

she is successful.

John 15:9

And having found it, she is calling together her friends and her women neighbors saying, “Rejoice with me, because I found the silver coin which I lost.”

That brings us to the key passage. We go from a hundred sheep to ten coins to two men.

You can always tell in Jesus’ story the point number one is a build-up, point number two is a build-up, but point number three is the whole point of the message.

Remember the story of the guy who had five talents, the other had two, and the other one had one? We can talk about the guy who had five talents got five talents, the guy who had two got two more, but the one that had one went and buried it.

The whole purpose of the parable is in the one. The whole purpose of the parable is not sheep and coins. The whole purpose of the parable is people and there are just two boys in the story.

These two boys represent the audience that is listening to Him teach. You’ve got tax collectors and sinners who are the boy we are going to look at and you have self-righteous Pharisees. That is the older brother who gets his nose out of joint after the other thing happens here in the latter part of the passage.

How does he handle it? Good interpersonal relationships. Here

is the principle: Are always undergirded by unconditional love.

How long does it take you to write somebody off? That tells me the condition of your love. When somebody does something wrong to hurt you, are you characterized as “That’s it!” and write them off?

Thank God He didn’t do that to us. Thankfully when we offend Him, He doesn’t write us off. Good interpersonal relationships keep on loving and devoted even in the midst of unfaithfulness or pain that is brought to the relationship by selfishness or the lack of love.

Let’s look at the story.

v. 11 And He said, “A certain man was having two sons;

“And He said, ‘A certain man was having two sons;’”

He nails it down just to two now.

v. 12 and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate which falls to me.’ And he divided his wealth between them.

“and the younger of them said to his father, “Father, give me the share of the estate which falls to me.” And he divided his wealth between them.”

Here’s a very selfish request. His request basically is in two words “give me.”

The Law stipulated when you had two boys the older boy got two thirds of the inheritance and the younger boy got one third. You will notice here that both of them get their inheritance.

This is a very loving, gracious father. He is in essence hearing from his younger son, “Give me what I’m going to get when you die because I am sick and tired of all the restrictions and the pain of living under your authority here in this house. I have places to go and people to see, so give me what I’m going to get when you die.”

What would you do if your kid said that to you? You’d say, “You’ve just been written out of it, boy.” That’s human thinking, isn’t it? That’s conditional love. “Listen, if you are going to get my inheritance, man, you had better be shaping up and cooperate with what I have got planned for your life. Otherwise, I’m going to do like several retired people are saying and get a bumper sticker that says **WE ARE SPENDING OUR KID’S INHERITANCE.**”

They’re going to have a good time with it ... live it up while they are still here. What’s the focus of this young man? It is all centered on the little word “me”.

“give me the share of the estate which falls to me.” And he divided his wealth between them.

The older boy got his two-thirds and the younger boy got his one-third.

Looking at the chart, from that one statement about him, what are some of the words that give you an indication where this young boy is coming from in his capacity for interpersonal relationships? What are some of the words that we see down there? Selfishness—centered on me, isn't he? He's about to bump out of the circle there. Pride, arrogance, self-sufficient, he's self-confident and he wants to be self-reliant.

You can take so many of those words in the lower left hand corner and put it on him right now because that's where he is located. Let's remember that big principle: The Father is free to act in interpersonal relationships because He is never in need of reconciliation.

Does the Father have the need for reconciliation with either one of these boys? Absolutely none. He has loved them, he's provided for them, he cares for them. In his unconditional love he reaches out and provides their request. He gives them what they ask for in this situation in ministering to the epitome of selfishness. He is now affected by that but grants the request.

The condescension of a father in his unconditional love is incredible. Do you want to see that in Jesus?

Remember in John 13 when He comes in the upper room. This is just less than 24 hours before He's hanging on the cross. He has been teaching them for three solid years that you learn to be good servants. What does He have to do? He comes walking in there the last night before the final exam, He's getting ready to hang on the cross, and they are arguing over who's going to be Secretary of State in the kingdom.

