

Coming Home

and other parables



Who says you can't go home again?

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*Abridged and adapted from the classic,
Christ's Object Lessons*

E.G. White

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Part I. Coming Home

Based on Luke 15:11-32

Luke 15:11 Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. ¹² And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. ¹³ And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living. ¹⁴ But when he had spent all, there arose a severe famine in that land, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵ Then he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶ And he would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the swine ate, and no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "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! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, ¹⁹ and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.' "

²⁰ "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. ²¹ 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.'

²² "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. ²³ And bring the

fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry; ²⁴ for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.

²⁵ *“Now his older son was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. ²⁷ And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’*

²⁸ *“But he was angry and would not go in. Therefore his father came out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. ³⁰ But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him.’*

³¹ *“And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. ³² It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.’”*

The parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son clearly show us God’s sympathetic love for those who are straying from Him. Although they have turned away from God, He does not leave them in their misery. He is full of

kindness and tender pity toward all who are exposed to the temptations of Satan.

The parable of the prodigal son reveals how the Lord deals with those who have once known the Father's love, but who have allowed the tempter to lead them captive at his will into sin.

“A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.’ So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together” and “journeyed to a far country.”

This younger son had become tired of the rules in his father's house. He thought that his freedom was restricted. His father's love and care for him were misinterpreted, and he decided to instead follow his own feelings and inclinations.

The young man feels no obligation to his father and expresses no gratitude, but he still claims the privilege of sharing his father's goods. He wants to receive the inheritance that would be given to him at his father's death, in advance. He is focused on present enjoyment and does not care about the future.

After receiving the inheritance, he goes away into “a far country,” far from his father's home. With lots of money and the freedom to do what he wants with it, he flatters himself that he has reached the desire of his heart. There is no one to say, ‘Do not do that because it is bad for you, and it will hurt you,’ or, ‘Do this because it is the right thing to do.’ Evil companions help him to plunge even deeper into sin, and he wastes his substance with riotous living.

The Bible says of certain men, “Professing to be wise, they became fools” (Rom. 1:22); and this is exactly what happens to the young man in the parable. He wastes the money on harlots that he has selfishly claimed from his father. The treasure of his young manhood is wasted. The precious years of life, the strength of intellect, the bright visions of youth, the spiritual aspirations—all are consumed in the fires of lust.

When a great famine arises in the land, he begins to be in want. His money is gone, and he must find work from a citizen of the country who pays him low wages to feed his pigs in a local field. To a Jew, this was the most menial and degrading job one could do. The young man who so recently boasted of his freedom now finds himself a slave. He is in the worst bondage of all—“caught in the cords of his sin” (Prov. 5:22). The glitter and tinsel that enticed him have disappeared, and he feels the burden of his chain. Sitting on the ground in that desolate and famine-stricken land, with no companions but the pigs he feeds, he is tempted to eat the husks that he is feeding to the pigs. Of all the friends and companions who flocked around him in his prosperous days, eating and drinking at his expense, there is not one left to help him. Where is his joy now? Silencing his conscience and numbing his reason, he thought he was happy, but now, with his money spent, stomach aching with hunger, with his pride humbled, with his morals crippled, with his will weak and untrustworthy, with his noble aspirations seemingly dead, he is the most miserable of men.

What an accurate picture of where sin leads us! Although surrounded with the blessings of His love, there is nothing that the sinner, bent on self-indulgence and sinful pleasure, desires so much as separation from God. Like the ungrateful son, he claims that he deserves the good things of God as one of his rights. He feels like he deserves them and takes them for granted, showing no gratitude and returning no service of love. Just as Cain left the presence of the Lord to seek his home, and as the prodigal wandered into the “far country,” sinners continue to search for happiness by trying to forget God (See Rom. 1:28).

