will, then it’s easy to say, “I don’t know so much if God really cares.”

Maybe you find yourself off in a distant country so to speak. You’re lost, alone, embarrassed, broken, and ashamed. Jesus says: Listen, all you need to do is put one foot in front of the other and begin to come home, and your heavenly Father will run to you. He’ll meet you three-fourths of the way. He’ll wrap his arms around you and embrace you. You are saved by grace through faith.

Now, I don’t know about you but before I had kids I always identified myself as this boy. I always read the parable from the son’s perspective. Now that I’ve got four kids at home, I also kind of read it from the father’s perspective. I was thinking about it last week and I was like, “I’ve got four kids, and if any one of them did anything like this

young man did to me one day I know if they came back, I know I would forgive them. I know I would receive them back.”

I had to be honest with myself as I looked at it and I was like, “You know what? I don’t know that I would do it that easily though.” I don’t know that I would be that quick to forgive for the reason that I don’t want to prolong their immaturity. I want my kids to grow up, I want them to mature. We sort of know that if we receive them back too easily we might actually feed entitlement. We might actually give them the message that it’s okay to be disrespectful and irresponsible.

I would forgive them and receive them back, but we would have a serious talk. And I’d say, “Now listen, do you realize what you’ve done wrong?” And not once does Jesus say the father says that to the boy. I would say, “Listen, you’re going to get a job and pay back every dime. Listen, you do this to your mother again and so help me I’m going to ...”

I was at the car dealership yesterday. My wife’s car needed an oil change. I was scrolling through Twitter and I came across this story. There is a 30-year-old man and his parents filed a law suit against him because he wouldn’t move out of their house. And on moving day he filed a counter law suit because he wanted to take a toy with him, and his parents said no.

And I thought, “Yeah, that’s how that happens. If you’re too easy on your kids, if you’re too gracious, if you forgive too easily...” And yet Jesus doesn’t seem to be concerned about any of that. He says: I want you to know the heart of your Father, that he is more gracious that you give him credit for and that he is more loving that you can possibly imagine.

The word prodigal means to be lost, but it also means this: prodigal: reckless spendthrift... to spend until you have nothing left.

This is why author Tim Keller when he wrote a book on the prodigal son entitled it *Prodigal God*. And I remember the first time I read that I was like, “No, that’s not right. God is not lost.” But that’s not what he meant by the term. He meant God is extravagant. God is audacious with his love and his grace.

Over the last several months we began to sing a song here at all of our campuses called “Reckless Love”. The lyrics go like this.

Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me  
You have been so, so good to me  
Before I took a breath, You breathed Your life in me  
You have been so, so kind to me  
Oh, the **overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God**  
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine



(The ninety-nine refer to the ninety-nine sheep the shepherd leaves to go find the one. Actually here in Luke 15 it's the very first parable Jesus tells before he gets to this parable).

I couldn't earn it, and I don't deserve it, still, You give Yourself away  
Oh, **the overwhelming, never-ending, reckless love of God**, yeah  
When I was Your foe, still Your love fought for me  
You have been so, so good to me  
When I felt no worth, You paid it all for me  
You have been so, so kind to me

I love the song. But I've had a few people question the song and say, "Should we really be singing it?" There is a debate right now in Christian circles as to whether or not we should be singing that song because of that word *reckless*.

The word reckless can mean to do something without thinking or caring about the consequences of an action. So under that definition, I'd be all with you. I'm never down with suggesting God does anything without thinking about it or caring about the consequences of an action. However, words have multiple meanings and the word reckless also means audacious. It means extravagant, which God most certainly is.

Oftentimes language only takes us so far, and when language takes us so far there is a literary device that we oftentimes employ to try to capture the full meaning of something when words or phrases fail us. It's called hyperbole. And Jesus seemed to be more than comfortable using it, especially in his stories. How else do you explain a shepherd who will leave ninety-nine perfectly found sheep to go off and risk it all to find the one sheep that was stupid enough to get lost? I'd sit there and go, "I think I'd probably stay with the ninety-nine. That one sheep is on its own."

Jesus is like: Nope. The audacious love of God goes after the one. And friends, you are the one.

