



Sermon Growth Guide

September 17, 2023

Wanderers

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Lead Me Home - Wanderers

Psalm 107:1-15

Key Verse: Psalm 107:4

“Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle.”

Big Idea: The people of God wander away from God’s faithfulness over and over, but God’s call is always to return to Him, our true home.



Foundations

This week we are back together in our **Lead Me Home** series. Our theme is “Wandering.”

Today we read Psalm 107, a beautiful Psalm of a longing for home. This Psalm reminds us (like the hymn, “Come Thou Fount”) that we are prone to wander much like our ancestors. Cain was cursed with wandering (Genesis 4:12), Abraham wandered (Deut. 26:5), and the people of Israel wandered in the desert for forty years.

As you read this Psalm together, think about your own heart, your life and your patterns of “wandering.”

The Psalm begins with thanksgiving: “O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for this steadfast love endures forever” (107:1).

Before you begin your discussion, take a moment to share what you are thankful for today. Have someone open your time with a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s steadfast love.

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Psalm 107:1-15.

What do you notice about this Psalm?
What words/phrases stand out?

What does a wanderer experience in this Psalm?

How does God respond?

Applying God’s Word

Read the Psalm again.

What role does gratitude play in this song?
What role does gratitude play in your life?

The Psalm indicates that the Lord led the wanderers to an “inhabited town” (107:7). Who are your people, the people who “inhabit” your life? Who are the people that keep you grounded and anchored in the Lord?

Witnessing God’s Word

How might God want to use you this week to encourage a “wanderer” in your life? Is there someone who needs to know they are not alone and needs to know that you (and God) “see” them?

Pray together for opportunities to relieve the distress of another person this week.

Well, it's true. I'm fifty. Today is my birthday. It's a big one. Do you think I'm halfway home? Sorry, is that a little morbid? I hope I am. I hope I'm past halfway! We jump back into our series this week walking through the entire story of salvation from creation to fall, to redemption, to consummation following this biblical theme of longing for home.

Lead Me Home. We long for home because we were made for home, God made us a home and made us at home. But when we disobeyed God and ruptured that relationship, we found ourselves wandering east of Eden in a world that is just not quite right. Sometimes it reminds us of home, but it leaves us wanting. We are nomads. Aliens. **Wanderers.** Or, if we know where we are headed, we are more like pilgrims.

I want us to find the way home, but along the way, we need to pick up a few fellow travelers and help them turn from nomads into pilgrims, from wanderers to hikers headed down the trail towards a destination, from lost to found. So we are going to sit here in the wandering today. We are going to linger in the uncomfortable wandering and longing, because we can meet some fellow travelers here. We have been handing out these conversation cards. Collect the whole set! Wandering is a common human experience. Start a conversation with a not-yet believer with this: "Does it ever feel like we are all just wandering?"

There is a Spanish Taizé song called "De Noche": "De noche iremos, de noche; que para encontrar la fuente, sólo la sed nos alumbró, sólo la sed nos alumbró." Or in English: "By night, we hasten, in darkness; to search for living water, only our thirst leads us onward, only our thirst leads us onward." That's haunting, isn't it? Pulled around by your thirst in the dark. I feel that way sometimes. Don't you? James K. A. Smith calls it "Road hunger." "We leave because we long for something else, something more. We leave to look for some piece of us that's missing. We hit the road in the hope of finding what we're looking for—or at least sufficiently distracting ourselves from the hungers and haunting absences that propelled our departure in the first place. We've

inherited the pilgrim penchant, but it's morphed into unsettledness, a baseline antsy feeling that leaves us never feeling at home. We're always on the move, restless, vaguely chasing something rather than oriented to a destination." (James K. A. Smith, *On the Road with Saint Augustine*) Road hunger. Wanderlust. We are homeless and hungry, and that makes us as vulnerable as a hungry shopper in Costco. Gullible! How do you handle the wandering in your own soul? Has it caused you to make a few wrong turns?

It is the story of the people of God. They wandered. Abraham wandered from his homeland. "My father was a wandering Aramean" (Deuteronomy 26:5), all the children of Abraham say. The Israelites wandered in the desert after liberation from Egypt. The people of God wandered away from faithfulness over and over, called back to salvation by a faithful and loving God. You could call it the curse of Cain: "You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." (Genesis 4:12) Our passage is a beautiful, poetic presentation of the wanderer. I want you to read the whole thing. If you can, keep the whole Psalm open in front of you. Does God understand the wanderer? "Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle." (Psalms 107:4) We think the city is a threatening place, but in ancient times the city was where there was a wall, protection and order and peace. Cities had economies trading goods and skills to meet needs, and that means life at a different level than mere subsistence creativity and spirituality could flourish, along with education and healing and romance. God still has a vision for a city like that. So does the heart of the wanderer, but he doesn't find it. "They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away." (Psalms 107:5) So hungry. So thirsty. Willing to try anything.

"Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle." (Psalms 107:6-7) They cried out to the Lord. As long as you think you can handle it yourself, you will not cry out for help, and, so, you will not get any. It is when you finally realize you can't get there on

your own—that’s when you cry out. That’s when the Deliverer answers and appears. He delivers. He saves. He straightens the road straight to the city, “make straight the highway of our God,” straight on home where you always wanted to go. “Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.” (Psalms 107:8-9)

Psalm 107 loops through that same pattern four times, as does the entire Old Testament in fact. Next comes the prisoner in chains. Iron chains are a loss of liberty, a deprivation of rights. How did they get there? They rebelled against God’s commands and found themselves trapped. “I thought this was freedom!” It’s about as free as the Prodigal Son felt in Jesus’ famous parable when he had run out his resources in dissolute living and found himself in the distant country longing for home but eating with pigs. Chains and limits, darkness and despair, that’s when you cry to the Lord. And what does God do? Shout, “I told you so”! No. “Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains. Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind.” (Psalms 107:13-15) Praise God! Praise God! “For he breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron.” (Psalms 107:16) Praise God. He saves.

