

The Elder Brother

“Love Your Neighbor As Yourself”

“Love your neighbor as yourself” is a command by Jesus written in the Bible eight times. This command is a foundational principle for all followers of Jesus. It’s easy to put it on a T-shirt but hard to walk it out especially if we feel there is injustice or wrongdoing involved, which is the case with the elder brother. So just as a recap let’s look at where the elder brothers outrage comes into play here. Look with me in the book of ***Luke 15:29-30***

“But he answered his father, look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I can celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fatted calf for him!”

A self-centered life that is governed by the elder brother’s attitude always focuses in on what they didn’t get and what they deserve. You know, an interesting observation of Jesus’s command to ***“love your neighbor as yourself”*** can be reversed in this situation by saying ***“hate your neighbor as you hate yourself.”***

Can I just say that love is not always convenient. It tests the bounds of our sanity sometimes. Ultimately the problem isn’t with someone else, it’s with ourselves. We can’t love deeply from our cores when we hate our core at the same time. It makes vulnerability and intimacy seem like a nightmare.

And again I wanna make it clear, I am not trying to demonize this elder brother because remember, this Elder brother is me, this elder brother

is you. The elder brother most likely feels betrayed and abandoned by his younger brother and if that's not enough he probably feels used and unappreciated by his dad. I think he expresses that when he says to his father, ***"All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders."***

I am also sure this elder brother can't figure out how his dad could so easily forgive his younger brother and restore him back into the family.

So instead of following his dad's example and joining in on the celebration, he chooses to lash out by saying things like, ***"All these years I have been slaving for you", "you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends."***

Miss placed anger always finds someone else to blame. Let's get more specific, **how has your own unaddressed anger been projected onto those around you?**

In the story of the prodigal son forgiveness is easy to pick out but yet there is nothing easy about it. But here's the thing, forgiveness is not forgetting or neglecting what we feel but being willing to courageously address whatever is there. I read in a devotional once that ***"forgiveness has a heartbeat, it's not something we do in our head."***

Jesus laid a clear foundation on how believers are to respond toward forgiveness and ***Mathew 6:14-15 "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your father will not forgive your sins."***

The real reason that we honor our true feelings is that when we own our hurt we can begin to feel our underlying grief, and as we grieve we learn to surrender. So here is where it starts getting good.

I believe that surrender and forgiveness are nearly interchangeable terms and both involve a process. **Forgiveness is the product of surrender!**

Look, it's easy to think that the elder brother should have just got over himself, forgiven his brother and joined the party, and maybe he did, we don't know the end of the story.

So let me get personal, when I think about my own superhero ability to hold and maintain a grudge I don't know if I would have been able to celebrate my younger idiot brother returning. Would you have forgiven so quickly? Maybe you were more in touch with God's mercy than I am.

Whatever you do with forgiveness, it's important to look closely and reflect honestly on your relationship with it and here's why, because **God has called us to a radical form of forgiveness through the example of his son Jesus. *Colossians 2:13-15 says, "When you were dead in your sins and in the circumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us, he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross."*** Jesus' forgiveness of us cost him his very life and for us the call is no different. We must forgive!

Ephesians 1:7-8 "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding."