

# The Lost Son's New Clothes



## SABBATH—MAY 28

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** Genesis 4:1–8; Genesis 25:25–34; Luke 15:4–32; John 11:9, 10; Romans 5:12–20.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “ ‘ “But we had to celebrate and be glad. This brother of yours was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found” ’ ” (Luke 15:32, NlrV).

**W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM, A FAMOUS AUTHOR, WROTE A SHORT STORY CALLED “RAIN.”** The story was about a missionary in the South Sea who “converted”<sup>1</sup> a prostitute<sup>2</sup> to the gospel. He poured himself, heart and soul, into trying to win her. But sometimes the missionary’s methods seemed hard and unforgiving. For example, he demanded that the prostitute return to the United States (which she was fleeing) in order to finish out a jail sentence. The missionary strongly felt that the prostitute should serve her jail time as part of showing her repentance (change of heart). So, she had to return to jail.

But the story ended unexpectedly. The missionary killed himself. His crushed body was found washed up on the beach. What happened? While spending all this time with the prostitute, he fell into sin with her. Unable to forgive himself, the missionary killed himself.

What the missionary and the prostitute needed was what we all need as sinners. We all need a personal experience of the grace<sup>3</sup> and assurance (promise) that Jesus showed in the parable<sup>4</sup> of the prodigal (lost) son.

1. converted—to help someone decide to give his or her life to Jesus.

2. prostitute—a person who has sex with someone in exchange for money.

3. grace—God’s gift of forgiveness and mercy (kindness that is not deserved) that He freely gives to us to take away our sins.

4. parable—a short, simple story that teaches a truth.

**SUNDAY—MAY 29****SAME PARENTS, SAME FOOD  
(Luke 15:12)**

“ ‘There was a man who had two sons’ ” (Luke 15:11, NIV). In this parable, the two sons, born to the same father, showed different character traits.<sup>5</sup> The older son seemed to be loyal, faithful, and hard-working. The younger one was unwilling to work and unwilling to be responsible. Both had the same family history. Both probably received the same love and care from the same father. One son was, it seemed, faithful. The other was disrespectful. What caused the difference?

**Of what other stories does this parable remind you? Genesis 4:1–8; Genesis 25:25–34.**

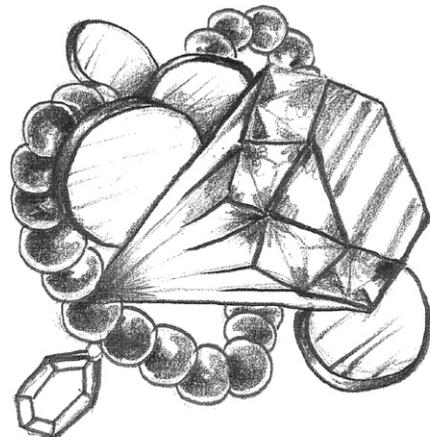
It is a strange situation that is very common. There are two (or more) children from the same parents, living in the same home. They have the same teachings, the same love, and even the same food. But one becomes spiritual, faithful, and determined to serve the Lord, while the other goes in the opposite direction. It is hard to understand, but it does show us the real power of free will. Who knows why the younger son did what he did.

**What lesson can we learn from Luke 15:12 about how the father felt when the younger son asked for his share of inheritance? What**

**does that tell us about how God relates to us?**

The verse does not say what kind of talk was going on between the father and the son. It does not say whether the father pleaded with him, asking him to reconsider. He probably asked the son not to be so quick with his decision. He probably asked him to think through his actions. And most likely the son did. But in the end, the son was given his “share of the family property” (Luke 15:12, NIV). And off he went! All through the Bible, we find this same principle (important rule): God lets humans have the freedom to make their own choices, to go their own way, to live as they want. Of course, as we all know so well, our choices come with results that we do not always imagine or foresee.

**What have been the results of some of your own free choices lately?**



**The younger son was given his share of his father's goods and then left home.**

5. character traits—qualities, such as being honest and faithful, that make a person who he or she is.

**MONDAY—MAY 30****SPREADING HIS WINGS  
(Luke 15:13–19)**

Picture the father as he watched his stubborn son pack his backpack, ready to leave home. Maybe the father asked his son where he was going, what his plan was for employment, what his dreams were for his future. Who knows what answers the son gave. They probably were not encouraging, at least to the father. And the son probably was ready for the good times ahead.

After all, why not? The son was young and adventurous. He had some cash to spend and a world to see. Life on the family farm probably seemed dull and boring as compared to what the world might offer to him.