You talk about selfishness in a personal relationship. They're fighting over who's going to be first and nobody is humble and broken enough to take the bucket and wash feet.

Jesus gives them one last object lesson of good interpersonal relationships. That's getting down on your knees with a towel and a bucket and minister to someone else's needs. Incredible unconditional love for those men.

He could have said, "How many times have I told you in these three years that I came not to be ministered unto but to minister; and whosoever is going to be great among you is going to be a servant. Whosoever is going to be chief among you is going to be the minister. It is the person that gives, not the person who selfishly grabs that is going to have a happy and fulfilled life.

v. 13 and not many days later, the young son gathered everything together and he went on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth with loose living.

"and not many days later, the young son gathered everything together and he went on a journey to a distant country, and there he squandered his wealth with loose living."

We can still leave him in lower left, can't you? Total and complete amazement. He takes what his dad gives him, sells it all off, puts it into American Express traveler's cheques and he takes off.

That's what it means when it says he "gathered everything together." Obviously there was some farm equipment, some stocks, and some property involved. It took several days, but he just put it all together. He put it in a big pot and he says, "goodbye, I'm going to high-cotton. I am going to the big city with the lights and all the fun."

It says "he squandered his wealth with loose living."

Can you see him? He takes off to town and the first place he stops is the car dealership. He gets himself a hot little Porsche and then he rents himself a real nice apartment. Then he has friends coming over all the time because he's got drinks, television, a pool and a hot tub. Everybody's just coming around, really partying and having a great time. You talk about interpersonal relationships. He's got it.

Then the money is gone. Where are the friends? That's so much of what we call interpersonal relationships. When the fun is gone, the fun's done, so are the friends. The poor guy is super lonely.

v. 14 Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be in need.

"Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be in need."

If he had any friends they would turn around and help him, wouldn't they? You can't find them anywhere. They were there

selfishly to get all they could get and poison all the rest. Then they left.

What is the reason for a severe famine coming at the time of his financial dwindling? It's simply because God wants to get his attention.

It is a very painful process to move out of the lower left to upper right. Sometimes we fight a long time before we ever get up there.

As the economics of struggle among the people intensifies with his material loss, he wasn't getting the message that the Lord was trying to give him. We want him out of the Incorrect Positive Thinking/Feeling and acting up here in Correct Negative Thinking/Feeling/Acting so we can get over here to Correct Positive Thinking/Feeling/Acting.

It is a long way across there. Not only on the piece of paper but on the experiences of life so deep we'll never get there.

v. 15 And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to be feeding pigs.

“And he went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to be feeding pigs.”

What's wrong? His pride just won't let him. He is saying, “Well I've made a couple of bad business deals but you know, I just don't go overboard here. Let's not be too harsh.”

And he goes to a farmer and says, “Can I work?” The farmer says “Yeah, you can feed some pigs.”

Talk about a repulsive job. A repulsive job for you would be slopping the hogs. A repulsive job for a Jewish boy would be slopping pigs.

That would be the depths of degradation. But here he is, out in the far country. Where is this interpersonal relationship with his father from his point of view.

v. 16 And he was longing to fill his stomach with some of the carob-pods which the hogs were eating, and no one was giving (anything) to him.

“And he was longing to fill his stomach with some of the carob-pods which the hogs were eating, and no one was giving (anything) to him.”

These carob-pods are things you pick up from under a tree. It is only food for poor people. You barely survive on it.

“And he was longing to fill his stomach” with some of that. He was hungry. He feels his stomach on his backbone. He’s starving to death and no one was giving him anything to eat.

All that shows you is sometimes it can really get bad. Sometimes God has to take us a long way down before He gets our attention. Sometimes having a rough time in your life is because God loves you so much.

If it is to bring you to Calvary and to make that big move from lower left to upper right, that's good for you. But as believers, He also does that to take that self-righteousness out of us and to get us to that broken, contrite, sweet, submissive, obedient spirit that is very valuable in His sight.