So, some wandered, some were imprisoned, but some did it to themselves, at verse 17. We do it to ourselves. We exchange wisdom for foolishness so we can smartly rebel against the foolishness of God. Pretty soon we are sick in our afflictions staring down the gates of hell. Then they cried out. Watch this, “He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.” (Psalms 107:20) He sent his Word! Are you paying attention? His Word grew legs and ran down the road to rescue, to heal, to rip us from the grip of the grave. Finally, the fourth iteration says some went out to sea and learned just what it is to get whipped around by life. Up and down. Side to side. Sick and staggered they cried for help. “He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the

sea were hushed.” (Psalms 107:29) Does that sound familiar? Is that ringing any bells? See, it is when you are at your wits end that you call on the Lord. So long as you think you can handle it, you won’t cry out. But when you do, He saves.

At the end of the Psalm is one further challenge. Could it be that God may allow situations to worsen so that you to cry out to Him? Would God have the gall? “He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, and fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there.” (Psalms 107:33-34) “You mean, here I am hungry and homeless, dying of thirst in the desert, and God might make it worse? God might exacerbate my thirst and increase my discomfort?” God is more interested in getting you home than making you comfortable. But read on and you will see, God is good. “Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord.” (Psalms 107:43) God cares when you are out there stuck wandering.

Wandering and thirsty, we are vulnerable. And remember (I say ‘remember’ because I believe you already know) you are stuck in a world that feeds off of keeping you hungry. We are in a consumer world. We have deep needs and hungers, and businesses use them to sell us stuff. As we said before, behind every temptation is a true longing for a true good. The other side of that is our marketing experts know how to turn true longings into true profits. Watch the ads. When they say, “sell the sizzle, not the steak,” they mean you are not selling a luxury car, you are selling acceptance and respect; you are not selling an iPhone, you are selling human connection; you are not selling clothes or shampoo, you are selling intimacy and romance. Locking into deep longings, they sell you a pasty, pale substitute, like replacing chicken with tofu. No. This isn’t it. You are sold a bill of goods. A Snickers doesn’t really satisfy. But you keep going, keep trying, keep falling for the next trick, and your hunger only gets worse.

“If only I could get promoted to executive, if only I could make partner.” When you climb that ladder and find it leaning against the wrong wall. “If only I could

get out of this marriage; if only I could get into that marriage.” Then you find that whatever relationship you are in, you are still the problem. “If only I could get that house, that car, get into that school with that scholarship.” Every thirst, every pursuit, it all seems worthy of ultimate sacrifice, the full leap of commitment over everything else, until you land there and find that this spot is only the birthplace of further desire. How will your thirst ever be satisfied? Does it ever feel like we are just wandering?

C. S. Lewis wrote, “...we remain conscious of a desire which no natural happiness will satisfy” (CS Lewis, *Weight of Glory*) Smith says, “The heart’s hunger is infinite, which is why it will ultimately be disappointed with anything merely finite. Humans are those strange creatures who can never be fully satisfied by anything created—though that never stops us from trying.” (James K. A. Smith, *On the Road with Saint Augustine*) Now, Carl Jung said the same. “Only if we know that the thing which truly matters is the infinite can we avoid fixing our interest upon futilities,” said the largely atheistic father of analytical psychology. Can we find some common ground? We thirst, unsatisfied, for something infinite. And the world will tell you just to be okay with that. Just learn to tolerate that. Nomads don’t get relief; desire only desires more desire. Try to find peace with the wandering. But also try this new skin cream.

The shift we need is from nomad to pilgrim. A nomad is homeless and hungry; a pilgrim is headed somewhere sacred, with hope. A wanderer skates across the land driven only by hungers and desires with no satisfaction; a hiker is on the path, on the way, headed to an anticipated end. How can we make that shift? Wait! Wasn’t there something about a Word? Didn’t we hear about a Way? Wasn’t there a breaking light of dawn over the landscape of darkness? I want you to feel the aching hunger today. I want you to feel the thirst of the wanderer. I want that, because I want us to be a people who can empathize with the lost in our city. “Yes, I know what that feels like. Yes, I get that. Doesn’t it feel sometimes like we are all just wandering around? Yes, I feel that.” With only our thirst to guide us. I want us

to all feel that today and leave here with open hearts for the nomadic wanderers we know. But I want you to feel that ache for a second reason—because I suspect, in fact I’m pretty confident, that you, like me, are stuffing things into that infinite gap that will never, ever fill it. The heart’s hunger is infinite. Only the infinite will fill it.

Wasn’t there something about a Word? “He sent out his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave.” (Psalms 107:20) “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) Wasn’t there a light? “He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains.” (Psalms 107:14) “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” (John 8:12) Wasn’t there something about a road, a way, a path that we could walk? “He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle.” (Psalms 107:7) “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life.’ (John 14:6) Come on, church, rise up and sing! You’re not wandering alone. Jesus Christ is leading you home.