

Gospel Doctrine Lesson #18: "He Was Lost, and Is Found"

(Luke 15, 17)

LESSON GOAL: To learn that joy comes when we repent, when we help others repent, and we find Christ.

1. The Savior teaches the worth of souls.

Parable of the Lost Sheep: Matthew 18:12 – Jesus speaking to His disciples. Luke 15:4-7 – Jesus with Pharisees

Pharisees: A religious party among the Jews who **prided themselves on their strict observance of the law**, and on **avoiding contact with things gentile** (not of the house of Israel). The tendency of their teaching was to reduce religion to the observance of a myriad of **ceremonial rules**, and to encourage **self-sufficiency** and **spiritual pride**.

IN WHAT WAYS MIGHT A PERSON BE LOST?

- All who came to this earth knew the eternal plan in the pre-existence. When the veil of forgetfulness was drawn across the eternal memory, **we were all lost**.
- Those who **have grown up being taught the truth**, but have **veered away from the gospel** without ever having obtained a mature testimony.
- Those who have received a testimony, but have been **led away by false teachings**.
- Those who **have a testimony, but have given in to temptation**.
- The many who have been **alienated from their loved ones and from society** for any number of reasons.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD THOSE WHO ARE LOST:

- Every member a missionary.
- Every member a neighbor.
- Fulfill our callings as leaders, teachers, and home and visiting teachers.

President Gordon B. Hinckley: "Some of our own...cry out in pain and suffering and loneliness and fear. **Ours is a great a solemn duty to reach out and help them**, to lift them, to feed them if they are hungry, to nurture their spirits if they thirst for truth and righteousness....There are those who were once warm in the faith, but whose faith has grown cold. Many of them wish to come back but do not know quite how to do it. **They need friendly hands reaching out to them**. With a little effort, many of them can be brought back to feast at the table of the Lord. My brethren and sisters, I would hope, I would pray that each of us...would resolve to **seek those who need help**, who are **in desperate and difficult circumstances**, and **lift them** in the spirit of love into the embrace of the Church, where strong hands and loving hearts will warm them, comfort them, sustain them, and put them on the way of happy and productive lives" (Ensign, Nov. 1996, 86).

David O. McKay: "I ask you tonight, **how did that sheep get lost?** He was not rebellious. If you follow the comparison, the lamb was seeking its livelihood in a perfectly legitimate manner, but either stupidly, perhaps unconsciously, it followed the enticement of the field, the prospect of better grass until it got out beyond the fold and was lost. So we have those in the Church, young men and young women, **who wander away** from the fold in perfectly legitimate ways. They are seeking success, success in business, success in their professions, and before long they become disinterested in Church and finally disconnected from the fold; **they have lost track of what true success is**, perhaps stupidly, perhaps unconsciously, in some cases, perhaps willingly. **They are blind to what constitutes true success**" (*Gospel Ideals: Selections from the Discourses of David O. McKay* [Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953], 535).

N. Eldon Tanner: "Every bishop, every stake president, every leader of any organization knows someone who needs attention, and you and **we have the responsibility of going to find that lost sheep**. If we had knowledge tonight that some young man was lost, if someone who was drowning, we wouldn't hesitate one minute to do all in our power to save that individual, to save the one who was lost. These who are inactive in the Church, who have strayed away from the Church because of inactivity or for any reason, need our help and need our attention just as much. **They need our prayers, our consideration**, and nothing will bring us greater joy and happiness than to see one come back into activity. By saving one, we might save a family; we might even save a generation. By losing one, we may lose not only the individual but a family and his posterity. **The responsibility is great.**" ("Search for the Wanderers," *Ensign*, June 1971, 59)

Orson F. Whitney: "Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Divine Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back to the fold....**Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God**" (*Conference Report, April 1929, Third Day—Morning Meeting* 110).