How else do you explain a heavenly Father who would run to lost prodigals like you and me who would squander it all and run off to a distant country? Maybe our motives weren't even full-on repentance yet, we were just desperate. We were like, "This is kind of the best of the options I have in front of me, so you have the courage to show up." And God runs to you by his Spirit. It sounds pretty audacious to me.

Let me put this together for you. Jesus is the one telling this story, and you and I are the ones he is telling this story about and for. And he wants you to know about the love the heavenly Father has for you whether you acknowledge him right now or not.

You see, this young man threatened to bankrupt his family. You and I threatened to bankrupt God when he sent Jesus to a cross. He says: I love you that much anyway. I'll do it for you.

Maybe, like many of you, this young man still doesn't get it yet. So where we left him is standing stiff as a board with his dad hugging him and he breaks into his rehearsed speech. "His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.'"

And I love this in verse 22. He doesn't even acknowledge what the boy said. "But his father said **to the servants**, 'Quick! Bring the **finest robe** in the house and put it on him. **Get a ring** for his finger and **sandals** for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We **must celebrate** with a feast, for this son of mine was **dead** and has now returned to **life**. He was **lost**, but now he is **found**.'" I love this last part "So the party began."

As I was studying this last week I was reminded that in Buddhist literature they actually have a story similar to this one. And all the details up until this point are very similar. In the Buddhist version of this story, the father hands the young man a shovel and says: You can begin shoveling excrement until you pay it all off.

But when Jesus tells the story, he throws a party. Do you see the difference? And that difference is the gospel message. The gospel means good news, and that's really, really good news. None of us can earn it.

Ephesians 2:8 says, "For it is by grace you have been saved by faith." It just means you show up. You come to your heavenly Father. He does the rest. He does the work. Jesus wants us to know this and see it at a heart level.

If Jesus were to stop the story right there, it would be a great story but he's got more to say. There is another son in the picture who never left home, but he is still lost. "Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working." and what is he doing? You bet he is working because 30 percent of the business has been squandered in Vegas. Somebody's got to be responsible around here: I've to the keep things above water.

"When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on. 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.' The older brother was angry," and I would be too. "...and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you,'" that's an interesting choice of words. "...and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!"

Did any of you grow up in the house where you were the straight arrow and your brother or sister was the one always coloring outside the lines? Somebody? I want to hear that story. You worked so hard, you got straight A's at school, and you picked the best

friends. You were responsible and your brother or sister never was and yet they got all the attention and affection from mom and dad because the squeaky wheel gets the grease.

That's this guy. He'd never left home. And the way Jesus describes him, to me, sounds a lot like spiritual and emotional fatigue. He is tired. He stayed home and he's been obligated to be faithful. He's been obligated to work hard. He's under all kinds of pressure which, by the way, is due in part to the irresponsibility and rebellion of his younger brother.

He's been doing all this stuff and it feels like he's been invisible to his dad. He's never once had his dad throw him a party. He's never once had his dad make this much of a fuss over him. Now that his brother comes home, he is stunned by the fact that his dad would express that much affection.

You know this can happen very easily in the church too. Those of us who maybe never left home, so to speak, we've stayed in the church, we've continued to attend and serve, we've continued to be generous, we've continued to be faithful. Our marriage hasn't always been easy but we dug in, we invested, and we made it work. We got through it.

Maybe you're a single adult and you've been called to singlehood, but it's been really hard to do that. You've been trying to be faithful in every area of your life, yet you keep waiting and waiting for the fruit to come and for God to bless you. You keep being told it's going to happen but you get to this place where you are tired and are in a valley spiritually.

And then maybe somebody comes to church or you see a baptism Sunday, or somebody comes to know Jesus and everybody is making a big fuss about that. They're all excited. They are so thrilled to see what God is doing in their life. You're like, "Wait a second. I've been here all along." In fact, if you were to be really honest, there are moments when you get sick and tired of us talking about those who need Jesus because you're like, "Well, I'm here."

In my very first ministry I was 23 years old, had no idea what I was doing and still don't. I remember doing a series based around this parable. I was talking about God's heart for prodigals who stray from home and how, as a church, we needed to roll out the red carpet for them, we needed to serve them and give them an experience of grace and truth.

I'll never forget I had this older lady come up to me in the lobby afterward. She was not very happy. She looked right at me and said, "Aaron, it seems to me like the only people you care about are the ones who aren't here." And I've never heard it phrased like that before. I thought to myself, "Well, the answer is both yes and no."