Is the firm foundation for good in an interpersonal relationship? It is a miracle when somebody moves out of lower left to upper right and it is wonderful to see.

Look at verse 17, there it is.

“But he came to his senses...”

What does that tell you? He started thinking differently. He comes to his senses. He is literally recognizing he has been living in the outer circle. He has been living with Incorrect Positive Thinking/Feeling/Acting.

v. 17 He comes to his senses, he said, How many employees of my father are getting more than enough bread, and I am perishing here with hunger.

“He comes to his senses, he said, How many employees of my father are getting more than enough bread, and I am perishing here with hunger.”

The key to repentance and to correction is to change is seeing things as they really are and recognizing them and coming to one's senses. He asks a really good question, “How many

employees of my father are getting more than enough bread, and I am perishing here with hunger.”

Can you see what is happening? Those are new words on the lips of this young man. What are some of those new words that are on his lips? Can you find any of them on your chart?

Humility. Self-denial. What is he starting to talk about for the first time? Servants—“How many servants of my father.”

Is he recognizing his failure? I think so. That’s tough to say “How many servants of my dad ... have got more to eat ... and I’m perishing here in hunger and I’m his son!” That’s hard.

He is preparing the soil for repentance and it is just exactly like the tax collector in our last study. This young man is down in the lower left and is heading for the upper right.

Now watch what is going to happen. It’s one thing to know that and it’s another thing to sit here and say, “Hey, that’s exactly right. That’s what I’ve got to do.” It’s another thing to do it.

It is one thing for the kid to sit there in the pig pen and say, “How many servants of my father while I perish...well, if I just keep on trying maybe I won’t perish. Hang on for one more time around.”

v. 18 Having pulled up stakes [he makes a decision] I will go to my father and I will say to him: ‘Father, I sinned against heaven and before you.

“Having pulled up stakes [he makes a decision] I will go to my father and I will say to him: “Father, I sinned against heaven and before you.”

“I sinned against God and I sinned before you.”

Now you have some more words to put in the upper right. He is acknowledging his sin and that he is a sinner. He has offended his father and offended God. He brings all that in there.

“I’ve sinned against heaven and before you.”

There are three things that help us to recognize that he is going to decide something.

1. He pulls up stakes,
2. “I will go to my father” and
3. “I will say to him.”

Notice something. There are four parts to this little speech that he has ready for Dad:

1. “Father, I sinned against heaven”

Psalm 51:4

Against Thee and Thee only have I sinned,
And done what is evil in Thy sight.

The incredible thing about David's sin is that he recognized it was more than against Bathsheba and more than against Uriah, it was against God.

“Against Thee and Thee only have I sinned.”

“Father, I sinned against heaven.”

He is in Correct Negative Thinking/Feeling/Acting.

The second part of his speech:

2. I not only sinned “against heaven” but I have also sinned “before you.”

“Father, I have offended you, too.”

Now, point three.

v. 19 No longer am I worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your employees.’

“No longer am I worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your employees.””

3. “No longer am I worthy to be called your son”

You can call me a sinner you can call me a servant, but I no longer can “be called your son.” I have limitations.

He is coming to failure. He is coming in repentance. He feels

guilt. He feels depression. He feels inadequacy. He feels sorry.

“No longer am I worthy to be called your son. I lost this privilege by what I have done.”

Point number four—recommendation in view of the other three points:

4. “Make me as one of your employees.”

What’s the difference between the initial request that he made before he left for the far country and what we see as point number four in his speech?

What did he say to his dad when he left for the far country?

“Father, give me.”

Now what is he saying in humble brokenness?

“Father, make me.”

You are never going to know the joy of a right relationship with God until you come to that point where you say, “God, I’ve really blown it. I’ve begged You for this and I’ve asked You for that and I want help here and I want help there. But I’ve never really come broken before You and said, ‘Father, make me into what you want me to become.’”

