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A Lost Son and a Loving Father

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God does not intend that His earthly children should suffer from troubled consciences. In His mercy He has provided a "way of escape" through the plan of forgiveness. Furthermore, He has abundantly provided for us to receive the infilling of His Spirit so that we may become victorious over the temptations that prey on us. "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Thus, in spite of human conflicts and the strategies of our adversary, it is possible for the Christian to live victoriously. This personal self-mastery through the influence of God's Spirit makes it possible for genuine happiness to take the place of the pangs of conscience.

Another human experience that contributes to happiness is wholesome social activity. Even in the Garden of Eden God recognized that "it is not good that the man should be alone" (Gen. 2:18). Human beings are naturally social in their outlook. Companionship between husband and wife is divinely intended to bring the ultimate of human happiness. The relationships between parents and children also provide many precious experiences on which a permanent structure of happiness can be built.

Social opportunities extend beyond the family circle. Here, too, cheerfulness, optimism, and pleasant relationships should characterize the conduct of the Christian. Jesus set the example of participation in proper social gatherings. He intends that His followers should use their social talents in ways that will create friends and generate happiness.

Happiness thrives best in pleasant surroundings. Recognizing this, some have gone to the extreme of trying to make their homes more lavish than is consistent with Jesus' teaching that we should share our abundance with those who are in need. In order to be pleasant our homes do not need to be extravagantly appointed. It is possible to find as great happiness in simplicity as in elegance. When the members of a family find enjoyment in their home, even though simple, happiness is sure to result.

Service to Mankind

Every loyal Christian obtains a thrill from ministering to the spiritual and physical needs of his fellow men. This type of unselfish service is consistent with the gospel commission Jesus gave His followers before He left this earth.

Participation in the work of spreading the gospel brings personal happiness because one thereby becomes a part of the greatest enterprise on

earth. "Those who are connected with Christ have happiness at their command."—*Messages to Young People*, p. 415.

Promoting the gospel is an enterprise in which every Christian can succeed. "Like the disciples, give what you have. Christ will multiply the gift. He will reward honest, simple reliance upon Him. That which seemed but a meager supply will prove to be a rich feast."—*The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 49, 50.

Perhaps the greatest happiness a human being can experience in this life results from leading a soul to Christ. It is always a pleasure to do a favor for someone else. Helping a person to accept Jesus is the greatest favor that can be bestowed. Not only does

it bring genuine happiness to both parties but it brings joy to the on-looking universe. "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:7).

In listing the elements that contribute to happiness, I trust that you have noticed that these are experiences which are especially available to the Christian. This is the reason why we can say truthfully that the Christian, above all people, is properly entitled to happiness. Look over the list again and make sure that you as a Christian are obtaining your full quota of happiness.

(To be continued)

A Lost Son and a Loving Father

By Ivan T. Blazen

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AUGUSTINE once prayed, "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee." The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24) was a person who needed to learn this truth. One day in his restless youth he came to his father and said, "Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." He was not content to wait until his father's death to become the lawful recipient of his father's means. He had to have his portion now. Toward his father he felt neither obligation nor gratitude. His request was based upon his desire to remove himself from the supposed restraints of his father's house. Freedom was his cry and present pleasure his goal.

The chafing of the prodigal was due to the fact that he had a false view of reality. There are three aspects to this. First, he had a false view of true liberty. For him liberty consisted in his being the absolute captain of his soul. He would be free, he thought, if there were no outward restraints upon him, and if he did not owe obligation to anyone except himself. Freedom involved being able to do exactly what he wanted, how he wanted, and when he wanted. The laws of his father's house were unjust, he felt, for they curtailed the full expression of his desires.

But this is not true liberty! True liberty comes only when a man returns to his Father's house and jurisdiction. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17). "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" (John 8:36).

The prodigal also had a false view of true happiness. He thought that happiness would come from serving himself rather than serving his father. He thought that happiness would come from without, in external pleasures rather than from within, by peace of soul. He had to learn that the Beatitudes—exclamations of the happy state of the individual—were addressed only to those who had joined themselves to their Father as members of His kingdom.

In the third place, the prodigal had a false view of self-guidance. He thought that he could plan his life much better than his father could. Many people feel that way about their heavenly Father.

