# PRODIGAL

#### A 4-WEEK STUDENT DISCIPLESHIP JOURNAL

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# STARTING NOW

IT HURTS TO BE LOST.

A few wrong turns on a road trip and suddenly you have no idea where you are or how to get back on track. Or maybe as a toddler you lost sight of your mom and didn't know who to turn to for help. You didn't get lost on purpose, you thought you were going in the right direction. But you've ended up confused, wondering where you are and how you got there. How are you going to find your way home?

Lost. We've all been there. And we'll probably be there again.

Jesus was pointing to that truth when he told the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32). When he compared the brothers in this story, Jesus showed us that there are two kinds of lost people: those who know they are lost and those who don't. He wanted us to know that there's more than one way to be lost and wandering from him. Thankfully, he also gave us a way to come back home; not through rule-following or self-righteousness, but by receiving the father's unconditional love.

Wherever you're wandering, are you ready to come home?

# HOW IT WORKS

This book has four weeks of journal pages to help you learn more about yourself and about God through the story of the Prodigal Son. You'll see that there are many ways to be "lost" but only one way to come home—through the unconditional love of God. Each week takes you through seven days of questions to get you thinking, Bible studies to shift your perspective, and challenges to stretch you out of your comfort zone. Then, on the seventh day of the week, you'll get a break to recharge for the next week. It'll help you get into a rhythm of learning, growing, and putting that knowledge into action.



Throughout this journal, you'll also find the **MARKS OF A DISCIPLE**. Include logo for Marks of a Disciple These are things that Christ-followers are committed to and have in common, like connecting with God through prayer, applying his Word to our lives, serving without personal agendas, managing God's gifts, and many other things.

Remember, you'll get out of this book what you put into it. The challenges you'll encounter won't always be easy—they're designed to stretch you! Take a risk and use this journal to run hard toward God. When we make ourselves available to him, he'll transform us and use us in ways that will blow our minds!

# WEEK ONE THE RUNAWAY



# INTRO THE RUNAWAY

When it comes to board games, there are two camps of people: those who read the instructions cover-to-cover and follow every rule, and those who go with the flow and make up "house rules" to spice things up. You know which camp you belong to, don't you?

If the two brothers from the story of the Prodigal Son were playing a board game, we all know who would be in each camp. The older brother would be eagerly reading that instruction manual, ready to be both scorekeeper and ruleenforcer. While the younger brother, would be saying, "Let's just go for it and make up whatever rules we want. Why be limited by these stupid rules anyway?!"

This week, you'll take a closer look at the younger son—the Runaway—the one who's ready to live a little and thinks his dad's just holding him back. It's easy to see things from the Runaway's perspective. But as we embark on this journey, we're going to start seeing things from God's perspective as we see his relationship with his runaway son.

Read Luke 15:11–20, the opening "chapter" of this story, to get your first look at the Runaway's journey.

# Y ONE: REGRET

Think of a time when you've done something you regretted. Maybe you said hurtful words or gossiped about someone. Or maybe you followed the wrong crowd and got into trouble with your parents or even the law. This week we will study the story of the Runaway in Jesus' parable-the younger son who regretted his rebellious, sinful decisions and eventually repented. You're probably familiar with this story, but have you ever put yourself in the son's shoes? You'll probably find that we are more like him than we realize. It's not just the big sins that draw us away from God the Father, but the daily choices we make to either honor God or honor ourselves-to either submit to or reject his good law. This week, we'll also look in-depth at what repentance entails and how the father in this story reflects the heart of God, our heavenly Father

# As we jump into the week, take some time to reflect on these **JOURNAL QUESTIONS:**

At first glance, how much do you think you are like the Runaway? Rate yourself on a scale of one to four (1=opposite, 4=identical).

Sin always destroys. True or false? Why?

What is something today-small or large-that you regret?

How did that action, thought, or word affect those around you?

How would you explain repentance to a friend at school? What Bible verse could you show them?

What do you think God does when we sin? Can you think of a verse or two to support your answer?

How many times a day do you think you sin? Five? Fifty? We probably sin much more often than we realize because many sins are committed in the heart—sins like jealousy, greed, bitterness, pride, and selfishness. Maybe we think we would never do what the Runaway did, but think again. He fought for what belonged to him out of greed and selfishness. He rejected God's commands out of pride. And he ultimately landed in a pit of mud, pigs (literally!), and depression. When he came to his senses and realized he should return to his father, he did so with humility and repentance. When you have sinned, do you try to push the guilt away, or do you go to the heavenly Father with grief over your sin? Thankfully, the Lord wants us to come to him! He freely offers forgiveness and rewards humble repentance.

Dig into **James 4:1–10** and take time to study the passage using the **SPECK** method below. The acronym SPECK is simply a way to help you remember this Bible study technique, so you can use it to learn from other passages later.

#### SINS TO AVOID

Make a list of any sins-wrong actions, attitudes, or thoughts-mentioned in the passage.

#### **PROMISES TO CLAIM**

Make a list of the promises in this passage. Promises give us confidence when we doubt God or face difficult times.

#### EXAMPLES TO FOLLOW

What examples do you find in the passage? Is there a right way of thinking or acting described in the passage that you should take as an example for your life?

#### COMMANDS TO OBEY

Write out all the commands you find. If a passage encourages you to take a certain action, take it as a command and write it down.