Whatever the appearance may be, every life centered in self is squandered. Whoever attempts to live apart from God is wasting his life. He is throwing away the precious years, wasting the powers of mind and heart and soul, and working to make himself bankrupt for eternity. All who separate themselves from God to serve themselves, are slaves. The mind that God created to be in companionship with angels has become degraded to the level of earthly and animal desires. This is the end that self-serving leads to.

If you have chosen such a life, you know that you are spending money on things that are not fulfilling, and laboring for things that will never satisfy. Times come to you when you realize you are going in the wrong direction. Alone in the far country, you feel your misery, and in despair, you cry out, “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24). The words of

the prophet are a universal truth; “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. For he shall be like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land which is not inhabited” (Jer. 17:5, 6). God “makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45); but men have the power to shut themselves away from sunshine and rain. Similarly, while the Sun of Righteousness shines and the showers of grace fall freely for all, we may still “inhabit the parched places in the wilderness” by separating ourselves from God.

Still, the love of God yearns over the one who has chosen to separate from Him, and He sets in operation influences to bring him back to the Father’s house. The prodigal son in his misery “came to himself.” The deceptive power that Satan had exercised over him was broken. He saw that his suffering was the result of his own foolish choices, and he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father.” As miserable as he was, the prodigal found hope in the conviction of his father’s love. It was that love which was drawing him toward home. So it is the assurance of God’s love that constrains the sinner to return to God. “The goodness of God leads you to repentance” (Rom. 2:4). A golden chain, the mercy and compassion of divine love, is passed around every imperiled soul. The Lord declares, “I have loved you

with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you” (Jer. 31:3).

The son determines to confess his guilt. He will go to his father, saying, “I have sinned against heaven and before you, and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” But he adds, showing how small his understanding of his father’s love is, “Make me like one of your hired servants.”

The young man turns from the swine herds and the husks and sets his face toward home. Trembling with weakness and faint from hunger, he presses eagerly on his way. He has no covering to conceal his rags, but his misery has conquered pride, and he hurries on to beg a servant’s place where he was once a child.

The thoughtless youth never dreamed of the ache and longing left in that father’s heart as he went out from his father’s gate. He never thought of the shadow that had fallen on his home when he was dancing and feasting with his wild companions. Now with weary and painful steps, as he trudges down the path towards home, he does not even know someone is watching for his return. But while he is still “a great way off,” his father discerns his form. Love has sharp sight. Not even the wearing result of the years of sin can hide the son from the father’s eyes. He “had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck” in a long, clinging, tender embrace.

The father will not allow anyone to look with contempt at his son’s misery, or mock his rags. He takes the broad, rich mantle from his own shoulder and wraps it around the son’s broken form, and the

young man sobs out his repentance, saying, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.” The father pulls him close to his side and brings him home. He gives him no opportunity to ask for a servant’s position. He is a son who shall be honored with the best in the house, and who the workers in the house will respect and serve.

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. 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.”

In his restless youth, the prodigal considered his father too strict and stern. How different is his concept of the father now! In the same way, those who are deceived by Satan often look upon God as being too hard and strict. They think He is just waiting to condemn them, unwilling to receive sinners as long as there is a legal excuse for not helping them. They regard His law as a restriction of their happiness; as a burden which they are more than glad to escape. But those who have had their eyes opened by the love of Christ will see God as full of compassion. He does not appear harsh and overbearing, but as a father, longing to embrace his repenting son. The sinner will exclaim with the Psalmist, “As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him” (Ps. 103:13).

In the parable, there is no condemning or criticizing the prodigal for his bad choices. The son

feels that the past is forgiven, forgotten, and blotted out forever. Similarly, God says to the sinner, "I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, and like a cloud, your sins" (Isa. 44:22). "I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more" (Jer. 31:34). "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7). "In those days and in that time, says the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought, but there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, but they shall not be found" (Jer. 50:20).

