

Jesus Calls Us To Maturity, Not Perfection

CHAPTER 5

Love Matures Us to be God Like

Love matures when we know what it is.

Love matures when we love ourselves properly.

**Love matures when we practice loving people
who are like Lost sheep, Coins, Sons and Brothers**

**"(Jesus) answered: "'Love the Lord your God with all
your heart and with all your soul and with all your
strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your
neighbor as yourself.'" Luke 10:27**

Mark Moore was just a newly married young preacher when he wrote these wise thoughts which define *love*.

"Valentine's Day is an appropriate day for reflecting on our love life. And I must confess that I have not lived up to my expectations. When Barbara and I were dating, I was such a gentleman, so suave, so debonair! And I was sure it would last.

I used to pick up her dirty dishes in the school cafeteria, now she has to pick up mine. I used to open her car door -- now, I just unlock it. I used to open the door for her -- now, I tell her to make sure she gets it shut on her way in. Now, I am not a total slob, but I must be honest and say that since the days of our impassioned

courtship there has been a decline in my chivalrous niceties.

True, the infatuation has faded; but I love my wife more today than the day we met or the day we were married. I have more reason to -- you see, I do not define love merely as a feeling or infatuation. **LOVE IS A COMMITMENT TO GIVE WHATEVER IT TAKES TO MEET ANOTHER'S NEED IN SPITE OF THE COST TO ME."**

"Harlandale Horizons" of the Harlandale Christian Church, San Antonio, Texas -- Vol. 1, No. 27, 2-11-87.

Mark's definition of love is most excellent. The greek words for *love*, which are often espoused as explaining *love*, provide no definition of the actual word, but only establish on what *level love operates*:

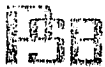
**agape*--self giving love, John 3:16; I John 4:8

**philo*--love of friend, parent, child

**eros*--fleshly, sexual

But, what is love?

Love is much like a bank check. The following blank check is from a bank where we did business many years ago. It is a metaphor of what people falsely offer as *love*.



Peoples State Bank

MINNEOLA, KANSAS, _____ 19 ____ No. _____

PAY TO THE ORDER OF _____ \$ _____

_____ DOLLARS

FOR _____
UNPAID STATE

SAMPLE COPY

Note: This check represents "head love,"-- a philosophy of good will

with no commitment.

Folk often use the word *love* in their communication, but follow up with no action.

To often *love* is defined in the garb of unselfishness.

C S. Lewis penned the following penetrating insight.

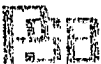
"If you asked twenty good men today what they thought was the highest of virtues, nineteen of them would reply, unselfishness. But, if you asked almost any of the great Christians of old, he would have replied, love. You see what has happened? A negative term has been substituted for a positive, and this is of more than philological importance. The negative ideal of unselfishness carries with it the suggestion not primarily of securing good things for others but of going without them ourselves, as if our abstinence and not their happiness was the important point.

I do not think this is the Christian virtue of love. The thrill of Christian living is recognizing how much we gain because God loved us and how much both our fellows and we gain because we love our fellow man. Self-denial is never an end in itself in the Christian life; always, it is a means to the end of love and its gain."

John says *attitude + action = love*. "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." I John 3:16-18 (NIV)

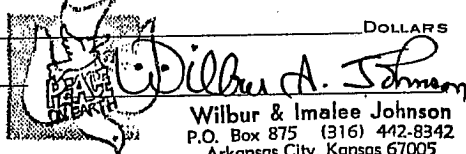
Note: The check is blank and not signed with the figure amount left open, thus fulfilling our definition "*Love is a commitment to give whatever it takes to meet another's need in spite of the cost to me.*"


So, the second part of John's above statement looks like this with my "check illustration:

 **Peoples State Bank** 03-118011011

MINNEOLA, KANSAS, _____ 19____ No. _____

PAY TO THE ORDER OF _____ \$ _____

FOR _____  _____ DOLLARS

SAMPLE COPY  **Wilbur & Imalee Johnson**
P.O. Box 875 (316) 442-8342
Arkansas City, Kansas 67005

A friend of mine named Paul received an automobile from his brother as a Christmas present. On Christmas Eve when Paul came out of his office, a street urchin was walking around the shiny new car, admiring it. "Is this your car, Mister?" he asked. Paul nodded. "My brother gave it to me for Christmas." The boy was astounded. "You mean your brother gave it to you and it didn't cost you nothing? Boy, I wish..." He hesitated. Of course Paul knew what he was going to wish for. He was going to wish he had a brother like that. But what the lad said jarred Paul all the way down to his heels. "I wish," the boy went on, "that I could be a brother like that." Paul looked at the boy in astonishment, then impulsively he added, "Would you like to take a ride in my automobile?" "Oh yes, I'd love that." After a short ride, the boy turned and with his eyes aglow, said, "Mister, would you mind driving in front of my house?" Paul smiled a little. He thought he knew what the lad wanted. He wanted to show his neighbors that he could ride home in a big automobile. But Paul

was wrong again. "Will you stop where those two steps are?" the boy asked. He ran up the steps. Then in a little while Paul heard him coming back, but he was not coming fast. He was carrying his little crippled brother. He sat him down on the bottom step, then sort of squeezed up against him and pointed to the car. "There she is, Buddy, just like I told you upstairs. His brother gave it to him for Christmas and it didn't cost him a cent. And some day I'm gonna give you one just like it...then you can see for yourself all the pretty things in the Christmas windows that I've been trying to tell you about."

Paul got out and lifted the lad to the front seat of his car. The shining-eyed older brother climbed in beside him and the three of them began a memorable holiday ride.

That Christmas Eve, Paul learned what Jesus meant when he had said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35

Shared by Dan Clark

How does love increase?

In order to mature in love, we must *practice love*.

How do we become better ball players? Practice!

