

We might also notice that the son of the parable decided to go back to his father *regardless* of the consequences he would face. He knew he could avoid starving if his father would just allow him to be one of the servants. So he headed home — humble and ready to do *whatever* it took to gain favor with his father. He abandoned his desire for everything the *world* had to offer and sought restoration with his father. Even with the knowledge that he had squandered his inheritance, he was confident that his father would have compassion on him or he would not have decided to head home. He *knew* the nature of his father. As he approached home — we know that his father saw *him* before *he* saw his father. And — as any good father would — desired above all else, the well being of his son. He had been waiting and watching for the son to return so that he could *restore* their broken relationship. As the father ran to receive his son, the son acknowledged that he had “sinned against heaven” as well as in his father’s sight and was no longer worthy to be his son. The merciful and forgiving father kissed him, got him cleaned up, clothed him and prepared a welcome home celebration. We see in this parable that both parties had a responsibility in restoring the broken relationship. The *son acknowledged* his error by coming humbly to the father. The *father accepted* his apology and humble return. It’s important to note however, that the father did not *force* the son to return to him. He *waited* for the son to *realize* the error of his way — the son “came to himself” — i.e. he recognized his sinful actions. As a result, the son was restored to the family. Had the son *not* “come to himself” and taken the initiative to return home, the relationship would *never* have been restored. The father was *waiting* for the son to initiate a return.

As we reach out to a world of people who are separated from God because of their sin, a key component to their restoration to God is to persuade them to “come to themselves” and *acknowledge* that the *source* of their existence *is* God and it is therefore God whom they have sinned against. So their search to acquire what they can’t seem to identify must *begin* with the recognition that their relationship with God, their Creator, is broken and needs to be restored. Without *recognition* that God is the source of their existence and that sin has *broken* their relationship *with* Him, there will be no acknowledgement of sin and no desire to humbly return to Him for forgiveness — and the divide will forever remain. Like the prodigal son though, it is *each individual* that must take the initiative to return to their Father. God will not *force* individuals to return to Him to restore the broken relationship. God is anxiously waiting for sinners to come home — just as the father waited in the parable for his son to return home. It is *our* job to convince souls that sin has *separated* them from God and He is anxiously awaiting their return.

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DILIGENCE

“We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure.” — Hebrews 6:11

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Restoration

Our society has become somewhat enamored with a desire to “restore” things — *something* — anything — *everything*. It’s not difficult to find *someone* interested in restoring just about anything one can think of. Consider for just a moment, only a *few* ideas that come to mind when we think of restoring something. First and perhaps most important to many of us might be the efforts constantly being made to restore the health of individuals. In addition to restoring health, just think of the time, energy and money that is spent by numerous individuals to restore old houses, photos, vehicles, pieces of furniture, even natural things such as rain forests, the Everglades, wetlands — not to mention things such as vigor, memory, etc. The list of restorative efforts is nearly endless.

Perhaps the most *challenging* restoration effort any of us may ever face is that of restoring a broken relationship brought on by the wrongdoing of someone whom we care about or love deeply. Unlike the restoration of *physical* things, a severed relationship is often never quite the same after a transgression has occurred that was serious enough to result in dividing individuals from one another. Unfortunately, that divide all too often lasts until the *death* of those involved.

Restoring a relationship is always difficult since the restoration process can be as complicated as the actions and circumstances that caused the dissension in the first place. The influence of events *following* the transgression must also be taken into account since they may or may *not* perpetuate the division.

Entire industries exist for the precise purpose of assisting people to deal with broken relationships. Some attempt to *restore* the relationship, while others only provide coping mechanisms. Numerous drugs are often used in order to enable people to cope with the emotional stress of a broken relationship. Jails even house many who are there *because* of their effort to *get revenge* on an individual who offended them. There is endless suffering in regard to broken relationships. So the bottom line is this — relationships are *important* to all of us and it is therefore a great tragedy when a relationship is broken between *individuals*.

It is a far *greater* tragedy however, when the relationship between an individual and *God* is broken. Since our relationship with God is of *eternal* importance, it is troubling to note that although many people become very distraught when an *earthly* relationship is severed, they are completely indifferent concerning their broken relationship with God? A bit of speculation as to *why* this is the case

today might include some of the following.

- A total lack of *awareness* or even *belief* in the God of the Bible.
- A lack of understanding concerning the impact of sin on ones relationship with God.
- Comparative goodness — seeing oneself just as good as anyone else.
- Disbelief in the existence of hell and eternal punishment.
- Re-visioning the Scriptures to a belief that *everyone* will go to heaven.
- False (or incorrect) beliefs as to how restoration with God occurs.

