

LOST IN DUTY  
[written in oral form]

Jesus was a visiting a church in Waterloo.

The church leaders were concerned about the church's passion, purpose and ministry, and so were hoping Jesus would share his wisdom and insight on those issues.

The congregants didn't seem excited, and meeting the budget was another concern. They were wanting Jesus to tell everybody what is expected of them.

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During the gathering before the service began, there was talk about how people, these days, lack a sense of commitment and responsibility.

All the while, Jesus was out in front of the church talking to a crowd of individuals. They were "outside" people. Folks who don't go to church. Some used to, but are angry at the church. Some were Apple employees. Some were oil company executives, and a few were card carrying Conservatives, and there were a couple of hedonistic heathens, too.

Inside, the church members were grumbling and complaining, "Doesn't he know that the service starts at 10:45, and What is HE doing....talking to THOSE people?" One person asked, "How did They know that he was going to be here?"

**WE sure didn't tell them about Jesus!"**

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Soon, Jesus was in the foyer, and he overhears their grumbling. He walks into the sanctuary and says:

There was this man who had two sons, He had worked hard all his life, and had done pretty well. He was fairly affluent, but not really rich. He made a decent living from farming. One of his blessings in life was that his sons participated in the family business, and they were a big help. He was glad they were involved, and he was very proud of them. He loved having them around.

The elder was very reliable and obedient, but lacked a *certain* ..... enthusiasm and joy. The youngest was full of energy, had lots of good ideas, but was often caught daydreaming or procrastinating. Each, in his own way, was very precious to the father.

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One day as the father was working, the younger son, again late for chores, walked straight up to his father.

He did NOT have his work clothes on, and There was Boldness in his eyes.

Without an "hello," the youngest son demanded, with the tone of much rehearsal, "**Father, give me my share of the business. I plan on leaving.**"

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*It is hard to say,..... what it is..... that causes some people to reject their life, they heritage.... and all those that love and care for them.*

Who knows? ..... maybe they feel like a cornered animal..... and just have to escape,... just have to run???

Whatever the reason, there is terror in their hearts and it causes them to become blind to the deeper truth and see only the vampire that lurks in the shadow of their fears.

It is hard to say..... what causes a son to tell his father, “I want the inheritance AND ... I CAN NOT WAIT UNTIL YOU DIE.”

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Stunned, the father silently starred at him, his posture slowly receding under the weight of his son’s statement until he leaned against the table that was next to him.

Rubbing the back of his neck, he started to speak, ... but had to clear the lump in his throat that had suddenly developed.

With a hesitant, low voice the father said, “I’ll have to go check the books—the accountant’s statements.”

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The son remained in his soldiers stance, as the father left the room.

Alone in another room, fidgeting with statements and the calculator, the father wiped tears from his eyes as he absorbed his younger son’s declaration.

He had planned, someday, to turn over the business to his sons, and hoped that in turn it would not only provide for their needs, but that it would also mean that they would carry on the heritage..... and..take care of him in his old age.

But,.... what really hurt was the essence of the son’s demand: taking his share and leaving was clearly a declaration of divorce from the family.

The youngest son's message was really saying,

“I claim/ I Take my life, my entitlement, and you are no longer my father, and I am NO longer your son. I remove myself from obligation and responsibility, and any future entitlement and privileges.”

\*The father was losing a son, and he knew it.

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His last service, as a father, would be to respect his son’s request.

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*It takes a lot of love to let go and allow free will, Especially when the consequences of the other’s choice seem bleak.*

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Moreover, it's not like the inheritance is sitting in a box waiting to be delivered.

The father had to determine the worth of the family's business, then sell portions of it, including land and fruit trees, and equipment in order to raise the funds.

This would greatly affect the business, and the elder son would significantly be negatively impacted, too.

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Within a few days, with the air of dignity, the father returned to his son, handed him a cheque, then said, “My prayers are with you.” And, gave his LOST son one last hug.

In the middle of the embrace, the son glanced at the cheque and saw \$500,000. He didn’t feel the hug; he was already gone.

With that kind of money, there was no need to pack – just stop at the bank, get out of town and head for the airport – destination: MIAMI FLORIDA.

It was going to be HOT life, fun in the sun and party time.

On the flight down, he did have a moment of reflection, ...so to speak, ... actually....., it was more “rationalization” than reflection. He thought to himself, “Hey, it’s my life. I can do what I want. Just because they brought me into the world and provided for me, .... doesn’t mean they OWN me. I am free – FREE to enjoy!”

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So, he got some fancy clothes, signed a lease for a posh condo on Biscayne Blvd., and bought that sports car he’d always wanted.

Before long, he was well received at all the hottest night clubs,.... and.... the women..... He never realized what a lady’s man he was,... but now he was convinced he was.

AND, .... to top it off, he was invited to join the Miami yacht club. Now, that is where one meets the beautiful and powerful people.

Of course, he didn’t tell anyone about his past. Instead, he told everyone he was a millionaire entrepreneur looking for new investments. He hoped that line would help him make some good connections.

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*Fancy things and twenty dollar tips can dissolve half a million pretty fast, but he wasn’t worried. He had made lots of good friends, some solid business associations, and.....his New girl friend was from OLD money.... and lots of it. She was also an active member of the Bridgeport Connecticut Junior League.*

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However, one afternoon, while recovering from the previous night, and slouched at the kitchen table, drinking his coffee, he got a text from his girl friend stating that she was moving back to Conn. Wanting to join her, he checked his account balance, and discovered he was out of money.

He arranged to meet, that evening, with his girl friend, and for the first time, he shared with her **his real story**, and that he was now broke. He asked if he could go with her. They were in love; he assumed she would say YES.

