

The 'Ups' and 'Downs' of Sacrificial Service

28 "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. 29 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 could celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!'- Luke 15:28-30.

1. Talk To Your Father

The older son was angry for the reasons stated above. He felt "cheated" because he had been working faithfully for his father and was not rewarded for his sacrificial service. However, his younger brother only caused his family pain and grief with his sinful lifestyle, not to mention that he never worked and contributed anything to the household. Yet upon his return, his father killed the best calf and made merry. This would make anyone upset. Instead of being judgmental in respect of the older son, I would like to highlight some positive points that came out of his discussion with his father.

- (a) **He was Honest.** Yes, quite understandably, he was angry. But he was brutally honest with his father. Sometimes, people may do things to hurt us, and instead of being honest about how we feel we pretend that everything is OK. Although he did not confront his younger brother, he said what was on his mind to his father. Keeping the hurts to ourselves that others inflict us will only open doors to the spirits of anger, non-forgiveness and even murder!
- (b) **Talk It Out.** This is related to the first point. It is important that we say out what is our minds, instead of keeping everything 'pent up' inside. The older son spoke to his father.

Even though there may be no one with whom we can speak, we can always talk to our Heavenly Father about the situation. The important thing is that we 'talk it out' and not 'fight it out!' or feel resentment and bitterness towards the wrongdoer.

The Bible gives us this advice:

⁵ "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." – Matthew 18:15.

The Bible also teaches that if we refuse to forgive a brother or sister, then God cannot forgive us and neither will our gifts be accepted by God.

"If therefore you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." – Matthew 5:23-24.

I believe that a big part of the problem with domestic violence and violence as a whole, is that most people don't say when someone has done something to hurt them. These feelings are kept bottled up inside until one's feelings reach 'breaking point,' and in a 'fit of rage' the offender lashes out at the other person. This anger can lead to very tragic outcomes. This is the next point.

- (c) **Don't Wait Until You Become Angry.** I will repeat this because it is important. If you are offended by what someone may have said or done to you, don't keep this to yourself. You should speak to the person who offended you. As seen, it is possible that anger will cause us to say and do things that we will only later regret.

The example of Cain and Abel comes to mind. Cain was upset because God had accepted Abel's sacrifice and not his. He became angry, and instead of 'talking it out' with someone (or even God), he allowed the spirits of anger and murder torment him and he killed his brother in a senseless act of rage.

"Then Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9And the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I do not know!" he answered. "Am I my brother's keeper?"..." – Genesis 4:8

As sin enters, note how it evolves into other sins. First Cain allowed the spirit of anger to enter his heart, then it was accompanied by the spirit of murder, and now a lying spirit was at work in him.

- (d) **He Took A Stand.** The positive point here is that, although the older son did not understand fully the significance of what was happening, he was not afraid to 'take a stand' for what he believed was 'injustice.' Yes, I agree that his behaviour may have been as a result of him being angry, but the positive point is that sometimes we will have to 'stand up' for what we believe is the correct thing and do not do as the crowd (or world) does. I admit that this may be a far-fetched point in respect of the older brother's behaviour but I believe it is worth mentioning to someone who may need to hear it. Roman 12:2 reminds us, "Do not conform to this world."

2. The I-s in Sacrifice

Having stated some of the positive points from the older son's behaviour, let's identify some other key issues, and see if we can learn from his short-comings. Because the older son was angry and hurting, he recalled all the things that he faithfully did in service to his father:

"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 could celebrate with my friends." – Luke 15:29.

(a) **The Standard – Faithful, Obedient Service.** The older son stated what is expected from us as we work for God. We need to be faithful concerning the use of the gifts and talents that God has bestowed upon us, and in respect of the ministry in which God has placed us. Be obedient. Answer the call that God has placed upon your life, and enter into faithful service unto God.

(b) **Beware of the Spirit of Pride.** This is one of the seven things that the Bible say that God **hates**.

“The LORD detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.” – Proverbs 16:5

Pride shows its ugly face and always takes to focus away from God. Pride exalts the person and never gives glory unto God and His Son Jesus. It always boast about what we have done for God, and not what God has done for us. It is possible that the spirit of pride may have enter the older son’s heart, as he stated his achievements over the years. He was focussing on what he had done for the father, instead of what the father did for him.

