

People Can Change Luke 15:17-24

Longer passages are not quoted in the study sheet, but they can be read in the accompanying transcript.

When you look in the _____ spiritually, do you like what you see? Today, we're wondering if we can change our hearts and lives, or are we _____ with what we have? We want you to know the Lord and to live with Him forever. Your friends, members of some churches of Christ in the area served by this station, sponsor this program; and they would love to have you attend Bible study and worship with them. When you walk through the door, you'll feel welcome and wanted.

The best _____ of life come from God's Word, the Bible. I don't know about you, but I need a lesson now and then. Lessons teach us, so we might not make the same _____ that we've made in the past. Lessons open an opportunity for us to change our lives and to do _____. Because they point to something better, we have _____ for the future. I thank God for the lessons of the Bible; they _____ me and help me to go in the right direction and avoid the hazards of life. Some people think that people cannot change. Have you ever heard someone say, "Well, that's just the way I am"; or "I can't change"; or "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." Or maybe, "Well it's genetic; and I was born that way."

When I hear people say such things, I have to ask, "Is that really true?" Are we _____ with no ability to make changes in our spiritual or moral lives? Are we unable to repent? I have to admit that that concept really doesn't square with what I've _____ in people or with what I _____ in the Bible. Through the years, I've seen all kinds of people make _____ changes in their thinking and in their lives. I believe you can too!

Our reading today comes from the most famous story ever told, the story of the Prodigal Son, Luke 15:17-24. What a marvelous story.

Making changes in our lives is challenging, because the _____ to continue doing what we used to do remains strong. An alcoholic may stop drinking, but the temptation to drink will _____ over and over. The alcoholic must keep his _____ strong and remind himself why he won't drink. He has to fight the _____ over and over, but he can _____. There are thousands, thousands who have _____ the temptation. An alcoholic will always be challenged, but he can break the habit of drunkenness. Can people change? Of course, they can!

Many times, it's not so much a question of whether a person _____ change as it is "do they _____ to change?" Many people make the _____ they cannot change, when the truth is they don't want to change. People start sinful practices and become _____. They don't plan to be controlled by their appetites, but they become _____. The Lord Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, that everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). That's a _____ reality. No one likes to be controlled. But because of Christ, it is not the _____ of the story. My friend, I tell you, there is hope for you! There is a way to overcome the past.

Two verses later, in verse 36, the Lord promised, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” Jesus can set us free from sin and its _____ over our lives. Jesus helps the Christian to _____ above the failures and moral stains of the past. God can help us become a _____ person, freed from the old and born again. The Bible says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation—or creature. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The apostle Paul explains this in God’s Word. He says, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the _____ of God is coming. And in these you too once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you’ve put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Colossians 3:5-10). If people cannot change, why would God _____ it? God’s not cruel. He doesn’t expect us to do what we _____ do! But God knows what we can do, and He knows that we can change our thinking, our behavior, and our lives.

Read the story the Lord told about a young man who changed in Luke 15:11-24. This touching story reminds us of the _____ that people can wake up to the life that they’ve been living, and can come home to the Father. God meets every one of his children just like He did the prodigal son. He runs to them with open arms and He celebrates their _____. The lost can be saved, and the dead can become _____ spiritually. Change can and does take place! People don’t have to _____ the way that they’ve always been. They can change their lives. Repentance is a change of _____ that leads to a change of _____. God made us people who can change our thinking. We can control our _____, and we can control the focus of our lives.

The Bible says: “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. But if a wicked person turns away from all his sins that he has committed and he keeps all my statutes and does what is just and right, he shall surely live; he shall not die. None of the transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him; for the righteousness that he has done, for that he shall live. Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked, declares the Lord God, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?” (Ezekiel 18:20-23). God wants everyone to _____ to Him, to change and do what is right that they may _____ with him eternally. Regretfully not everyone will change, and that brings us a heartache.

I want to tell a _____ story of forgiveness and freedom. In 1935, a family in Oklahoma with eight children lost their father. The mother went to work as a nurse to _____ the family, and the children had to spend much time raising themselves. The youngest boy, as time went by, got into the wrong crowd and began to do all the _____ things that rebellious teens do. He often drank and committed crimes. He would rather _____ than pay for anything, even when he had money in his pocket. As a young adult, he spent many nights in _____. He was a strong, young man; and if he had been drinking, he would tear up his jail cell. He was wanted for theft and burglary in

several states. Once, when he came home to visit family in the 1950s, he stole a check-writing machine; he was caught and went to _____ for four years. This got his attention. While he was there in prison, his oldest sister and her husband came to visit him and talk about the Bible and his _____. Some fellow prisoners were also Christians, and they taught him what he should do to be saved. He learned he had _____ been baptized according to the teaching of the Scriptures and he _____ to be baptized.

