

## **Sunday, April 13: Landslide (Palm Sunday)**

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<https://open.spotify.com/track/5ihS6UUlyQAfmp48eSkxuQ>

*Text: Luke 15:11-24*

I fell in love with music while riding in the car. Because my parents divorced before I could walk, every other weekend, my dad would drive two hours, one way on Friday evenings and back on Sunday afternoons, so that I could spend time with him. On those East Texas roads, we listened to country music or rock from my dad's era. We connected over the lyrics as much as the melody, my dad appreciating how an entire story could be told in three minutes, capturing more feeling than simple prose could. So, it's no surprise the first time I heard "Landslide" by Fleetwood Mac, I was captivated.

There's a story that Jesus tells in the Gospel of Luke that gives us insight into what God is like. He tells the story of a man with two sons. The first comes to his father, demanding that he be given his share of his inheritance (even though his father is still alive.) Without any disagreement, the father does as the son asks, and the son goes his own way. As the story goes, the son squanders away all that he is given in "dissolute living."

I think there's a common pull in adolescence when children decide that they need to stand on their own two feet. There's this internal need to become independent and charge our path instead of living out the lives that others, especially our parents, may have planned for us. It's not always easy for the child or the parent. But the hope is that, unlike the son in Jesus' story, who, based on cultural norms at the time, implies that he wishes his father were dead, is that when the time comes for children to become independent, they are able to do so with a bit more tact and grace.

In the thoughtful twang of the guitar and through the steady pull of the melody, Stevie Nicks soulfully tells the story of one stepping out on their own. With images of climbing mountains and self-reflection in "snow-covered hills", one can imagine the anxiousness of stepping out on your own for the first time, whether through encouragement from a loving parent or whether the young person demanded their way out in the first place. And then "the landslide brought me down."

As Jesus continues the story of the son who had set off in independence and wasted his wealth away, it becomes abundantly clear that the landslide of his choices brought him to his knees. Starving and desperate, he is forced to recognize the error of his ways as he is brought down in the literal dust and muck of the fields where pigs need to feed. (This is another one of those details that, in the cultural norms during Jesus' life, meant that this young man had hit rock bottom.) Recognizing that he is being crushed by the choices that he has made, he makes the decision to humble himself and return to his father in hopes of mercy.

My own forging out in independence was definitely anti-climactic in comparison. Mine was a typical modern story of a young college freshman packing up her car and moving into the college dorms. This time, I would travel three hours away, determined to get an education, make new friends, and begin crafting a life of my own. There were hiccups, for sure. Friction came in the form of my father, who deeply loved Fightin' Texas Aggie Football and his baby girl. In his mind, nothing could be better than spending every other weekend at Kyle Field, followed by taking his girl to dinner and hearing about her new life and adventures. Meanwhile, I just wanted to hang out with my friends.

In the song, Nicks doesn't offer us anything more than questions about the future or wonderings about reasons that may have landed one under the landslide in the first place. The tone is filled with melancholy and reflection; one can almost imagine the melody playing as we envision the young son that Jesus talks about making his way back home to his father.

Jesus continues to tell the story of the young man heading toward home, but before he even makes it, the father, so overjoyed at the sight of his son coming toward him, runs in compassion to greet him. In this scene, we find another cultural insight. In first-century Jewish culture, it was deemed undignified for grown men to run. As the son apologizes, the father hurriedly welcomes his son home, caring for his needs and celebrating his return.

Ecclesiastes 3:20 notes, "All go to one place, all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again." During the season of Lent, we reflect on the ministry of Jesus and, ultimately, his journey to the cross. It's a time for us to reflect on our own lives as disciples of Jesus Christ and how we live as a reflection of God's love in the world. There are seasons of life where it can feel like we are buried in the landslide of dust and dirt from our own life choices. But unlike the questions that linger in the song, we know that Jesus, who overcame the power of sin and death, reaches right down into that dust, pulling us out from under the rubble.

On this side of heaven, we still experience the sting of death, the tangible reminder that from dust we came and to dust we shall return. In 2016, my father died after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. Shortly after his diagnosis, he made the seventeen-hour drive to the Mojave Desert, where I was living with my husband and our daughters. Both of us grappling with the realization that our time together on this side of heaven was coming to an end, we set out for a drive through Joshua Tree National Park, just the two of us, just like when I was a little girl. Dad was driving, and I rode shotgun as country radio played softly in the background. We didn't connect over the music this time. My dad shared that in spite of the sadness he felt that his time on earth was coming to an end, he was at peace. He knew that he was a beloved child of God who was deeply loved and forgiven. Through Jesus Christ, there is hope and resurrection. Just as God breathed life into the dust that would become humankind at creation, we will one day be made alive in Christ.