



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume V
Issue 147

Unseen Lessons from “The Parable of the Prodigal Son”

Luke 15:11-32

by – André Sneidar

While the story is given the title “The Prodigal Son” in reference to the son who left home with his part of the inheritance to spend it in a prodigal (*i.e.*, extravagant, wasteful) manner, it is a story that involves so much more than just the prodigal son. Of everything I had ever heard or read regarding this parable of Jesus, it occurred to me one day that there are four things in this parable that are *not* mentioned from which we can gain invaluable insight.

No Faithful Son

My first “unseen lesson” is that it’s interesting to note that of the father’s sons, there was no “faithful” son mentioned. There was the son who was the “prodigal” who rebelled and left home to squander his inheritance; then there was the son who rebelled through his bitter, jealous spirit upon the prodigal son’s return and his father’s joyful celebration.

This intrigued me: surely each son considered himself to be faithful at some point – at least prior to the prodigal’s decision to depart. Yet neither son was truly faithful about his state in life (prior to the prodigal’s departure), for their *unfaithfulness* was more obviously manifested after the prodigal’s return.

The supposedly “faithful” son who stayed behind is discovered to be unfaithful, revealing what truly was in his heart: before his brother’s departure with his share of the inheritance, nothing is revealed about his heart; but upon his brother’s return, and as he sees the unfolding events of his father’s rejoicing, then we see what was lurking in his heart all along. It took his brother’s eventual coming to his senses and throwing himself at his father’s feet, to manifest his dissatisfaction and prideful spirit.

I believe there is no faithful son mentioned because, as it relates to us (or, directly, to Israel), there is *no faithful son*. What I mean is this: as we go through life, I think we are either the “prodigal” son, impetuously leaving our father’s care and foolishly wasting our “inheritance;” or, we are the son who stays home who, while thinking himself to be the “faithful” one, really isn’t faithful because he truly has a bitter, envious and grudging heart.

(see *PRODIGAL*, page 1491)

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Dear Saints,

The Prodigal Son #2 The Parable of the Lost Coin

In this issue of the **BSN**, we are presenting a study by our managing editor, Andre Sneidar.

The darkened human mind, wayward society and culture, and the influence of religious systems of this world have kept the genuine charter and nature of God from us. The Lord Jesus Christ came to correct this, by revealing the Father to us. Everything about the Son of God was an unveiling of the true God. For indeed,

“... God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself ...” (II Corinthians 5:19).

The Lord Jesus Christ's very words, life and death were but a manifestation of the Father. The parables of Luke chapter 15 were no exception.

The chapter begins with these words:

“Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, ‘This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them’” (Luke 15:1-2).

Jesus' reception of societies' "sinners," and the reaction of the contemporary religionist, provide the context in which the three "lost" parables fit.

#1 The Parable of the Lost Sheep

#3 The Parable of the Prodigal Son

Andre's study presents worthy observations on the latter of these parables.

30th Anniversary

It seems hard for me to believe, but on July 8, Cindy and I celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary.

Finances have been exceptionally difficult this year, so we decided to take our special anniversary vacation "at home." We took a three day trip down memory lane. We stayed out of our offices and traveled into the past by reminiscing over boxes of

photographs. We traveled many miles, and over many states during our three day journey (a day for each decade). It was a joy to remember where God has brought us on our amazing voyage together.

Nathan

Speaking of special days, and of trips; our youngest son Nathan, who just turned 22 on July 12th, has temporarily moved to Las Vegas. He is living with his brother Jason and his wife Britney while he tends to a business venture. We surely miss him already, and eagerly look forward to his return.

Until next week, be strong keep fighting the good fight of faith!



Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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This weekly publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7)
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11)
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25)
- true freedom and liberty apart from the law (Galatians 5:1)
- the organic nature of the church, the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12)
- the distinct ministry of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles (Romans 11:13)
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15)
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13).
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with ...
 - total forgiveness of sins (Colossians 1:14)
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6)
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4)

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

This publication is not connected with any "church," "denomination," "movement," "organization," "mission," "creed," "meeting," "school," "conference" or "fellowship."

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PATRIARCHS

Remember that it is our responsibility as husbands and fathers to take the truths we learn from God's Word, the truths that we hold dear, and impart them to our families.

