

## Running away.

*The story of the lost son, from Luke 15*

JESUS TOLD this story about a boy who ran away: Once upon a time, there was a boy and his dad. Now, one day, the boy gets to thinking, *Maybe if I didn't have my dad around telling me what is good for me all the time, I'd be happier. He's spoiling my fun, he thinks. Does my dad really want me to be happy? Does my dad really love me?* The son never thought of that before. But suddenly he doesn't know anymore.

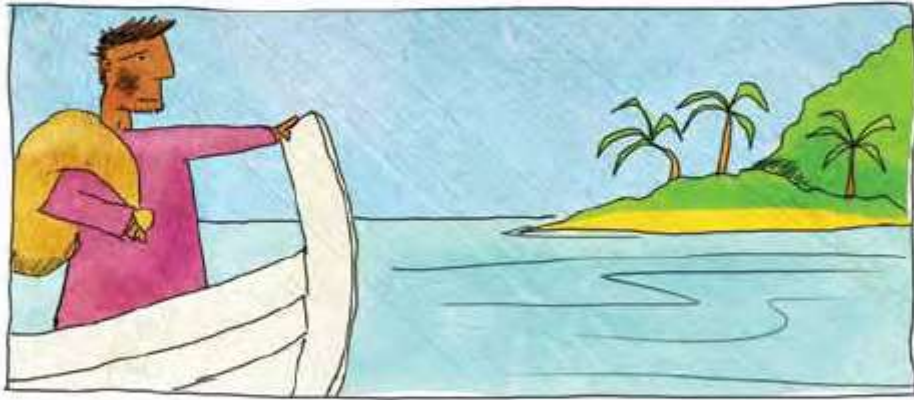
So the son goes to his father and says, "Dad, I'm better off without you. I can look after myself. Just give me my share of your money."

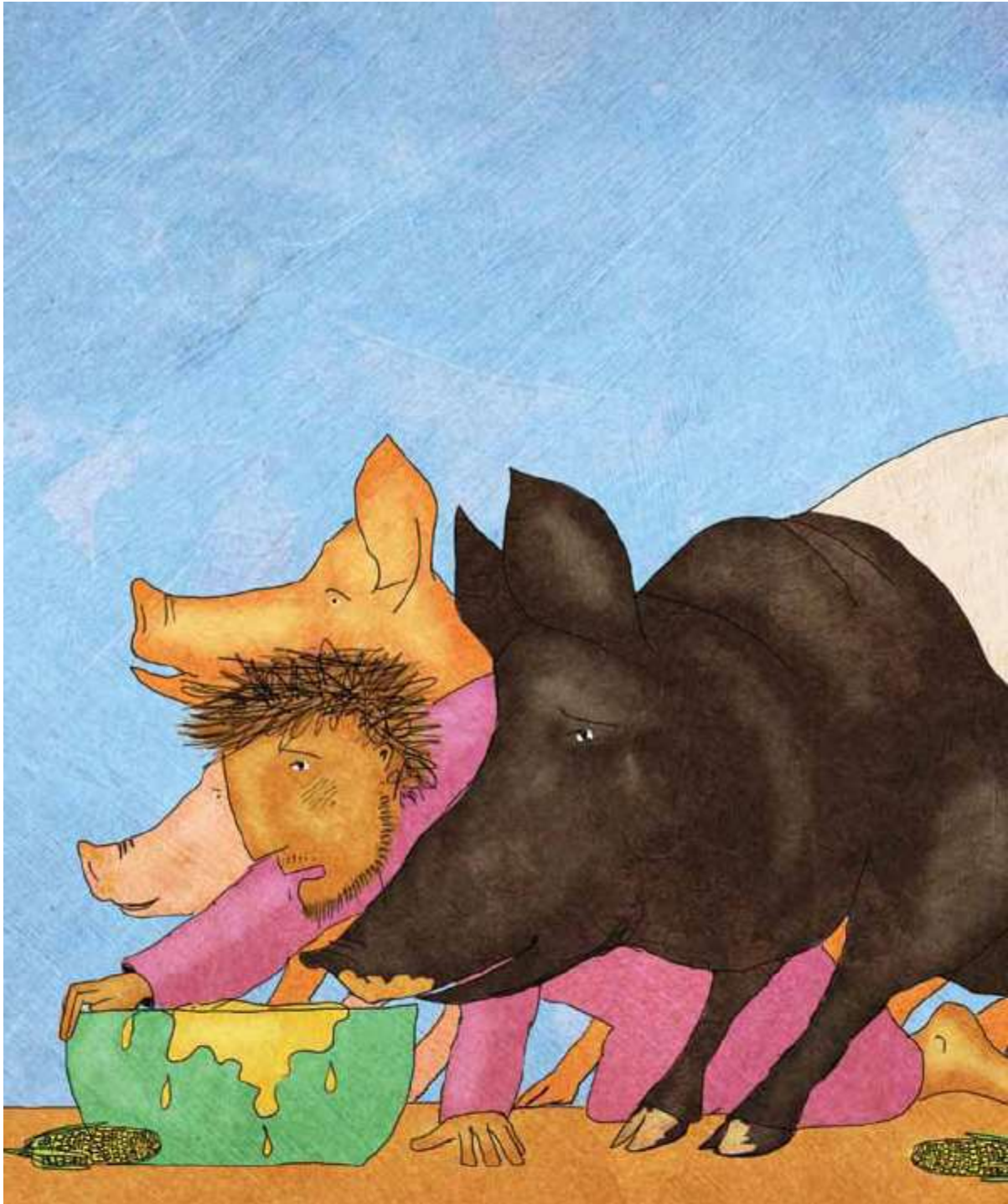
His father is sad but he won't force his boy to stay. So he gives his son what he wants.

