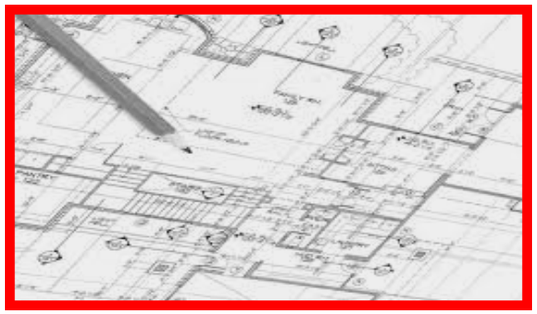
Father's house and will say unto him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me one of your hired servants." The young man returned home with humility in his heart. Here are some timeless principles of RESTORATION from the Prodigal Son's story (Lk 15:11) . . .

1. The Father's love - the father never gave up or stopped loving the wayward son. The story indicates that the father (a picture of God) had been watching for him day after day, hoping for his return. When the Father saw his wayward son, the Bible says that he *"saw him a great way off, ran and had compassion, and fell on his neck and kissed him" (vs. 21).* WOW! What love! Dear friend, isn't this the kind of love that we all yearn for? And, isn't this the kind of love that we are called to express to others? It goes on to say that the father fully RESTORED the son in every way. There was no recrimination – only forgiveness, love, and rejoicing. He said, *"For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found. And they began to make merry" (vs. 24).*

2. The process of RESTORATION takes time - never doubt that God is at work, even when you don't "see" immediate change. As described previously, it takes time to overcome the blinding effects of sin. The prodigal son spent all his money on parties and riotous living. Only then did he finally *"come to himself"* and repent. If you have a spouse, child, or loved one who seems far away from God, take courage! God will work through your prayers. Your job is to hold on to your faith and trust that God is at work in their lives, even if you can't "see" results at this point. They can't escape the Holy Spirit or your prayers.

3. The wayward son had to come to a point of humility and repentance. Restoration always requires humility and repentance. In verse 18, the young boy finally said to himself, *"I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, 'I have sinned against heaven and before you."* James 4:8 says, *"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."* We should be praying for others to have a gift of repentance. Ask God to work within their hearts according to Philippians 2:13 – *"For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."*



4. The Father fully RESTORES - the story says that the father fully restored the son with a feast and ring of authority, in spite of the elder brother's bad attitude. The father put the best robe on his son, a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. Then he had the fatted calf prepared for a great feast! The boy was restored with full honors as a son entitled to provision and authority. What a picture of God's grace!

5. The bad attitude of the elder brother – is a warning to all of us to guard our hearts against judgmental attitudes that would block others from receiving restoration. Study the story carefully and you begin to see a bad attitude in the elder brother. He was upset that the Father restored his brother, to the point that he refused to go to the feast! May we all guard our hearts from such attitudes towards those who need love and restoration.

6. Galatians 6:1,2 says, *"You that are spiritual RESTORE such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest you also are tempted."* As long as we are in this mortal body, no one is exempt from temptation – NO ONE! May we never become so "religious" that we judge others for the very same things that we struggle with in our own hearts. If you are strong in the Lord, then fulfill the law of Christ and help those who are weak. RESTORATION is something that we are all called to.

Dear friend, don't give up on others or yourself! Let the love of God bring RESTORATION! When hearts turn to Him, restoration begins.

■ ***-- Jason Peebles***

Key Memory Verse:

"And I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten . . . and you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God." Joel 2:25,26

Prayer for Restoration

"Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for my sins. I accept His sacrifice and commit my life to Him. I want to walk with you and love you each day. RESTORE my life in every way – in my mind, my heart, and my circumstances. Help me to be an instrument of restoration to others. Thank you for your great love. In Jesus Name – Amen."

