

Do We Ever Come Back?

Some things can't be confessed. Well, they could be confessed, but we can't bring ourselves to say what we actually did in all its grim ugliness. We know the darkness we descended into, the ways that we wounded others. We know, and we hate ourselves for what we did, the person we let ourselves become. We hate that we still don't fully understand why we did what we did. We hate that a part of us would still be pursuing that darkness if things hadn't taken a turn for the worse. Saying it all out loud is too much. Replaying the ways that we failed ourselves and others and dissecting the reasons we did it feels like it will only increase the pain. The only thing we really know is that we can't go on the way things are. Something has to change. Something has to give. It's not about repairing it all. It's simply about our own survival.

And so, we make our way home. We make our way back to the ones we were with before.

It's not because we are ready to be home. We don't feel like we will ever fully come back. Our shame is too great. It's just that we have nowhere left to turn. We have no hope of repair, we simply need an arrangement so that we can survive. We have to somehow face the people we have failed and wounded. The only thing we can say or think is, "*I'm not worthy. I was wrong. I have nowhere else to turn.*"

What kind of speech will we receive from them? Nothing they might say could sting any more than the lashing we've been giving ourselves. What will they say?

Splagchnoisomai. That word sounds like they just threw up on you, and in a way they did; but in the very best way. *Splagchnoisomai* is the Greek word for compassion. It means to let one's innards embrace the feeling or situation of another. It is literally like they turned their guts inside out to feel all of the ways you feel. Maybe you won't come all the way back from this, but they are wrapping their guts around that feeling. Even if you don't come back, you aren't alone.

Over and over the gospels use this word *splagchnoisomai* to describe the guts of Jesus as he is with people who have been through the wringer of life. Jesus' guts embrace the situation of others. Over and over Jesus uses that word *splagchnoisomai* to describe the guts of the Father towards humanity. (Matthew 9:35-36; 14:14; Mark 6:34; 8:2, Luke 7:12-13, Luke 10:33; 15:20)

Read Luke 15:11-32.

3-5 minutes: Focus on the face of the son and the Father. In what way are the son's feelings, your feelings? Feel the Father wrapping his arms around you. Sense the Father's guts wrapping around the feelings you can't even say, the things you can't put into words. Receive the embrace of the Father who simply cannot stop kissing his child.

Open Reflections: Share about your experience of listening to God through this picture.

The Return of the Prodigal Son, Rembrandt Van Rijn. 1636, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY. Bequest of Harry G. Friedman.