In addition to those listed above, still another reason might be revealed with just a quick look around us. Most of us in *this* Nation have just about everything we *need* — not to mention having an abundance of things we only *want* — but *surely* do not *need*. While basking in such an abundance of physical blessings, those who have no relationship with God fail to recognize the fact that God is the *provider* of all of those blessings and there would therefore *be* none if it was not for Him. When physical needs are so abundantly met, it's a difficult transition for many people to recognize and admit that unmet *spiritual* needs are that important.

That *same* quick look around however, *also* reveals something else — something that indicates that — even *with* an over abundance of blessings — there *must* be something still missing in the lives of many. Why do we say that? Have you noticed the barrage of products, businesses and techniques dedicated to reducing stress in the lives of individuals? There's a proverbial explosion of interest in *anything* that might provide even a few moments of calm relaxation and freedom from concerns of daily life. There is a heightened interest in Eastern Religion practices like meditation and yoga. One can even purchase “hot stone massage therapy” kits to aid relaxation. On almost every store shelf there are candles, lotions and even soaps that are *supposed* to induce feelings of calm or other desirable emotions. There are more and more labyrinths popping up in private and public gardens and parking lots of various organizations and *even* churches — with the expectation that *walking* a labyrinth will generate some sort of inner peace for which more and more people seem to be searching. In addition to the futile aids and exercises of Eastern Religions, some search for the perfect “place” to acquire peace and serenity. For others, it might be a combination of things or perhaps even medications to help calm and relax frayed nerves. So it's quite evident that — regardless of the “happy-face” displayed by many living the “good life”, there is still an on-going and seemingly never ending effort to induce a more serene existence. We can only conclude from this, that “the good life” is just not as rewarding as many apparently seemed to have thought it *would* be or — *should* — be.

This challenge to find contentment is not new. It has existed and *will* continue to exist in the hearts of people for all times. The symptoms, prognosis and end result are spoken of in Scripture in various places. Let's look at one example.

In the parable of the prodigal son as told by Jesus in Luke 15:11-32, we learn of a son who sought his father's inheritance *prior* to his father's death. Apparently, life in his father's house just wasn't as exciting as he wanted it to be. The father

agreed to give him the inheritance and so the son headed for “the bright lights of the city” to live a life he believed would be far more rewarding. The son became completely absorbed in that “good life” with new found friends who were more than willing to live it up with him. Just as it would be today — all spending and no earning resulted in the depletion of his resources — he spent all of the inheritance. As it is *also* often the case today — when the resources are gone, so are the “friends”. Friendless and without money in a dire economy the son was destitute and began to feel hopeless. When a famine impacted the land, he sought work and was sent into the fields to feed the swine. He would have eaten the *swine's* food but was not offered any. So as he came to the realization that he was hungry and broken, he *remembered* where he came from. He remembered the very source of his existence. He remembered his father's house. He remembered that his father's servants were treated better than the conditions in which he now found *himself* — headed toward certain starvation. Finding himself at the very bottom of *physical* existence, the son decided to humble himself and go back to the father and ask for forgiveness. Feeling however that, because of his actions — he had *relinquished* the right to be his father's *son*, he hoped to become just a *servant* in his father's home.

Let's consider now, how this fits so well with many people today. Those who have no relationship with God are completely *unaware* of the inheritance God has waiting for them. But like the prodigal son they too, have found that “the good life” is not as rewarding as they thought it would be. All of the *physical* blessings just don't seem to provide a satisfactory level of contentment for them so they continue to seek whatever it is that eludes them — but they're just not sure exactly what it is they lack. So they latch on to one of those reasons listed on the previous page and *continue* to deny that the source of their very *existence* as well as all of the blessings they have in their “good life” are *from* their Creator, God.

Back to the prodigal son now — he *knew* what life had been like in his father's house. But *he* had to *loose* every physical blessing he had before he realized that he had *had* “the good life” in his father's house — he just failed to recognize it as such. Those who have never *had* a relationship with God have no way of *knowing* what life would be like in *their* “Father's house”. They have no means by which they can understand that their contentment is *never* going to be found in the *physical* blessings of their “good life.” They fail to realize that only the restoration of a relationship with God will provide what they continually seek in every other way imaginable. The prodigal son had to *loose* all of the *physical* blessings he enjoyed before *he* “came to himself” (KJV) and sought a restoration with his father. Let us state once again — when physical needs are abundantly met, it's a difficult transition for many people to recognize and admit that unmet *spiritual* needs *are* important. People today find it difficult to admit that the void they feel is a *spiritual* void — not a *physical* needs void yet they seek to fill it through all kinds of *physical* means.