Jesus doesn't say it's either/or here. The reason why he includes the response of this older brother is because he knows there are those of us who are lost, but we've never left home. We've stayed faithful to God, yet we still feel spiritually and emotionally fatigued.

And so listen to the response of the father as Jesus finishes out the parable starting in verse 31. "His father said to him, 'Look, dear son,'" and notice his affection for him, "you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours." Anytime you wanted you could have thrown a party. Anytime you wanted you could have had a goat. "We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!" So he is basically beckoning this boy to join the party.

Here is the application point. For those of you who are prodigals who have strayed from home, the simple yet direct invitation is that you can come home. I'm talking to someone right now at one of our campuses. You feel like you can't because maybe there have been some things in the past you've been ashamed of. You feel broken. You feel lost. You've been abused. You've been victimized. Whatever it is you're like, "I don't know. If I stepped out, I think I would be judged or I think I would be rejected." I just simply want you to know that you can come home. It doesn't matter. The love of your Father is audacious and extravagant.

The application for those of us who are prodigals who have stayed home and maybe we're spiritually fatigued and tired and we've been trying to be faithful and we don't think it is paying off; the application is come join the party.

There is a party here in the other room and the quickest way to get refreshed is to come back the heart of your Father and be reminded of how he feels for you and be reminded of how he feels for others. The fact is that God is at work in the world today. He's working in the lives of people and he invites you to be a part of it. That's the quickest way to feel refreshed.

Being in ministry there are definitely moments, times, and seasons where I get spiritually and emotionally fatigued. That's when it's really difficult to stand up here in front of all of you and to try to preach a message—when my wells are just dry and I'm trying to convince you of some things I need to be convinced of. I'm just crying out to God, "God, will you please refresh me and fill me?"

There was a season like that four or five years ago when things were just crazy as a church. God was moving in big ways, but there were all kinds of demands being placed upon me. We were in the middle of a capital campaign. We were trying to go multi-site. There were all these things going on and I was just tired and probably close to burnout and didn't know it. It's usually the case. If you're ever facing burnout, you're one of the last people to know it.

I got done preaching all these Christmas services and went back to Missouri to visit family. I went over to my grandparents' house. My grandfather, who is 89 years old and is a retired pastor who served in ministry for over 40 years, loves what's going on here. Every time I go back he wants to talk to me about it. Usually when I see him he gives me a big smile, a big hug and is like, "Hey, come in here," and he asks me a bunch of questions and wants to know what is going on.

On this particular day I walked into his living room. He has a cane now. He walked in with his cane and held that cane up right at me. And he goes, "I need to talk to you." And I was like, "Okay." So we went in the other room and I sat down on his couch. He looked at me and he said, "I've been watching your sermons over the last month or two. Aaron, you're tired. Do you not know that? You are exhausted right now. Are you in a good place? Are you taking good care of yourself?" It was one of those come to Jesus moments that I really needed him to have with me.

The quickest way for me to get refreshed was to join the party, so to speak, in the sense that I needed to be reminded of God's heart for prodigal sons and daughters, whether they stayed at home or strayed from home. It wasn't that I necessarily needed a break but I needed to be refreshed. I needed to be filled once again with the Father's love for me.

Our church has seven values. Two of them are relational evangelism and healthy culture. They come right out of this parable: relational evangelism because we have a heart for prodigals who have strayed from home. And we will do anything and everything to send the message that you can come home. There are all kinds of silly messages and barriers out there keeping people from Jesus. We want to remove them so they can get to our heavenly Father.

The second is healthy culture. We have a heart for the prodigals who have stayed at home and are just spiritually exhausted and tired. And you know who you are. You're like, "I just wonder if this is even worth it anymore." We want you to join the party. We want to beckon you to come and get to know the heart of the Father.

There are a number of decisions we make all the time as we run hard with both of these values. It gets really hard to keep both of them in balance because, as we seek to reach more and more people, we have to make sure we stay healthy and that we stay close to the heart of God.

We make a lot of decisions behind the scenes to make sure our staff and volunteers stay healthy. And I want to share one of them with you. It is coming up this fall, the first weekend in August.

