

TITLE: The Seven Downward Steps Of The Backslider

TEXT : Luke 15:11-16

"...A certain man had two sons: and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him."

It is noted that this family is not a poor family; the surroundings are not of an humble abode. There were money and assets to be distributed; as the parable continues, the Scriptures reveal that there were fields to be cultivated; means existed for costly feasting on a large scale; costly clothing is mentioned --- even gems. So it is safe to assume that this was a family of the upper, wealthy class.

Now, this home had all the comforts one could want; it was a home of prominence; it was a lovely home; love and fellowship prevailed there.

But the younger son made a strange request; "...give me the portion of goods that falleth to me..." In other words, "Give me my inheritance." And the first downward step in the life of this backslider was **SELF WILL**.

Self will is defined as stubborn about getting one's own way; willful; selfish; self-seeking; self-centred; self-indulgent; wrapped up in self; looking out only for number one.

All these characteristics are easily seen in this younger son in verse 12. Here was this son --- secure in the love of the father, enjoying all the blessings of the home --- but what happens? He took his eyes off the blessings; his narrow, shortsighted, selfish, impulsive, fleshly self took over. He was rebellious and egotistical. And the second downward step was **SELFISHNESS**.

But the father gave the son what he asked: "And he divideth unto them his living." Now, the custom was that the oldest son received a double portion, and when the division of property was settled, the younger son had no more claim on the estate. But he cared not about these things --- he wanted his share now. And the father complied with his request.

"And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country..." Now came the third step downward: **SEPARATION**. Soon after he received his inheritance, he chose to separate himself from family and country; he severed himself from his home; he cut himself off from his home life and said his farewells and embarked upon a new venture in life.

Now, he revealed why he was so anxious to get his share of the estate. He wanted to be free from this life style. He wanted to free himself from the discipline of this life at home. He wanted to be on his own, to be his own man. So "he took his journey into a far country."

Forgetting his upbringing, forgetting his heritage, forgetting his religious training, this young man, who was a Jew, left his home --- and all that one holds dear --- for one of the world's great cities --- perhaps Alexandria or Athens or Antioch or Rome.

He hastened to be free from the orderly, quiet home life in which he had grown up. Ingratitude for the blessings that were his is seen in his attitude. Utter forgetfulness of duty and responsibility was displayed in his actions. And he went as far away from home as he could, starting a new, exciting life. And what did he do?

"And there (in that far away country) wasted his substance with riotous living." The fourth downward step came quickly --- **SENSUALITY**: a great desire for sensual pleasures, satisfaction of bodily desires, gratification of the flesh.

"Riotous living" carries the connotation of rioting and noisy, disorderly conduct; wildly extravagant living. The scene comes to mind of wild, drunken parties --- extravagant gifts for women --- perhaps a woman on each arm, wining and dining them extravagantly --- buying drinks for everyone --- throwing his money right and left as if there were no end to the bank account.

He lived wildly, recklessly, carelessly, wastefully. He was the life of the party. Everyone loved him; everyone flocked around him as long as he was the "good Joe" --- as long as he was paying the bill. But then, what?

"And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land (that far away country). The money ran out --- there were no more funds --- no more good times --- no more revelling and extravagant living. Difficult times arose in his glorious surroundings. A shortage of food, a famine of jobs and opportunity, and a famine of the soul --- a famine that sin causes, a hunger of soul that grew worse and worse --- abounded. And the fifth step downward came: **SPIRITUAL DESTITUTION**.

Now his money was gone, and so were his friends. He was all alone in "a far country." He was spiritually destitute.

"And he began to be in want." This young man had sacrificed everything for selfish pleasure, and now he was in a state of want for food, clothing, and shelter --- the very necessities of physical life.

So "he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into the fields to feed swine." **SELF ABASEMENT** was the sixth downward step (that of humiliation and degradation). He had hit rock bottom!

Here was a young Jew from a prominent, wealthy family, being sent out to do the work of a hired hand. That was self abasement enough. But to feed the swine? Swine were very repulsive to the Jews. They regarded swine as unclean animals, and they had nothing to do with them.

This young Israelite, nurtured and trained in the worship of the chosen people, was now reduced to the position of a herdsman of the unclean creatures for which they regarded with such loathing and abhorrence. My! What self abasement!

But he had no choice! He was reaping the sin-fruit of "doing his own thing --- of being his own man."

"And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat:" And the seventh downward step was **STARVATION**. He was so hungry --- so desperately hungry --- that he desired to eat the unsavoury, unpalatable food that the pigs were eating in the muck and mire of the pig pen.

For "no man gave unto him." Where were all his fair-weather friends now? His selfish, evil-living and excesses of various kinds had brought him no real friends. Instead, they had left him homeless and friendless.

No one gave him the time of day now. Perhaps they looked upon him with disdain --- as a foreigner --- as a despised Jew. But no one offered friendship to him. He was starving. Indeed he was destitute, both physically and spiritually.

CONCLUSION: This young man, pictured here as the backslider, had been reared in a godly home, trained in the service of the Lord, but turned his back on God and His blessings. He became self willed and selfish, separated himself from home and family and the ways of the Lord, and went out into the world, living it up in sensual pleasures. But soon he found himself in spiritual destitution, self abasement, and starvation of the soul. He found

himself feeding on the husks of the world, and there was no satisfaction, no joy, no peace.

And that is what every child of God who backslides and goes out into the world finds: a life filled with misery. he is miserable, undone, and of no use to the Lord. He is a detriment to the cause of Christ until he comes to the realization that he must come back to the Lord. Then and only then can he be a clean and useful vessel in the Lord's service.