What assurance we have here of God's willingness to receive the repenting sinner! Have you chosen your own path? Have you wandered far from God? Have you tried to find pleasure by feasting on the fruits of sin, only to find them turn to ashes on your lips? And now, your substance spent, your plans obstructed, and your hopes dead, do you sit alone, disappointed by life? Now that voice which has been speaking to your heart for so long, that voice you have tried so hard to silence, comes to you distinct and clear, "Arise and depart, for this is not your rest; because it is defiled, it shall destroy you, even with utter destruction" (Micah 2:10). Return to your Father's house. Jesus invites you, saying, "Return to Me, for I have redeemed you" (Isa. 44:22).

Do not listen to the enemy's suggestion to stay away from Christ until you have made yourself better; until you are good enough to come to God. If you wait until then, you will never come. When Satan

points to your filthy garments, repeat the promise of Jesus, “the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37). Tell the enemy that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin. Make the prayer of David your own, “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Ps. 51:7).

Arise and go to your Father. He will meet you a long way off. If you just take one step toward Him in repentance, He will hurry to embrace you in His arms of infinite love. His ear is open to the cry of the repentant soul. He knows the very first moment you begin to open your heart to Him. No prayer is offered, no matter how sloppy, no tear is shed, no matter how secret, no sincere desire for God is cherished, no matter how feeble, that the Spirit of God does not go forth to meet. Even before the prayer is uttered, before the yearning of the heart made known, grace from Christ goes forth to meet the grace that is working on the human soul.

Your heavenly Father will take away the garments defiled by sin. In the beautiful parabolic prophecy of Zechariah, the high priest Joshua, standing clothed in filthy garments before the angel of the Lord, represents the sinner. And the word is spoken by the Lord, “‘Take away the filthy garments from him.’ And to him He said, ‘See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes’ . . . So they put a clean turban on his head, and they put the clothes on him” (Zech. 3:4, 5). In the same way, God will clothe you with “the garments of salvation,” and cover you with “the robe of

righteousness” (Isa. 61:10). “Though you lie down among the sheepfolds, yet you will be like the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold” (Ps. 68:13).

He will bring you into His banqueting house, and His banner over you shall be love (Cant. 2:4). “If you will walk in My ways,” He declares, “I will give you places to walk among these who stand here”—even among the holy angels that surround His throne (Zech. 3:7).

“And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you” (Isa. 62:5). “The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you in His love, He will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:17). And heaven and earth shall unite in the Father’s song of rejoicing: “For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.”

Up to this point in the son’s return, there was no note of unhappiness to jar the joy-filled scene, but now Jesus introduces another element in the parable. When the prodigal came home, the elder son “was in the field. And as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and because he has received him safe and sound, your father has killed the fatted calf.’ But he was angry and would not go in.”

This older brother had not been sharing in his father’s anxiety, watching for the one who was lost, so he does not share in the father’s joy when the

wanderer returns home. The sound of rejoicing kindles no gladness in his heart. He inquires of a servant the reason for the festivity, and the answer stirs up his jealousy. He refuses to go in and welcome his lost brother. He regards the favor shown to the prodigal son as an insult to himself.

As the father now comes out to talk to him, his pride and spitefulness are revealed. He talks about life in his father's house as if it had been painstaking labor, and then contrasts his hard work with the favor shown to the son who just returned home. He talks as if he was more like a servant than a son. While he should have been happy to be in his father's presence, he was thinking of the inheritance that he would gain from his good and upright life. His words show that this is the real reason he has passed up the pleasures of sin. The older son feels that it is unfair if his brother still gets to share in the father's gifts. He resents the favor shown to his brother. If he had been in the father's place, he would not have allowed the lost son to return home. He does not even acknowledge him as a brother, but coldly speaks of him as "this son of yours."

Still, the father deals tenderly with him. "Son," he says, "you are always with me, and all that I have is yours." Through all these years of your brother's outcast life, haven't you had the privilege of companionship with me?

