Lesson 7A - Older Brother Syndrome

Older Brother

Many Christians in the church have a tendency to act more like the older son:

- They are the loyal, hard-working, dutiful workers serving wherever they see a need.
- They appear to be the good members of the church, but in their hearts there may be competition, self-righteousness, resentment, pride and much more.
- Their sin is against love and misrepresenting the Father's heart. They fail to see others through love.
- We will often drift and insist on being right rather than wanting a relationship with others if we are not rooted and grounded in love.
- Obedience may flow out of fear or a desire for personal gain rather than a heart full of love. We can serve God out of a sense of obligation, or by performing and striving to earn love.
- They think Father God's love is in proportion to the hours they have spent reading the Bible, time in prayer, soul-winning, and other ministry.
- They are slaving for the Lord in their own strength rather than receiving His strength to fulfill their vision. We can keep pouring out until we burn out if we fail to receive His love.

Differences between the Younger Brother and the Older Brother

Younger	Older
1. Sins of the flesh – spirit of the world	Sins of heart or disposition – spirit of religion
2. A slave to sin	A slave to law
3. In humility, admitted his sin	In self-righteousness, justifies his actions
4. Values relationship	Values being right
5. Freely received Father's love	Worked to earn Father's love
6. Experiences coming home and resting at home in Father's unconditional love	Only sees himself as a slave in his Father's fields, serving out of obedience
7. Restored to being a son of the Father	Works as a servant in his Father's house
8. Can bring others to a loving Father	Can only bring others to a hard taskmaster

The greatest sin is misrepresenting the Father's love to another person.

- If we major in Truth and minor in love and compassion, our focus becomes one of service, duty, and discipline. We end up acting more like a servant than a son. "Servants can only bring others to a master. Sons bring others home to a loving Father." (The Homecoming, Jack Winter)
- Father God may set us free of the sins of the flesh, but we must always be on our guard not to drift into the older brother's sins of the heart attitude.
- Anything that is not rooted and grounded in love will eventually drift.
- Father God does not want us to be a slave to sin nor a slave to law, but a slave to love. (2 Cor. 5:14-15)
- What we leave behind should be love, not pride. Do you want to walk in your strength or God's strength?
- Everyday we must ask Holy Spirit to show us when we are starting to drift from Father's heart of love.

Concepts from Jack Frost Experiencing the Father's Embrace and Henry Nouwen Return of the Prodigal Son
Written and compiled by Rick and Sue McCoy, Abba's Arms International, Inc., PO Box 1396 State College PA 16804-1396 2009

Symptoms of the Older Brother

1. **Emotional and spiritual distance between him and his Father** due to his negative attitude and judgmentalism.
   - ✓ Distance from God's love **leads to legalism and law.**
   - ✓ Distance from God leads to **feelings of insecurity**. We cannot have intimacy or feel secure with others until we feel good about ourselves.
   - ✓ Only unconditional acceptance and love of the Father gives us true value and self-worth.
   - ✓ Lose touch with their family and the heart of the Father.

2. **Aggressive striving and hyper-religious activity** becomes a way of life trying to earn Father's blessing. It becomes a heavy burden if we think that we **have to do** to be loved.
   - ✓ We can attempt to earn God's love through religious activity, works, duty, and discipline.
   - ✓ We can get caught up in busyness and may give up trying.
   - ✓ We can **perform for acceptance and love.** You may have been "good" for the wrong reasons and obey out of fear of rejection or fear of failure.
   - ✓ Our hard work may be out of **wrong heart motives**. Are the "good" things you do from a "striving for acceptance or a "resting place knowing you are accepted?
   - ✓ **Love is a gift, not a reward for service**. Is your "doing" based on being loved or trying to find love?
   - ✓ The more we try to earn acceptance through striving, the more of an angry edge we get towards others who do not agree with our ways or thinking.
   - ✓ When the task, mission or project becomes all important so we look good, it will lead to misrepresenting love to the body of Christ.