Parable of the Lost Coin: Bridegrooms gave wedding gifts to the bride, often ten silver coins. A good bride would highly value such a precious gift, decorating their veils with the coins. Losing one would be disrespectful and cause much stress, while finding it would bring such joy, to her and those who helped her find that joy.

APPLICATION: How are you, or someone you know, lost? How can you repent or help someone else repent?

2. Jesus teaches that Heavenly Father rejoices in forgiving the repentant.

PRODIGAL: "A person who spends money or uses resources with exceedingly or recklessly wasteful extravagance to suggest eventual impoverishment; spendthrift or profligate." (Webster's College Dictionary, 1996, 1076).

Neal A. Maxwell: "...[prodigal sons and daughters] need a warm welcome. Let us emulate the father of the prodigal son, who **ran to greet his son** while the son was still a great distance away, **rather than waiting passively** and then skeptically asking the son if he had merely come home to pick up his things!" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1980, 14–15).

President David O. McKay's Formula for Becoming Prodigals:

- Irritation at restraint
- Self-conceit
- Wasting time, opportunities, talents, and resources that could be used to build up the Kingdom
- Extravagance
- Intemperance (Addictions)

Gordon B. Hinckley: "I am satisfied that **there are thousands** across the world who in their loneliness and hunger for truth are **crying out for help**... And in addition to these there is another group who are members of the Church in name, but who have left, and who now in their hearts long to return, but do not know how and are too timid to try. They, too, in moments of quiet reflection, ask, 'Why am I here? Why am I so lost? Please, please help me find my way.' To you, my brethren and sisters, who have taken your spiritual inheritance and left, and now find an emptiness in your lives, **the way is open for your return**. Note the words of the parable of the Prodigal Son: 'And when he came to himself.' Have you not also reflected on your condition and circumstances, and longed to return?"

"I think I know why some of you left. You **were offended** by a thoughtless individual who injured you, and you mistook his actions as representative of the Church. Or you may have been drawn to **other company or habits**, which you felt were incompatible with association in the Church. Or you may have felt yourself **wiser** in the wisdom of the world than those of your Church associates, and with an air of disdain, withdrawn yourself from their company. If you will take the first timid step to return, you will find **open arms** to greet you and warm friends to make you welcome" (*Ensign*, Nov. 1976)

Jeffrey R. Holland (on the elder brother): "This son is not so much angry that the other has come home as he is angry that his parents are so happy about it. Feeling unappreciated and perhaps more than a little self-pity, this dutiful son—and he is *wonderfully* dutiful—forgets for a moment that he has never had to know filth or despair, fear or self-loathing. He forgets for a moment that every calf on the ranch is already his and so are all the robes in the closet and every ring in the drawer. He forgets for a moment that **his faithfulness has been and always will be rewarded**.

"No, he who has virtually everything, and who has in his hardworking, wonderful way earned it, lacks the one thing that might make him the complete man of the Lord he nearly is. He has yet to come to the compassion and mercy, the charitable breadth of vision to see that ***this is not a rival returning. It is his brother...***

"Certainly this **younger brother had been a prisoner**—a prisoner of sin, stupidity, and a pigsty. **But the older brother lives in some confinement, too**. He has, as yet, been unable to break out of the prison of himself. **He is haunted by the green-eyed monster of jealousy**. He suddenly feels very unhappy because another has had some good fortune as well.

"Who is it that whispers so subtly in our ear that a gift given to another somehow diminishes the blessings we have received? Who makes us feel that if God is smiling on another, then He surely must somehow be frowning on us? You and I both know who does this—it is the father of all lies. It is Lucifer... **No one of us is less treasured or cherished of God than another**. He loves each of us—insecurities, anxieties, self-image, and all" (*Ensign*, May 2002, 63-64).

Howard W. Hunter: "**Both brothers in the parable desperately need the Lord to free them of their burdens**. This is the message of the parable. We learn from this parable that all of us, regardless of status or condition, have an absolute need of the Lord's saving grace." (*Latter-day Commentary on the New Testament: The Four Gospels*, 255).

