Daily Devotional: *For When Someone You Love Walks Away*

Introduction:

Few things in life are more painful than watching someone you love walk away from God. Maybe it's your son or daughter, a spouse, a sibling, or a close friend. Maybe they've completely rejected the faith they once professed, or perhaps they're slowly drifting away-either way, you sense not only feel the loss of having your faith in common, you begin to see what Romans 6:23 describes as the “wages of sin”. Death begins to work its way in-broken relationships, unhealthy habits, and small things that can have disastrous consequences when left unchecked.

When we love someone, we want to protect them from the pain that poor decisions bring-especially when their relationship with God is at stake. But what happens when the person we're trying to help doesn't want our help? This week, we're going to spend our time with Jesus' parable of the prodigal son and consider what it teaches us about loving people who are walking away from God.

In preparation for the week, read through the whole story of the prodigal son, found in Luke 15:11-32.

Day 1— ALLOW THE DOOR TO CLOSE

Scripture: Luke 15:11–13

There's something remarkable about the beginning of this story: the father lets his son leave. He gives his son what he's asking for. From what we know about the father, we can safely assume he’s a man of wisdom and intelligence-he is not oblivious to what is about to happen. He knows what awaits his son when he leaves through the gates of his father’s home and enters a world of temptation and sin. And yet, he allows him to go without (and this is the hardest part) *any guarantee he'll return.*

Why?

Because the father knows: sometimes, loving someone means allowing them to make decisions we know are wrong. We cannot control another person's relationship with God, no matter how desperately we want to. The father doesn't stop loving his son when he walks away, but neither does he prevent his son from experiencing the consequences of his choices.

He knows that he could refuse to give the inheritance, and he could try to force the son to stay home. And then what? The son lives in bitterness for years until the father finally dies? Then what happens? He still gets his inheritance, he still does out into the world and squanders it, and he still finds himself covered in mud, feeding pigs. Except now…there is no father to return to.

The Father understands the path that leads to seeing his son walk back home (verse 20) begins with allowing his son to walk away.

Today's Reflection: Am I trying to take responsibility for decisions that aren't mine? Have my attempts to help become attempts to control? Am I willing to trust God with someone I love, even when I don't know how their story will end? There is no guarantee that they will return, and God understands the fear we can feel when we face that reality. But if we try to exert control over another person who wants to walk away from the faith, they may stay in the building-they may attend church and say the right things for a time…but their hearts will be far from the Father.

I want to be clear-I'm not saying you should never do anything to help this person, or cut them out of your life. I'm not telling you to refuse to talk to them or spend time with them. That being said, you may need to set boundaries of what you will do, and what you are willing to allow into your life and your home. This is where Godly wisdom plays a crucial role in how we act.

As you pray about your role in their life, think about this. What if the Father in the story had sent a servant to give money to his son so that he could buy food? Would the son have returned home? No-we would have squandered that too-because he would have continued to believe that he could live a good life outside of a relationship with his Father.

Now again, I'm not saying you should never help someone with tangible needs when they are walking away from God. But you need to ask this question: is the support I'm giving them serving to remind them of God's goodness, or does it allow them to believe the lie that they can do just fine without God in their life?

Ask God to help you surrender responsibility for their decisions while continuing to love them. The father allowed his son to walk away, but he never stopped being his father.

Day 2— GOD, NOT YOU

Scripture: 1 Samuel 8:7

When someone we love walks away from God, it's easy to feel as though they're rejecting us, too. But those aren't necessarily the same thing. When Israel rejected God's leadership, Samuel took it personally, and God reminded him that their rejection wasn't ultimately about Samuel. Sometimes the people we love make decisions about their faith that have nothing to do with us. We need to be careful not to make their relationship with God about our own feelings, expectations, or disappointment.

One of Satan's most effective weapons against us is to get us thinking about ourselves. Today, spend time in God's presence and allow him to help you distinguish between someone rejecting him and rejecting you. Ask him to help you with your own insecurities.

When you pray "God help my child return to the faith so they can be saved" is there also a part of you that is really praying, "God help my child return to the faith so that I can feel like a good parent?".

It's a hard prayer-and your Father knows that. Seek him, trust him, rest in him.

Day 3— Real Danger

Scripture: Luke 15:14–17

The prodigal son found himself in a desperate situation. His money was gone, famine had struck the land, and he was so hungry that even the pigs' food looked appealing. Far from his father's home, he was vulnerable, alone, and in danger.

When someone we love walks away from God, we may not be able to protect them from the consequences of their decisions, but we can pray for God's protection over their lives.

Keep in mind-its very important that we started with allowing the door to close. When we pray for protection, we are not praying that God removes all hardship from their life.

First of all, in his truth and justice it's not a prayer that he will answer-to allow people to make sinful decisions and remove the consequences would be dishonest. Poverty and despair are the true outcomes of a sinful, selfish life. Second of all, it was the hardship that the son faced that made him realize the real truth: things weren't so bad with his father after all-in fact they were far and above everything he had found in the world.

This is where we return in prayer to our role in their life. Think about this. What if the Father in the story had sent a servant to give money to his son so that he could buy food? Would the son have returned home? No-we would have squandered that too-because he would have continued to believe that he could live a good life outside of a relationship with his Father.

Now again, I'm not saying you should never help someone with tangible needs when they are walking away from God. Remember, *we are not the Father in the story.* It's not about earthly children walking away from their earthly parents. Because we are children of God we must have compassion and generosity. But you need to be very careful that the support you provide does not enable them to continue believing the lie that they can live a perfectly good, fulfilling, healthy life while living in complete disobedience to the Father. Sometimes we need to help, and we need to support-but only when it tells the story of God's goodness and faithfulness.