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An Identity Crisis

Why did these sons have these problems? I think there are three issues, all related to an “identity crisis.”

(1) They didn’t know who they were – they were their father’s sons, yet they thought and acted independently from their true identity.

(2) They didn’t know what they were – they thought themselves to be something different than they actually were; they considered themselves faithful sons, and yet manifested their unfaithfulness by their behavior and attitudes.

(3) Most importantly, they didn’t know their father – they didn’t know *who* he was. The returning son thought no more of his father than an angry, overbearing, demanding master, asking only to be treated as a servant, a slave in order to be accepted, rather than a son. The resentful son thought no more of his father than an insensitive, inconsiderate superior, thus never realizing that he possessed his inheritance all along. Neither of the sons acknowledged the inestimable value of their relationship with their father.

In short, the second unseen lesson is that both sons were self-absorbed. Not recognizing the faithfulness of their father, and not being familiar with his love, concern and care for them, their attitudes and actions demonstrated just how self-centered they really were, in spite of their father’s commitment to their welfare.

The Resentful Son

A third thing we don’t “see” is whether the resentful son’s bitter heart was ever resolved with either his father, or his brother. How the father’s heart must have ached as well for this son who revealed his heart’s true essence through his resentful spirit. Yet the father’s love and wisdom is illustrated by the affectionate and tender response to the son who stayed behind, gently urging him to be a part of the family’s celebration, and lovingly assuring

him of his standing as his son. I believe their relationships were, at some point beyond the end of the parable, reconciled and healed, for after all, is this not the final outcome of true love?

It is the father’s attitude of grace and charity that fills me with unabated hope. While the second son’s angst over his father’s sudden “memory lapse” regarding his brother’s “failure” is left unsettled, what gives me such hopeful anticipation that it one day will finally be resolved, even though it may take a long time, is what I believe lays buried in the human heart: that there really is such a thing as True Love which reconciles sons to each other, and to their Father.

The Father’s Heart

Finally, we do not read any mention of the father’s concern for the inheritance that was lost by the departed son. Instead, we perceive the immense relief, joy and gratitude of the father – which is the manifestation of his true heart – for his son’s safe, albeit humiliating and ignominious return. His concern was for the welfare of his sons, not the loss of earthly fleeting riches, the possession of which is only temporary, and can bring none of the fulfillment which occurs only with those things which are truly valuable in our lives, those “unseen” riches. Look at I Corinthians 13:4-13, and visualize the father’s behavior in his interaction with his sons:

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind ... seeketh not her own ... beareth all things, endureth all things ... Charity never faileth ... the greatest ... is charity.”

If I may be allowed the liberty to paraphrase for today’s language:

Love is extremely patient ... and is kind ... is not self-serving or self-seeking, but rather seeks what’s best for others ... bears and endures all hardships and inconveniences, even when we may suffer as a result ... Love – true love – *never* fails ... of faith hope and love, love is the greatest.

The word “charity” as used today in our society conveys with it the idea of giving, especially from personal belongings. Thus it implies sacrifice of a greater or lesser degree, because to give of something that is ours is to procure personal loss for the benefit of someone else. Therefore, true love is manifested by allowing the loss of possession to personal detriment for another’s need. It is truly an act of selflessness. What a beautiful description of the father’s love towards his sons: he allowed one son to leave contrary to his own desire for him, and he suffered his other son’s resentment knowing that he could not force him to change his heart. This is a wonderful demonstration of the character of *grace* which was resident in the father’s heart.

We don’t see the father arguing and striving with his sons about their choices. Rather, if what we read of the father’s dialogue with his son who stayed home is of any signification of his manner, I think it safe to presume that he lovingly counseled and guided his sons about what he thought was the best course of action for them, while allowing them to choose their own path. How it must have pierced the father’s heart to see one of his sons embark on a venture that not only separated them, but held much risk and peril for the son as well.

Can we imagine how torn was the father’s heart as his son left, turning his back on his father as he headed for what he thought would be the grand adventure of his life? How the father’s heart must have ached at his son’s departure and continued absence, longing to put his arms around him that, in expressing his love for him, would keep him from leaving. How long must he have stood there, watching the profile of his son shrink and eventually disappear into the horizon. It must have felt like a part of him died with his son’s exodus. Yet the father would not force his will, his earnest desire for what he knew was best for his son, upon his son. How his heart must have ached with his son’s each plodding step forward, every second dragging into a seeming eternity. Still, the father would not force his son to act contrary to his heart. Instead, with what must have been tears

in his eyes, he kept his heart and his arms open, waiting for the day that his son would remember the last loving embrace of his father and know that he could come home.