He served his time and came out of jail in 1962 shortly before his mother died. At first, he was humble and spiritually motivated, but before long, he _____ to a rough life out in the oil fields of Oklahoma. He was often drunk and took illegal drugs. His mouth was foul and his behavior very obnoxious. For more than twenty years, he forgot the _____ he made to God while he was back in prison. In 1985, he attended my father's funeral and was very obnoxious; I said in my heart that I didn't care if I ever saw him again. I regret saying that now.

But the Lord had something more in store for him. In 1987, he had gained a lot of weight and the doctors told him that his heart was enlarged, like a cow's heart. They said he would soon _____ if he didn't change his ways. Many nights he would hunt raccoons and get drunk. He sometimes woke up in a _____, not really knowing where he was. The doctor's words, though, hit home. He remembered all the promises he had made to God and to his older sister while he was in prison. Frantically he approached every preacher in town to find spiritual help. But none of them had time for him. One even threatened to call the law.

Then he remembered the two family members who taught him in prison. He called me one Friday night and asked me to come to his house and _____ him about baptism. The next morning, I was there and I had my Bible. He knew that he hadn't been baptized according to the Scriptures and he wanted to know the _____. So I began with Matthew 3 and told him how Jesus fulfilled all righteousness and was baptized by John. I showed him that the one who believes and is baptized will be _____ (Mark 16:16). We learned that the baptism of Christ was the _____ birth of water and the Spirit (John 3:5); and a person must be _____ again (verse 7). We also learned that we needed to _____ and to be baptized for the forgiveness of sin (Acts 2:38). In baptism, we also learned that you go _____ into the water and you come _____ out of the water (Acts 8:38-39); and that baptism is an immersion; it's a dipping or plunging in the water. We also learned that when we're baptized it is at that time that our sins are _____ away (Acts 22:16). We learned that baptism is into Christ; that's how you get into Christ, and it's also how you get into the death of Christ; that we're baptized into His death, that we're _____ with Him in baptism, and raised with him in baptism to walk in newness of life (Romans chapter 6). We also saw that our old man of sin was crucified with Him in baptism so that we can be _____ from sin (Romans 6:3-7). We learned many other things about baptism that day, that is that baptism doth also now save us (1 Peter 3:21). And that He saved us by the washing of regeneration, the renewing of the Holy (Titus 3:5). After we had finished about three hours of study, five precious souls went down into that large pond behind their house, and they were baptized.

From that very day, my uncle never _____ again. He began attending _____ every time

the doors were open. His language was godly and his attitude was one of love and faith. He opened his big old heart to everybody, _____ everyone, and _____ many, many prisoners. He began reaching out to the prisoners at the county courthouse, and soon many of them were being baptized. Then he went to other county jails, and it wasn't long until people there were being baptized as well. Soon he went to the Oklahoma state prisons where he taught young men who had fallen into the same sinful _____ he himself had known in times past. He would speak straight to them about sin but with lots of love, and they responded to it. From 1987 onward, he baptized more than a _____ souls into Christ with his own hands. My friends, I have to tell you, never, never had I seen such a great change in a man.

That kind of change is not so unusual for people who come to Christ. The Bible says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Don't be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you (that is, in the Corinthian church). But you were washed (God cleaned you up), you were sanctified (God made you holy), and you were justified (God declared you innocent) in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:9-11). God _____ them change from sinners to saints, and they made that change.

You probably know people who've left a sinful lifestyle and have come to Christ. They made _____ changes in their moral and spiritual lives. When you come to Christ, you become a _____ person. You have a new start! You're born again! If God could make a difference in the life of my dear uncle, He can make a difference in people that you know too. If He could make a difference in those Corinthians, He can make a difference in your life if you let Him. He can help you overcome every sin and become the kind of person that you want to be.

My favorite saying is, "I'm not all I ought to be; I'm not all I want to be; I'm not all I'm going to be; but, thank God by His mercy and grace, I'm not what I used to be." God can help each of us become the _____ person that He intended for us to be. You can _____ over sin by giving yourself to the Lord. He'll help you overcome every sin and struggle that you face. Faith truly is the _____ that we have in Christ our Lord. So are you willing to come to Him?

To become a Christian, _____ with all your heart that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And out of faith and love, love for Christ, then turn away from what the Bible calls sin, take up your _____ and follow the Lord Jesus. That change of heart, that change of life is what _____ is all about. The Bible everywhere teaches that people can repent. And after repenting, _____ your faith and be _____ into Christ. Yes, baptism is an immersion in water in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins can be _____ away. And when you're baptized, the Lord will cause you to be born again, a new creature. God will add you to His family, the church of Jesus Christ, the church of Christ; and you'll be His child, an heir of heaven. Won't you make that change and become a Christian?