Everything that could minister to the happiness of his children was freely theirs. The son did not need to question any gift or reward. "All that I have is

yours.” You only have to believe my love and take the gift that is freely given to you.

One son had cut himself off from the household for a time, not discerning the father’s love, but now he has returned, and the tide of joy sweeps away every fearful thought or worry. “Your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.”

Did the older brother realize his own mean, ungrateful spirit? Did he eventually recognize that even though his brother had done wickedly, he was still his brother? Did the older brother repent of his jealousy and hardheartedness? Concerning this, Christ was silent because the parable was still in process, and it rested with His hearers to determine what the outcome would be.

The elder son represented the unrepentant Jews of Christ’s day, as well as the Pharisees in every age who look with contempt on those whom they regard as publicans and sinners. Because some have not gone to great excesses in sin, they are filled with self-righteousness. Christ met these complainers on their own ground. Like the elder son in the parable, they had enjoyed special privileges from God. They claimed to be sons in God’s house, but they had the spirit of the servant. They were working, not from love, but from the hope of reward. In their eyes, God was an exacting taskmaster. They saw Christ inviting sinners to freely receive the gift of His grace—the gift which the rabbis thought they could only secure by work and penance—and they were offended. The prodigal’s return, which filled the Father’s heart with joy, stirred them to jealousy.

In the father's appeal to the elder son, God was appealing to the Pharisees. "All that I have is yours"—not as something you earned, but as a gift. Like the prodigal, you can receive it only as an unmerited gift of the Father's love.

Self-righteousness not only leads men to misrepresent God, but it makes them coldhearted and critical towards others. The elder son, in his selfishness and jealousy, stood ready to watch his brother, to criticize every action, and to accuse him of the slightest deficiency. He would detect every mistake, and make the most of every wrong act; then he would use his brother's sinful past to justify his own unforgiving spirit. Many today are doing the same thing. While the soul is making its very first struggles against a flood of temptations, they stand by, stubborn, self-willed, complaining, and accusing. They may claim to be children of God, but they are acting out the spirit of Satan. By their attitude toward their brother, these accusers place themselves where God cannot give them the light of His countenance.

Many are constantly questioning, "With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil?" But "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:6-8)?

This is the service that God has chosen—"to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy

burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke, . . . and not hide yourself from your own flesh” (Isa. 58:6, 7). When you see yourself as a sinner, saved only by the love of your heavenly Father, you will have tender pity for others who are suffering in sin. You will no longer meet misery and repentance with jealousy and censure. When the ice of selfishness is melted from your heart, you will be in sympathy with God and will share His joy in saving the lost.

If you are truly a child of God, then it is “your brother” who was “dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.” He is bound to you by the closest ties, for God recognizes him as a son. If you deny your relationship to him, you show that you are not a child in the family of God, but a hired servant in the household.

Even if you do not join in greeting the lost, the joy will go on; the restored one will have his place by the Father’s side and in the Father’s work. He that is forgiven much; the same loves much. But those with an unforgiving spirit will be left in the darkness without, for “he who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8).

Part II. The Lost Sheep

Based on Luke 15:1-7

Luke 15:1 Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. ² And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them." ³ So He spoke this parable to them, saying:

⁴ "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? ⁵ And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶ And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!' ⁷ I say to you that likewise there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance.

As the "publicans and sinners" gathered around Jesus, the religious leaders expressed displeasure. "This Man receives sinners," they said, "and eats with them."

By this accusation, they implied that Jesus liked to associate with evil and sinful people, while being ignorant of their own wickedness. The rabbis had been disappointed with Jesus. Why was it that one with such a noble character did not mingle with them, or follow their methods of teaching? Why did He go around working among all classes? If He were a true prophet, they said, He would work with them,

and would treat the sinners with the indifference they deserved. It angered them that Jesus, whom they were constantly fighting, but whose holy life inspired and condemned them, would meet with the social outcasts of society with such tenderness and sympathy. They did not approve of His methods. They thought of themselves as educated, refined, and extremely religious, but Christ's example exposed their selfishness.