Son's Request Granted

The father did not refuse his son's demand for his inheritance. He did not want forced obedience. If his son thought he could do better elsewhere, he would allow him to try. Thus, he gave the portion requested, "and not many days after the younger son gath-

ered all together, and took his journey into a far country." It did not take the son long to leave, and when he left he took everything with him, thus showing that he had no intention of returning. Now in a foreign land, the prodigal is his own master, and he makes the most of his new-found freedom. But the riotous living could not last indefinitely. There comes an end to a man's resources. Either his body wears out or his money is exhausted. It was the latter for the prodigal. Soon "he had spent all." What he had so easily gathered from his father he now had easily scattered. Nothing was left to maintain either his pleasures or his friends.

To make matters worse, "there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want." An outward famine is made to correspond to the inward famine in his soul. Beginning to starve physically as he has been starving spiritually, "he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave to him." The prodigal who set out to be free now finds himself a slave.

Thus far Jesus has painted three successive scenes in the picture of the young son. First, the self-will of the son; second, his folly; third, his misery. Now, in the fourth scene Jesus pre-

sents the picture of his repentance. The downward fall of the son began in want, passed into degradation, and ended in a state of desperation. This state was the prelude to his conversion. When a man comes to the place where self-help is impossible, there is only one thing he can do. He must say with Paul, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24).

The Steps Home

It was the revelation of his absolute impotence and his great need that led the prodigal to take the first step in his return home. First, he began to *think*. He could think, for he had "come to himself." These words indicate that up to this time he had been beside himself; he had been out of his mind. We say of a person, "He is not himself today." That was the case with the prodigal. He had not been himself for a long time. Sin is a sort of madness, a sort of insanity. There is nothing sane about the man who squanders all that God has given him and then ends up feeding swine.

But for the prodigal all this changed. When he came to himself he began to think. He thought of his miserable condition and the steps by which he had come to this place. Then he began to *remember*. He remembered his father's home. He remembered the many good things he used to enjoy. He remembered that even his

father's servants were much better off than he was now.

This led him to *regret*. "I perish with hunger!" Regret led him to *resolve*: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants."

This was a true prayer of confession. Perhaps the prodigal's initial desire to go back home was occasioned by the physical pangs of hunger that he felt. It was his physical want that had rekindled what his revelry had extinguished. But now, his motives have been raised to a much higher level. He recognizes that he has been a sinner and that his actions, in the ultimate sense, were against God. He feels thoroughly unworthy, and wishes for the grace that will allow him to occupy the lowest station in his father's estate. When he first left home he said, "Give me"; now he says, "Make me." He has come to the place where he realizes that it is not what a man *has* but what a man *is* that counts.

As faith without works is dead, so resolution without action is dead. The son gives proof of the perfection of his resolve by arising and going to his father. He goes with the hope of mercy, but he is completely unprepared for the generosity of his father's love. Christ, the Master Artist, paints the picture in the following way. While the son was "yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck, and kissed him." This is one of the most moving illustrations of the love of God in the whole Bible. The father, who represents God, has been waiting with eager longing for his son's return. Daily he has watched at the window. Now, with the first glimpse of the returning prodigal he cannot restrain himself. He rushes out of the house to meet his son. In the father there is not even a momentary struggle between pity and resentment. He lavishes upon his repentant son the evidences of his love. The word translated here as "kissed" indicates that the father kissed his son not once but many times and with fervency and rapture of spirit. This happens before the son even has a chance to make his confession, showing that the love of God precedes the repentance of man.

Before the prodigal even had a chance to finish his confession with the words "make me as one of thy hired servants," the father was already giving orders to his servants, "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and



[Address prayer requests to Parents' Fellowship of Prayer, Review and Herald, Washington 12, D.C.]

Recent Answers to Prayer

"My brother was steeped in sin and had recently suffered two heart attacks for which he was then [at the time prayer was requested] hospitalized. One of our ministers kept close to him, leading him step by step to the throne of grace, and on June 4, 1960, he was baptized. Having been a heavy smoker for 38 years, he had an impressive experience giving up tobacco on a moment-by-moment basis while keeping a record of the minutes, hours, and days until the craving vanished."—Mrs. M., of Virginia.

"My husband has stopped smoking after indulging in this habit for about 40 years. Surely this came about only through prayer."—Mrs. C., of Canada.

"A year or so ago I wrote to you and asked you to pray for my husband and son. My husband was baptized in June. Praise the Lord. My boy is still out, but

he is much better than he used to be. My husband is now a good Christian and a more thoughtful person all the way around."—Mrs. G., of Massachusetts.