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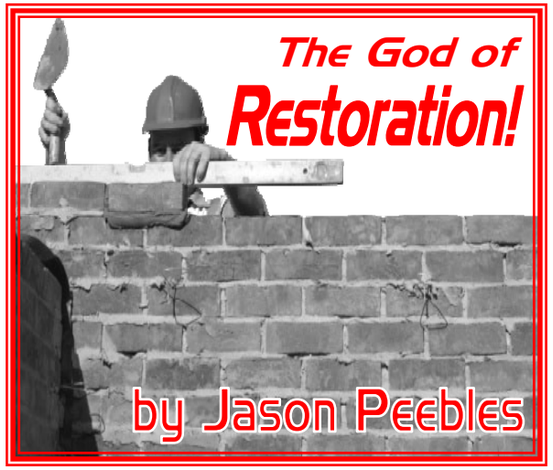

The Bible is an ongoing account of God's desire for RESTORATION! Over and over we read stories of men and women who messed up, made mistakes, fell into sin, and in general fell short of God's standards. Yet, God always initiated a plan of RESTORATION. When Adam and Eve sinned, God immediately had a plan to restore them (Gen 3:15,21). **When you study about Abraham, Rahab, Ruth, David, Peter, and Paul – you begin to understand that God's heart is one of mercy, forgiveness, and restoration. This is the very reason that He sent Jesus Christ to die for our sins.**

Before we go much further, let me say that if you are the kind of person who feels that you are better than everyone else (because you've lived such a 'holy' life), then this Study Guide may disturb you. But, that's OK, as long as you will have an open mind. This Study Guide is dedicated to the theme that God's plan is ALWAYS forgiveness and restoration regardless of how "low" a person may sink in life.

Rahab the Harlot

Let's take a moment and look at one of the most unlikely candidates for God's hall of fame. **The story of Rahab the harlot is a favorite of mine and perfectly illustrates the heart of God.** First of all, we know that Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho (Joshua 2). Yet, the Bible later commends her faith – and, she actually ends up in the lineage of Jesus Christ!

Before her dramatic change, though, Rahab had fallen into the business of sleeping with men for money. That kind of lifestyle is always filled with lies and deception. Men are lying to their wives about their whereabouts and the prostitute denies that they were ever together. It's an underworld of lies, deception, and addictive lust. That kind of life produces a very low self-esteem in the woman. In time, she comes to feel that her only value in life is when she produces sex. What a terrible self-image! Additionally, most prostitutes are abused verbally, sexually, and in every other way. And, as we all know, people in the community do not speak well of prostitutes. In time, it becomes a very hard life that drains away any sense of goodness and dignity. This, then, was the world that Rahab was caught up in.

Yet, the Bible tells us that God delights in taking what seems impossible and turning it around for His glory! 1 Corinthians 1:27 says that, *"God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty."* And, it goes on to tell us the reason – *"That no flesh should glory in His presence."* You see, when Rahab converted, God truly got the glory! The turning point for Rahab came when she believed the report about Israel and made a decision to help Joshua's spies. She hid them from the authorities and then trusted their word to protect her family during the coming invasion. Thus, her faith won recognition in Hebrews 11:31. But that's not the end of Rahab's story by any means! We learn from Joshua 6:25 that she made a choice to continue living with Israel. Evidently her life was completely transformed by faith in the God of Israel.

Now here's the biggest surprise of all that will shock the religious mind! Did you know that Jesus Christ came through the lineage of Rahab? That's right! Matthew chapter one gives us the lineage of Christ – and right there in the list is Rahab. She married a man named Salmon. Some commentators speculate that he was one of the spies that Rahab saved. In any event, they produced a son named Boaz, the man who helped restore Ruth. Thus, you can track the lineage from Rahab, to Boaz and Ruth, to Obed, to David, and to Jesus Christ. What an amazing story of God's redemption and restoration! By the way, as a sideline lesson, you really ought to study the book of Ruth. You talk about a messed up situation! All the men had died and Naomi and Ruth were left alone. Yet, through God's guidance, Ruth was eventually led to Boaz, who, as we have just pointed out, was the son of Rahab. No doubt the kindness that Boaz showed to Naomi and Ruth was due in part to the sensitivity he had developed from his mother's situation. Knowing how cruel and unkind people can be, I am very sure that Boaz grew up hearing cutting remarks about his mother's past lifestyle. Thus, when he met Ruth and heard of her terrible plight, he was moved with compassion to help her.