#### KNOWLEDGE OF GOD TO APPLY

What does the passage tell you about God that you can apply to your daily life? God's character shines throughout Scripture.

Sometimes it can be difficult to recognize our sin and feel the weight of our offense against God. We want to ignore our wrongdoing or compare ourselves to others ("I'm not that bad...").

To help us see how much we can be like the Runaway, think through your day so far. Make a list of sins you have already committed today. As you do, pray Psalm 139:23–24. SEARCH ME, O GOD, AND KNOW MY HEART! TRY ME AND KNOW MY THOUGHTS! AND SEE IF THERE BE ANY GRIEVOUS WAY IN ME, AND LEAD ME IN THE WAY EVERLASTING!

PSALM 139:23-24

God is completely holy, unable to be in the presence of sin. Thankfully, as our loving Father, he has provided a way to come clean and return to him: confess your sin to him with a genuine heart. He promises to forgive and cleanse you! "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). There's no need for a to-do list to get back on his "good side." He is waiting for you to return to him. Sin always destroys. Bitterness eats us up inside, gossip degrades someone else, and stealing takes what isn't rightfully ours. Once we sin, destruction has happened in one form or another, and guilt sets in. Now, guilt is actually a helpful misery; it may hurt but it alerts us that something is wrong and directs us to our Father in repentance. However, we can become calloused and overlook the guilt in order to continue getting what we want, no matter the cost.

"We want to be saved from our misery, but not from our sin. We want to sin without misery, just as the prodigal son wanted inheritance without the father. The foremost spiritual law of the physical universe is that this hope can never be realized. Sin always accompanies misery. There is no victimless crime, and all creation is subject to decay because of humanity's rebellion from God."

– R. C. Sproul<sup>1</sup>

The Runaway sinned big. And at the end of his selfish rampage, he sat penniless in his misery and regret. His sin produced misery—not only in himself, but also in his family. Think about how his father must have felt. Even though God does forgive us, we can't get away from sin's natural consequences.

# CONSIDER THE QUOTE ABOVE AS YOU ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

How do certain sins produce misery and destruction?



What do you usually do when you feel guilty?



Why do you think God allows sin to have its natural consequences even after we confess our sin to him?

"All creation is subject to decay because of humanity's rebellion from God."<sup>2</sup> Where do you see the truth of this quote in the world around us?



Brainstorm or look up 2–3 verses that you could use to aid you in confession of sin to God.



Examining our sinful hearts this week may have you feeling a bit defeated. But we do not have to—nor should we—wallow in that guilt and gloom! The glorious truth is that Jesus, our Savior, died to take the punishment for our sin, to appease the wrath of God so we don't have to suffer. And when we surrender our lives to him and admit we need a Savior, he becomes our Lord and Father. We become his precious children. Now that we are a part of God's family, we have a rich inheritance, just like a first-born son would receive an inheritance in Jesus' day. By God's mercy, we receive the Holy Spirit, justification (salvation), and Christ's own righteousness.

**Study Titus 3:1–11 carefully by using the OPA method for Bible Study: Observation, Principles, and Application**. *Helpful tip: the more effort you put in to making observations, the easier the principles and application will be to see.* 

### **OBSERVATION:**

Compile all the facts found in these passages. Try to make 10–15 observations about what you read.

## **PRINCIPLES:**

Draw a few principles from the observations you made. What is God trying to teach you in this passage?

**APPLICATION:** Draw a few principles from the observations you made. What is God trying to teach you in this passage?

Our heavenly Father wants what is best for you, to make you like Christ. It can be a painful process—one filled with hardlearned lessons like the Runaway's journey in the story of the Prodigal Son—but in the end, we are able to rejoice in our Father's presence. It is helpful and wise to have a Bible study group or a mentor to help guide you in your spiritual growth. We should be intentionally confessing sin, asking for biblical advice, praying together, and studying Scripture together. This is how we sharpen each other, encourage each other, and remind each other of the truth.

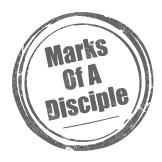
#### Challenge:

Today, choose one person who you look up to spiritually, preferably someone you know well and trust, and schedule a time to meet with them. When together, ask him or her a few questions about the themes from this week. Here are some example questions to get you started:

- When you realize you have sinned, what are the practical steps you take to repent?
- Are there any verses that help you confess and get right with God?
- Tell me about a time when you grew spiritually because of the natural consequences of sin.
- Do you have any helpful resources for me, like books, podcasts, or blog articles?

## WRITE AT LEAST TWO ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS





DISCIPLES OF CHRIST SEEK TO ENCOURAGE AND BE ENCOURAGED BY OTHER CHRIST-FOLLOWERS. (HEBREWS 3:13)

## DAY SEVEN: SABBATH

Have you ever heard of someone refer to Sunday as the Sabbath? That means it's our day of rest. So today that's your challenge. Rest! Reflect on that you've learned so far, the challenges you did, or Bible verses that stuck out to you. Spend some time praying and talking with God. Recharge your batteries and refresh your mind. Then come back tomorrow ready to go deeper. "AND ON THE SEVENTH DAY GOD FINISHED HIS WORK THAT HE HAD DONE, AND HE RESTED ON THE SEVENTH DAY FROM ALL HIS WORK THAT HE HAD DONE."

## **GENESIS 2:2**