

Exchange Brings Change

When I say the word HOME, what comes to your mind?

Community where you were born? Grew – up? Do you think back to memories of people, places and a simpler time? Isn't it funny how a certain smell or sound can create a powerful memory of home? (Ex. Freshly cut field of grass)

Home seems to have a powerful influence or draw over our lives. It may bring up wonderful memories of a place that you felt fully accepted, unconditionally loved and totally at ease. A place where we don't sense the weight of the world on our shoulders.

Or on the flip side, it may create a deep longing for a place where you will finally feel fully accepted, completely loved and totally understood. Home, for you, may be a place which you have never truly experienced.

At times we try to recreate those feelings of "home", the love, comfort, and joy that we remember so fondly. But typically, our attempts fall well short of our expectations and we are left to deal with our disappointment.

Picture: Cincinnati Home

Why is that? Why are we so restless for home? Why do we seem to be constantly longing and searching for home, yet never seeming to find it?

We can trace our longing for home all the way back to Genesis, a garden, Adam and Eve and God the Father. Mankind was created by God, the Father, to live in the Garden of Eden. He provided everything they needed. It was a perfect place. It was home in the truest sense of the word.

They walked with God the Father. They enjoyed conversation with Him. They could look in His eyes and see His love for them. They could enjoy His embrace. Nothing separated them from Him. It was home as God created it to be.

And then sin entered the picture. Just as the younger brother did, Adam and Eve turned away from God the Father, walked away from the perfect home and became alienated from Him. The rest is history. Humanity has been longing for that home ever since.

What does it mean to be HOME? **Home is not a place. Home is in the Presence of The Father.**

The entire Bible is the story of people living in exile and searching for their elusive home. This broken world we see each day, this world that has death, disease and natural disaster, is not the home we long for.

Luke 15:17 (NIV) **"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!"**

“When he came to his senses” – the young son realized everything he had been searching for, everything he thought would satisfy his longings, he actually had at home with his father. Unconditional love, acceptance, grace, mercy and understanding.

Luke 15:18 (NIV) I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

Luke 15:19 – 20 (NIV) I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

He realized what he was searching for was only ever going to be found in the presence his father. How do we get home, to the presence of The Father?

Bad news. We can’t. On our own. Sin separates us from God and we can’t earn, buy or talk our way into being forgiven. That is a problem.

Good news. The cost for our sin was completely and fully paid. It was paid by the major player in this story, who also is the main character of the entire Bible. Jesus.

Jesus does what the elder brother in this story was unwilling to do.

Luke 15:25 - 26 (NIV) Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on.

In Jewish culture the older brother was expected to help reconcile the father and the younger brother. The older brother should have gone out looking for the younger brother and brought him home. He is in the field.

Jesus left heaven to go on a search & rescue mission for the younger and older brothers of the world. And then he paid the cost of their (my, our) sin to reconcile them to His Father.

Pastor Timothy Keller, in his book, “The Prodigal God”, helped me to better understand this. *“Mercy and forgiveness must be free and unmerited to the wrongdoer. If the wrongdoer has to do something to merit it, then it isn’t mercy, but forgiveness always comes at a cost to the one granting the forgiveness”.*

He goes on to say that “It is only at the elder brother’s expense that the younger brother can be brought back into the family.”

Luke 15:11 (NIV) Jesus continued: “There was a man who had two sons.¹² The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate.’ So he divided his property between them.

The split would have been 2/3 and 1/3. Everything was assigned, and the younger son’s portion was way gone! So, when the father says to the older brother:

Luke 15:31 (NIV) “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours.

The father is spot on. Everything that remained of the family estate belongs to the older brother. The robe, the ring, the sandals and the fattened calf are ALL rightfully his.

“The younger brother’s restoration was free to him, but it came at an enormous cost to the elder brother”. – Pastor Tim Keller

The father could not reinstate the younger son into the family except at the expense of the older son. There was no other way. Forgiveness always comes at the cost to the one granting forgiveness.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NLT) **For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.**

On the cross Jesus **exchanged** our (MY) sin for His perfect righteousness. On the cross, Jesus was treated as *if* He were a sinner, even though He was perfectly holy and pure, and we were treated as *if* we were righteous, even though we were defiled by sin.

What does righteousness mean? Two things: Being right w/God. *Relationship*.

For us to get home, to be in the presence of The Father, we must accept the gift of what Jesus, our perfect, sinless, older brother did on the cross, as payment for our sin. This puts us in right standing or relationship w/God.

Second part: Means living right as God intends in our conduct towards others. *Lifestyle*.

What’s it look like to live at home? Do we kick back, feet up in our spiritual easy chair?

An Exchanged Life is a Changed Life

Lost to Found. Darkness to Light. Death to Life. Not only is our life exchanged, but God provides the power to live out the change day to day!! It’s the power of God’s presence living in us.

Col. 1:27 (NIV) **the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.**

To produce the Spirit’s fruit, we need the Spirit’s power.

