



**Nurturing Members / Reclaiming
June 18, 2016**

**Sabbath School Program
“The Story of the Lost Son”**

by Paul Richard and Nancy Canwell

Read the following story taken from Luke 15:11-31 (NLT) as a Reader’s Theater. Dress in time-period costumes if possible.

NARRATOR: To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: “A man had two sons. The younger son told his father,

SON: ‘I want my share of **your** estate now before you die.’

NARRATOR: “So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living. About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself,

SON: ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”’

NARRATOR: “So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him,

SON: ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’

NARRATOR: “But his father said to the servants,

FATHER: ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’

NARRATOR: “So the party began. (Pause) Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, and he asked one of the servants what was going on.

SERVANT: ‘Your brother is back,’ he was told, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.’

NARRATOR: “The older brother was angry and wouldn’t go in. His father came out and begged him, but he replied,

OLDER SON: ‘All these years I’ve slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!’

NARRATOR: “His father said to him,

FATHER: ‘Look, dear son, you have always been with me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!’ ”

“The Prodigal Son” Bible Study*

Divide into groups of three or four and discuss the following questions. Take notes so you can share your ideas with your pastor, Reconnecting Ministries Team, and your Church Board.

ENGAGE

1. Recall the time you first left home. Perhaps it was when you were going away to school. What feelings did you have as you walked away? How long were you gone? What was it like to come back home?
2. When you first think about people who have quit coming to church, what are your first honest thoughts?
 - a. Good riddance
 - b. A sense of guilt that you did something wrong
 - c. Complete surprise
 - d. Anger
 - e. Feeling like there is nothing you can do
 - f. Other...

3. Can you think of anyone you personally know who has stopped attending church? Why do you think they quit?

EXAMINE

4. Study Luke 15:11-13.

- a. Who asked his father for his inheritance?
- b. What made this request so unusual?
- c. How did the father respond?
- d. Why do you think the father carried out his son’s wish?

5. Look carefully at Luke 15:14-16.

- a. What happened to all of the prodigal son’s money?
- b. How did he “join himself to a citizen of that country”?
- c. When did this young man find himself ready for a change?
- d. Why do you think the Bible says, “And no one gave him anything”?

6. Read Luke 15:17-19. Examine the thinking of the son who left home.

- a. How did this lost son “come to himself”?
- b. What was behind the thought, “How many of my father’s hired servants have bread enough to spare, and I perish with hunger?”
- c. Do you think there was any hesitancy for this son to approach his father?
- d. Who did the son want to become in his father’s household? Why?

EXPERIMENT

7. Walk in the shoes of someone who has quit coming to church. There are a number of ways to look at life from

their perspective. Try one of the following:

- a. Call someone who has quit church. Tell them you want to hear their story of leaving—not to change it or twist their arm to come back but just to listen.
- b. Invite someone who has returned to church (perhaps someone in your small group) to share their experience of leaving.
- c. Read stories about people who have left church. Look at the resources in this book for places to find articles. (For example, *Ten Who Returned* by Tim Lale, Pacific Press.)
- d. Look over the names in your church directory, find someone who is not attending and go visit them. Take a friend along. Once more, focus on listening, not trying to guilt them into coming back.

8. Think about the first impressions visitors and returning members might have when they come to your church.

- a. Get in a car and drive to your church. Look at signs and entries from the perspective of people who may have never even been to your building.
- b. Sit in your car in the parking lot and think about what it must feel like for someone who has quit church to open the car door, get out, and walk up to the front entry.
- c. Ask yourself, “If I were a guest at a church of another denomination, what experience would help me to feel more relaxed and welcome when I walk through the front door?”
- d. Stand in the foyer of your church and look around. If you had no clue where anything was located, could you easily find your way to the restrooms, the nursery, the sanctuary, classrooms, or the offices?

9. Does your church really have any missing members? Some people might think it really isn’t that big of an issue. Try doing an audit of your church books.

- a. Obtain an up-to-date record list of your membership from the church clerk.
- b. Sit down with a small group of members and go over every name.
- c. Classify people into five groups (Active, Out of Town, No Address, Shut-Ins, and Missing).
- b. Share what you discovered with your pastor, head elder, or church board.

ENTER

10. What one thing do you think would make the biggest difference to show missing members that you genuinely care?

11. What do you sense God calling you to do differently to touch the life of those who have quit coming to church?

12. Will you commit to take one step forward this week in reconnecting with a person who is not attending church? Who might that person be? How will you make contact with them?

*Questions taken from the book, *An Indescribable Welcome Home*, by Paul Richardson. Order the Bible Study and Leadership Guides from AdventSource: www.adventsource.org

Suggested Songs

Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal No. 363 “Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service”
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal No. 353 “Father, Help Your People”
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal No. 350 “Blest Be the Tie That Binds”
Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal No. 367 “Rescue the Perishing”

Morning Scripture Reading: Luke 15:1-7