"I laid my oldest brother away a year ago. I want you to know that he gave his heart to God completely a few days before he died of heart trouble. When he was very sick, I was impressed while reading *The Great Controversy* to buy him one and underline the last four chapters in the same way that I had underlined my copy. I sent it to him immediately, with a letter pleading that he give his heart to Jesus. After his funeral, five weeks later, I learned that he had fully given his heart to the Lord a few days before he died. I know the Fellowship Hour prayers helped to pave the way for his conversion."—Mrs. O., of California.

be merry: for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

Not a moment must be lost in restoring the prodigal to his place in the home. Thus it is when we come to our heavenly Father with a repentant spirit. We are restored immediately. There are no waiting lines, no long forms to fill out, no examinations to take. In the first instant of our return our names are recorded in the book of life.

The son's ragged and dirty clothing is replaced by the "best robe." Not just any robe, but the *best* robe. For the sinner there can be no doubt about the meaning of this robe. It is the robe of Christ's righteousness. This robe is given in exchange for our "filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6). What joy this should bring to our hearts! What praise it should bring to our lips! Isaiah said, "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness" (Isa. 61:10, R.S.V.).

The son is given a ring for his finger and shoes for his feet. The ring signifies that he is now invested with the authority of his father, and the shoes indicate that he no longer has the status of a slave—only slaves went barefoot.

The father treated his son *as if he had never sinned*. This is the very essence of the transaction we call justification by faith. In justification we are not made righteous—this belongs to sanctification—we are declared righteous. For Christ's sake we are treated as if we were righteous, as if we had never sinned. Christ "died for us, and now He offers to take our sins and give us His righteousness. If you give yourself to Him and accept Him as your Saviour, then, *sinful as your life may have been*, for His sake you are *accounted* righteous. Christ's character stands in place of your character, and you are accepted before God *just as if you had not sinned*."—*Steps to Christ*, p. 62. (Italics supplied.) "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth." The hills reminded the psalmist that the One who made them was far stronger than they, and that the Creator's strength was available to him. He expressed this thought in Psalm 46:1: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." The hills and mountains remind us too of God's strength.

The starry heavens are a constant revelation of the Creator. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun" (Ps. 19:1-4).

Isaiah declares that the vast, immeasurable universe is an eternal exhibition of God's mighty power and unfailing care. "Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth" (Isa. 40:26).

That this same loving Creator is interested in each of us, and will supply us with exhaustless power is declared in Isaiah 40:29-31: "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint."

Upon the sky is written the message of God's boundless mercy, according to Psalm 103:11, 12. "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us."

Both wind and water remind us of the power and eternity of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). In John 7:37-39 He said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive)."

Spirituality will grow as we learn to read . . .

God's Other Book

By Preston Smith
Minister, Oregon Conference

OUR spiritual experience may be greatly deepened and broadened by a study of nature, God's other book. This book has been in existence since Creation and is universally read. It is open day and night and may be studied while you drive your car or do your housework.

It has a voice, but is seldom listened to. It reveals the greatest Person in the universe, but is seldom examined closely. Like many books in these busy days, it remains unread and unappreciated. Thus a great blessing is lost.

This book rightly used will bring inspiration and an awareness of the Creator's love, care, power, and continual presence. Jesus constantly used this book along with the Bible. "So through the creation we are to become acquainted with the Creator. The book of nature is a great lesson book, which in connection with the Scriptures we are to use in teaching others of His character, and guiding lost sheep back to the fold of God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 24.

From the alpine meadows filled with lupines and paintbrush to the endless varieties of dahlias and chrysanthemums in the flower garden and the buttercups in the pasture, one may behold the love of God. These earthly flowers for our enjoyment and pleasure reveal God's love to us.

The lofty trees of the forest and the lowly bushes in like manner teach us three spiritual lessons: God shares His life with them; He cares for them by sending them sunshine, rain, and nourishment from the soil; He has a work for each to do. The most important is purifying the air by absorbing carbon dioxide and manufacturing oxygen.

These facts are also true in our relationship with the Lord. He shares His physical and spiritual life with us. He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). He has a work for every believer (Mark 13:34).

As David looked upon the majestic hills and mountains he was led to write in Psalm 121:1, 2: "I will lift