

ON THE WAY HOME

There was a late night, long distance phone call.

Following the “I accept the charge,” comes a muffled, small voice, “Father,..... I’m in trouble. I got a little greedy..... and..... wasn’t thinking clearly,..... well..... I’m in prison..... in Egypt,..... can you get me out?”

After a moment of heavy silence, comes the answer, “YES, but it won’t be easy.” “I have a good friend who lives there. I’ll make arrangements, but you must do what he says, and he will lead you to home and freedom. This whole thing won’t be cheap or easy, either.

I’ll be in close contact with you all the time, so keep your spirits up.”

The father makes a few phone calls, and then sits back and ponders:

How did he drift so far away? How did we get to this place?

He made some mistakes when he was young, but even so, we had a good relationship. There was trust and honesty.... What happened?

There was more reflection:

I find it difficult to watch my children lose their innocence.

I remember him telling me that he was going out to chase his dreams.... and he said to me, “Finally, things will become good.” He didn’t listen, when I told him, “Life is not about chasing a dream. Life doesn’t get better in other pastures; real living is simply making the best of what is... NOW.”

And, then there was a deep....Sigh.....

The guide, that was sent by the father, got the son free and lead him away from Egypt. They were harassed, at times, as they fled out into the wilderness to escape / to head for home.

The father was in frequent cell phone contact with his son and the guide.

However, more and more, during conversations, the son found something to complain about.

It seemed that being free and on his way home wasn’t enough.

He complained about the food and that he couldn’t recharge his Ipod.

Apparently, he hadn’t learned much about what is important in life, and his father knew that.

At one point, the sons protested furiously that the trip home was taking far longer than it should.

The relationship between the father and son was getting worse, and not better.

The father confessed that he was concerned about his son, and thought this experience of learning trust and “doing without” would be beneficial for him, and,, that this time... “along the way” could build a stronger relationship between the two of them, even though they were relying on cell phone conversations and messages passed on through the guide.

The father even told the son that it was bad choices, while in Egypt, that got him in trouble in the first place, and that he needed to acquire some humility, healthy wisdom, and the ability to love and trust in a relationship.

The son balked at the accusations, and he suggested that he could easily find another father who would take better care of him – **by leaving him alone!**

Finally, the son screamed out, “Well tell me what you want from me?”

The father calmly responded, “To know you, to be trusted and to be loved as I love you.”

“Yes, YES,” the son tersely retorted, “But, what does that look like. Tell me exactly what I **should do** and **CAN’T** do, and then I’ll know what it takes to make you *happy with me*,..... and the son then mumbled,..to keep you satisfied and out of my hair.”

Again the Father sighed, and said..... “Life is not about obeying rules, but if it will help, I’ll give you..... two. **You shall LOVE**...., and before he could finish, the son interrupted, “Ya, Ya,..... I know those two: Love you and love your neighbour,..... ya dee dah dee dah, but I’m looking for more details. **I need details.**”

Once more the Father sighed, and repeated, “Life is NOT about following the rules, but your weary me, and so I’ll give you TEN Basic Rules.”

I hope these rules will help you, because your lust and greed have made a real mess of your life and everyone’s life around you.

And, please understand, these rules are between me and you, So don’t go and post them in courthouses or in schools. Most of these rules are commonly accepted, anyways,..... **except the first four**, and those four are personal– between you and me. They are not for everyone. So,..... here they are:

I’m God, the only God. There are not any others, people just call me different names. But, there is only one God, and it’s me, and you can’t really make any others, even if you try, so don’t bother trying. Those are the first two rules.

The third is also about our relationship, which is:

don’t call on me unless you mean it. I listen, but my time is important, so don’t waste my time.

Call me, when you need me, and I’ll be there!

These first three are for US, so we can have a good and honest relationship.

The next commandment is for you: Take one day off a week, remembering to spend time with me, to rest, and ... to re-create! Recreate / re-create..... is good stuff, life starts with creation and continues with creation, so keep doing it.

The others are common knowledge, but apparently not so common with your knowledge, so..... here they are:

Honour those who've taught you about me. This rule is for adult children, “Take care of your elderly parents!”

Don't take someone's life, and don't take someone's partner, either.

Don't take someone's dignity by falsehood or by being deceptive.

Don't take someone's stuff and don't even want to take someone's stuff. Greed will eat you up, and it will lead to financial crisis for everyone, too..... so, Just Don't be greedy! **Be content with what you have.**

I think that's 10. That's enough. It's more than enough..... If you'd learn to love, then you won't need the rules,.... but maybe they will help you see how far off you are. Good luck.

The guide was entrusted to write the 10 rules down for the son, but by then,..... the son had drifted off into his own self centred activities.... of .. Taking Life into his own hands.

Eventually, the son received the 10 commandments,.... in fact.... he spent a lot of time interpreting them and adding to them.

However, the commandments didn't seem to have the desired effect. The relationship between the two remained a struggle, and so the story goes.

Obviously, the father in this story is God and the son represents God's children–humanity in a narrative with God.

Years and years went by, and through out those years, God kept trying to be in a close loving relationship with people.

Phone messages were left, emails sent ... and the prophets delivered hard copies, too, but about all God was getting in return was an annual Christmas card that said, “WE miss you and love you, wish you were here, and.... we're working real hard at following all those rules for you. Please send money or a Messiah.”

So, I suppose in frustration..... and... maybe because God was a little lonely, But mostly because God really does love and care for people,... God decided to visit God's creation in a very direct manner – as a human.

I think God was a little curious to see what it was like to be IN creation.

