

Running from Relationship

Jesus's story takes a turn when the younger son makes an ill-fated decision to leave the father's house and start a new life. As it goes,

The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. (Luke 15:12-16)

The younger son knew his father was wealthy, meaning he had everything he needed in the present and an inheritance to look forward to in

the future. And yet the son said, “Father, I want to live my own way. I don’t want to live here with you. I want to live differently. Can I have your money to fund another life?”

It almost seems absurd. Why move away from a good life and offend his father? One thing is for sure: he wanted independence so that he could be the master of his life. The son left, with no intention of coming home. He didn’t leave at his father’s request, nor did he invite his father to come or express interest in staying in touch. Foolishly, he thought that money and freedom would be all that he needed on his new journey, but he didn’t consider what he had left behind.

So, the son took his father’s wealth and set off in search of a “better life.” This new life was a total break from his father—not just in proximity, but also in lifestyle. He knew full well that his decisions would be too drastically different from his father’s. His version of life was completely incompatible with his father’s. He wanted sex, parties, and wild living, and those were only possible away from his father’s house. Ironically, this new life required his father’s funding. How independent!

So, you may wonder, was the runaway right? Is God’s home too limiting? Can we find a better life apart from God? That is, partly, what Jesus’s story answers.

A Better Life?

Let's rewind to Adam and Eve. They are, so to speak, the ones who started the trend as the first runaways. As a father, God had provided them with a beautiful home and everything they needed. Imagine gorgeous landscapes, mountaintops, waterfalls, gentle animal friends and every kind of fruit and vegetable. Not to mention, Adam and Eve had each other, and they walked with God personally (yes, like you walk with a friend!). They were lacking nothing.

Yet in this paradise, there was one thing off-limits: the tree of knowledge of good and evil. With everything else so perfectly suited for their needs, this tree seems out of place, doesn't it? The name is somewhat lengthy and enigmatic. Why was it even there? It must have had some purpose.

This tree was not for their diet. It was an opportunity to express their faith and freedom. A loving father does not lock his children in a home or force them to live his way. A father who loves his children leaves the door open, so to speak. The tree gave Adam and Eve a choice to live with the Father or not. That freedom, as risky as it was, was part and parcel of growing up as a child of God.

The tree was not a symbol. It was a real tree with real fruit that probably tasted very nice. It didn't have a fence around it or a signpost warning "stay away!" It just sat there among the other trees, as accessible as any other, maybe even right in the

middle. And it was that ease of access that created a practical choice for Adam and Eve. Every time they walked past it, they had to make a decision: should they eat it or listen to God?

This sounds simple, but it is a profound dilemma. Over time, Adam and Eve may have wondered,

- Is God holding back something good?
- What if this is the tastiest fruit in the garden?
- Does God want it for Himself?
- If He is really good, why can't we have it too?
- If He doesn't want us to eat it, why has He made it so attractive?
- Will He *really* punish us if we eat it?

Perhaps you wonder about these things, too.

Wrestling with these questions brings us to the very heart of trusting in God. God wanted Adam and Eve to wait and trust in His wisdom, His goodness, His provision, and His timing. But, they also needed the freedom to distrust, take hold, disobey and go their own way, because God matures His children through choices, not control.

We don't know how long Adam and Eve withheld from eating the fruit, but eventually, sadly, they gave in. They saw a rich "inheritance"—an opportunity to live their own way and leave—and they took it. They wanted to be their own gods, and so stopped trusting in the God that they walked beside each day.

To be fair, there was someone else in the garden who prompted them: Satan, the original rebel. That's right; God even gives freedom to rebels. Satan had already rebelled against God and decided God wasn't trustworthy. Satan's delusion was (and is) that God is a tyrannical master who needs to be overthrown, although that is quite the opposite of what creation reveals. And yet, Satan convinced Adam and Eve that God was hiding something. They were made to believe that God was withholding goodness, not generous, not loving and that they'd be better off going their own way.