How do we become better musicians? Practice!

How do our muscles increase? Exercise/ Practice!

How do we become better artists? Practice!

How do we become better golfers? Practice!

How does our love increase? Practice!

Love comes from God and is developed in us by "practice" as Henry Drummond says so well.

"This is the supreme work to which we need to address ourselves in this world -- TO LEARN LOVE. Is life not full of

opportunities for learning Love? Every man and woman, every day has a thousand of them. The world is not a playground; it is a schoolroom. Life is not a holiday, but an education, and the one eternal lesson for us all is how better we can love. What makes a man a good cricketer? Practice. What makes a man a good artist, a good sculptor, a good musician? Practice. What makes a man a good linguist, a good stenographer? Practice. What makes a man a good man? Practice. Nothing else. There is nothing capricious about religion. We do not get the soul in different ways, under different laws, from those in which we get the body and mind. If a man does not exercise his arm, he develops no biceps muscle; and if a man does not exercise his soul, he acquires no muscle in his soul, no strength of character, no vigor of moral fiber, nor beauty of spiritual growth. Love is not a thing of enthusiastic emotion. It is a rich, strong, manly, vigorous expression of the whole round Christian character -- the Christ-like nature in its fullest development. And the constituents of this great character are only to be built up by ceaseless practice.

What was Christ doing in the carpenter's shop? Practicing. Though perfect, we read that He learned obedience, and grew in wisdom and in favor with God. Do not quarrel therefore with your lot in life. Do not complain of its never ceasing cares, its petty environment, the vexations you have to stand, the small and sordid souls you have to live and work with. Above all, do not resent temptation; do not be perplexed because it seems to thicken round you more and more, and ceases neither for effort nor for agony nor prayer. That is your practice. That is the practice which God appoints you; and it is having its work in making you patient, and humble, and generous, and unselfish, and kind, and courteous. Do not grudge the hand that is molding the still too shapeless image within you. It is growing more beautiful, thought you see it not, and every touch of temptation may add to its perfection. Therefore, keep in the midst of life. Do not isolate yourself. Be among men, and among things, and among troubles, and difficulties, and obstacles.

You remember Goethe's words: 'Es bildet ein Talent sich in der Stille, Doch ein Charakter in dem Strom der Welt'. 'Talent develops itself in solitude; character in the stream of life.' Talent develops itself in solitude -- the talent of prayer, of faith, meditation and love, of seeing the unseen; Character grows in the stream of the world's life. That chiefly is where men are to learn love.'"

Taken from a 100+ year old book that I purchased for twenty-five cents from a Preacher's yard sale in Indiana -- "Addresses by Henry Drummond" -- Published, 1891 -- from "The Greatest Thing in the World," pp.49-53.

So, *Drummond says love matures as we "practice it in the stream of life."*

First, we must practice loving ourselves:

"Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. **And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'**" **Matthew 22:37-39**

In Jesus' statement, He clearly implies, that we should love ourselves. There is a self-love which is corrupt, and it must be put off and mortified; but there is a self-love which is natural, and the rule of the greatest duty, and it must be understood, for *loving others* depends upon our properly *loving ourselves*. We must love ourselves, that is, we must have a due regard for the dignity of our own natures, and a due concern for the welfare of our own souls and bodies.

Love begins at home, so to speak, as suggested by this amusing story.

A Texan and two northerners went to Alaska to hunt bear. In camp, the northerners started cleaning their guns and were ridiculed by the Texan.

"Why down Texas-way, we catch 'em with our bare hands"

'We'd like to see you get a big Kodiak bear without using a gun," replied his friends, whereupon the Texan started out empty-handed. Some time later his friends in the cabin heard him yelling. Looking out the window, they saw him running toward the cabin with a big Kodiak bear lumbering close behind him. "Open the door" the Texan yelled, so they did. The Texan stood aside and the bear ran right into the cabin. The Texan slammed the door shut and yelled, "You boys skin that one while I go git another one!"

So, our *practice of love* must begin at home.

Rosalind Rinker, author of books on Conversational Prayer, says:

Folk lose sight of God's love and purpose for them:
Nobody loves me, then God doesn't either,
If God doesn't love me then nobody else does either,
Result: You don't love yourself."

The following questions suggest wrong conclusions drawn from non love of yourself.

Who told you that someone else is better than you?
Who told you that you are not good looking?
Who told you that others are better than you?
Who told you that you are not intelligent?
Who told you that you are better than others?
"Who told you that you were naked?" asks God of

Adam. Genesis 3:11"

Who asks the "who" questions? God did and does. HE knew that Adam became aware of his nakedness by his conscience as awakened by the Evil One and Adam's own willful act.

We wrongly conclude many matters about ourselves, and negative action follows, because we do not love ourselves.

We wrongly conclude **we are ugly**, so become shy, bashful, timid.

We wrongly conclude that **others are better than us**, so we recoil, shrink back.

We wrongly conclude we are **dumb, not intelligent**, so we become inadequate in living, marriage, etc.

We wrongly conclude **we are better than others**, so this opens the lid of Pandora's ancient box to many evils-- pride, conceit, egoism, narcissism, disdain, arrogance, haughtiness, insolence, superiority.

What is the antidote to self-acceptance, loving ourselves properly? The writer of Psalm 139:14-17 expressed it well:

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!" Psalm 139:14-17 (NIV)

Simply pray-repeat these words: ***GOD MADE ME JUST AS I AM; THEREFORE I PRAISE-THANK HIM FOR MY WHOLE BEING--BODY, SOUL AND SPIRIT-- AS I AM RIGHT NOW, AND WHAT HE MAKES ME TO BE IN THE FUTURE.*** Commit these words of Psalm 139 to memory and repeat them as often as negative NON-SELF LOVE comes to my mind. OBSERVE your attitude begin to change. I did and you can, too!