There was no anger or bitterness on the father’s part over the prodigal’s behavior, regardless of how foolish he may have thought his son to be. There were no legalistic, judgmental demands from the father that only if and when his son might finally “get his act together,” acknowledge his wrongdoing, and then “repent in all humility” that he would then be allowed to return home. NO! Rather, his immense love for his children resulted in the ultimate victory of his love: his son knew and eventually remembered that he had a loving, caring father and home to which he could return.

The attitude of the father’s grace was such that he *left the door open*, which eventually would facilitate the son’s return. Can we not hear the father saying to his departing son, “My son, I love you, and you will always be welcome, here in our home. There is always a place for you, and I will be here, waiting for you should you desire to return.” Thus, even in the midst of the son’s failure, humiliation and self-condemnation, he could still think and reason within himself, at the end of himself, “*I can go home – I **will** go home – to my father.*”

Notice that while the son was “*yet a great way off, his father saw him.*” This, to me, is one of the most exciting parts of this story, because it tells me that the father *was looking for his son!* This implies that he had never stopped looking, had been ever straining at the horizon, hoping every day that he might catch the slightest vision of his departed son’s return. Then, one day, *Finally! The father glimpses his son just on the horizon!* Can you see the excitement in the father’s face, the tears of joy and rejoicing in the father’s eyes as he *runs* to greet his son, his arms still open in eager anticipation of the embrace of his son? Can you see them together as they grasp each other and twirl around in a frenzied dance of absolute and utter delight?

Observe also that, while the son began to articulate to his father his well-rehearsed speech – a humiliating confession of his sinful behavior – it was as though his father didn't even hear what he said, as though to say that none of the past behavior of his son had any bearing on the present reality. All that really mattered to the father was *the here and now*.

The Heart of the Matter

Now, is this not *our* story – our parable, if you will – as well? Surely, we all consider ourselves to be “faithful” to some extent or degree. We all judge ourselves as faithful servants of our Father, faithfully doing our part, when really within our hearts we are self-centered and self-absorbed, wanting only what we desire for ourselves, and not considering that our father knows what is best for us. Therefore we either strike out on our own, forsaking our father's wisdom in favor of our own impetuosity and conducting our lives with reckless abandon; or we “faithfully” “stay behind,” all the while resenting our brother for doing and “getting away with” what we in our heart might have desired all along but for our sense of “duty,” and furthermore resenting him (and possibly even his father) for the lavish celebration for his brother which he probably felt should have been reserved for him for “faithfully” maintaining his station.

In my personal conviction about this wonderful parable, I believe that the reason there is no “faithful son” mentioned is that there is only the two sons, and that eventually they will become the *faithful father!*

In other words, it is not until we have transitioned through the phase of either of the sons (or both), playing our part in life's parable, that we are able to become, and take on the role of, the faithful father. Furthermore, it is only through the faithful demonstration of the father's grace, love, longsuffering, compassion and *wisdom* that we learn to be faithful ourselves – *when we eventually fulfill our role as that faithful father.*

The Ultimate Lesson

Now, all of this is not to overshadow the ultimate lesson of this parable: that this parable is really about God – that God is the Faithful Father Who patiently and affectionately waits for His sons to transition through their childish phases of selfishness and pride – waiting for the day when they become faithful sons of their Faithful Father, meanwhile gently and lovingly reminding us of our place in His family as His sons, regardless of where our own path may temporarily lead us.

Is not our Father truly wise? Has He not shared His counsel with us (Scripture), and yet we avoid it? Has He not demonstrated His Love for us (the cross), and yet we reject it? Does not His heart ache for His sons who have wandered aimlessly away from His provision for them, or bitterly resent their brothers, and yet we hear not the silent crying of His broken heart? Yet He patiently and lovingly has kept His heart and His arms open, waiting and anxiously watching for us to come home, home where the doors have been kept open.