We've all had similar voices tempting us to doubt that God is beautiful and loving.

When Adam and Eve bought the lie, they became Satan's first recruits on earth. And sure enough, they got their "freedom." Their eyes were opened, but along with their moral agency came drastic consequences. They would die. To clarify, they didn't die from something in the fruit. There wasn't a poisonous chemical inside. It was their sin against God that led to spiritual and relational separation, and eventually physical death.

If you think Adam and Eve's decision was a minor mistake, you'll misunderstand the rest of the story. Their sin, any sin, is not trivial. It's a decision to try to be "like God," and be the decider of good and evil. Sin goes against God's created order, and the universe was never meant to

function in that way. Thus, sin isn't just damaging; it is *damning*. Sin is turning your back on God and choosing sides, aligning with Satan's rebellion.

Can you see why sin has relational implications? It is more than a mistake; it's disavowing someone altogether. It is more than violating a rule book; it breaks one's ability to interact with the Creator of order and boundaries. The runaway son, and Adam and Eve, show that sin is a relational problem. It begins with distrust and distance in the heart, and leads to physical distance, further manifesting itself through separating decisions that move us further from God's presence and ideals. No matter how small the movement is, it is still seeking an alternative reality without God.

When we leave the presence of the life-giving Creator, death follows. We are, after all, just dust without the breath of God. Adam and Eve knew the consequences of their decision, and God did exactly what He said He would. They removed themselves from God's presence, and death became inevitable.

What makes the situation problematic is that it's not just a behaviour problem. It is a heart problem. Sinful action lacks heartfelt trust in God. A sinful heart desires life away from the Father. And when hearts have turned away, the next logical step is to walk away. That is a lifestyle of godlessness (the opposite of God's way) and recklessness (harming ourselves and others).

After Adam and Eve's death sentence, the problem compounded. They did not suddenly become filled with love, trust in God, or humble repentance. Their newfound "independence" only accelerated their rebellious behaviour with more evil and less love. Eve's first act was to give the fruit to Adam. She shared her sin with him, thereby inviting him into sin too. Now they were both in rebellion. Did they go and talk to God about it? No. Rather, they hid from God. They withdrew. They saw their imperfection, and wanted to hide from a perfect God. They became ashamed of their nakedness. Already, their mind was being re-shaped by sin.

That is why, like with the prodigal son, no matter how pleasurable godlessness seems, it is always lonely, empty, unsustainable, selfish, unrealistic, spiralling down, and ends in slavery, eating pigs' food.

So, to answer our question, there is nothing truly good to be found outside God's presence. Not even freedom itself can be found apart from God, for true freedom requires life that only comes from Him. We may continue to express our freedom outside God's presence, but it is not a new-found freedom. It is a limited and dying freedom. It is a lesser freedom because we eventually succumb to our natural limitations and death. We are like the runaway son who needs the father's money. When we walk away, we always run dry.

We were made to be dependent on God's provision. And, without our providing Father, we have no prosperity. We are left to deal with the consequences alone.

Freedom in a Runaway World

Years ago, I visited a large slum in Central America. If you have been in a similar environment, you will likely remember the sights and smells of inhumane living conditions. I stood atop a mountain of trash and saw children scavenge for food. How can millions of people live in these dire situations? If God is so good, and creation was so great, how did the world get here?

The experience overwhelmed me to the point of tears. I wondered, "Lord, where are you?" As I looked down, I saw a cross, dirty and sitting on top of the trash. It seemed a profound answer to my prayer—God is present even when the world is at its worst.

We know that human poverty has many causes: corruption, lying, stealing; the list goes on. But ultimately, the condition of our world is a result of billions of sinful human decisions. So before we blame our ancestors Adam and Eve, we must recognise that everyone—you and me included—has followed suit. The whole world has gone awry. We are all runaways who have joined the runaway world. We have chosen life without the Life-Giver and history has proven time and time again that