

Others, like ***the lost colns***, are lost through *no fault of their own*. Many people grow up in horrible living conditions with abusive parents who use God's name only in profanity. They know almost nothing about God's love for them. And church members today, like the Pharisees who look down on them instead of helping them, drive them further away from God. Paul, the ex-Pharisee, told the Pharisees; **"The name of God is blasphemed because of you."** (Romans 2)

Sadly, most people are like ***the lost son***. They don't hate God or criticize the church; they just *want to call the shots*, when it comes to what they want to do. They don't want God or anyone else telling them what to do.

Just as flowers cannot bloom long without sunlight, the soul of man can bloom for a little while in this world without fellowship with God; but it isn't long until we are unable to live the joyful, purposeful life God wants for us. For this boy, the money ran out, the friends ran away and he ended up eating with hogs, which to a Jew, would be like us eating with rats. This is not necessarily ending up like a street-person. Many a hog pen has a three-car-garage and a pool.

One day, the son saw where he was, and **"came to his senses"** (NIV). He went home to the Father hoping he would welcome him. Before he got to the house, the Father saw him coming, ran to him, hugged him, kissed him and threw a party.

Johnny Cash was a strong young man and life poured its treasures at his feet. Fame, fortune and friends were his. But slowly he descended down and down to the hog trough. He was arrested first in 1965 with hundreds of Amphetamine pills in his pockets. He had gone from 200 to 140 pounds, a shell of his former self. Arrested again in the deep-south, a kind and godly police officer took him aside, told him he ought to make something good of himself, and let him go. Johnny started home

spiritually and with the help of friends and pastors, he made it. So can you and I.

The Father (God) did not ask his son to ***take a shower*** and get the smell of the hogs off of him, before He hugged him. Satan whispers that we need to "clean-up" a little and get rid of some sins, if we want Him to accept us. God does the "cleaning" (1 John 1), accepts us as we are, and slowly changes us into the person He wants us to be.

Romans five says, **"while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."** Salvation is by **"grace"** (Ephesians 2:8-10) and the word "grace" means, **"a gift we do not deserve"**. A young man, home from war, called his parents from New York, to tell them he was coming home. He said he had a friend with him whose face was horribly burned and the right side of it was blown off. He told them he had nowhere to go and asked if he could bring him home with him to live.

They hesitated, and suggested his friend might be better off in some kind of facility and he said, "OK". The next day the manager of a hotel in New York called them and said their son had been found in his room, dead, hanging from the ceiling. His face was badly burned with the right side of it blown off.

Our lives can never be ugly enough for God to stop loving us or stop wanting us to be in His family. Slave traders in the 1980's sold human beings; men, women and children, for money. Those who got sick were thrown overboard alive to save bullets. John Newton worked on some of these ships and after he gave Jesus his sins to forgive and his life to change, he was forgiven and spent the rest of his life, as a Pastor, fighting against slavery. And he wrote:

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was ***lost***, but now am found
Was blind but now I see.

Every time you hear that song from now on, remember that you can come home too.