

LOST THINGS: THE LOST BOY (2)

BY KEITH GREER

In *Luke 15*, our Lord taught a powerful lesson on what it means to be LOST. In this parable, He used three illustrations of lost things—a sheep, a coin and a boy.

The story of the lost sheep tells of the deep love and concern the Lord has for His own. Christians are His sheep, and when one wanders away, God is very concerned. There is great rejoicing when a lost sheep finds its way home. The second story was about a lost coin. This story shows the value one might place on personal things and the joy he feels when he finds something he values. But the most important part of Jesus' teaching concerns a lost boy—many refer to him as the prodigal son. This story vividly portrays a father's love for his son and the father's willingness to extend mercy and compassion toward his son and receive him back again after he corrects his mistakes and seeks forgiveness. Yet another part of this lesson shows how easy it is to become confused about what brings true happiness in this life. Please read *Luke 15:11-32*. We want to examine the two parts (how he **departed** and how he **returned**) of the prodigal son's story.

How He Returned:

1. Realization. *"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger!'" (15:17)* Now we begin to see a much brighter picture for this young man. He could not change until he realized how far he had fallen. Recognition and reflection can lead to reformation. He understood his terrible plight and condition and knew he needed to change. His thoughts returned to home—what he had previously and what he left. When converting a sinner, the hardest part is getting him to face up to where he is in God's sight. The sinner needs to be convinced that he is lost because he turned from God, and that he can regain what he lost if he returns.

2. Repentance. *"I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.'" (15:18,19)* Repentance is a change of will that results in a change of conduct. It's not just the returning; the person's determination to return must also be involved. He not only changes his life; he has a willingness to change. Only godly sorrow can bring true repentance in the sinner's life, *"For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death."* (2 Corinthians 7:10)

3. Returning. *“And he arose and came to his father...” (15:20)* The young man’s repentance led him back to his father. His determination to change culminated in his actual return. He no longer desired the far country, eating from the pig trough, and being alone. He resolved to change, and then he followed through with his resolve. Often, people see the need to change and admit they need to change, but never get around to it. Our deeds show the fruits of our repentance. A reformed life is strong evidence of true repentance. This young man took a big step—he went all the way home.

4. Resignation. *“And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.’” (15:21)* What a difference in attitude! He had demanded his inheritance from his father and then left. Now he was resigned to do his father’s will and become one of his servants. There was no plea bargaining, term agreements, or demands for special privileges because he was his son. While he was away, this young son became a man. He openly admitted his mistakes and did not ask for pity; he just wanted to go to work. Contrition—freely admitting sin and responsibility for it—is a wonderful thing to behold.

5. Restoration. *“But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.’” (15:22)* An erring son was restored to his father, and the father restored his son to full fellowship. Notice, the father didn’t chastise his son; he welcomed him home!

6. Rejoicing. *“And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry.” (15:23,24)* There was rejoicing because the son had returned alive. Remember that God rejoices when one sinner returns. *(Luke 15:10)*

What a happy ending for the young man and his father! Sadly, he had to learn the lessons of life the hard way—just like so many still do today. God loves us and gives us free moral agency to make our own choices in our lives. He has given us instructions, counsel, wisdom to help us in making those choices. Do you really want to learn the lessons of life the hard way like the prodigal son? What kind of choices are you making in your life? ***