**What kind of repentance do we see here in Luke 15:13–19? Does it seem like a true repentance? Is he really sorry for what he did? Or is he sorry only for the results of what he did? What hints are there in the verses that could give us the answer?**

It is hard to know how this story might have turned out if things had gone well for the lost son. Suppose the son found ways to keep the money flowing in and to keep the good times coming. It probably would not be necessary for him to come back “on his knees,” would it? Who among

us at one time or another has not been really sorry for our sins but only for the results of our sins when we get caught? Even the most immoral (behaves wickedly) person is going to be sorry he commits (does) adultery (sex outside of marriage) if he gets herpes, gonorrhea, or syphilis.<sup>6</sup>

So, what about this young man? There is no question that the young son found himself in a terrible situation. And this brought about a change in his attitude. This change might not have happened in another situation. The thoughts of the son's heart do show that he realized he sinned both against his father and against God. The speech the son prepared in his heart does seem to show that his repentance is sincere.

**Sometimes we need the bad results of our actions to help us to realize how terrible our sins are. This often happens when the suffering comes from our actions and not just from the results. What about yourself and whatever situations you are facing now? Why not choose to avoid the sin and save yourself from all the sorrow and the repentance that will follow?**

**TUESDAY—MAY 31****YOU CAN GO HOME AGAIN  
(Luke 15:4–10)**

In the early 1900s, a writer of novels, Thomas Wolfe, wrote a famous

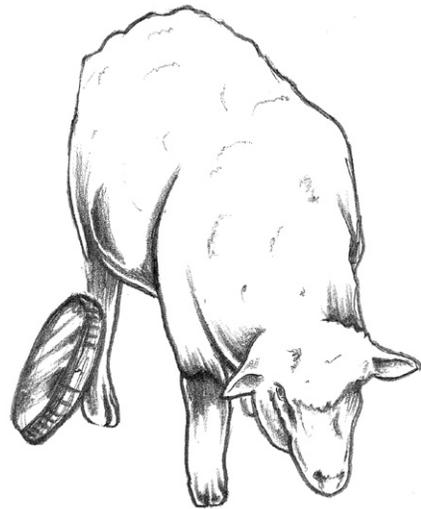
6. herpes, gonorrhea, or syphilis—diseases of the sex organs that are spread through sexual contact.

book, *You Can't [Cannot] Go Home Again*. It is about a man who leaves his humble family home in the South, goes to New York, makes it big as a writer, and then tries to return to his home. It was not an easy change. This explains the title of the book.

**In the story of the lost son, who makes the long trip in order to be reunited with his father? How different is it from the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin in Luke 15:4–10? What might be the important difference here?**

In the parables of the lost sheep and the coin, the sheep and the coin needed someone to find them. They could not make it back even if they tried. But the lost son walked away from the truth. And it was only after he was in the darkness (read John 11:9, 10) that he came to know just how lost he was. All through the history of salvation, God has had to deal with those who know Him but have gone their own way. The good news of this parable is that God still is willing to reunite with those who have turned their backs on Him. Just as the lost son chose of his own free will to leave, he had to choose by his own free will to come back. It works the same way with all of us.

What is interesting, too, about these parables is their background. Read Luke 15:1, 2. Look at the different people who are listening to what Jesus is saying. What a powerful message it should be to us. Instead



**In the parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, the sheep and the coin needed someone to find them.**

of giving warnings about end-time events or about God's judgment upon unrepentant (not sorry for wrongdoing) sinners, Jesus gives parables showing the Father's earnest love and care for all of those who are lost.

**Have you known people who have walked away from God? What hope can you learn from this story? How important it is that we all pray for those who still have not learned the lesson that the lost son so painfully did.**

### WEDNESDAY—JUNE 1

#### THE BEST ROBE (Luke 15:20–24)

As we saw, the son himself had to make the decision to return. The father did not do anything to make the son return. God forces no one to

obey. God did not force Satan to obey in heaven or Adam and Eve to obey in Eden. So, why would He do it now, long after the results of disobedience have caused problems for all people on earth? (Romans 5:12–21).

**How does the father feel about the son's confession in Luke 15:20–24? What was the son required to do before the father accepted him? What message is in there for us? Read also Jeremiah 31:17–20.**

The son did confess to his father. But you can understand from reading the verse that the father almost did not hear it. Notice the order of events: the father ran to meet his son. He fell on him. And he kissed him. Sure, the confession was fine. And it probably did the son more good than the father. But at that point the son's actions spoke louder than his words.



The father ran out to meet his son and fell on him and kissed him.