Enjoy the Relationship

Everything begins here. When you are home you are a son or daughter of the King! You have been adopted into the King’s family. He’s not going to un-adopt you!!

Keys to the relationship: joy, intimacy (guys – what you’re willing to confess), love, compassion, grace, mercy. *Everything boils down to motive*. Am I praying to connect with my father or to earn his favor? Am I reading the Bible to understand how my father loves me and wants me to live or to check my “quiet time” box? *Why* am I doing what I am doing? To deepen my relationship or duty? Love of Christ or fear of consequences?

Am I praying consistently or only until things get better? Is my prayer life all about my needs and wants or my desperate need of God? Am I experiencing wonder, awe or delight in my conversations with God? I am here to connect w/Your heart. What do you want to say to me? What do you want me to do w/it?

It is so easy to drift back into older brother attitudes and sense of duty. Guard against this! Remind yourself that you are home w/a Father who loves you, longs for you and went looking for you when you were lost! He loved you then, He loves you now!

Experience a Community

We need each other. We need to show up on Sundays. We need to have people walking w/us in relationship and accountability. Small Groups are great for that! There is no way we will ever grow spiritual depth and roots apart from a deep involvement in a community of other Christ – followers.

Whenever we become careless about building community, everything else begins to slide, too.

Radical Mentoring story. Steven begins to see what true community is but still wrestles with the temptation to find the quick fix. Carlos tells him “You can only mature and get real wisdom in community”. Isolation produces the Unabomber”.

We can use the church or love the church, but we can't do both.

Engage in Serving

We were created to add to life on earth, not just take from it. God wants us to give something back. We live in a world of “serve us” rather than “service”. That cannot happen in the church. **Saved people, Serve people.** Martin Luther said, “We are saved by faith alone, but not by faith that remains alone”. Serving is not optional for a follower of Jesus. All been given gifts & they are to benefit others! An unopened gift is a waste.

Jesus said, “The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve”. (Matt. 20:28) As we grow we change from “who's going to meet my needs” to “whose needs can I meet”? Does serve and give define my exchanged life?

Emulate Jesus' Life

You and I were created by God to bring Him glory. We do that by becoming more like Jesus. He desires that we become godly – taking on his values, attitudes and character. He wants to fill us with his presence so not only do we imitate Him but other begin to see His likeness in us.

So, if Jesus loved and sat down to share a meal with the tax collectors and sinners, shouldn't we? If Jesus was compassionate and kind, we should be as well. If Jesus was patient and self-controlled, how are we to be with people?

Embrace His Mission

Luke 19:10 (NIV) **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."**

I was lost. You were lost. We were lost. Weighted down by sin. Jesus sought us out. He came after us when we were lost. We can lose sight of the reason Jesus came just like the Pharisees.

If We Lose Sight that We Were Lost, We Lose Sight of the Lost. The Pharisees lost sight of why Jesus came. They missed His mission.

The second we lost sight of Jesus' mission, we lose sight of the lost around us. If you are a Christ – follower, His mission is our mission. Jesus came for everybody.

Home is not a place. Home is in the Presence of The Father. A good, good Father. An exchanged life leads to a changed life. Is being home, in the presence of the Father, changing your life? Would the people who know you best, say they see changes produced by the power of Christ living and working in you? If so, keep on rolling with Jesus! If not, would you ask Jesus today to give you the strength to step into the changes He desires for you, and trust Him for the results?

Small Group Questions

1. What was the best part of your past week and the most difficult part of your past week and why?
2. When you hear the word "home" what comes to your mind? Share about it. Why do you think we have such a deep longing for a place where we feel fully accepted and completely loved? Can this world fill that longing? Why or why not?
3. Read Luke 15:17 – 20. What does it mean that "he came to his senses"? What did the younger son know about his father? In Jewish culture, what role was the elder son expected to play between his brother and his father?
4. Pastor Timothy Keller states, "Forgiveness always comes at the cost to the one granting forgiveness". How did the father's forgiveness of his wayward son cost the elder brother? What did it cost God to forgive you of your sin? What does understanding that do for you?
5. Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. What does that verse tell us about Jesus? About God the Father?
6. Steve stated, "An Exchanged Life is a Changed Life". What does an exchanged life offer you? Do you think it's important that change happens when we exchange our sin for the righteousness of Jesus? Why or why not?
7. Read Colossians 1:26 – 27. Where does the power come from to see progress and change happen in our lives? Are we able to make lasting change happen on

our own? Why or why not? Share about an area in your life where you depend on the Spirit's power to produce spiritual fruit (results).

8. Steve mentioned five changes of an exchanged life. Why is "Enjoy the Relationship" key to experiencing change in your life? What do you most enjoy about your relationship with God, through Jesus Christ? Why do our motives matter?
9. Of these four; Experience a Community, Engage in Serving, Emulate Jesus' Life and Embrace His Mission, which is your strongest suit? Which would you say is your weakest one? What step(s) can you take this week to work on your weak area? Who can hold you accountable to do so?