That’s the key statement in the whole parable. He wants to be one of his dad’s employees. He lost the right because of his sin.

Such brokenness.

Do you want to see a father that is filled with unconditional love? What does God like? Look at this.

v. 20 Having pulled up stakes, he came to his own father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and having run, he fell on his neck and kissed him again and again.

“Having pulled up stakes, he came to his own father. And while he was still a long distance away, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and having run, he fell on his neck and kissed him again and again.”

There are five things here in this verse that demonstrate unconditional love.

1. “he saw him”

What does that tell you? He has been looking ever since the kid left. There were lots of nights sitting at the window, hoping that kid was going to come home. Many mornings sitting there, many lunch times wondering when his kid was going to come home.

2. “he was moved with compassion”

He never ceased loving his son.

We are going to talk about compassion in our next study so we’ll

just leave that for next time. The thing that compassion tells you is that God can love a selfish, sinful, sorry, senseless son and not be affected by what that kid has done.

He loves him. “He was moved with compassion.”

That is the difference between conditional and unconditional love. Conditional love would not have allowed him to be moved with compassion. He would have said, “Boy, when that kid gets here, I am going to put him on restriction. He is going to have a rough time with me until he shapes up before he comes back into this house.”

Unconditional love is key and critical. Unconditional love is a commitment to an imperfect person unconditionally. That is unconditional love. Unconditional love is a commitment to an imperfect person unconditionally.

Some couples might say, “We are getting a divorce because he/she isn’t what I thought he/she was.” What makes you think that you are such a prize? What makes you think that you are so hot? “Oh, after all, I’m the judge. I’m the one calling the shots in the relationship.” Conditional love again.

It is unconditional love that is a commitment to an imperfect person unconditionally. How does he demonstrate it?

3. “and having run”

Do you ever run to somebody that you need reconciliation with? No, there is nothing in the father that needs to be reconciled. He

is not restraining and holding himself back.

Now God can see repentance coming a long way off. He has no problem running to reconciliation. He comes and:

4. “he fell on his neck” and
5. “he kissed him again and again.”

What does that tell you? That tells you that there is nothing stopping you from reconciliation with God but your own pride.

God loves you so much. He wants to get His arms around you. He cares about you.

That’s the way the Father works. He longs for reconciliation in a relationship with us. He is not out there looking for things to do to us to take away our joy. He is only working in our lives for the purpose of making us more like Himself.

v. 21 And, the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, no longer am I worthy to be called you son.’

“And, the son said to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you, no longer am I worthy to be called you son.””

He only gets three points of his four point sermon before dad interrupts. He doesn’t get to the other part. “Make me as one of your servants.” After all, the father already knows that.

v. 22 But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.

“But the father said to his slaves, “Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.”

Three things here:

1. “Bring out the best robe”
2. “put a ring on his hand“

That’s giving him back the credit cards.

3. “and sandals on his feet.”

He is not going to be a servant. He is a son. Then he says:

v. 23 and bring the fatted calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry.

“and bring the fatted calf, kill it, and let us eat and be merry.”

Why did he kill the “fatted calf”? So the whole community knows that the father and son are reconciled.

“let us eat and be merry.” Why?

v. 24 Because this son of mine was dead and has come to

life again; he was lost and has been found.’ And they began to be merry.

“Because this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.” And they began to be merry.”

What do we have? We have a young man who went from lower left and he has gone through Incorrect Positive Thinking/Feeling/Acting to Correct Negative Thinking/Feeling/Acting.

Now the selfishness supreme has been met with unconditional love and it is now, “Father, make me as one of your hired servants.”

The sin and selfishness sure mess up a lot of interpersonal relationships and unconditional love is the only way that you can have good interpersonal relationships.

He says, “I will go.” Repentance says, “I will stay.”

He makes things right with his father. What about your own condition today? What about your capacity for unconditional love?

What kind of capacity for unconditional love do you know?