3. **Sibling rivalry and competing** for acceptance and love can increase. When this person is among his peers, he is **quick to compare**. He develops an "us-verses-them" mentality.
   - ✓ "I" must be better than others to receive Father's love.
   - ✓ This person gets upset if someone gets credit or recognition and "I" do not.
   - ✓ **Spiritual ambition is big.** He is willing to strive so he can be seen and counted among the mature.
   - ✓ They often value relationships more for what that person can do for them. This moves them into a lust to get their from a person rather than receiving Father's love.
   - ✓ If a person is looking for attention, affirmation, and acceptance from others, they may relate to others by manipulating, becoming jealous, envious, or devaluing them.
   - ✓ Unloving attitudes of those in the church have caused many people not to come home to Father's house.

4. **Feels he is not favored, which leads to resentment.** We can feel we are not honored or blessed if we are not the center of attention.
   - ✓ **It results in envy.** Feelings of ill-will toward those in the same line of work increases. We feel the need to earn a reward to be accepted or important in life.
   - ✓ He fails to rejoice or grieve over others' situations. This person cannot rejoice when someone else is honored. If another person falls, he feels they got what they deserved.

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- ✓ Unconscious anger at not feeling valued or loved can lead to a lifestyle of resentments because we feel **life has not been fair**.

5. **Resentment leads to a critical and judgmental attitude.** This person begins to see the worst in people and does not
treat them like the father. (**Luke 15:20-24**)

- ✓ He is quick to be critical of others, pointing out where they fall short. He has no empathy or forgiveness for them either. It is an unconscious way to elevate self. "See how good I am."
- ✓ He stays in a critical attitude towards people and he feels like others are more blessed than he is. He has an "It is not fair" attitude!
- ✓ He may also judge himself harshly if he has not achieved what he believed that he must to merit a place in Father's heart.
- ✓ If others do not do it right, they feel demeaned or devalued by you. We value people by performance!
- ✓ Wherever we judge others the same judgment will come back to us. (**Luke 6:36-37**) A root of bitterness grows in his heart.
- ✓ Childhood resentment and aggressive striving equals an angry edge to our ministry and service at home with our family, at church, or at the office.

6. Finally this person puts on **a cloak of defensiveness**, as he feels guilt when he comes up short. The **need to be <u>right</u>**
is more important than relationships.

- ✓ They demand perfection and are judgmental when someone is not perfect.
- ✓ This person cannot handle others pointing out their shortcomings and will deny them or give excuses.

Father's Response to His Older Son:

The older brother had been working hard in God's fields, but he had not "come home" to the Father either.

- ✓ The Father left his home, the party and his guests to entreat the older son to come home. (Luke 15:28)
- ✓ He did not lecture him nor plead with him.
- ✓ The Father remained loving and gentle despite the son's anger and resentment towards him and his younger brother.
- ✓ The Father left the door open for his older son to come to the party and to come home.
- ✓ How far from Father's house do you live on a daily basis? Father God has left the door open, inviting each of us to come home no matter what we have done or not done!

Lesson 7B - Performance Orientation

We may all find some patterns of performance in our lives, but before we go over them, let us look at the truth: **Ephesians 1:3-6 "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be **holy and without blame before Him in love,** having predestined us to **adoption as sons** by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which **He made us accepted** in the Beloved."

