

The 'Older Brother' complex

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In I John 2: 12-13, John talks about three basic stages of spiritual growth.

- Little children
- Young men (and women)
- Fathers (and mothers)

Being a spiritual "father" is not exclusive to those who are in full time ministry. This is for every Christian. It's for "he who believes in Me". We are now seeing baby Christians growing quickly and becoming mothers and fathers of others within a year, just as it was with the early church. However, finding parents in the early church was not easy.

Even though you have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers ... 1 Cor. 4:14 NIV

Why the shortfall of fathers? Some leaders don't have a father's heart and instead have what we call, an "older brother" complex.

What's an "older brother" complex?

Back in the mid eighties we conducted many power evangelism 'Jesus Heals' Crusades in India and as a result, hundreds of thousands heard the gospel. One day the Lord told me that I was at a crossroads in my ministry. He showed me that if I continued with these crusades my 'reputation' would grow and eventually my name would be recognised world wide.

"That doesn't sound all that bad," I thought to myself. However, He went on to explain there was another road I could take.

"I really don't need another healing evangelist." He explained. "I have taught you many things in regard to the leading of My Spirit and I have need for many who can equip My people."

It was rather obvious that the potential of having tens of thousands of believers reaching into every nook and cranny of society with His power could do much more than one healing evangelist.

He then went on to tell me that my goal was to raise up those who could and would have a greater impact on that world than my own ministry. Immediately I responded with, "That's exciting!" However, within a few short days my enthusiasm waned.

"Greater impact than me?" I questioned. "What about my ministry?"

"You've got a problem!" He quickly responded.

"What's my problem?"

"You've got an older brother complex."

I was mystified. "An older brother complex....What's that?"

He reminded me of the story of the prodigal son, who on his return, received many blessings from his father.

"Who had a problem with that?" He questioned.

"The older brother," I replied.

"What was the problem?"

"He didn't want the younger brother to receive greater blessings than him," I replied ... with a growing conviction.

"That's the older brother complex and that's your problem. You really don't want to see your younger brothers and sisters do greater things than you!" He said quietly.

I was shocked at what was being revealed in my heart. However, my mind was still battling how I was to release others to do greater things and continuing my own ministry. I had an expectation of my own ministry and reputation continuing to grow. Although those I was discipling were growing as well, I pictured them remaining a little less in stature and reputation than myself.

“Can’t we all continue to grow together?” I asked Him. I then quickly reminded Him of His promise, “You told me in John 14:12 that the works that You did I would do also.”

“There’s that older brother again”, He answered.

“No Lord”, I quickly replied. “I’m just quoting your Scripture.”

“Do you really want to be like Me?” He asked patiently.

“Of course!” was my immediate reply.

“I wanted My spiritual sons to do bigger and better things than I ever did.”

“No!” I protested. “Who could do it better than you? You’re Jesus!”

He went on to say, “You only quoted half of John 14:12. What did the other half say?”

Of course, He goes on to tell His disciples;

“...the works that I do will he do also and greater works will he do...”

“If you want to fully mature into My image, your next stage of growth is to develop from an elder brother into a father. A good father in the natural wants his children to grow up and do bigger and better things than himself.”

Further Clarity

He then gave me the following parable.

A man is a successful state manager of a company and is earning in excess of \$150,000 per year. He is offered the chance to run the national office in another country where, with all the incentives and bonuses, he would be a multi millionaire within a few years. He turns down the offer, explaining that his son is doing a specialized course at university and at this time needs all the family support he can get. The man is overlooked for future promotion because he’s not considered a “company man”.

Many years later, the son starts his own enterprise and one day comes to his father and says, “Dad, I’ve made over a million dollars this year.” What does the father do? Does he start to complain, telling his son what he sacrificed and what he could have been? Does he accuse the son of being big headed? No, he puts his arm around him, looks him in the eye and says, “That’s my boy, I’m proud of you son.”

In the natural, a good father wants to raise children to their greatest potential and (hopefully) surpass what he has achieved. He will sacrifice himself so they can achieve this.

Jesus is the model of the perfect spiritual father. He poured His life into His sons and then sacrificed His own life and ‘career’ to enable His sons to potentially achieve more than He did. When Jesus saw His disciples doing what He did and even greater things, His heart would have burst with pride and joy. He had been a successful father.

Good spiritual parents will believe God for great spiritual sons and daughters, and will pour their life into them in the hope that their spiritual children will have a greater ministry, just as Jesus did with His sons.

FINAL EVALUATION

The Lord went on to show me that ‘my’ ministry was to continue to model and to

raise 'sons' as He has done.

“When you stand before Me I will ask how many sons and daughters with great ministries you raised. Your glory will not so much be in what you did in your personal ministry but in the greatness of your sons and daughters.”

Older brothers, by nature, want to have the limelight and are highly competitive with the younger. “Older brother” ministries will be threatened by others, will want to control and suppress them and are more than happy for them to leave “home”. The few who have this tendency will need to grow up and leave their insecurity behind them.

This need for recognition leads to suppression not only of our future leaders but all of the saints who are subject to them.

The real heart of spiritual parents is that they no longer see “their ministry” as the most important thing. They take responsibility for younger Christians with an expanded ministry goal of modelling, training and releasing them so that they can go through the stages of little children, sons and then become spiritual parents as well. Hopefully, their “sons” will have a greater ministry than them.

If every generation of Christians trained, modelled and believed God that their spiritual kids could do greater than they had, what kind of church would we have?