Mature Love Reaches People who are like Lost Sheep, Lost Coins, Lost Sons, or Lost Older Brothers.

Howard Clinebell said: "A man needs a sense of his own worth which will make it possible for him to feel that others have inherent worth, too."

So, when we properly **Love our self**, then the **Loving of others follows**.

When we love only those who are nice, and good, and shun those who are unattractive, plain or bad: is this really love?

In Luke 15 Jesus names four *practice fields* for maturing by loving people who are like *wayward sheep, lost coins, lost sons or lost elder brothers*. All of these involve the unattractive, plain and bad.

These four parables are really united into a single connected story by two words, **lost and love**. All four were **lost**, not necessarily those who have become wrecks and renegades, nor hopelessly doomed and dammed. They are rather those who are out of right relationship, and needed **love** to find and bring them back.

"Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'" Luke 15:1-6
Yes, Jesus told this parable to remind the religious people, *Pharisees, tax collectors, and sinners*, that people who are like lost sheep must be **loved, and sought** until they are redeemed.

Mature Love reaches People who are like Lost Sheep

This sheep was not lost in the sense that it had fallen over some cliff, or been devoured by wild beasts. It was lost in that it was away from the shepherd and the flock. Losing the shepherd it had lost its guide. It had no sense of direction. It didn't know its way back to the fold. It gazed and grazed, eating a clump of green grass here, and then one over there, and the "grass on the other side of the fence looked more sumptuous" and had to be sampled. So, the lamb became lost in unsuspecting ways.

Like the sheep, people usually become lost in similar ways. They fall in love with the things of the world just as Demas did. "Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world." 2 Timothy 4:10. My barber of twenty five years is like this. He started smoking when in the Army. Continued on until his voice became raspy. He asked me if I loved him and if so, to pray. I did and I did! The VA Doctors said it was cancer. I prayed! He smoked. They operated and cut it out. I loved him still and prayed on, and he smoked on the sly. His talking was reduced to a whisper. But, I love him still, and pray for this *wandering sheep*.

A search for truth sounds like a noble adventure; but, can lead to sheep becoming lost. Various religious groups, including Herbert W. Armstrong's Plain Truth, Christian Science, Calvinism, Jehovah Witnesses, and the Mormons have tidbits of truth to offer, for unsuspecting *lambs*. A *lamb* will *nibble* at these facets of truth, and finds them *delicious*. Seeking *sheep* want more and their sequacious appetite is strengthened by these group leaders with Bible promises: "The truth shall set you free" John 8:32;

"My word is truth" John 17:17. So, the *lambs* are enticed and become *lost*. As did a lady in the church where I ministered at Minneola, Kansas. Bit by bit she studied the teachings of Plain Truth-- judgment, paradise, double Sabbath on the week of crucifixion, the Sabbath, etc. Eventually she slipped away from the church, her family and herself.

Like sheep, people wander away from their purpose in life.

The purpose of sheep is to remain with the flock which provides protection and warmth, and wool for the owner. As a teenager I herded a flock of three hundred sheep by leading them out onto the prairie. There, all day long, my dog, horse and I kept them safe. One evening when the time came to take the herd to the big corral at the ranch house, as difficult as it is, I did a quick count, and it seemed one or two were missing. But, a quick visual search found nothing, and with the sun setting in the west, I took the herd home. However, the next morning I found the two missing sheep scattered over about a fourth of an acre where coyotes had devoured them. They made the mistake of wandering into a small ravine away from this shepherd and the flock.

Lester Hull was a *wandering sheep*. A college graduate, he fell into the habit of drinking vanilla. The alcohol gave him a 'high' and did not qualify him as a drinker of liquor. Lester lived down by the railroad tracks in Minneola, Kansas.

Folk shunned him and refused to sit by him at the cafe. They claimed he licked the catsup bottle and wiped his mouth on his shirt sleeve. I sought him out. We drank coffee, and I encouraged him to use our church library. Timidly he came to read and mostly to be in

out of the cold. We visited about many subjects--philosophy, temptation, religion, lust of the flesh, Jesus, sex, etc.. Finally we talked about Jesus and being saved from sin. Lester became a believer on a winter Friday morning of 1974 confessing his faith in Jesus. I buried him in baptism. A few years later he developed *vanilla sickness*. He asked me to help him move to a Care Home at Bucklin. He grew weaker and twice a week I drove over and took him for a ride in the country. Although he wet on my car seat, I loved him still, and he asked me to write out his Last Will and Testament. I did and he insisted our Faith Alive Ministry be one of the benefactors. His provision of \$42.50 for our ministry was very special. Soon he went home to be with Jesus and it was my privilege to conduct his memorial service. Love always wins if we give it enough time!

Love matures as we practice love towards people who are like *wandering sheep* some of the virtues named by Paul in I Corinthians 13--- **Love** is kind, **Love** is not easily provoked, **Love** thinks no evil, **Love** rejoices in truth not in iniquity, **Love** suffers long, **Love** bears all things, **Love** believes all things, **Love** hopes all things, **Love** endures all things.

While visiting our daughter, Rebecca, in Houston, Texas on the occasion of her triple major surgery, the church folks brought food each day for us and our granddaughter, Katie. One of those ladies was a Hispanic lady, Shenny Griffin. In the few minutes Shenny was there, she related how several years ago her husband left her with four children. Yet, she loved him. His brother was struck with Aids. His family rejected him, yet Jenny loved and cared for him. Her husband came back. She still loved him. They marry again. Jenny

was a Catholic. She became a Christian. Still, she loves the Catholic people, priests and pope. Her husband leaves again. They divorce, yet love goes on.

The parable about the *Lost Sheep* concludes with these words: "What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, does not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, **until he find it?**" Luke 15:4 KJV

Love matures when we keep on loving and seeking wandering lambs until they are returned home.