The son takes the money and goes on a long, long journey to a far off country.

And everything's wonderful and perfect—for a while. He can go wherever he wants, do whatever he wants, be whoever he wants. He is the boss, he is free!

Sometimes he gets a strange, hungry, homesick feeling inside his heart, but then he just eats more, or drinks more, or buys more clothes, or goes to more parties until it goes away.





But soon his money runs out—and so do his friends. He ends up getting the only job he can find: feeding pigs. One day, he is so hungry and so desperate he even tries some piggy food—

“What am I doing?” he says suddenly, as if he has woken from a nightmare. He spits—YUCK!—all of it—ICK!—out of his mouth. “My father

is rich, and here I am—in a pig sty, eating piggy food!”

He wipes his mouth and dusts himself off.

“I’m going home!”



As he starts for home though, he begins to worry. *Dad won't love me anymore. I've been too bad. He won't want me for his son anymore.* So he practices his I'm-Sorry-Speech.

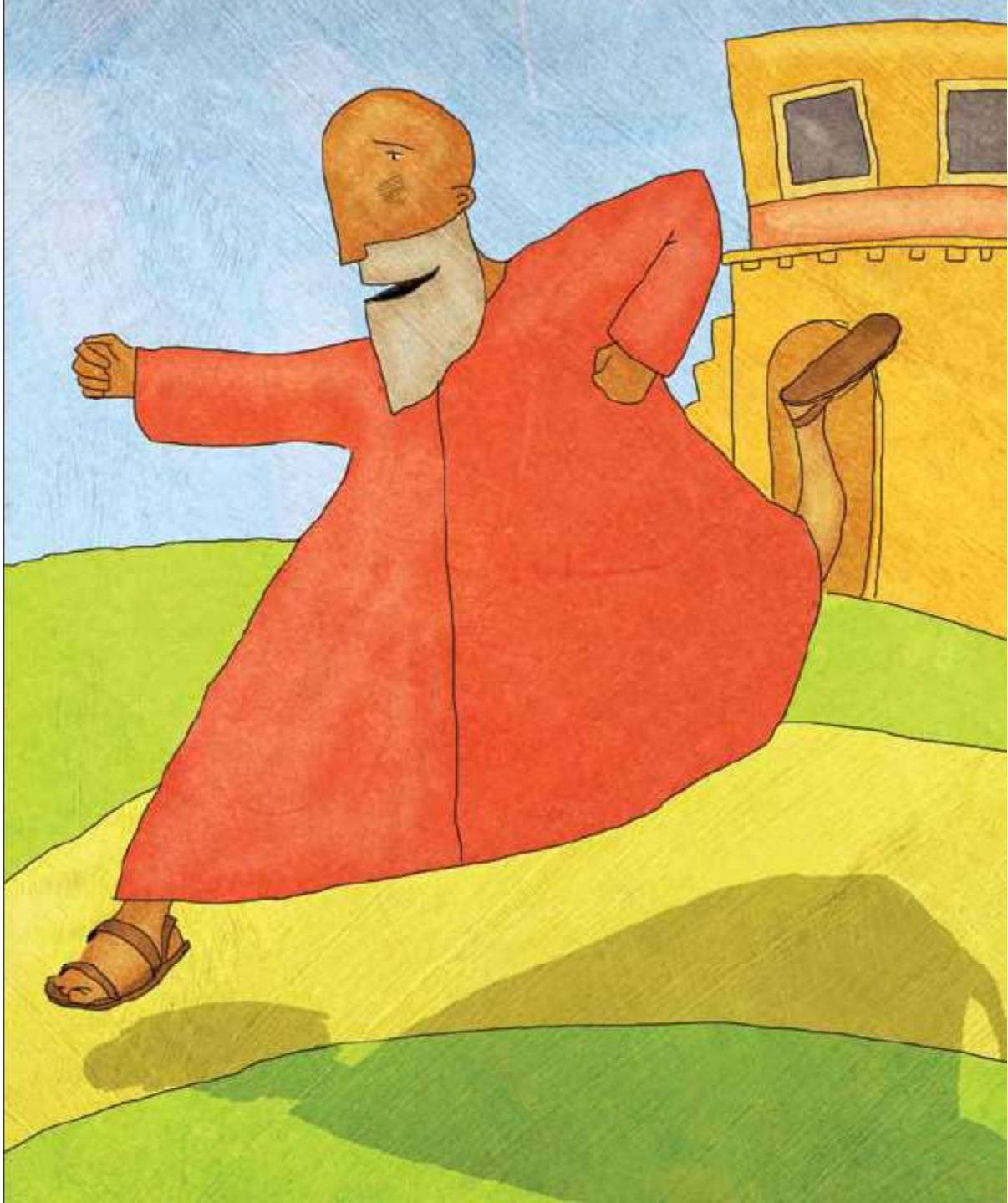
All this time, what he doesn't know is that, day after day, his dad has been standing on his porch, straining his eyes, looking into the distance, waiting for his son to come home. He just can't stop loving him. He longs for the sound of his boy's voice. He can't be happy until he gets him back.

The son is still a long way off, but his dad sees him coming.

What will the dad do? Fold his arms and frown? Shout, “That'll teach you!” And, “Just you wait, young man!”

No. That's not how this story goes.

The dad leaps off the porch, races down the hill, through the gap in the hedge, up the road. Before his son can even begin his I'm-Sorry-Speech, his dad runs to him, throws his arms around him, and can't stop kissing him.



“Let’s have a party!” his dad shouts. “My boy’s home. He ran away. I lost him—but now I have him back!”

Jesus told them, “God is like the dad who couldn’t stop loving his boy. And people are like the son who said, ‘Does my dad really want me to be happy?’ ”

Jesus told people this story to show them what God is like. And to show people what they are like.

So they could know, however far they ran, however well they hid, however lost they were—it wouldn't matter. Because God's children could never run too far, or be too lost, for God to find them.