Our Heavenly Father has never been an angry, overbearing, demanding, insensitive and inconsiderate Father, insisting that we His children first “get our act together” before beginning our journey home, before He will open the doors and let us come home. No, He has *always* loved us emphatically with an unflinching and unfailing love. Just like the returning son and the resentful son, our Father accepts us in every bit of our failed, fallible, fallen state, having no expectations of us than that we will eventually come to the end of ourselves, and finally recognize and acknowledge Him for Who He is: our Father; our only Loving, Eternal Father, Who has always coveted our best interest, and Who has always pursued our ultimate welfare.

The Parables of Lost Things

Notably, this “Prodigal Son” story is included with two other stories: the lost sheep, and the lost coin; all of which is a response of Jesus to the objections and harassment brought against Him by the religious zealots of His day (the Pharisees

and scribes – the resentful son): All three of these are really part of one parable, and are dealing with the Pharisees’ and scribes’ objection to Jesus’ association with those whom these religious zealots considered to be lower-class citizens, at the least unworthy of their consideration, at the worst unworthy of God’s. These people were the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the “lost son” of this parable, and Jesus was showing that they had immense – indeed, immeasurable – value to the Father, and that “even they” are worthy of the Father’s every and constant effort to ensure they will be found, and eventually brought home.

Our life in this world is our passage through the parable of the prodigal son. We have immense – indeed, immeasurable – value to the Father, and “even we” are worthy of the Father’s every and constant effort to ensure we will be found, and eventually brought home. How truly wise is our Father, Who patiently awaits our return home, Who lovingly lets us live our lives as we choose, and devotedly guides our hearts, not forcing us to follow His counsel, but tenderly and passionately persuades us towards forgiveness and

reconciliation. His zeal and love for us compels Him to do nothing less.

He has reconciled us to Himself (II Corinthians 5:18); our Father desires that we discover who He is, who we are in Him and who and what He made us to be, and thereby be reconciled to each other. Then all that remains is the celebration upon our homecoming – none of the past will be brought to bear upon the excitement and exhilaration of the fantastic festivity of the Father’s reveling and exultation as he reclaims His children from the far county, rejoicing in the *here and now* of that moment!

“In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6).

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (II Corinthians 4:18).



LOVE (continued from page 1504)

The day after he wakes up early and is ready to leave quickly to beat the traffic, but he soon discovers that he is living the same exact day over again. Same people, same situations, same conversations. Nothing is different.

The next day it happens again. Then again and again and again. No matter what he does, he’s stuck in February 2, 1992. As the movie progresses, a strange thing begins to happen. Phil is forced to look at other people’s lives. Eventually, he starts to care about them. He starts to respect people, he tries to save the life of a homeless man and discovers that he is in love with Rita, the same coworker he had treated so disrespectfully for so long. Little by little, Phil is transformed ...

Being self-absorbed is the nature of the flesh. Loving other people is action that comes through conscious intention. Instead of relating to the same people in the same way we always have, what if we determined to be excessive in showing

love to others? What if we chose to move outside our comfort zone, our self-consciousness and self-interests and focused on the people who cross our paths with the goal of pouring out Agape on them? What if we intentionally veered off our familiar and comfortable paths to find people to love who don’t appear to be “all that lovable” on the surface?

If the grace walk means anything, it means loving people. The Bible says “*God is love.*” Humanly speaking, Jesus loved the most unlikely people. Here’s a radical idea ... Let’s just love people indiscriminately. Let’s love them whether they are pimps or preachers – whether they are crack-heads or corporate heads – whether they are drug addicts or deacons, whether they are immoral or moral. Let’s just love them all! ...

Let’s be conduits of God’s love toward others.

Steve McVey
Learning to Show Love (2008)

Love

The Greatest of These Select Readings on Love

(Part 2)

“Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (I Corinthians 13:13).

UNLOVING AND JUDGMENTAL

If Christians are supposed to have a monopoly on the riches of God, why do our lives look so similar to those who don't believe?

Instead of being the most free, we remain all bound up. Rather than being the ... least confined by the opinions of others, the most free to love unconditionally, we Christians have become stiff, unbending, unloving and judgmental.

Bill Ewing

Rest Assured (2003), pages 20, 21

CREATED FOR PURPOSE

Creation wasn't so much a demonstration of God's power as it was of His love. We are not here because God needed us to fill some empty space in His existence; we exist because of His character. Love is part of God's nature. He is the Author and the ultimate example of love – not theoretical love – but love expressed and demonstrated.