Mature Love reaches People who are like *lost Coins*

"Or what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, does not light a lamp, and sweep the house, and seek diligently until she find it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost. Even so, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents." Luke 15:8-10 (ASV)

The record says the lady owned the coin and she lost it. The owner was responsible for the coin. Relationships die as love breaks down with a lack of forgiveness, understanding, and acceptance.

The world, more often than not, loves its own kind far more than the church. Neighbors, friends, coworkers sin, but they talk it out, ignore with understanding, manifest acceptance, and relationships go in; but, not so in the church. Usual practice in the church when a sin is public--silent judgment, followed by 'hot tongue' and 'cold

shoulder' treatment, then the 'casting out of the synagogue.'

In our Mount Zion country church near where we live, there are many fine people. Two families in particular became *lost like coins* to the congregation because of a breakdown in love. They are multi talented people and diligent workers for the Lord. Like all of us they had at least one problem, that of putting self forward in strong leadership. Their zeal conflicted with some of the leaders and by various means already named above they were forced out of the congregation. At the same time that their forward leadership was being rejected, there was adultery, lying, fornication, divorce and homo sexual activity being committed by others. Of course these latter sins were hid, so like dirt swept under a rug their sins were tolerated.

Mature Love Reaches People Who Are Like Lost Sons.

I Corinthians spells out certain virtues of mature love which require us to love *people who are like tarnished/lost coins*. **Love** suffers long...**Love** bears all things...**Love** hopes all things...**Love** believes all things and **Love** endures all things. Thus, people who are like lost coins, can be redeemed if we are willing to practice *mature love*.

In Luke 15 are two more people types to be addressed: "*Lost sons and elder brothers*."

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there

squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'

So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate." Luke 15:11-24

In this marvelous story Jesus reveals his attitude towards sinners. And remember his attitude is the attitude of God. How does Jesus feel about those who are lost? He makes it plain that he is the sinners friend. No man who came in contact with him ever doubted

that. The Scribes and Pharisees were indifferent to the lost, but he regarded them with infinite concern. He knows who are lost. He cannot be content as long as one lamb, one coin or one son is away from the fold. He is the supreme lover! His heart goes out to the whole world. But He does not love us in the mass; he loves us individually. Every man may sing with Paul, "He loved me and gave himself up for me." In Him every sinner has a friend.

These four stories contrasted shed beams of light about our Father and us. The SHEPHERD goes seeking the *lost lamb* and brings it back; the WOMAN sweeps and looks for *the coin* until it is found; with the *son away from home*, the FATHER waits at home until he returns; and with the *stay at home son*, as the song says "*He was there all the time.*"

These *away from home sons and daughters* who I have been blessed to meet will be forever kept fresh in my memory by what I dub as *their longing for Home* and *the longing for the touch of a hand on their hearts*. In a revival I was sharing, the preacher said, "We have a young man in the hospital. He has Aids and you do not need to feel obligated to visit him." "Let's go" I said. The hospital room was isolated and I was offered a gown, mask and gloves. I refused all three. In the room was a young man in his twenties who had been too long away from home in the far country of sin. Two nurses in white gowns, masks and gloves were there as I walked up to the lad's bed, and extended my hand. He hesitated, for obviously it had been a long time since a fellow human being dared to touch him. Finally he reached out a trembling hand.

I grasped that hand and said--"*My friend God loves you and I do too!*"

Yes he cried, then I laid my hand upon his head and we

prayed--*"Father, we all wander away from Home and later look back wishing we could go back. Thank you for Jesus who stands ready to lead and welcome us back. Bless this young man in body, soul and spirit. Have mercy upon him and help him to know you're still saying--Come home, come home, all you who are weary come home."* A-men. With breaking voice he said *"I want to go back home. Please help me."* As soon as I gathered my self together we visited, then prayed again with him repeating after me. *"Father, here I am in this far country reaping the results of my sin. I'm sorry and am happy to say, I still believe in Jesus and remember the day of my baptism. Please forgive me for my many sins. I am glad to know I'm still welcome at home."* A-men and A-men

What a day that was, but many years ago in sophisticated religion I would have gathered my robes about myself and passed on by. Mature love reaches these lost sons and daughters wherever we find them.

My heart often grows weary as I hear preachers damming the lost sons and daughters of this world into the pits of hell. It was with a heavy heart that I heard Vernon Richerson of Bible Christian Church of Ark. City preaching at our Mt. Zion country church on the subject of "Am I my Brother's Keeper?" (Genesis 4:9) He reiterated how Cain, Jezebel, the Rich Fool, and Judas were all in hell crying out--*Am I my brother's keeper.* The worst thing was, he seemed to delight in telling us over and over that these individuals were in hell.

Four things are terribly wrong with this presentation:

1. No one is in hell yet, at least that is what the Bible says. (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:13-15) You see souls may now be in Hades much to my consternation, but not in Hell.
2. There is not one Bible verse without a twisted interpretation which indicates any one of

these, Cain, Jezebel, Rich Fool, or Judas is in hell. 3. Where is his compassion for someone who messed up in a big way? As John Wesley said about a drunk--"*There go I, but for the grace of God.*"

4. Wouldn't mature love reach far enough to pray--*God you can do all things, and You have created and love all your creation. Please, since with You all things are possible, save the lost sons and daughters of this world?*" My love has often prayed this prayer many times.

While the son is away in the far country, what does mature love do at home? It waits with the knowledge of how this son has been trained.

It addresses this *away from home son* not as the "Prodigal son," but a son away from home. True, the lad packed his suitcase, asked for his share of the inheritance and walked away from his Father into the far country. But, surely far too much has been made out of the son's involvement in good times, parties, and prostitutes and his end of feeding pigs. True this is the quagmire of many or most "prodigals"; but, it is not the reason Jesus related the story.