It also angered them that those who showed contempt for the rabbis, and who never went to the synagogue, flocked to Jesus and listened with great attention to His words. If the scribes and Pharisees felt only condemnation in the presence of Jesus, why were the publicans and sinners drawn to Him?

They did not realize that the answer was found in the very words they had uttered as a scornful accusation, "This Man receives sinners." The souls who came to Jesus felt that in His presence, even *they* could find the power to escape the pit of sin. The Pharisees had only scorn and condemnation for them, but Christ greeted them as children of God, estranged from the Father's house, but not forgotten by the Father's heart. Their misery and sin only made Him feel more compassion for them. The farther they had wandered from Him, the more earnest the longing, and the greater the sacrifice for their rescue.

The teachers of Israel should have learned all this from the sacred scrolls, which they were to be keepers and expounders of. Hadn't David, who had fallen into a deadly sin, written so long ago, "I have gone astray like a lost sheep, seek your servant" (Ps.

119:176)? Hadn't Micah revealed God's love to the sinner when he asked, "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy" (Micah 7:18)?

At this time, Christ did not remind His hearers of the words of Scripture. He simply appealed to their own experience. The wide-spreading tablelands on the east of Jordan gave abundant fields for their flocks, and through the gorges and over the wooded hills, many lost sheep had wandered, only to be searched out and brought back by the hand of a loving shepherd. In the crowd around Jesus were many shepherds, as well as men who had invested money in flocks and herds, and everyone there could appreciate His illustration: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it?"

Jesus was telling the stern Pharisees that these souls whom they despised were the property of God. They were children of God by creation and by redemption, and they are of value in His sight. Just as the shepherd loves his sheep and cannot rest if even one is missing, God loves every outcast soul to an infinitely higher degree. People may deny that they are God's children, they may wander from Him, and they may even choose another master, but they are still God's, and He longs to recover His own. He says, "As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My

sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day” (Eze. 34:12).

In the parable, the shepherd goes out to search for one sheep—the very least that can be numbered. Similarly, even if there had only been one lost soul, Christ would have died for that one.

The sheep that has strayed is the most helpless of all creatures. It must be sought for by the shepherd since it cannot find its way back. In the same way, the soul that has wandered from God is as helpless as the lost sheep, and unless divine love had come to his rescue, he could never find his way to God.

The shepherd who discovers that one of his sheep is missing does not look carelessly at all the sheep that are safe inside the barn and say, “I have ninety-nine sheep that are safe. It will be too much trouble to go in search of the straying one. If he comes back, I will open the door of the sheepfold and let him in, but I can’t go out after him.” No way! As soon as the sheep wanders off, the shepherd is filled with grief and anxiety. He counts and recounts the flock. When he is sure that one sheep is lost, he cannot even sleep. He leaves the ninety-nine inside the barn and goes in search of the straying sheep. The darker and more dangerous it is outside, the greater the shepherd’s anxiety, and the more earnest his search. He makes every effort to find the lost sheep.

What relief he feels when he finally hears its first faint cry in the distance. Following the sound, he climbs the steepest mountain and goes to the very edge of the cliff, at the risk of his own life. As his

search continues, the cry grows fainter, telling him that his sheep is about to die. At last, his effort is finally rewarded when the lost is found. He does not scold the sheep because it caused him so much trouble. He does not hit it with a whip. He does not even try to lead it home. In his joy, he takes the trembling creature on his shoulders. If it is bruised and wounded, he carries it in his arms, pressing it close to his chest so that the warmth of his own heart may give it life. With gratitude that his search has not been in vain, he carries it back to the fold.

Thank God that He did not leave to our imagination a picture of a sorrowful shepherd returning without the sheep. The parable does not speak of failure, but of success, and of joy in the recovery. Here is the divine guarantee that not even one straying sheep of God's fold is overlooked. Not one is left unassisted. Christ will rescue everyone from the pit of corruption and from the briars of sin, who will submit to be rescued.