So today we go to battle and we go to prayer. Not that God would remove discomfort from their life, but that God would protect them from people and circumstances that might lead them further into harm. Pray against the influence of evil and the plans of the enemy.

But perhaps most importantly, pray against the lies they may have come to believe.

The turning point in the prodigal son's story comes when he remembers something true about his father: even his father's hired servants have more than enough food. That truth gives him the courage to begin the journey home.

Satan would love for those we care about to believe that God has abandoned them, that they've gone too far, or that they would never be welcomed back. Pray that those lies would be silenced and that the truth of God's goodness, love, and abundant grace would become impossible for them to ignore.

You don't have the authority to pray that your loved one would be compelled (forced) to return to the faith. They have a God given right to make their own decisions. You do, however, have the authority to pray against the work and lies of the enemy. (see also: Luke 10:19, Matthew 18:18-19, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Today's Prayer is directly from John 17:15: "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."

Day 4— You, not God
Scripture: Ephesians 6:4

On Tuesday, we considered the possibility that someone we love has rejected God, not us. But today we need to consider another possibility: What if they've rejected us, and they have a good reason? Sometimes the distance between us and someone we love isn't simply the result of their spiritual decisions. Perhaps we've been too controlling, too critical, too demanding, or too unwilling to listen. Perhaps we've hurt them, and instead of acknowledging that hurt, we've blamed their distance on their lack of faith. If that's the case, the most important thing we can do might not be to confront them about their relationship with God, but to repent of our own behavior and begin repairing the damage we've caused.

Let me just say this. All of us, if we have a loved one who has walked away from the faith, are guilty of this in some way. You are human, and I am human. Whether it's a judgemental comment, something we say in fear, or an area of hypocrisy in our life, there is always something we have done to make it a little easier for them to walk away. You are not alone in this-we all have areas where we need to repent and areas we can grow.

Remember this: we're not praying this week for prodigals to return to us. We're praying for them to return to our heavenly father. If we want to be there to see them come home, we need to make sure we're abiding in him. We need to make sure we aren't prodigals ourselves.

Today's Prayer: Ask God to show you whether you've contributed to the distance between you and someone you love. If he reveals something, ask for the humility and courage to acknowledge it, apologize without making excuses, and begin making things right. This is where you may need some help. Talk with a trusted Pastor or spiritual leader, or maybe other

members of your family. Ask if there are things they've seen you do that have pushed others away. And know that as painful as this is, it is the best thing you can do to help your loved ones return home.

Day 5— PREPARING THE WELCOME
Scripture: Luke 15:20–24

When the prodigal son finally returns home, his father does something remarkable. He doesn't lecture him, demand an explanation, or make him prove that he's changed. Instead, he embraces him, kisses him, and begins celebrating.

Look at what the father does. He gives his son a robe, a ring, and sandals. These aren't simply gifts. They're signs that his son is being welcomed back into the family, not merely tolerated as someone who has made terrible mistakes. And then the father throws a party!

Sometimes we spend so much time worrying about whether someone we love will return to God that we give very little thought to how we'll respond when they do. Will we greet them with suspicion or celebration? Will we remind them of everything they've done wrong, or remind them how deeply they're loved? Will we make them earn their place in our lives again, or welcome them with open arms?

The father was more interested in restoring his son than reminding him of his failures. God is truth and justice, and a relationship with him (as we've certainly been reminded this week) often brings painful reminders of how broken we are. But God's conviction and judgment are not what draw prodigals to him-it is his grace, abundance, and love. (Romans 2:4)

Today's Reflection: Think about someone you're praying will return to God. Imagine what it might look like if they began taking steps toward him. How would you respond? Are there old arguments, disappointments, or expectations you need to lay aside? Ask God to help you prepare your heart now, so that if the opportunity comes, your first response will be love.

Day 6— EYES ON THE ROAD

Scripture: Luke 15:20

There's a detail in this story that I don't want us to overlook. The father saw his son while he was still a long way off.

Jesus doesn't tell us how often the father looked down that road, or how long he waited for his son to return. But when his son finally appeared, the father was ready.

Notice something else. The father didn't run after his son into the distant country. He ran toward him *when he saw him coming home*.

There's an important difference between pursuing someone who is determined to walk away and being ready to welcome someone who wants to return. When someone we love walks away from God, we can become consumed with trying to bring them back. We worry, argue, plead, and sometimes attempt to force a change that only God can bring about.

But the father shows us another way. He allows his son to leave. He doesn't stop loving him. And when his son begins the journey home, he doesn't hesitate to run toward him.

Perhaps that's what God is asking of you. Not to give up. Not to stop praying. Not to stop loving. But to trust him enough to wait.

Today, seek God's wisdom as it relates to keeping your eyes on the road.

It can be discouraging and disappointing to keep your eyes on an empty horizon-pray for strength.

It can be painful watching someone you love suffer the consequences of sinful actions-pray for courage and comfort

It can feel like nothing is happening. Trust that God is at work and give him thanks and praise for what he is doing and will do-even when you can't see it yet.

The following is your prayer for today, but it may be something you want to keep coming back to over time as you keep your eyes on the road.

Pray this prayer, or your own version of it today, and often. Keep returning to it, allowing God to search you and continue to shape and prune you to be of use for him.

Father, I place _____ in your hands today. Protect them, remind them of your goodness, and help them recognize the way home. Keep my heart free from bitterness and my arms ready to welcome them. Teach me when to act, when to wait, and how to trust you with what I cannot control. I know you are at work in their life doing things that only you can do. Amen.