But, .... she responded, “**you pretended to be someone you are NOT, and you rejected who you were. YOU are then a nobody.** I was in love with NOBODY.

I am NOT in love with you. Good-bye.”

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The youngest son, out of money and faced with an eviction notice, called all his “good friends.” But, found no one willing to help.  
ALL were fair weather friends – prostituted friends.

Since, the streets of Miami were a very dangerous place, the youngest son drifted out to the countryside and managed to secure a part time job working at an alligator farm. He feed the alligators rats that were caught in the city.

His meagre wage barely paid for a place to sleep. Food was scarce, and rarer still, were showers to wash off the baked on swamp slime from his body.

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At this point, Jesus noticed some of the people were smirking and mumbling, "Well he got what he deserved..... This is a great story. It shows how important duty is. Yes, yes.... we must be frugal and do our duty."

Jesus looked around, and then resumed his story.

Then one day, while holding the remnants of a rat in his hand, trying to pretend it was a Big Mac, the youngest son broke down and realized how alone he was and... how empty he had become.

His thoughts went to where he came from, .... back to where he once was, but no longer deserved to be. He had renounced that place–his place.

Yet, in desperation, he thought, “Even my father’s hired help have food and shelter, and I am dying here.”

\*He came to Himself, and decided, “I will go to my father, and beg to him saying, ‘I know that I have severed ties with you, and I know that was wrong of me. It was sin. I have broken the relationship, and I am NOT worthy to be a son. Yet, PLEASE treat me as one of your hired hands. I badly need a job.’”

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Back home, things were difficult there, too. Yet, by hard work and good fortune, the father and elder son had managed to keep things going. All the while, the father thought about his younger son, and prayed for him, and... quite often glanced down the road..... just in case ..... just in case.

\*The father had lost a son, but NOT hope.

The son lost hope, and thought he had lost a father.

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By hitching rides on trucks and trains, the youngest son made it back to his hometown. With head hung low, he walked down the last road to his father’s house.

*Perhaps, it was the noise from barking dogs alerted by remorseful, dragging feet..... OR... maybe it was parent’s intuition, .....Either way, His father went out to look, and recognized his son, and ran down the road to meet him.*

With tears in his eyes he embraced his youngest son and kissed his weather worn cheek.

The father released his hug and stepped back to behold his son. [ ]

The tattered son,.... with heavy eyes that have seen too much, looked back at his father, and began his much rehearsed confession.

The father saw that his Son was present / there / now .... HE HAD RETURNED, and... the father felt the pain and remorse in his son's heart, BUT the father did NOT hear the request of a MAN asking for a job.

Instead, he heard HIS SON asking for forgiveness.

Before the son could finish his petition, the father interrupted and said, "Come on home. I've waited for your return – Oh, how I have waited.

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The father continued, "Fresh clothes and shoes are in your room, and of course, a clean towel for after a shower." He then placed a house key in his son's hand, and said, "My place is your place, come and go as you wish. YOU are my SON."

As they entered the house, the father yelled, "**Tell everybody to take the rest of the day off.... with pay, and we're going to have one huge celebration because this SON of mine was dead... and is ALIVE again. He was lost and is Found!**"

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Again, Jesus heard people mumbling. They were saying things like, "What? NO Punishment?" Another commented, "Well, somebody has to pay for his sins. You can't have restoration, you can't have forgiveness without somebody / something balancing the debt. What about retribution?"

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Jesus paused until the mumbling ended, and then continued.

A little while later, the elder son returned from an errand, and noticed no one was working, in fact everyone was out behind the house.

It looked like a giant picnic, and there was even a band playing.

Bewildered, he asked someone who had run out to a car to get something, "What in the world is going on?"

The employee blurted out, "Your younger brother has come home. He is back safe and sound, and your father has invited everyone to celebrate his return. And, the best cow has been killed for the feast."

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The elder son just stood there for a moment, arms at his waist, shaking his head. He was furious. He didn't join the group, but instead went to the front porch and paced back and forth, ... kicking chairs out of the way.

The father was told about the elder son's return, and went looking for him. He came around to the front porch. Sensing what was going on said, "Hey, it is NOT the chair's fault. I welcomed YOUR brother to be a part of the family again. Come on..... join the celebration."

The elder son exploded, "NO WAY am I going to Celebrate that ungrateful, little twerp's return. THAT SON OF YOURS chose to leave. He Broke your heart, and nearly broke the family business.

I can NOT believe you've allowed him to return. Who knows where he has been or done? Who knows what disease he might have .... and... .. and..... WHAT ABOUT RETRIBUTION and justice. IT ISN'T FAIR.

The eldest continued his rant, "... and... For goodness sake, I have worked harder than any of the hired help, and always.... ALWAYS did my DUTY, even through difficult times....."

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*Here is the core of the eldest son's discontent,.... as he protests saying,*  
**"I have been dutiful, I've kept plugging along..... yet you have never hired a band and thrown a party for my friends and me. Where is my reward? What is in the hard work for me?"**

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After a moment of quiet, the father responded,  
"Son....., you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours to enjoy. You know that, don't you? And, it isn't something you earn, and all this isn't about fairness.  
**It is about love and grace.**

Focussing on being dutiful / being obedient is missing the point.  
The business/ the busyness is not that important.

What matters **is the relationship.**  
Life is about being with each other.  
And, relationship depends on love and grace.  
You've been with me, and I with you, and now my lost son is with us.

And hear me, we must celebrate and rejoice because this Brother of YOURS,.... Your brother, was dead... and has come to life!  
He was LOST, and has been Found.

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After finishing the story, the people stared at Jesus, expecting more.

But Jesus did NOT say anything else about the story.  
He did NOT explain it.  
And, no one said a word.

There was silence, painful silence, and the silence spoke very clearly.