So dear friend, what is the point of this story and all the stories in the Bible of RESTORATION? The point is that regardless of how "messed up" someone may be, there is hope in God! God can take people who have been addicted to alcohol, drugs, sex, etc. and absolutely transform their lives! There's no situation too "messed up" for God's grace. That's what the gospel is all about! **If you have a loved one who seems beyond hope, please don't give up! God is greater than their sin and bondage! Your part is to try and separate your emotions from the situation so that you can have faith for them. In most cases, it will take time.** 1 Corinthians 13 teaches us about God's kind of love that never gives up, refuses to take offense, and always believes the best for the other person. In reality, this kind of love is not possible without God's help. Normally, our first response (in the flesh) is to be angry with the person and seek punishment – especially if they have offended or betrayed us. **Yet, if by God's grace, you can rise above the hurt and see the wayward person as God sees them, then you will be able to be a part of God's RESTORATION plan. You can become an instrument to gradually lead them back to God.** But if you choose the path of being hurt and judgmental, then you will only serve the devil's purposes in keeping them ensnared and trapped in sin. God will have to find someone else to help them. Galatians 6:1-3 says, *"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, you which are spiritual, RESTORE such a one in the spirit of meekness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear you one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ."* And what is the "law" of Christ? It is the "agape" love of God (Jn 13:34).

King David

I can already hear some of you thinking: *"Well, Rahab wasn't a believer when she was in sin. But my loved one once walked with God and then turned away. That's different!* Well, let's consider one of the key players in the Bible -- King David.

As we all know, David walked with God from his youth. As a shepherd boy he was a worshipper and later became the King of Israel. In fact, it was his love for God and his tender heart that gave him the advantage. If anyone ever walked with God, it was David. Yet David fell into adultery and then tried to cover it up with a murder (2 Sam 11). As you read the account of this low point in David's life, you can readily see that David did not immediately repent. Like most people who fall into sin, he tried to lie his way out of the situation and cover up his sin. He denied it; he lied about it; and he committed murder to hide the fact. Only after some months passed was David forced to acknowledge his sin when Nathan confronted him.

In my experience, I have observed that when someone falls into sin, it takes time for them to "disconnect." Why? It's because sin produces spiritual blindness. When you lie and deceive others, it creates a "veil" over your mind and heart. You literally can't think straight. It's sad that in most cases everyone else can clearly see the sin and the impending consequences – but the blinded person who is ensnared by Satan cannot see clearly. All of this has a lot to do with emotional addictions, lust, soul ties, and a physical change that occurs even on the chemical and hormonal level. As I said earlier, the "disconnect process" usually takes time. It's almost identical to a drug addict. Occasionally you will hear about someone who is instantly set free -- but 99% of the time the addict needs "time" to "disconnect." The same is true with sexual sins, adultery, alcohol, etc. David fell into this category. Praise God, David finally repented and turned back to God. God initiated RESTORATION. That is ALWAYS God's goal. He never gives up on people. His love is the kind of love defined in 1 Corinthians 13 – a love that never gives up, never quits, and always believes the best. It is the "agape" love of God Himself at work.

Yes, there are consequences to sin, and David suffered for his sin. Yet, God in his mercy helped RESTORE David. **If you want to know "how" God restores, then meditate on Psalm 23. RESTORATION starts on the "inside" of a person and works its way out.** God begins by restoring the "soul" of the person – that is, the mind, will, and emotions. He requires sorrow and repentance for sin. 2 Chronicles 7:14 gives us God's "recipe" for RESTORATION – *"If my people, who are called by my name, shall humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sins and will heal their land."* This verse is true for individuals, families, and nations. Little did David realize that some of his best days were still ahead. God wasn't finished with David. He still had a Temple to design and a son named Solomon to raise.

The Prodigal Son

I love the story of the Prodigal Son. It's another classic Bible story that perfectly illustrates the heart of God for RESTORATION. Remember, Jesus himself gives us this story, so we know with certainty that this is the heart of Christ. Jesus tells about a father who had two sons (Lk 15:11-32). One of them became rebellious and demanded his inheritance early. He left home and started living a wild life. The account indicates that he chased women and partied -- so much so that he wasted all his money. The lowest point came when he took a job feeding pigs. Then one day, a change came in the young man's mind. The account says that *"he came to himself and said, 'How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough to spare and I perish for hunger! I will arise and go to my*