If you don’t know God and His love and you have never received Christ, you don’t have the capacity for the kind of love that God produces in life. There needs to be reconciliation to the heavenly Father. Don’t delay another day longer in seeking that, realizing

that He's running and desiring to get close to you.

You might say, "I'm a Christian but I feel kind of like the Pharisee." Remember the story of the older son? He comes up to the house and he gets his nose out of joint because they are having a big party while he's been working for his dad all these years. His dad says, "Come on in." He never responded.

Maybe he never came in. He represents the Pharisees. The self-righteous guys who thought they had it all together.

He didn't know anything about interpersonal relationships. He probably went right back out in the field to work and refused to come in and experience the joy of the unconditional love his father had for his younger brother.

He says, "This son of yours." He wouldn't even say "this brother of mine." He had no desire for anything personal or any kind of interpersonal relationship.

Do you know how you test your love? If you want to make a real good test of your love, take 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and put your name in it. This is how love looks and how it will work..

[Your name] is patient. He is kind. He is not jealous. He does not brag and he is not arrogant and he does not act unbecomingly. He does not seek his own things. He is not easily provoked. He does not take into account a wrong suffered.

In other words, he doesn't have a ledger book of wrong.

He doesn't rejoice in unrighteousness when somebody else falls and he hears about it; but, he rejoices with the truth. He bears all things, he believes all things even when nobody else is believing them and he hopes all things. That it is going to work out. Above all he endures all things.

In other words, when everybody else is gone, he is still hanging in there.

That word "endures" is characterized as remaining under the stress.

Love never fails.

Father, we are just overwhelmed to think that You cared so much for us that You chose us before the foundation of the world. Through the gift of Your Son, You brought about a means for reconciliation with You. Father, may we know the freedom, the joy, the thrill, the excitement of being rightly related to You through personal reconciliation. Father, if we've been scared, if we have been apprehensive, may we know You are running. You long for total love and reconciliation. Father, I pray, if there are those who, as believers, feel their love has grown cold, that they have been grieving the Spirit of God by sin, that they are quenching Him by resisting some purpose or plan that He has for their lives. And as a result, the Spirit of God is not able to produce this kind of love that we have talked about, may it cause them afresh to listen to what you said to the church at Ephesus. "You've left your first love." May they be strangely warmed as they draw close and may Your love again find a channel that is open and free through whom You can love the

world. Father, we realize that we have talked about the two most important ingredients—a relationship to you on the vertical provides the capacity and the ability for unconditional love on the horizontal. We pray that we would be mature enough to evaluate our own condition and to apply the truth of this study to our individual lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

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SOLVING STRUGGLES

In Interpersonal Relationships

“Learning to Live, Love and Listen to Each Other”

Ingredient #2: Unconditional Love – Luke 15:11-24

NOTES

I. “Who is God and what is He like?” – Luke 15:11-24

Take a look at My Father:

1. Where He spent His time – 15:1, 2
2. When a sheep was lost – 15:3-7
3. When a silver coin was lost – 15:8-10
4. When a prodigal son left – 15:11-24

v. 11 And He said, “A certain man was having two sons;
v. 12 and the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the estate which falls to me.’ And he divided his wealth between them.

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v. 24 Because this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to be merry."

5. When a proud son got angry – 15:25-32

THE FATHER IS ALWAYS FREE TO ACT IN INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS BECAUSE HE IS NEVER IN NEED OF RECONCILIATION.

LESSONS FROM THE PASSAGE:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

Lesson #1: We have seen a young man in the parable move from Inaccurate Positive Thinking/Feeling/Acting to Healthy Negative Thinking/Feeling/Action.

Lesson #2: The Prodigal Son first sees interpersonal relationships for what he can get. Now he sees them for what can I give.

Lesson #3: Sin and selfishness sure mess up a lot of

interpersonal relationships.

Lesson #4: The Father is always free to act in interpersonal relationships because He is never in need of reconciliation.

Lesson #5: “Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

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