Ted Gibbons: "Why is it that we sometimes want our mortal experiences to be evaluated like sums in a math class: "You were bad a total of 72 times and good only 64. Therefore, you are more bad than good and you can go to Hell!"

This is not the manner in which the Father and the Son calculate our preparation for salvation. Their only concern is, "What are you?" Not, "What were you?"

What do these verses tell you about the importance the Lord places on past mistakes when we repent?

- What must we be willing to do when those apparently less worthy than ourselves return to be with us?
- Why is this sometimes so hard to do.

Isaiah 1:18: Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: **though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;** though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

Ezekiel 18:21-22: But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. **All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned** unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live.

Isaiah 43:25: I, even I, **am he that blotteth out** thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.

Mosiah 26:30: Yea, and as often as my people **repent will I forgive them their trespasses against me.**

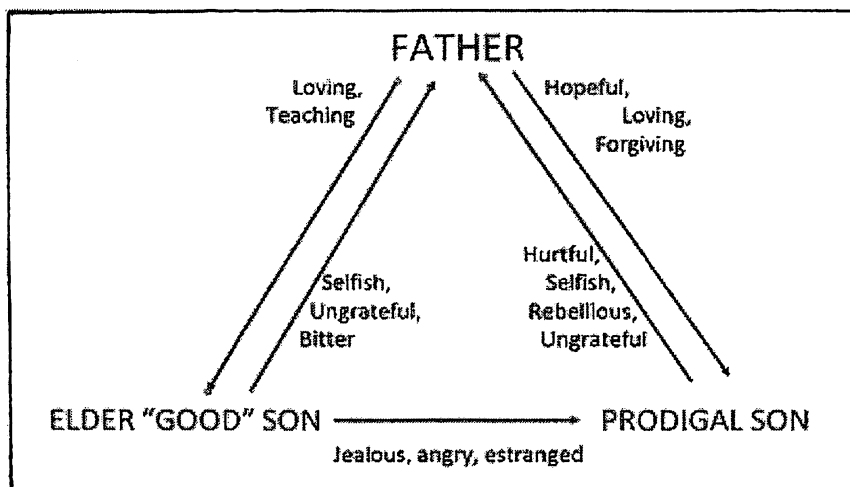
Elder Neal A. Maxwell: "There are many prodigals who lack the meekness and the intellectual clarity to do what the prodigal son did. Saying, in effect, 'Living like this is ridiculous!', **the prodigal son 'came to himself.'** He realized how much better off he would be to return to his father. He did not ponder, 'What will they say? Will anyone come out to meet me?' Instead, he arose and went home. **Being sufficiently meek to feel caused him to think, and humbleness of mind saved his soul!**" (*Meek and Lowly*, 48).

President Gordon B. Hinckley: "I ask you to read that story of "The Prodigal Son." **Every parent ought to read it again and again.** It is large enough to encompass every household, and enough larger than that to encompass all mankind, for **are we not all prodigal sons and daughters** who need to repent and **partake of the forgiving mercy** of our Heavenly Father and then follow His example?" (Ensign, June 1991, p5)

Lost Item	How Lost	How Found	Result
Sheep	Unintentionally wandered	Shepherd sought out & led back	Rejoicing!
Coin	Neglect of the woman	Woman swept floor to remove dirt & debris covering coin	Rejoicing!
Son	Willful rebellion	Father watched, waited, never gave up	Rejoicing & Resentment

Nancy W. Jensen: "The older son had forgotten his *real* relationship to his younger brother! In Jewish custom, the oldest son was the birthright son and received double the inheritance that the rest of the sons did. This was to give him the means to fulfill his responsibility to take care of anyone in the family who might need help--a widow, an orphan, a disabled brother. **At the death of the father would assume the role of patriarch.**

"His father reminded him of this role when he said, **"It was meet [necessary] that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother"**--notice he says "thy brother," not "my son"--"was dead, and is alive again: and was lost, and is found" (Luke 15:32). In effect, the father said, "Aren't you and I on the same side? Don't we share the same role? Shouldn't we both be rejoicing?" **But notice this diagram:**

