

INTRO: Most of us at one time in our lives were the Prodigal Son or Daughter as we left the comforting side of our heavenly Father and decided to go our own way. We took those possessions we thought was supposed to be ours and heading out for the "time of our lives" , not looking back, not caring, not concerned over those that we left behind but looking forward in anticipation of the excitement that was in our future, those "good times" that had been forbidden by our father and those that were trying to hold us back home. Rather we left physically from our earthly father's house to travel to that "far country" or if we simply left the godly atmosphere and comfort of our home and let our mind drift to that "far country" and away from godly influence makes no difference. Either way, we left home and sought for happiness and joy on our own terms and not on God's terms. Some of us were raised in godly homes and some of us were raised in homes far from being godly but at some point in our lives, we all drifted, we all left that place of safety that can be found in God's house and decided to make it on our own, make our own choices. Some in early years of life, others in the middle and other in the later years. Fortunately many found their way back in a short time, but others spent years journeying down the path of least resistance, aiming to please themselves every step of the way yet never really finding that fulfillment in their soul that they were longing for. Any way we look at it, most of us have "wasted years" in our life that we wish we could reverse and never have those memories haunting us where we separated ourselves from God.

- A.** I want to speak to two classes of individuals today – those that are still wasting their lives and those that are planning on wasting their lives. Perhaps not intentionally, but on their way to a life of wasted years.
- a. I have known individuals in my life that were converted at a late age in life, some even in their 70's and even with the joy of salvation and the promise of an eternal life, they were still haunted by those years that were wasted. That is, they did nothing to serve God, nothing to glorify God, nothing to further the kingdom of heaven in those years, their primary goal was what can I do for myself and my own? Does not mean they were "bad" people, does not mean they were vile reprobates of society, simply means their life up to that point had been a waste, with nothing of eternal value to show for it.
 - b. I am sure old Lot thought he had made a wise decision when he took the land of Sodom and gave the mountainous terrain to Abraham and even though he reached a position of power in the city and apparently was very wealthy, was what he gave up really worth it? Years he spent in that city and even though perhaps not as deep in evil as the rest of the city, one could only wonder what he really was involved in while there. But he lost his wife, his possessions and in reality, his daughters, while he was there in that city – separated from God. Was his delving into that city really worth it, everything he thought he had gained was gone. The city was destroyed and every tie he had with it was destroyed as well. The only thing that saved his life was listening to the angels of the Lord when they told him to flee the city or else he would have perished along with the others. What a waste of a life!
 - c. Paul was a persecutor of the church till his Damascus conversion and even though he was wealthy, powerful and in good standing with the Roman government, he would later write it was "all as dung". In other words, it was a waste. But at least Paul used the remainder of his life to amount to something.
 - d. But there are so many that are wasting their lives today and unless God's word is brought to bear upon their lives, they will have amounted to nothing while here on this earth. As I look around this nation of our, that I dearly love, I see young and old that are totally wasting their lives – apparently no direction in their lives, no goals in their lives, apparently no reason even for living in their eyes and I wonder if anyone, including us, will ever reach them. I see families that are losing their children, even some godly families, as they have wandered into the ways of the world and I wonder what the future holds for them. Some will eventually turn around and come back, if there is time, but many others never will. One of the biggest mission fields in the world today is our own families.
 - e. But these are all human lives, precious in the sight of God, created in the image of God, alive by the spirit of God and provided for by God Himself, yet they refuse to recognize His provisions living a life of rebellion that has only one destination and that is not good.
- B.** Then there are those that have not left and gone to the "far country" yet, but they are looking and they are wondering and they are making plans. The Prodigal Son looked for some time before he acted but something out there was pulling and he would not resist.

- a. Certainly the "lights of the city", the "draw of the world" is a strong temptation. The Las Vegas lights from above is a beautiful thing to see but if you walk on the streets, it is a totally different story. Young men and women often feel as if they have been "tethered" to Mom and Dad and are seeking to loose themselves from those ties that in their eyes, have them "tied down". They want to "do their own thing", "make their own choices", "spread their wings", "sow their wild oats" or whatever you want to call it, but the draw of the mysterious is strong and the more people say "no", the more they want to say "yes".
- b. I have seen kids in church all my life and many of them now are far from where they were at one time and it does not appear they are seeking to return any way soon. I watch kids in this church and when they reach certain ages, those things "out there" begin to beckon and they begin to look and wonder and even start to doubt perhaps what Mom and Dad have taught them, what the church has taught them, and even if God really cares about them. They become rebellious - They start to pull away from the church, separate themselves from those Christians that were friends at one time –church becomes a chore, a bother, a nuisance, a duty and in the back of their mind they cannot wait to try something "new" on their own. I have seen young people destroy their lives because of a few hours in the wrong place at the wrong time. They become more influenced by those of their age that are living in sin drawing them into them, telling them what a wonderful time it is away from the influence of parents, church and God. Be your own man, be your own woman, no one can tell you what to do. So they become involved with others of questionable character, turning their back on those that love them and walking out into darkness with those that will eventually destroy them.
- c. They think "freedom" is the answer to everything and when they first achieve some of that "freedom" they abuse it and forsake everything decent to try those things that "look appealing" and by the time they realize how foolish they have been, it is often too late. And another life is wasted. Some die physically in the far country, some die spiritually in the far country, but they all waste their lives there.

CONCLUSION: I could list a category of those things that seem so attractive but few would listen for they would say Bro. Dave is an old man and just not with our modern society. The opposite sex attracts, parties attract, popularity attracts, wanting to "fit in" attracts, money attracts, just wanting to be "on your own" attracts, etc. but in reality, anything that draws you away from God is dangerous to play with and sin will be in the picture before too long and it is often harder to get back to where you were than it was to leave in the first place. The old Prodigal Son thought he had a good life, thought he had friends, thought the world was going his way, till one day he woke up in the pig pens and realized he had lost it all, wasted it all and what did he have to show for it – nothing! His story has a good ending for we read he came to his senses and return to his father's house, but not all those stories end up that way. More so than not, the majority end up squandering their entire lives, wasting their whole lives and when it comes to the end, nothing to show for it. We read about a godly king Hezekiah in the Bible, but he had a son by the name of Manasseh that turned away from everything his father stood for and became an embarrassment to his father and to his God. In the end, he tried to turn it around but the damage could not all be repaired. Maybe you think, I'm just going to try this once or twice, then I'll come back – just a little here and a little there and then I'll be right back; but, it never works that way. This has not been much of a sermon, just a talk from the heart of somebody that cares and from the heart of someone that watches and sees the signs around and is concerned over your relationship with God, and especially to encourage you to not give up on the church – not just speaking about this church, I am talking about the Christian walk completely. There is nothing in this life that is worth losing the next life. No one has to be like anybody else, no one has to participate in the things that others do, we need a generation of young people especially, as well as those that are older, that will stand against the attractions of this life and be willing to say "no" when tempted to draw away from God. I would encourage any of you that are still wondering in the far country that just as the Prodigal's Father was waiting, so is your heavenly father looking, watching and longing for your return so you can be part of the family again. And those of you that are thinking about leaving and doing your own thing, the Father will not stop you, he will not force you – it will break His heart but He will let you go. But you are gambling with your eternal life in that situation for when the Lord returns, you will face Him just as your are and He will not overlook your participation in the "far country" if you have not repented before facing Him. Do not waste your life, do not regret waiting so long to make a decision for Christ, do not be the Prodigal Son that does not make it home – come home while the Father is still watching and waiting and calling for you will stand before Him one day when He is the Judge and He will dispense judgment where it is due. **DO NOT WASTE ANOTHER MINUTE!**