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It was a sad moment this week as we finished our final G. God is gracious so we don't have to prove ourselves.

We spent time in Luke 15 (v1-2 and 11 end) analysing the words of the older brother as he shames the Father, unwilling to celebrate at the party, upon the return of his younger brother.

We noted that the older brother character, playing the part of the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law, has a bad case of 'olderbrotheritis'. We highlighted 5 key symptoms:

1. Anger.

Older brothers are frequently angry because they feel that they and their efforts are taken for granted. In the account from Luke 15, he is angry that his undeserving brother is being celebrated. In an older brother framework you have to earn it - those who don't seem to earn it are recipients of their anger.

2. Slavery.

Joyless dutiful obedience often characterises older brothers. He has 'slaved' in the fields, ticking boxes, working hard, keeping his nose clean. Hard work is in itself not wrong, but rather than loving devotion it's morphed into labour and duty. His identity has changed.

3. Judgmental

In a framework where duty and slavery are key, the actions of others will be very important. They set the context. Thus the older brother seems to highlight and even exaggerate the sins of the younger (language of prostituted etc) but also blaming the Father (your son!). As is typical, he makes himself sound better by making others look worse.

Which leads to

4. No assurance

Life is wobbly for older brothers because their wellbeing depends on the performance of others. He seems to lack assurance in the account (*we never even had a goat...*) in his relationship with his father.

5. No forgiveness

In a world where love and favour is earned - forgiveness does not come naturally. The older brother does not celebrate the 'resurrection' of his sibling, but rather resents it. For the follower of Jesus who has been forgiven, so we are people who must seek to forgive. There is something peculiarly Christian about forgiveness.

We noted 2 concluding thoughts as we finished

1. He had forgotten his identity as a son. If we suffer from 'olderbrotheritis' our first movement towards a cure is to consider who we are in Christ and who our Father is. We are not servants but primarily, in Christ, children of our Loving Father.

2. The account is left hanging. Earlier in the passage for the lost coin and the lost sheep someone seeks and then finds. This account is deliberately different and we're meant to notice it. Jesus is the one seeking and he's seeking Pharisees. Will they recognise their lostness and return and come into the party? Clearly some did in NT times (eg Nicodemus or the party of the Pharisees in Acts 15:5).

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As always feel free to use these questions, or do your own...

What, if anything, has struck you most from the 4Gs? In what situations do you forget the character of God? Why? What does that look like?

Does the older brother resonate with you? Which of the 5 symptoms strike a chord? Do you ever feel like a servant?

Where do we begin to find a solutions? How can we better remember our identity?

Why is grace so hard to accept?

Moving on from this series, what things are you still working on?