Although, we are lead to believe that God's motives were more altruistic than that.

Nevertheless, Jesus entered the world in a very special way, with a very special purpose – to turn things around, and to show us all how to finish the journey back home – back to love.

Jesus lived and taught how to be in relationship with God, with each other and God's creation. In other words, Jesus showed people how to live and be – We sometimes call that process “being saved”.

Jesus had many wonderful success stories and experiences; however, he had the most difficulty with those who were religious.

The decedents of the captives in Egypt who Moses lead to freedom were the ones who were challenging Jesus, and who wanted to end Jesus' ministry. The Jewish leaders were resistant to Jesus' way and message, and they were the RULE keepers and followers. They loved the rules.

But, as you know, rules are generally not warm and conducive to building a trusting and loving relationship. Rules can reveal poor judgment and help modify behaviour, but they do little to encourage intrinsic motivation, trust, grace and love.

Laws can not keep RCMP officers safe, nor can they ensure the police officers won't be bullies.

And, Rules will NOT make for a wholesome and satisfying marriage. We don't fall in love with rules, and we don't live for rules..... **unless**....fear and selfishness are in control. Rules thrive during times of tyranny, greed and fear.

We **do need** rules to help clear up the fog of confusion **and when there is an absence of love...** [] So, why do we associate rules with religion, if Religion is about love and being in a relationship with God?

Yet, we do associate rules with religion, and **that** insanity is what Paul reveals in the I Corinthians passage.

Being obedient to the regulations and expectations,... and putting the pieces together into a logical, simple theology is what Paul calls "The Wisdom of the world." And, Paul called that wisdom "foolishness."

For example, Genesis one presents a story about God's interaction with creation, including humans, yet some assert that it must be taken literally – that the world was made in six 24 hour days. And, those same people claim by following the genealogy in the Bible, *which is presented to draw us near to God*, that the world is less than 10,000 years old. **That** logic / **that** "wisdom" is totally missing the point and is foolish wisdom.

Rules, such as the 10 commandments are like a compass. They are handy in showing direction, but they will not take us home. A compass won't take us home, it will only help in maintaining a direction. Moreover, chances are we already know that we are in trouble before we turned to a compass for help.

Likewise, our inner sense / our spiritual spark knows when we are heading in the wrong direction. It normally doesn't take some law or rule to tell us that we are off track.

And,..... all this talk about rules, laws and regulations bring us to the story of Jesus clearing out the Temple!

This incident is troubling for some people. It seems as if Jesus lost his cool / went into a rage and attacked people, but that is not what happened, according to the passage in John.

Moreover, the episode is included in the Bible to teach us that there are times when it is appropriate and necessary to challenge injustices, foolishness and stupidity. Too, often we are silent when faced with compromises that hurt people..... and when we encounter stupid and destructive theology.

In the days of Jesus, the outer court of the Temple was meant to be a welcoming place for all people. It was a place that even the Gentiles could come to worship God. Some people would come to offer a sacrifice to God. Initially, a sacrifice was a gift and a way of experiencing the suffering that comes from making bad choices.

But Sadly, it became easier to think of the sacrifice as a bribe / a way to buy forgiveness– as if to say, “something has to die physically in order for something to live spiritually, and that is foolishness.

Entrepreneurs enticed fearful worshippers to “buy”, on the spot, an animal for their sins / an animal to be sacrificed.

After a while, all kinds of animals were being sold, relevant to one’s guilt. And, other forms of commerce joined in. The Gentile area had become a market place. People could even exchange their hated Roman currency, into Tyrian money..... for a fee.

Marcus Borg suggests that [In his book “The Last Week”] some of the corrupt temple officials were also in collaboration with the Romans by collecting taxing for them.

Stupidity and injustice..... at the place that is suppose to be safe, welcoming for all and reserved for worship was too much for Jesus to tolerate. Jesus appropriately confronted the offences!

Jesus made a whip of cords from what was handy, such as rope or twigs. This whip was not a cruel leather whip that Indiana Jones used. The whip was NOT used on humans, but to chase out the animals. The Greek is very clear about this, saying, “The sheep and the cattle were all together” chased out.

In addition, Jesus acted to end the commerce by turning over tables and so forth, but Jesus did NOT do violence against people. He only used words. Jesus told them to stop what they were doing and to remove their tables and equipment from the temple.

Jesus appropriately and decisively, in a non-violent manner, confronted the injustices and rectified the situation.

To the point/ some lessons:

There are situations for rules / laws, such as for children who are just starting out on their journey. Children need directions. There are situations for rules, but enhancing love in a relationship is not one of them.

Another lesson:

Good and just rules are for positive reasons, and should be respected.

And, unjust practices and bad rules need to be confronted in an appropriate fashion, and this includes confronting bad and destructive theology.

And finally, there is NO manual on how to fall in love, how to do a successful marriage..... or any relationship for that matter.

There is no rule book or legal book that will tell us how to be happy and fulfilled in life. Being obedient to the laws will likely keep us out of trouble, but submission will not relieve the pain or heal a broken heart.

Our hope is to be on a journey away from captivity, on a journey to wholeness, to freedom to a place of love and trust with God.... a place that we envision feels like the..... ideal home – a place of peace.

We are at different stages on this journey, and that is okay. Some of us are reaching for a compass,.... while others are reaching for a helping hand,..... while others are being that helping hand,..... and that is okay, too.

Just keep going..... and each day, make a little more room for God,... and I think you'll discover all those commandments seem to fall into place without much thought..... and so will life.

This is just a lesson learned along the way.