Having been in the "far country" myself I choose to call our attention to some very positive factors about this away from home lad.

1. He knew how to think and act, vs. 13,15,17,18;
2. He still remembered home and knew where it was, vs. 18;
3. He knew he wanted to be at home even as a servant, vs. 19
4. He knew how to get home, vs. 18a, 20a;
5. Sin and time left him a humble lad, vs. 17-21
6. He knew his sin was against his Father, vs. 18,21
7. He knew how to say "I'm sorry" vs. 18,19;
8. He knew how to accept forgiveness and how to forgive

himself vs. 22-24.

Mature love has a chance to stand up tall when we meet these away from home lads of the world.

WOW! What a man this lad of Luke 15 was! I have often met *him* on the highways and byways, in the houses and huts of life and like to ask this question--"My friend are your bags all packed? Are you ready to go to heaven?"

Mature love waits with the open arms of compassion to forgive and forget. (Luke 15:22-24)

"Are your bags all packed? Are you ready to go?"

This question I first heard asked by George Younce, bass singer of the Cathedral Quartet, in reference to being prepared for our eternal journey beyond this world.

"Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. 2 Corinthians 5:20 (NKJ)

Since that time I often use this question of the sons and daughters along Life's way. The replies are significant and give me a wide open door to speak for Jesus. -- *

* **The grave side service** was ended and I introduced my self to the young assistant funeral director from Laverne, Oklahoma inquiring--"**Matt, are your bags all packed? Are you ready to go?**" He replied-- "**Yes, where are we going.**" I said--"**Up up to meet God.**" He smiled and said-- "**Yes sir, I got ready long ago.**"

We shared our faith about living, and church a bit and went on our way rejoicing.

* **Our meat butcher** at the Venture store here in Ashland is a fine hard working man. I asked him this inquiring question--"**Shorty,**

are your bags all packed? Are you ready to go?" With a special surprised grin he said *"Yes they are! Fifteen years ago I met Jesus my Engineer and got my ticket. I'm ready!" Bless you my friend" I said.* And we enjoyed a most pleasant conversation.

* **Visiting a computer internet "Fellowship Chat Room"** I asked the question of a 14 year old lad down in Kentucky--*"Ty, are your bags all packed? Are you ready to go?"* There was silence as I waited for his instant typed message. Finally he typed--*"No, I'm afraid to die for I am lost and going to hell."* I inquired *"Do you Believe in God and the Bible as the Word of God?"* *"Yes, I do. My step father is a preacher,"* he said. I began to ask him about John 3:16 and Acts 2:38. We continued to chat. They do practice baptism (immersion). He claimed he is confused and our chats are ongoing.

* **Jim Fellers**, a local young man in Ashland, responded with--*"Nope! I'm ready but taking no bags with me. I brought nothing into this world and am taking nothing out."*

The question and replies are so neat as I learn so much about human beings and we get to talk about eternal verities, becoming friends to talk more another day.

* **Henry Umeodum** is from Nigeria, West Africa. We met in a chat room and I *drew him out*. He is a Philosophy major and is considering Theology as his Master major. He is a follower of Jesus and so hungry for Truth.

I am having a "picnic" as we visit about life there and here and share truths about God and the Bible. Our conversation is ongoing.

* **Calvin McGonigle** is a local handy man who does mechanical-carpenter chores for us at such a cheap price it is a shame, but I don't complain and try to offer him a tip besides.

"Calvin, are your bags all packed? Are you ready to go meet God?" He remonstrated-- "Nope, I'm not going." I inquired--"Well now what are you going to do when your number comes up?" He said--"I'm going around and start over." Calvin and I have much more talking to do, but at least he's thinking.

* I met **Do Dang Phuoc Tien** of Vietnam in a "chat room", *drew him out* to talk of High and Holy things. He is 18 years old and a University student. To that question-- *"Ti, are your bags all packed? Are you ready to go?"* he responded-- *"Life is difficult here and sure I want to go to heaven in some distant year."* When I Reminded him that Jesus loves and died for him. He began to cry in unbelief. So that ended our chat for that night; but, our conversation is ongoing, and progress is being made. Because of a 12 hour time difference he wants to talk at noon his time - midnight our time. Its worth sacrificing a few minutes for one of God's creation.

Mature love waits with the knowledge that God is at work in the lives of *away from home sons and daughters even in the far country.*

There are countless times in the Bible when God worked in unusual ways to call his sons and daughters back Home---*the voice in Eden* speaks to Adam; *the Prophet Nathan* appears to speak to David about a man stealing one little lamb; *a donkey* is prepared to speak to Balaam; *the still small voice* speaks to Elijah in a cave as he hides from Jezebel; *the Lord speaks to Jezebel- I kings 21:23;* *A rooster crows* to bring conviction to Peter; *A voice speaks to Saul on the Damascus road.* *The Lord sometimes uses famines* (Deuteronomy 32:18-28) and *storms* (Psalm 107:24-31) to point his children home.

It is imperative that we wait at *home* with total acceptance of

the away from home sons and daughters.

Yellow with age is my newspaper clipping of the fifties which reveals the true story about a family at home as they wait for their son.

"At the close of the Korean war, there was a soldier-son of an aristocratic New England family. His parents had not heard from him for a long period of time; and they had become extremely anxious. Then one day they received a long-distance call from their son who had just landed in San Francisco and was on his way home. His parents were overjoyed to hear his voice and know he would soon be with them.

But the son said, "I have a buddy that I would like to bring home with me who has been badly wounded, in fact he has only one eye, one arm and one leg."

The mother began to stammer; "Well, of course, we would be glad to have your buddy come with you for a short visit."