Whoever you are and whatever you are going through, don't lose heart. Take courage. Even though you have done wickedly, do not think that God would ever consider letting you go. Do not think you must first do something to earn his love. God has made the first advance. While you were in rebellion against Him, He went out searching for you. With the tender heart of the shepherd, He left the ninety-nine and went out into the wilderness to find that which was lost. The soul, bruised and wounded, and ready to perish, He encircles in His arms of love, and joyfully carries it safely back to the fold.

The Jews taught that before God's love was extended to the sinner, he first had to repent. In this view, repentance is a work that men must do to earn the favor of God. This idea led the Pharisees to exclaim in astonishment and anger, "This man receives sinners." According to their ideas, He should not allow anyone to approach Him except those who have repented, but in the parable of the lost sheep, Christ teaches that salvation does not come through our seeking after God, but through God's seeking after us. "There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all gone out of the way" (Rom. 3:11, 12). We do not repent so that God may love us, but He reveals to us His love in order that we may repent.

When the straying sheep is at last brought home, the shepherd expresses his gratitude in songs of rejoicing. He calls his friends and neighbors with the words, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!" In the same way, when a wandering soul is found by God, heaven and earth unite in thanksgiving and rejoicing.

"There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine just persons who need no repentance." Christ was saying, "You Pharisees regard yourselves as the favorites of heaven. You think you are secure in your own righteousness. If you need no repentance, My mission is not to rescue you. These poor souls who feel their poverty and sinfulness are the very ones whom I have come to rescue. Angels of heaven are interested in these lost ones, whom you despise. You complain

and sneer when one of these lost souls turns to Me, but don't you realize that the angels rejoice, and the song of triumph rings throughout heaven whenever a sinner turns to God and gains eternal life."

The rabbis had a saying that there is rejoicing in heaven when one who has sinned against God is destroyed, but Jesus taught that to God, the work of destruction is a strange work. Instead, heaven delights in restoring the souls whom God has made back into His own image.

When one who has wandered far in sin seeks to return to God, they will encounter criticism and distrust. There are always some who will doubt whether his repentance is genuine, or perhaps they will accuse them, saying, "He has no stability. I don't think he will last." These people are not doing the work of God but of Satan, who is the accuser. Through their criticism, Satan tries to discourage these people. He tries to turn them from God and drive them farther from hope. Instead, the repenting sinner should think of how much heaven rejoices over the return of the one that was lost. They should rest in the love of God, and not become disheartened by the scorn and suspicion of their accusers.

While the parable applied to the publicans and sinners, it also has a wider meaning. By the lost sheep, Christ represents not only the individual sinner, but the one world that has been ruined by sin. This world is merely an atom in the vast universe that God has made. Still, this little fallen world—the one lost sheep—is more precious in His sight than the ninety-nine that did not stray from the fold. Christ,

the loved Commander in the heavenly courts, stooped from His high estate, and laid aside the glory that He had with the Father, in order to save the one lost world. For our world, Christ left the sinless worlds, the ninety-nine that loved Him, and came to this earth to be “wounded for our transgressions” and “bruised for our iniquities” (Isa. 53:5). God gave Himself, in His Son, that He might have the joy of rescuing the sheep that was lost, and bringing him back to heaven.

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1)! And Christ says, “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world” (John 17:18)—to “fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church” (Col. 1:24). Every soul whom Christ has rescued is called to work in His name for the saving of the lost. This work had been neglected in Israel. Will it also be neglected today by those who claim to be Christ’s followers?

How many of the lost, wandering souls, have you, reader, made an earnest effort to search for and bring back to the fold? When you turn from those who seem unpromising and unattractive, do you realize that you are neglecting souls whom Christ is trying to rescue? At the very moment that you neglect them, they may be in the greatest need of your compassion. In every assembly for worship, there are souls longing for rest and peace. They may appear to be living pleasant lives, but they are not unaware of the influence of the Holy Spirit. Many among them might be won to Christ.