About six years ago, our church was busting at the seams. God was bringing all kinds of prodigals to us. We were one campus with two services on Sunday morning. Many of you who were around here then know it was bananas around here. There were traffic

jams. People were parking in the grass. We were running out of seats and the Kids Ministry was busting at the seams.

We said, “We will never hang a No Vacancy sign out front.” So we said, “We’ve got to add a service.” The best time to do it was a Saturday night so we could continue to invite more and more people to come to know our Father’s heart.

I believe God wanted us to make that decision. If I’m being honest, we probably did so at the sacrifice of being healthy ourselves—keeping a sustainable, healthy pace for our staff and volunteers. Many of you were showing up on Saturday night, serving, and coming back on Sunday morning to worship. Our staff was stretched thin.

So now here we are. We are in a very different place today. We are at four campuses with 11 services on the weekend. We are finding ourselves at several of our campuses quickly reaching capacity in some of our services once again. We want to make a move before the fall season.

At our North and Downtown campuses, beginning the first weekend in August, we’re going to be adding Sunday evening services. It will be the exact same service as Sunday morning. We’re just going to duplicate it on Sunday night. And we believe this will create more space for people to come, people who wouldn’t normally be able to come on Sunday morning for any number of reasons. This is going to give them an opportunity. We have to add services because we are running out of room, particularly at the 10 a.m. services at those campuses. This is a really good problem to have. We don’t want to turn people away.

Going Sunday night is healthier than Saturday night. So if you’re at North or Downtown, especially if you attend one of the really full services, jump into Sunday evening and go one and serve one. That’s going to help us reach more people and stay healthy.

Here at the Northwest campus, we are going to be moving our Saturday night service to two Sunday evening services. It is the same deal, same reasoning, so we can reach more and more people. I want to encourage those of you for whom Sunday night is a good option to go to these services. Serve one and go one.

I knew that when I shared this with the Saturday night crowd they might be a little disappointed in that decision, yet I want you to know that when I shared this with our Northwest staff team several weeks ago, they cheered. This told me we probably needed to make this decision a while ago. In fact, some of them even cried. They were here most of the day on Saturday, here half the day on Sunday and did not get to spend time with their families.

My son, Connor, is getting ready to be a sophomore in high school. He plays soccer. A lot of his soccer games are on Saturday afternoons and evenings. I was missing a lot of

his games. I was here in the green room, getting text updates on the games when I really wanted to be there.

I shared with him this decision several weeks ago and said, “Hey son, I will be able to come to all your soccer games because we’re moving the Saturday night services to Sunday.” The look on his face showed me that was the right decision. I’ll never forget it because I don’t want to be a fulltime pastor and a part time husband and dad. I believe that if I can give the best of my efforts to them, I’ll be a much, much better pastor because I’ll be operating with a full tank rather than an empty tank.

I want to thank you for your understanding. Thank you for jumping in on this. We’re going to need all hands on deck to make sure this goes really, really well.

West campus, I don’t want to leave you out. You guys are doing an amazing job. We’re not necessarily changing any of the service times on you. But West is setting up and tearing down in a middle school every week. Can we show them some love for that? That is amazing. I don’t know if any of you from our other campuses have been to West, but it’s amazing what they do there.

I had a lunch with a pastor from Avon this past week who had a weekend off so he attended West. He was blown away by how you transform that school into a church and by the kindness of the people. So, thank you guys. You are doing an amazing job.

I want to thank all our volunteers who make this happen so we can reach people who are far from the heart of God, and stay refreshed ourselves doing it.

Did you notice that at the end of the parable Jesus never once gives us the response of either boy? I kind of wish he would have. It would have been nice if he would have been like: The younger son took full responsibility for his rebellion. He got a part time job and paid back every dime he squandered. But it doesn’t say that.

I’ve always wondered: Did the older boy go into the party, or did he storm out mad? Jesus never tells us. You want to know why? The response that really matters is yours and mine because all of us listening to this, we are one of these two prodigals. We are either the prodigal who strayed from home or the prodigal who stayed home. If you are the one who strayed, come home. If you’re the one who stayed, join the party.

I want to pray together.

Father, we come to you right now and I thank you for the way you told stories to share with us your heart. I pray that it will not be missed on us. So God, as we lift our voices and sing as a response to your goodness and your grace, may it be a pleasing sound to you. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.