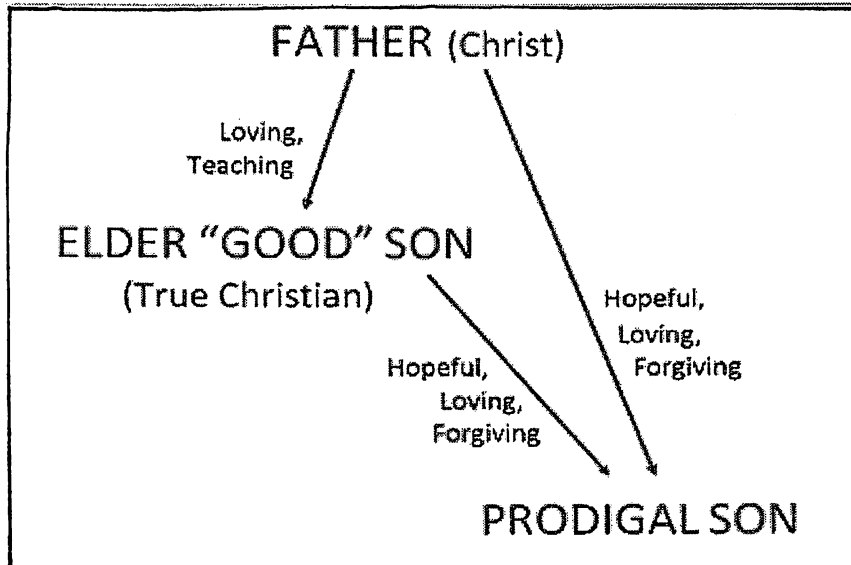


The Missing Conclusion to the Parable of the Prodigal Son:

The response of the elder son is not given in order that Jesus may draw the listener up onto the stage to finish the drama, and give an answer for himself.

- What will the **birthright son** do?
- Will he **stay away** from the feast and **punish himself and his father with his bitterness**?
- Or will he remember his role and follow the example of **love and acceptance** his father has set?

The ideal relationship hoped for by the father of the parable, and the Father of us all is this:



APPLICATION: Recognize that you are both the prodigal son and his older brother. Run to God's open arms.

3. A man whom Jesus has healed of leprosy returns to thank him.

Elder Merrill J. Bateman: "In becoming a whole person, the grateful leper was healed inside as well as on the outside. That day nine lepers were healed skin deep, but **only one had the faith to be made whole**" (Ensign, May 1995, 14).

George Albert Smith: "Now, my brethren and sisters of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, **which of these would we be?** Shall we not be numbered among those **who recognize the gifts of God and the mercy extended to us?** Or **will we be among the nine**, and take the blessings as they come, and accept them as belonging to us—with **very little gratitude?**" (*Sharing the Gospel with Others*, Ed. Preston Nibley, 1948], 94 - 95).

President Brigham Young: "I do not know of any, excepting the unpardonable sin, **that is greater than the sin of ingratitude.**" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, 228).

APPLICATION: Render gratitude to the Lord on a daily basis. Be free of the leprosy of selfish ingratitude.

Jeffrey R. Holland: "It may not be blizzards and frozen-earth burials that we face [like those of the handcarts] but the **needy are still out there**—the poor and the weary, the discouraged and downhearted, ... **They can be rescued only by those who have more and know more and can help more.** And don't worry about asking, "Where are they?" They are everywhere. Take your team and wagon; load it with your love, your testimony, and a spiritual sack of flour; then drive in any direction. **The Lord will lead you to those in need** if you will but embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ. **Open your heart and your hand to those trapped in the twenty-first century's equivalent of Martin's Cove and Devil's Gate. In doing so we honor the Master's repeated plea on behalf of lost sheep and lost coins and lost souls**" (CR, 2006).