The father, too, told the servants to bring “the best robe” and put it on the son. The Greek word translated as “best” (from *protos*) often means “first” or “foremost.” The father was giving the lost son the best he had to offer.

Think of the meaning too. The son had been living as a poor man for who knows how long. He probably did not come home dressed in the finest of clothes. After all, the son had been feeding pigs up until then. Imagine the sharp difference between what the son was wearing when he was hugged by his father and the robe that was put on him. (Notice, too, that the father did not wait until the son had cleaned up before throwing himself on him.)

This shows that the restoration (renewal) between the father and the son was complete. If we think of “the best robe” as the robe of Christ's righteousness, then this is all the lost son needed. The lost son had repented, confessed, and turned from his ways. The father did the rest. This is a perfect symbol of salvation!

**What is interesting here, too, is that there is no “I-told-you-so” from the father. There was no need for it, was there? Sin earns its own wages. When dealing with people who come back to the Lord after falling away, how can we learn not to scold them for their sins?**

## THURSDAY—JUNE 2

### THE FATHER'S OWN GARMENT (ROBE) (Luke 15:22–24)



**The father called for the best robe in the house to be put on his son.**

Ellen G. White, in *Christ's Object Lessons*, pages 203, 204, adds an interesting detail to the story that is not found in the verses themselves. Mrs. White describes the scene of the father coming to the son as the son humbly comes home. She writes: "The father will let no one mock [laugh at] his son's worn-out clothes. The father takes from his own shoulders the broad, rich cloak, and wraps it around the son's weak body. And the son sobs out his repentance, saying, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.' The father holds him close to his side and brings him home. The father does not let his son ask for a servant's place. He is a son, who shall be honored with the best the house can give. And all the servants in the house are to respect and serve him.

"The father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it

on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattest calf and kill it. Let's [Let us] have a big dinner and celebrate. This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.' So they began to celebrate (Luke 15:22–24, NIV)." —Adapted.

**What gems of wisdom does this story give us? What does it tell us about God's character (who God is)?**

The father wants, right away, to cover up the shame of the son's mistakes. What a message for us about learning to let the past go, to not remember others' past mistakes or our own. Some of the worst sins are not known now. But one day they will be (1 Corinthians 4:5); like Paul, we need to forget what is past and look forward to the future (Philippians 3:13, 14).

**What does the father mean in Luke 15:24 when he says that his son was dead but now is alive again? How do we understand these very strong words?**

In the end, there is no middle ground in the final issues of salvation. When all things finally and completely come together (Revelation 21:5), and the great controversy (war) is ended, all people either will be eternally alive or eternally dead. No middle ground exists.

Certainly, this is something for us

to think about as we make our daily choices, both good and bad, as the lost son did.

### FRIDAY—JUNE 3

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** Read Ellen G. White, “Lost and Is Found,” pages 198–211; “A Great Gulf Fixed,” page 260, in *Christ’s Object Lessons*; “The Last Journey From Galilee,” pages 495, 496, in *The Desire of Ages*; “Parables of the Lost,” pages 100–104, in *Testimonies [Messages] for the Church*, volume 3.

“See how gentle and merciful the Lord is with His people. He loves His wandering [lost] child, and begs him to return. The Father’s arm is around His repenting son. The Father’s garments cover his rags. The ring is put upon his finger as a member of the royal family. But how many judge the lost son with disgust. Like the Pharisee, they say, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people’ (Luke 18:11, NIV). But how do you think God looks upon those who stand by like the elder brother in the parable? Are they stubborn and selfish too?” —Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel [Good News] Workers*, page 140.

“Strength and grace have been given by Christ and brought by angels to every believing soul. There is no one whose sins are so terrible that he or she cannot find strength, purity, and righteousness [a holy life] in

Jesus, who died for him or her. Jesus is waiting to remove from us our garments that are stained and polluted [made filthy; dirty] with sin, and to put upon us the white robes of righteousness. Jesus orders us to live, and to not die.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, pages 55, 56.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Discuss more the question of how children who come from the same parents, the same home, and the same environment can go in such different spiritual directions. How do we understand this?
- ② Suppose there are people who have turned away from the Lord, done what they wanted to do with their lives, and damaged themselves. They want to put their past behind them, but they cannot. The results of their past choices stare them right in the face. What hope, what promises, what help can you offer to them?
- ③ It is one thing to know that you are messed up, as the lost son did. What about those who have “left their father’s home,” and things are going quite well for them? Let us be honest: not everyone who leaves the Lord winds up feeding pigs. Some end up owning the pig farm! What can be done to help them to understand that they have made a fatal (deadly) choice, no matter how rich they are?