"No, I don't mean for just a visit, I mean to make his home with us, he has no place else to go"

"We're sorry about your buddy, son," said the father, "but we have big plans for you and things to get done, we just couldn't possibly have anyone like that around here to take care of."

There was a click as the phone in San Francisco was hung up. The next day they received a wire from official sources that their son had jumped to his death from the window of a tall building. As if for consolation, they added that he had been badly wounded in the Korean situation and had "but one eye, one arm and one leg."

Will you let God mature your love so as to accept any and all *away from home sons and daughters* no matter what their condition. They may return as a smoker with lung cancer, a person with

syphilis, gonorrhea or aids.

Mature love waits with heart felt hope. (Luke 15:20)

His attitude toward his son and all the lost is one of boundless hope. Luther Burbank once said, "Every weed is a possible flower." What a marvelous confidence he had in the vegetable kingdom! The only reason that old burweed does not have its hands full of blossoms instead of full of cockleburs is because no man has cared enough to give it a chance. The only reason that sour dock is not sweet with the perfume of fragrant flowers is because everybody has passed it by as hopeless. And Jesus believed that every sinner was a possible saint, that every coward might become a hero, that every defeated man might stand up in moral and spiritual victory.

The Lord blessed me to pen the following poem which looks at the *away from home son* through the eyes of the waiting father.

**Just two days ago I saw the Father waiting on the porch
Swinging to and fro in the old porch swing.
Love was reaching down a path where eyes could not see.**

**Yesterday, I saw Him standing by the yard gate,
Looking longingly down an empty path.
He was hoping---*perhaps today My lad will come home.***

**Last evening I saw Him standing at the kitchen door.
It was supper time, and a welcome home feast was prepared.
An empty chair was at the table, set for a certain lad.**

**This morning I saw Him at the end of the lane.
He spoke of an expected letter as He nailed a sign on the post:**

"WELCOME HOME MY SON, COME ON IN!"

**Now, it's high noon, and the waiting Father waits no more.
I see Him running down the road as He calls His son by name.
He peers thru shadows cast by clouds beneath the
noonday sun.**

**I stand and watch as He crosses the creek.
And seems to disappear down an ever empty road.
Then there is a speck? an animal? a tree? his son!**

**Now, thunder rolls, it's quite dark for such an early hour.
Suddenly the figure becomes clear on a distant hill.
The Waiting Father has won and they hug with hope!**

Willbur S. Johnson

on Father's Day 6/18/89 at Forth Smith, Arkansas.

Although the religious world talks about *tough love*, *limited love*, etc., yet the Bible knows no such designations. These statements allow the prodigals of life to slip through religious loop holes. Across fifty plus years I have heard folk assert:

"I would love him, b-u-t he is an ex-con."

"I can't love her, b-e-c-a-u-s-e she is a *street walker*."

"Well, you know he/she does have Aids, so I must protect myself."

"As long as she keeps the wrong company I cannot love her."

"You expect me to love Mormons? J.W.'s?"

"I cannot Love a person who keeps on sinning."

"Joe is a homosexual, so he is beyond my love."

The list is endless. The truth is that these who would limit their

love, not only lack *mature love*, but have no love at all.

**Hear again the what the Holy Spirit says in I Corinthians 13:
*love is:***

"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."

Much of what parades as *love* in the church today **is not love** at all, but merely a "warm fuzzy feeling", or an "idea in the head" but not the heart, (I John 3:14-17).

Resolve now through prayer and a new commitment to be possessed with God's love. Here is a simple true story which challenges me to meet and pass the tests of love as I meet "*away from home people.*"

"Every week in my growing up years we tuned in Pacific Garden Mission sponsored by Moody Bible Institute. I often heard stories about Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago and vowed if ever I went there, it was one place I wanted to visit.

In later years business took me to Chicago and after finding my hotel, the first place I went was downtown on the Loop to Pacific Garden Mission. As I walked up to the mission the door swung open and a little white haired lady stretched out her hand and said--"*Mister, in Jesus' Name come out of the night into Pacific*

Garden Mission because Jesus loves you and I do, too." I was going in anyway but this greeting was most unusual and heart warming. I sat in a simple chair with others and sang the simple old Gospel songs, then heard a soul searching message. When the altar call was done, I lingered, and the white haired lady who had greeted me so warmly asked if I knew Jesus. I did. She said, 'Would you like to hear my story as to why I am here?' I responded, "Yes, please tell me." She said: "Many years ago I lived with my husband on the North side of Chicago in a very expensive mansion. We owned a prosperous business, but he died and I was left alone. The days and nights became impossible for me, so I locked up the house and started walking down towards Lake Michigan as a place to end it all. Walking on the other side of the street I paused under the street light to read one last verse from my New Testament. When I finished, the night lights caused the Pacific Garden Mission sign to glimmer. The purple color intrigued me and I decided to hear one last sermon before leaving for eternity. I came in and the grand old songs warmed my heart and the message brought tears to my eyes and soon I answered the altar call. They baptized me in the very lake where I planned to end my life.

When it was all done and we were back at the mission, the director said--"Lady, do you need a job? We need someone to stand at the door and welcome people into the mission. You invite folk on the street into the Mission by opening the door, grasping their hand and telling them that Jesus loves them and you do, too, and please come in out of the night."

The lady said--"Well, I have never done this kind of thing before, but I'll try. But, it was almost too much for me and the next night the second person who came almost caused me to fail my duty."