Woodrow Kroll

The Bible Minute

THE LOVE OF CHRIST

Have you ever noticed that the Apostle Paul never speaks of his love for Christ? Rather he keeps talking about Christ's wonderful love to him. Neither does he exhort us to love Christ, but keeps telling us how Christ loved – and loves, us. This is consistent with the message specially committed to him: *“The Gospel of the Grace of God”* (Acts 20:24).

The Law said, *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God”* (Matthew 22:37). This is the very essence of the law. And we should love God, but the law cannot produce love, so God comes to us in grace and says, *“I love you.”* This is why Paul's epistles are so filled with *“the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:29).

The fact that God deals with us in grace does not mean that believers should not, or do not, love Him. The very opposite is true, for love begets love. It is when men come to know the love of Christ that their hearts respond to Him in love.

Cornelius R. Stam (1909-2003)

Two Minutes with the Bible

A BETTER KIND OF LOVE

It was a busy morning, about 8:30, when an elderly gentleman in his 80's, arrived to have stitches removed from his thumb. He said he was in a hurry as he had an appointment at 9:00 am.

Upon examination his wound was well healed, so I talked to one of the doctors, got the needed supplies to remove his sutures.

While taking care of him, I asked if he had another doctor's appointment this morning, as he was in such a hurry. The gentleman told me no, that he needed to go to the nursing home to eat breakfast with his wife.

I inquired as to her health. He told me that she had been there for a while and that she was a victim of Alzheimer's disease. As we talked, I asked if she would be upset if he was a bit late. He replied that

she no longer knew who he was, that she had not recognized him in five years now.

I was surprised, and asked him, “And you still go every morning, even though she doesn’t know who you are?”

He smiled as he patted my hand and said, “She doesn’t know me, but I still know who she is.”

I had to hold back tears as he left and thought, “That is the kind of love I want in my life.”

True love is an acceptance of all that is, has been, will be, and will not be.

The happiest people on earth don’t necessarily have the best of everything; they just make the best of everything they have.

We all want to receive this kind of love, but the better part is to be able to give this kind of love.

“*While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8).

The beautiful thing about Christ’s act on the Cross is that He has prepared a way for us to love like that through Him.

I have heard it said, “Life isn’t about how to survive the storm, but how to dance in the rain.”

Selected

PERFECT LOVE

We go forward in happy, humble, believing cooperation with the One Who is the Power, and He is moving out in power by us ...

He is Love. He’s perfect love and He is loving some portion of His perfect love in this common thing – loving in me, loving by me, making me see with the eyes of love, feel with the feeling of love, and speak with the words of love.

It’s He coming through, He Who is perfect love, perfect holiness. So we see this is a wonderful, living relationship. It isn’t a thing, it isn’t a doctrine,

it isn’t an experience – it’s a Person.

Norman P. Grubb (1895-1993)
Notes from Norman

MUCH MORE LOVING

I believe that God is much more loving than we have been led to believe. Many people say that God loves us, but in the next breath they tell us that He will condemn us to hell if we do not measure up to the standards *they* lay down in His name.

Walter Williams
Love Without Limit (2004), page 13

THE POWER OF LOVE

“... *God is love*” (I John 4:8).

In the New Testament, love means nothing less than the true nature of God. John assures us that God – the power behind our vast universe – is love, and that the life of His Son Jesus on earth was neither more nor less than the expression of that nature, that love, in terms of human life.

J.B. Phillips (1906-1982)
For This Day (1975) page 10

GROUNDHOG DAY

I know it’s a ridiculous movie, but I can’t watch *Groundhog Day* enough times to become bored with it. I must have seen it ten times through the years. Bill Murray plays Phil, a TV weatherman who works in a piddly local station but believes that his great break will come soon and that he will be a national celebrity.

He acts so charming on the air, but the moment the camera goes off, his self-loathing, bitter self emerges. He treats others with contempt and obviously cares about nobody but himself. On *Groundhog Day*, he and his coworkers are sent on an assignment in Punxsutawney, PA where he is to report on the *Groundhog Day* festivities. He is nothing but condescending to everybody that day.

(see *LOVE*, page 1502)