If the lost sheep is not brought back to the fold, it will wander until it dies. And many souls go down to ruin because no hand reached out to rescue them. These people may appear mean, crude, and unrefined, but if they had received the same advantages that others have had, they might have revealed far more nobility of soul, and greater talent for usefulness. Angels pity these wandering ones. While human eyes are dry, and hearts are closed to pity, the angels weep for the lost.

Oh, how troubling is our lack of deep, soul-touching sympathy for the tempted and erring sheep of this world! We need more of Christ's spirit, and far less of our own selfish interest!

The Pharisees understood that Christ's parable was a criticism of them. Instead of listening to their criticism for associating with sinners, He reproved their neglect of trying to save sinners who were lost and alone in this world. He did not do this openly, or it would have closed their hearts against Him, but His illustration revealed to them the work God required of them, which they had failed to do. If they had been true shepherds, these leaders in Israel would have done the work of a shepherd. They would have shown the mercy and love of Christ, and would have united with Him in His mission. Their refusal to do this had proven that their claims of holiness were false. Many listening, rejected Christ's reproof, but to some, His words brought conviction, and after Christ returned to heaven, the Holy Spirit came, and these united with the disciples of Christ in the very work outlined in the parable of the lost sheep.

Part III. The Lost Coin

Based on Luke 15:8-10

Luke 15:8 “Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹And when she has found it, she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ ¹⁰Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

After giving the parable of the lost sheep, Christ told another parable, saying, “What woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it?”

In this part of the country, the houses of the poor usually consisted of only one room, usually windowless and dark. The room was rarely swept, and a piece of money falling on the floor would be quickly covered with dust and rubbish. In order to find it, even in the daytime, a candle had to be lit, and the house had to be swept diligently.

The wife’s wedding present usually consisted of coins which she carefully preserved as her most cherished possession, to be later passed down to her daughters. The loss of one of these coins was considered a great crisis, and its recovery would cause great celebration that even the women of the neighborhood would share in.

“And when she has found it,” Christ said, “she calls her friends and neighbors together, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I lost!’ Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

This parable, like the one before it, tells of the loss of something which could be recovered if diligently searched for, resulting in a great celebration, but these two parables represent two different classes. The lost sheep knows that it is lost. It has left the shepherd and the flock, and it cannot recover itself. It represents those who realize that they are separated from God, who are in a cloud of perplexity, in humiliation, and severely tempted. The lost coin represents those who are lost in their sins but do not realize it. They have no sense of their lost condition. They are estranged from God, but they do not know it. Their souls are in danger, but they are unconscious and unconcerned. In this parable, Christ teaches that even those indifferent to God’s claims are the objects of His pitying love. They are to be searched out, so they can be brought back to God.

The sheep wandered away from the fold. It was lost in the wilderness or on the mountains. The piece of silver was lost in the house. It was close, but it could only be recovered by diligent search. This is a good lesson for families. In the household, there is often great carelessness concerning the souls of family members. In the home, there may be some family member who does not believe in God, or is

straying away from the faith, but little anxiety is felt because we do not recognize their eternal value.

The coin, though lying among dust and rubbish, is still a piece of silver. Its owner seeks it because it is valuable. In the same way, however deep they have fallen into sin, every soul is still considered precious in God's sight. As a coin bears the image and superscription of the governing power, man at his creation bears the image and superscription of God. And even though they may be marred and damaged by the influence of sin, the traces of this inscription remain upon every soul. God desires to recover that soul and to retrace on it His own image, in righteousness and holiness.