"How was that," I asked. "It was night and I saw this little teen age girl coming down the sidewalk. She wore ragged clothes and her hair was unkempt. As she drew closer I secretly hoped she wouldn't come near the mission for my years of fine furs and clothes had not prepared me for this challenge. But, she seemed to be walking directly toward our door, so I swung open the door and said--'Little girl, come in out of the night because Jesus loves you and I do too.' The little girl looked at me out of her hollow eyes with a penetrating stare and said--'You don't love me.' *Yes, we do love you very much, I replied. The little girl answered --'If you really love me, then kiss me.'* I was sorely torn inside to answer with mere words for the girl seemed to reek of every sin of society. She had scabs on her arms and her face was unwashed, so I hesitated. The little lady paused for a long time, and Dee Shaffer could wait no longer, so he said: 'Little lady, don't stop now. What did you do?' The white haired lady with tears in her eyes continued--*I did what love had to do. I grabbed that little girl, kissed her on the face and arms and said little girl Jesus loves you very much and I do too, please come out of the night into Pacific Garden Mission.*" And, she did! In days to come she found Jesus to be her lover, too."

as shared by Dee Shaffer at the 1973 National Missionary Convention
in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

Mature Love Reaches People Who Are Like Lost Older Brothers.

"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. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your

father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'" Luke 15:15-32

Matthew Henry in his comments suggests:

"In God's family. Those who are comparatively innocents seldom know how to be compassionate towards those who are manifestly penitents. The language of such we have here, in what the elder brother said (v. 29-30), and it is written for warning to those who by the grace of God are kept from scandalous sin, and kept in the way of virtue and sobriety, that they sin not after the similitude of this transgression. Let us observe the particulars of it. First, He boasted of himself and his own virtue and obedience. He had not only not run from his father's house, as his brother did, but had made himself as a servant in it, and had long done so:

Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment. Note, It is too common for those that are better than their neighbors to boast of it, yea, and to make their boast of it before God himself, as if he were indebted to them for it."

The *Stay at home Sons*" are often blind---*

His elder son/brother, who I dub "*the stay at home boy*," was as they say "blind in one eye and couldn't see out of the other." vss 28-30. He is to be pitied above all others, for he was both blind to his own faults and unable to see any good in others including his own brother. How often today people, particularly church folk, do the same. In teaching a Bible lesson at Random Road Chapel of here in Arkansas City, Kansas, I inquired: "Peter denied Christ three times. How many of you have ever denied Christ? Judas betrayed Christ. How many of you have every betrayed Christ?" The answer was "O". Then, I asked " "How many of you have ever sinned?" Every hand went up. So I pointed out that sin is precisely a betrayal and denial of Christ and God. See Genesis 39:9; I Samuel 12:23; Psalm 78:17, 119:11; I Corinthians 8:12. Lord, open our *eyes* that we may see!

This *stay at home son* was *disobedient in his spirit* in not respecting his own father (the Father of us all) and the father of his brother, too. Vss. 29,30. His claim was, "*But when this son of yours....is come*". Was this his Father's son, and not his brother? Further, to add insult to injury he suggested, "*Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders.*"

He would not listen to love or reason.

No question remains in my mind he lied at least twice---the *away from home boy* was his brother, and to suggest that he never disobeyed his father is unreal. Wasn't he a normal boy? Was there in fact a person on earth who has never sinned? Remember, while this is a story, yet, Jesus told it and the language "*A certain man*" vs.

11, seems to suggest Jesus had in mind a particular father and two sons which he had observed in his earthly sojourn.

No doubt this *stay at home boy* was blinded by pride as are all people who suppose they are 100% perfect.

Had this *stay at home son* admitted publicly that this *just come home boy* was his brother what might people think? That he was a party to the sins in the far country? That he approved of leaving home?

So, today in the moral failure of President Bill Clinton, the American church faced one of its biggest challenges in the area of practical forgiveness. A Preacher who was counseling Mr. Clinton wrote many other Minister via e-mail--"Shall I forgive Mr. Clinton for his sin?" I wrote to ask if Bill had confessed his wrong and sought forgiveness? The reply was, "Oh yes, many times over!" I wrote back to say--"Considering what Jesus said in Matthew 18:21,22? and what he did for the woman at the Well and the Woman taken in adultery, what other choice do you have?" I'm not asking if the President's sin was wrong. That is a certain YES!
What did you do?

Just so, the *away from home son/brother* had sinned, that is not the question. The question to be answered is--"Will I call him my "son/brother" when he returns from the far country?"

Many of my readers know I was sexually attacked in the Walnut Park of here several years ago. What would people think if I ever went back there again? Isn't it best to stay away from these *wandering sons of the world*? The answer is "NO!" for these *away from home sons* need to be witnessed to, and so I go. And, the opportunities to inquire--"Are your bags all packed? Are you ready to die?", and share copies of my books.

This *stay at home son* could not / would not face his own shortcomings, so he focused on his brother's shortcomings. vs. 30.

Probably the younger brother had not left home until he was 30 years of age as suggested by Jewish culture. So, what of all those years when the two boys played together? Worked together? Prayed together in Jewish upbringing?

This scenario is played out today when preachers/teachers condemn, *slam kick the 'butts'* of their audience. Almost without exception, they are trying to hide shortcomings of their own. A couple of national TV personalities in the nineties were unfortunate illustrations of the same matter. Just last Sunday at our Mt. Zion country church the preacher did this to us. All the sins of the Seven Church of Revelation were charged up to the Mt. Zion people. I came home and checked it out, and what a startling revelation. Of the 34 things asserted about these seven churches, only four (13%) were negative, while 30 (87%) were positive. How come we so often hear only the negative?

Preachers/teachers all too often play the part of the *elder brother(son)*, ignorantly I hope, and give the Devil and his angels too much publicity in their message/lesson by announcing what the Devil is doing in the world by reading the latest FBI crime report, abortion statistics. Please! Do not tell me what the enemy is doing and then *beat me over the head* with the same by way of some kind of twisted exhortation. Tell me what God is doing, what Jesus has done and the Holy Spirit is ready to do!