Symptoms or Indicators of Performance Orientation

- It is striving by human effort in our flesh rather than resting on the finished work of salvation that Jesus purchased. We are held captive by the lie of earning love by performing. We have not believed the truth of the Gospel that we are loved and accepted.
- It is a way of living your life where you figure out what people want you to be and that's what you become.
- You are so busy being who everyone else expects you to be that you never really know who you are.
- You require constant affirmation. Your acts of service need to be acknowledged and appreciation expressed. There is no resting place for the people around you.
- There is only anxiety, fear, and striving, no rest. There is a vague fear of never knowing how much is enough or if you "did it right."
- Your value is based on doing everything right. Criticism is not handled well. Correction is a disaster because that means you didn't get it right and have no value. Your parents may have demanded upright behavior without affection. The message was you won't be loved unless you deserve it.
- As young children we are told what we actually are is unacceptable such as "I can't love you when you act like that." "You did good. Mommy loves you." (when potty training) Or we get the hidden message as parents tried to encourage us to do right: "If I don't do right, look right, have the right clothes, address, etc… I won't be loved."
- New situations have intolerable stress levels as you try to find out what is expected. Knowing the rules beforehand is much better.
- There is an overall fear of trying new things.
- All of life becomes a struggle to be acceptable or accepted.
- There is a strong need for the approval of the group. When others are doing wrong, you follow the crowd even though you know what is right. You want to please others.
- There may be several wrong motives that need to die: earning brownie points, fear of punishment, earn Father's love, duty, fears, threats
- You dole out affection on the performance of others. Love is not given when not deserved such as no sex, the cold shoulder, or silent treatment. Each is used to drive the other to what we want.
- They may crack if they are thrown into too much pressure. Their inner self feels angry and may blow their role of being the good guy as they explode like a powder keg.
- There is a "false belief that I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself." (From Robert S. Magee's book Search for Significance where he defines the performance trap as one of four key issues.) This leads to a drive to succeed, perfectionism, and withdrawal from healthy risks. God's solution is His justification, which comes through God's forgiveness of my sins and granting me Christ's righteousness.

Freedom for the Older Brother and Performance Orientation

1. **Move towards love and Father's house.** How far from Father's house do you dwell?
   - We all have a little of the older brother in us. We need to acknowledge our need for more revelation of Father's love to fill our soul where we have not been at home with love!
   - A homecoming is an emotional experience. We can not devalue emotions like compassion, love, and intimacy, preferring truth and law.
   - If we fight against coming home, we may have one crisis after another. Crisis depletes us of self-sufficiency, strength and self-confidence. Father embraces the weak and needy. **(1 Cor. 12:9-10, 1 Pet. 5:5-7)**
   - Father reaches out and invites older sons to a time of refreshing, refocusing of vision, and the restoration of relationship. He desires a heart relationship with each of as sons or daughters. He does not judge you. (**John 5:22**)

2. **Mov**e **to repentance. Repentance** means **a change of heart** so deep it **changes our core values and behavior.**
   - Ask God to dismantle the structures that support false ways of thinking. Ask Jesus to bring wrong motives to death and give you peace and rest in Him.
   - Ask the Lord to reveal older brother and performance orientation patterns, wrong motives, and sins. Then you need to confess your sins such as pride, jealousy, aggressive striving, self-righteousness, rivalry, resentments, envy, criticism, etc.
   - Ask the Lord to also expose and pray for the hidden resentments that stem from feeling that their parents did not give the kind of love which could have helped them find their true identity and security. Confess the things the Holy Spirit has revealed and receive forgiveness.
   - Renounce aloud the whole pattern of performance, seeing performance as the sin it is against accepting His love and grace. Recognize your sinfulness and need for a Savior.
   - Ask the Lord to reveal any ways you have felt there were benefits to walking as an older brother or in performance. (Being top dog, getting even by keeping your cool while the other looses his temper…)

3. **Ask for and receive forgiveness for believing the lie that "I must work to gain Father God's love and acceptance."**
   - The older brother syndrome begins in childhood when we see more laws and rules of religion than love.
   - Ask Father to break through with the power of His love for you. Ask Jesus to speak truth to your heart. Then live in that truth daily.
   - Ask Father to reveal His total acceptance of you and give you His rest and peace. His unconditional love must be experienced on a level that brings healing to the childhood hurt and anger of not feeling unconditionally loved.
   - Ask Holy Spirit to heal your heart, help you renew your mind to what God says and transform your character.

4. **Ask the Lord to show you how you have hurt others around you and feel the pain and heartbreak you have caused.**
   - Go to the people you have hurt and seek their forgiveness for each way you devalued them and misrepresented Father's love to them...
   - Begin to work at restoring relationships with your family and others.

5. **Practice humility everyday by seeing Father God with open arms to receive you**.
   - Expect to experience and receive His warm embrace, unconditional love, affirmation and affection.
   - Don't focus on "What should I do?" Learn to rest in Father's love and relax more, not taking things so seriously.
   - My responsibility is my ability to respond to what He is doing.
   - True Christianity should be where we behold the Lord and who He is and this transforms us and our personality and character. As we become like Him, then we take Him to the world!