It is a sin that will be punished. It happened to Lucifer in heaven who felt that he should be praised instead of giving glory unto God. He was cast out of heaven and great was his fall. After pride comes a great fall. Proverbs 16:18 reminds us of this:

“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

(c) **Overlooked and Unrewarded.** The older son made the point quite clearly:

*“ 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 could celebrate with my friends.” - Luke 15:29.*

He felt as though his service to the father went unnoticed and unappreciated because he was never once rewarded for his faithful and obedient service, not even with a young goat. The New International Version above used the term ‘slaving.’ However, this is how the New King James Version translates this account:

*“²⁹ So he answered and said to his father, ‘Lo, these many years I have been **servng** you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends.’”*

Irrespective of the translation, the older son felt that his service went unrecognized by the father, and therefore he felt unappreciated. We should not compare ourselves with others who may be rewarded and appreciated. The need to feel appreciated by others should never be the main motivator for service unto God. I honestly believe that if others appreciate the work that you do and decide to bless you, then thank God for that. However, if they don’t seem to give any tangible appreciation, like the father in the story, this should never deter us from serving God with much passion and great joy. God is our Rewarder in Heaven.

Back in biblical times when there were slaves in Christian household, the Bible offers this advice, which is timely for us in this discussion:

*“Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not only to please them while they are watching, but with **sincerity of heart** and **fear of the Lord**. Whatever you do, **work at it with your whole being, for the Lord and not for men**, because you know that **you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as your reward**. It is **the Lord Christ you are serving**....” - Colossians 3:23.*

We should work wholeheartedly with sincerity of heart and with reverence for the Lord. For what we do is service unto Jesus and not unto man. The Lord will reward us for our faithful and obedient service unto Him.

3. Serve Without ‘Hidden Agendas’

The older brother was making the point that his father had killed the best calf to celebrate his prodigal son’s return, yet he never received anything – not even a young goat’ - for his many years of obedient service to the father. It is only human, in that situation, to react as the older son reacted. Yet his statement says a lot from which we – who work in service unto God – can learn.

We need to determine why we do what we do for God. If you have a role in Church, or you are involved in ministry, we need to seriously ask ourselves, “Why am I doing this?” There are really two answers: Either I am doing this to give honour and glory unto God and His Son Jesus; or I am doing this for “self” glory. Self glory would include whatever ‘hidden agendas’ (with respect to gaining position, power, money etc.) one may have for getting involved in ministry (service unto God).

4. A Servant Must Be Compassionate and Ready to Forgiveness

The older son was angry. He was quick to recall the past sins of his younger brother, and he lacked compassion for him. When someone has done us wrong, and that person truly repents we need to be filled with a heart of compassion, instead of recalling their past wrongdoings, as the older brother did:

” 30 But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!” - Luke 15:29-30”

Perhaps he did not believe that the younger brother had truly repented of his sins. But this is not for us to decide. It is for the father to decide, and for us to gently allow the penitent sinner to grow into the fullness that the Heavenly father has for him or her.

Let’s all heed the Word of God:

“I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.”
Isaiah 43:25

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.” - Isaiah 55:7

5. Celebrate With Others When the Lord Blesses Them

The older son refused to go in. He not only had the spirits of anger and perhaps pride at work in his heart, but he was also battling with the spirit of non-forgiveness. He could not understand how the father could have restored his prodigal and delinquent brother, and therefore could not join in the celebrations. As believers, it is not for us to judge other sinners, nor say who are deserving or not deserving of the blessings of God. The older son felt that his brother was undeserving of the blessings from the father.

Instead, we should join in the celebrations and be happy for others whom the Father chooses to bless. In the parable, the father pleaded with the son to come in and join in the celebrations. He recognized the importance of this, and he gave his son an explanation afterwards. Each time a sinner repents, there is a celebration in heaven. Let us not harden our hearts, but join in this celebration. *Let us pray.*

Heavenly Father,

“Thank You for Your love and mercy towards me. Forgive me as I forgive those who have hurt me or my family. I release them, so that they may be fully restored as they seek to fulfil Your divine plans for their lives. I join in the heavenly celebrations for every penitent sinner who has truly repented of his sins. O Lord, help me also to talk out my problems instead of keeping everything ‘bottled up’ inside of me. I give no room for the spirit of anger, non-forgiveness and bitterness. Lord, even in my sacrificial service unto You, I guard against the spirit of pride, and I recognize that my service is unto You, and not unto man. I don’t look towards man to feel appreciated for the things that I do for the kingdom of God, for I know that You are my Rewarder. I serve without hidden agendas with joyful passion. I pray for Your grace and anointing as I continue my service unto You. In Jesus’ mighty name I pray with thanksgiving. Amen.”

Memory Verse:

“Whatever you do, work at it with your whole being, for the Lord and not for men”- Colossians 3:23