Blinded by self, the *Stay at home son* was unable to rejoice with his Father when his brother came home. vss. 27,28

The words of the *stay at home son* reflects the lad's real need. vss/

27,28. He needed to stop, look, listen, then act accordingly. (James 1:22-25) Preachers/Teachers who have backsliding/ slumbering people need to look in the mirror of self examination for a true revelation. After three years, a congregation/class begins to reflect clearly the image of the teacher/preacher--his/her love, desire, interests, hunger, hope, etc.

Four times I experienced this in fifty years of preaching. When the congregation where I was preaching/teaching begin to lag in winning souls, fruits of the Spirit, worship, away from home missions, love for youth, witnessing, giving, etc., I had only to begin the remedy by searching my heart, then kindly, yet firmly, sharing the Word in the lacking area, with perhaps a collective service program and soon the breach in the wall was under repair, and victory appeared!

How does mature love act towards the stay at home sons?

My answer: Cautiously, slowly with no weapons beyond the Sword of the Spirit and the fruits of the Spirit.

Jesus had an advantage over us in that while he taught these *stay at home sons*, Saducees and Pharisees, wherever they appeared ; yet, he was not required to *rub shoulders* with them every day. We are to wait like the winsome Father who waited for his *away from home son* and went out to meet both these sons on their own ground.

Perhaps a key phrase for us in reference to people who are like *lost sheep, coins, away from home* and *stay at home sons* is **PRACTICE LOVE NOW** as illustrated in this true story:

In a class I teach for adults, I gave the assignment to "go to someone you love, and tell them that you love them."

At the beginning of the next class, one of the students began by saying, "I was angry with you last week when you gave us this assignment. I didn't feel I had anyone to say those words to. But as I began driving home my conscience started talking. Then I knew exactly who I needed to say 'I love you' too. Five years ago, my father and I had a vicious disagreement and never really resolved it. We avoided seeing each other unless we absolutely had to at family gatherings. We hardly spoke. So by the time I got home, I had convinced myself I was going to tell my father I loved him.

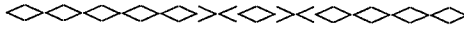
"Just making that decision seemed to lift a heavy load off my chest.

"At 5:30, I was at my parents' house ringing the doorbell, praying that Dad would answer the door. I was afraid if Mom answered, I would chicken out and tell her instead. But as luck

would have it, Dad did answer the door. "I didn't waste any time - I took one step in the door and said,

'Dad, I just came over to tell you that I love you.' "It was as if a transformation came over my dad. Before my eyes his face softened, the wrinkles seemed to disappear and he began to cry. He reached out and hugged me and said, 'I love you too, son, but I've never been able to say it.'

"But that's not even my point. Two days after that visit, my dad had a heart attack and is in the hospital. I don't even know if he'll make it. "So my message to all of you is this: Don't wait to do the things you know need to be done. What if I had waited to tell my dad? Take the time to do what you need to do and do it now!" *Dennis E. Mannerling*



"Dear Wilbur,

Oh how I can relate to the story that you forwarded concerning "Practice Love." I could have easily written that story. From the time I was about 12 when I told my Mom that I was never going back to see my Dad, (my folks were divorced, Dad was an alcoholic) until I was about 28 I refused to have much of anything to do with him. But with age, some wisdom and time, Dad quit drinking, I'm glad I finally told him that I loved him!!! I was glad to have known my Dad his last several years and we had some memorable moments to share elk hunting in the mountains of Wyoming. It will be 10 years on Dec. 30th since he passed away, but I often am reminded during my times of prayer that I'm thankful that God showed me the need to say "I love you". Now not a day goes by, that I don't say "I love you" to someone that I do! Once again-- I thank you!"
Craig Fausett of Highmore, South Dakota
(Used by permission of Brother Craig who is an elder in the Church of Christ Highmore, South Dakota and Manager of the Phone Company there)

**"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you."
Ephesians 4:32**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

by Chuck Thomas - Tulsa, Oklahoma

Chapter 5 - "LOVE MATURES US TO BE LIKE GOD"

- 1. What is Mark Moore's definition of love?**
- 2. What did C. S. Lewis say nineteen (19) out of twenty (20) good men would say was the highest of virtues?**
- 3. What did C. S. Lewis say almost any of the great Christians of old would say was the highest of virtues?**
- 4. How is the love that comes from God developed in us?**
- 5. What did Jesus say was the second commandment?**
- 6. What is the antidote to self-acceptance?**
- 7. What did Howard Clinebell say will make it possible for a man to feel that others have inherent worth?**
- 8. What did Jesus tell the parable of the lost sheep to remind religious people?**
- 9. How does the apostle Paul say love matures?**
- 10. Who, more often than not, loves its own kind far more than the church?**

11. In Luke 15:8-10, who was responsible for the lost coin?

12. Relationships die as love breaks down with a lack of

_____,
_____, and
_____.

13. In I Corinthians what virtues of mature love are listed?

14. What attitude does Jesus reveal towards sinners?

15. List the eight (8) positive factors about the "Prodigal son."

16. Mature love waits with the open arms of compassion to:

_____ and _____.

17. What does mature love wait with?

18. According to I Corinthians 13 love is: Lov suffers long

_____; love does not _____; love does not
_____, is not _____;
does not _____, does not
_____, is not
_____, thinks _____; does not

_____, but rejoices in _____
_____; bears all _____, believes all
_____, hopes all _____, endures all
_____. Love _____
_____.

19. Matthew Henry suggests: "In God's family. Those who are comparatively innocents seldom know how to be:

_____."

20. What are the "Stay at home Sons"?

21. How did the "Stay at home Son" show he did not respect his own father?

22. How did the "Stay at home Son" demonstrate he could not / would not fact his own shortcomings?

23. Why was the "Stay at home Son" unable to rejoice with his Father when his brother came home?

24. What is the key phrase for us in reference to people who are like lost sheep, coins, away from home and stay at home sons?