The woman in the parable searches diligently for her lost coin. She lights the candle and sweeps the house. She moves everything out of the way that might obstruct her search. Even though only one piece is lost, she does not stop looking until that piece is found. Similarly, if one member of the family is lost to God, every means should be used for their recovery. There should be diligent and careful self-examination from every member of the household. Let every member examine their own life to see if they made some mistake, some error in management, which led that soul to turn from God.

If there is one child in the family who is unconscious of his sinful state, parents should not rest. Light the candle. Search the word of God, and by its light, let everything in the home be diligently examined to see why this child is lost. Let parents search their own hearts to examine their habits and

practices. Children are the heritage of the Lord, and we are to answer to God for our management of His property.

There are fathers and mothers who long to labor in some foreign mission field. There are many who are active in Christian work outside the home, while their own children are strangers to the Savior and His love. Many parents trust the work of winning their children for Christ to the pastor or the church, but in doing this, they are neglecting their own God-given responsibility. The education and training of their children to be Christians is the highest service that parents can return to God. It is a work that demands patient labor, lifelong diligence, and persevering effort. By a neglect of this responsibility, many have proven unfaithful stewards. No excuse for such neglect will be accepted by God.

Still, those who have been guilty of neglect are not to despair. The woman whose coin was lost, searched until she found it. In the same way, let parents continue to work for their households in love, faith, and prayer, until they can come to God with joy, saying, "Here am I and the children whom the Lord has given me" (Isa. 8:18)!

This is true home missionary work, and it is as helpful to those who do it as to those for whom it is done. By our faithful interest in the salvation of our families, we are preparing ourselves to work for other members of the Lord's family, who we will live with throughout the eternal ages of history, if we remain loyal to Christ. We are to show the same interest for

our brothers and sisters in Christ as we do for the families Christ has given us.

In addition, the work for lost souls in our families and our churches should also prepare us to work for the salvation of others without. As our sympathy for the lost grows, and our love increases, we will find work to do everywhere we go. God's great human household embraces the world, and none of its members should be neglected or passed by.

Wherever we may be, there is a lost piece of silver that needs us to search for it. Are we looking for it? Every day we continually meet people who have no interest in religious things. We visit them. We talk to them. Do we show an interest in their spiritual welfare? Do we present Christ to them as the sin-pardoning Savior? Do we tell them about the love of Christ? If we do not, how will we be able to look at these people who are lost when we stand with them before the throne of God?

Who can estimate the value of a soul? If you want to know its true worth, go to Gethsemane. Watch with Christ through those hours of anguish, when He sweated great drops of blood. See Jesus as He was lifted up on the cross and gave that desperate cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me" (Mark 15:34)? Look at the wounded head, the pierced side, the marred feet. Remember that Christ risked all. For our redemption, heaven itself was put in danger. At the foot of the cross, remembering that Christ would have given His life for one single sinner, you may there estimate the value of a soul.

If you are in communion with Christ, you will place His high estimate on every human being. You will feel the same deep love for others that Christ feels for you. Then you will be able to win, not drive, to attract, not repulse, those for whom He died. None would have ever been brought back to God if Christ had not made a personal effort for them, and it is by the same personal work that we can rescue souls. When you see those who are going down to death, you cannot rest in quiet indifference and ease. The greater their sin and the deeper their misery, the more earnest and tender your efforts for their recovery must be. You will recognize the needs of those who are suffering, who have been sinning against God, and who are oppressed with a burden of guilt. Your heart will go out in sympathy for them, and you will reach out to them with a helping hand. In the arms of faith and love, you will bring them back to Christ. You will watch over and encourage them, and your sympathy and confidence will make it hard for them to fall from their steadfastness.

In this work, all the angels of heaven are ready to co-operate. All the resources of heaven are at the command of those who are seeking to save the lost. Angels will help you to reach the most careless, and the most hardened. And when one is brought back to God, all heaven is made glad. As the lost are found, angels of heaven will touch their golden harps, singing praises to God and the Lamb for their mercy and lovingkindness to the children of men.

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