

Pa232 Counseling

Lesson Pa232-15 Temptation: Wild Living

Inheritance rights vary from culture to culture. Sometimes, when a man dies, his wife inherits everything. Sometimes the wife and daughters are left out and only the eldest son inherits the wealth. Today's lesson concerns a father and his two sons. In their particular culture, the father's possessions would have been divided into three parts, with two parts going to the older son and one part to the younger.

The younger son decided to ask his father for his share of the inheritance. That was the same as saying, "I wish you were dead; give me my inheritance now. I want to spend it my own way." So the father sadly gave him the money, and he went off to the city to spend it. This story is found in the Bible, in the Gospel according to Luke. It was told as a parable by Jesus, some 2000 years ago.

Looking at Jesus' story, ask yourself if you have added any assumptions of your own? The parable was the third story Jesus was telling that day. He told of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and finally, the lost son. He said, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living" (Luke 15:11-13).

So the younger of the father's two sons asked for his inheritance. The son did not steal or ask for anything that was not going to be his. The story did not say why he was asking for it nor if the father objected to the request. It did not say he stole from his father or older brother. It does tell us that after he received his inheritance, he stayed only a while. Soon he left his father and older brother. It doesn't say if the older brother heard the conversation between the father and his son, or if he was told of it later. We understand that the younger son felt he could make it on his own, now that he had his inheritance. But, it appears from the story that he had little experience with handling money in a wise way. *What do you think?*

The parable does not say if there was trouble in the home between the father and his sons. It did not say whether or not it would be a financial hardship if the younger son took his share of the inheritance from the family. Little is said about why the older son was angry about his brother leaving, and later returning. We can only guess why, but we really do not know.

We do know what the son did. After he had spent his money, he was eating food served to pigs. He "came to his senses" and decided to go home and ask to be one of his father's servants. The Scripture says, "While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him." He rejoiced, "This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." Let's have a party! The parable does tell us how the older brother reacted to the joy his father showed when the younger son returned. He became angry and would not join in the celebration.

This parable has many sides to the story—as do most stories. There is the view of the younger son asking for his inheritance and what he did with it. There is the older son’s loyalty and service to his father and his refusal to celebrate his brother’s return. Then, one must consider the joy and relief the waiting father experienced when he saw his younger son coming home.

As a counselor, you will face problems in people’s lives that have more than one viewpoint. The problem could be harming or helping more than just the one person seeking your counsel. It is easy to listen and form an opinion based on the facts presented to you. But if you decide without *all* the facts, you may be prejudiced toward one side, while ignoring the other. ‘Prejudice’ refers to pre-judging with limited information.

We hear many times from people in stressful situations. “Let me tell you what my horrible wife has done!” Or, “Come and see what a mess my brother has made of our business!” Or maybe, “I have ruined my life and am not worthy of the grace of God!” There can be many points of view on the same subject. As a counselor, you must be careful not to form an opinion too quickly. Ask questions. Try not to advise a quick solution without prayer and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

If all three characters in this story had come to you at different times, to seek your advice, what would you have said? The younger son saw no evil in asking for what would someday be his own. The father could ask you what he should do, knowing his younger son was going out into the world unprepared for reality. And the older brother could ask your counsel as to why his father seemed to favor his younger brother. If all three of the members of this family should approach you, you would hear three different versions of the same story. Each would tell you what needed to be done, while at the same time asking your counsel. They would each insist how noble and honest they were in trying to resolve the situation. Each might feel frustrated by the attitudes of the other persons involved.

Often it is easy to listen to a situation and make a judgment, when you hear only one side of the story. In life, there is rarely only one side to a situation. If you do not hear the other side of the story, you can become prejudiced and blind to the faults of the side you have heard. In counseling, this is called, “counsel without prejudice.” It means you should allow yourself to hear as many sides of a story as possible. Decisions should not be based on a person’s age, skin color, national origin, or gender—or without all the facts. Go to prayer for guidance and direction for a solution from the Holy Spirit. And if you can hear only one side, you must rely even more on the Spirit of God to give you sound judgment.

Most writers who comment on this parable title it “The Prodigal Son.” Jesus simply referred to him as the son who was lost. The word ‘prodigal’ means ‘a wasteful, self-serving person.’ It is not used in this story nor any other story in the Bible. It describes the behavior of one person in the parable. To judge a situation by the behavior of one person can cause someone to counsel with prejudice. A one-sided view of a problem is often slanted in one person’s favor. Save your judgment, advice, or instruction until you have heard all the information and sought the Holy Spirit to give *you* wise counsel.

Christian counselors should not accuse, or judge, or take revenge. The mission of counseling in furthering the gospel is pointing people to the mercy and forgiveness they can find

in Christ. He loves the fathers and mothers, younger and older children, boys and girls. He died to save them and will forgive all who come in repentance to him. The context of Jesus' parable was three things that had been lost—a sheep, a coin, and a son. His point was that God the Father wants lost men and women to be found.

This lesson is **important** because it shows us a counseling principle that will help avoid prejudice. Since there is always more than one side to a story, a counselor must try to get all the facts. Then seek the Holy Spirit for wisdom and direction for the situation.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that the goal of Spirit-directed counseling is to help people realize that God can forgive sin, heal what others may have done to hurt them, and redeem even a person's mistakes.

Review questions:

1. What is the meaning of 'prejudice'? [Pause]
A. If you answered that prejudice it is making a judgment with only one view of the situation, without all the facts, you are right.
2. What kind of counseling is needed in situations with several people involved? [Pause]
A. If you said, "Counseling without prejudice is needed when several people or sides are involved," you answered correctly.
3. What is the mission of the gospel and counseling? [Pause]
A. If you said, "The mission of counseling is for the person to find mercy, forgiveness, and redemption in Christ," you are correct.

Your **assignment** is to listen to this story several times until you can tell it from three different viewpoints—the view of the father, the view of the elder brother, and the view of the lost son. Ask God to help you to be a wise counselor and leader, always open to hearing all sides of a situation with compassion.