

# *Never Ending Love*

If you made a movie based on today's story, who would you choose to be the main character? You might want to choose the younger son who was so desperate for independence, who spent everything he had, became destitute and finally went back home. If you chose that son, the movie's theme would be homecoming or repentance.

You might choose the older son who stayed home, worked hard, and obeyed his father, living for duty but with little joy in his heart, and then the theme would be how the faithful can learn to enjoy their lives.

If you choose the father as the main character, then the theme would be forgiveness, patience and unconditional love. I chose the last one, because I believe that Jesus used that parable to tell us what the love of God is truly like.

Are you ready to see the movie, titled "Never-Ending Love"?

The movie opens with a scene of a big farm where many workers work hard with joy and singing; everyone looks happy – even the goats, lambs and calves look happy as they graze in the green fields. It's a peaceful farm, but there's a secret, a dark cloud in those green fields.

Does anyone one know the pain and longing deep inside the farmer's heart? He is often found gazing into the distance, lost in thought. Whenever he sees a distant figure approaching, his heart races as he squints to pick out the tiny figure in the sun-drenched landscape. Is he waiting for someone? Yes, he is waiting for his son, the restless young man who claimed his inheritance and left for a foreign country. The young man may have never looked back, but the father has never stopped looking, hoping, and waiting for the return of his child.

We switch to the older son's point of view. He sees his father's heartbreak, the way he looks out at the road every day, staring hard at each dusty figure that

passes their land. The older son is hurt and angered by his father's waiting. How can his father still be concerned about that reckless and selfish brother?

He remembers the day when his brother asked his father to give him his share of the property. That was a shock - the older son knew what the younger son's request meant. Nobody, especially in the Middle East, would make such a request while their father is still alive; the heirs are to receive their share only at the father's death.

The younger brother not only lacked common sense, he lacked the simple decency to wait and receive his inheritance at the proper time. The older son blames his brother for his father's worries, but sometimes he regrets that he did not refuse his own share when the father divided his property between the two sons. He did not say "no", because he has never disobeyed his father.

Even though they work the land side-by-side, sharing both the hard times and the good, the brother does not feel like he has a true loving bond with his father. He is thankful for not being a rebel, like his brother. He is proud of his loyalty, but he always wonders: Am I not good enough for my father? Is my company not enough for him? If I had been the one to leave, would he be watching the road every day for me? Every day when he wakes up, he thinks, "This is the day when I will truly please my father." Maybe that's why he buries himself in working hard – he buries his own pain and need into the land.

The next scene shows the younger son, who is on the way home. Every step he takes overlaps with his memories of the past few years. He had everything he thought he wanted, and he lost it all. He left home to find a better life, and for the same reason he is now going home. The lessons he has learned were hard but now he knows: it is not how much he owns but how much he is grateful for even small things like a piece of bread that gives him happiness. He has given up on his foolish pride, and is ready for any task. He knows that many people will point their fingers at him, yet he sees no choice but to return home, the only place he can rest.

At the end of the movie, we see the father again, watching the road. A dusty figure appears, struggling along in the mid-day heat. Something – the way the person walks, a ragged scrap of once-bright clothing, tells the father that finally, finally, his long-lost son has found the road home. “While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him.”

That is the end of the movie, followed by Never-Ending Love 2 and 3. Actually you can make your own movie with your imagination. I wonder if the younger son will change his way of life. I wonder if the older son can accept the younger brother, and live in harmony with him. I wonder how the two sons will live together.

The father loves both the older son and the younger son. Both of them are equally important to him, whether they left home or not. The Father has always been there for his children – he knows them both so well. It is the two sons who don’t know their father. The younger son was not sure whether his father forgave him or not, so he said, “I am no longer good enough to be called your son.” But the father didn’t say anything in reply, just welcomed him with a special treat which made the older son think that his father is unfair. So when the older son would not even go into the house, the father came out and begged him to go in saying, “My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.” Here we see a difference again between the father and the two sons.

The father rejoices and celebrates the younger son’s presence, not because the younger son has been changed or has repented, but because the father loves him. Likewise, the father loves the older brother, not because the older son has obeyed his father and worked so hard, but simply because he is a child.

I believe that God rejoices over you and celebrates your presence, not because you have done great things but because you are God’s beloved. What the younger son needed was to accept that his father loved him unconditionally. And what the older son needed was to accept that his father loved his brother as much as God loved him.

Such love was the only thing that could change their lives. And such love is where our ministry starts; God loves you unconditionally *and* God loves others as much as God loves you.

We don't have to think that we are not good enough for God's love – and we don't get to judge whether others are not good enough. Instead, we need to continuously be reminded that we are here together because of God's unconditional love for each one of us.

I started writing my sermon with some questions such as, 'where do we find God's presence during the week and on Sunday?', 'how much do we actually celebrate God's presence?'

But as I was getting into the end of my sermon, those questions changed, 'How much does God rejoice over us?', 'How much does God celebrate our presence?', 'How much does God love everyone in our church, their families and friends?', and finally, 'How do we respond to such love?'

Our church is getting busier with hope and excitement as we head into autumn. The lazy days of summer are over as we prepare for Thanksgiving, Advent and Christmas, along with the programs, Bible studies and various meetings that fill up so much of our time.

Before we get busy, let us give thanks to God for the unconditional love that is given to each one of us. No matter who you are, whether you are more like the younger son or the older son, God sees you and invites you to accept that love which is truly never-ending.