

WD January 13, 2024

“Getting Unstuck”

Well, old man winter finally came for a visit to southern Indiana last week. Last Sunday I walked into church with a dusting and came out to five inches of snow. The ride home was awesome. Someone told me that we had our entire annual snowfall for our area in one week. It sure seemed like it. Naturally the roads were a mess because of it as was our church parking lot and neighborhood driveways.

Our drive-up door on the side of the building was not plowed but people still tried going through there including a delivery van with rear wheel drive. They got in on the one side but couldn't clear the pile of hard frozen snow on the other side and got stuck. When pulled up to the church there they were going nowhere. Left wheel was spinning helplessly on the ice rut created by the spinning tire. On the right-side rear wheel rested. The right side must have been *tired*. (Joke). However, with a little bit of digging and a little bit of rocking the van back and forth to get momentum we finally got him out.

Getting stuck was an ongoing thing. Because there was so much snow intersections were deep in town and smaller vehicles were bottoming out and getting stuck right in the intersection. Parked cars in downtown New Albany, were stuck behind mountains of snow left from the snow plows which froze up and had to be chiseled away. One of my neighbors had the best idea. She went to Florida to visit her granddaughter.

Getting stuck is no fun. Getting stuck happens when certain conditions occur. Weather is one reason but there are a whole lot of reasons why we get stuck personally and spiritually as well. We can get stuck in grief or in anger or in a lifestyle we know is not working for us. Getting stuck was something both the sons got into in Luke 15. The younger Son, we remember, got stuck on the idea that dad was boring, that home life was preventing him from the good life somewhere else. He asks his dad for his share of the inheritance and leaves as fast as possible. The older son is stuck in a performance-based lifestyle, stuck in resentment for his brother, and disrespect for his father. Both were prodigals in different ways.

Getting stuck is not where we are meant to be. If it was why bother digging out our car. If our car is stuck, we aren't going anywhere. Likewise, when the brothers got stuck they weren't really going anywhere that was good. The younger son blows all the money on Vegas style living. The Older son burns up inside with resentment but covers it up by working harder. The younger son finally comes to his sense and returns home. The older son remains open-ended.

I once got a tractor stuck up to its axles in mud. I stubbornly worked for hours thinking I could get unstuck by myself. I didn't. I finally got pulled out with some help. The trouble with getting stuck is a willingness to be unstuck. If our hearts are weighed down over and over again with the same thinking, the same troubled mind, wondering why nothing seems to change, then perhaps something can. The first thing that must change when getting stuck is perspective. Changing our perspective is within our reach with the spiritual gift of self-control. We are told that that younger son came to his senses, realizing that back home even a hire hand eats better than he was at the pig pen. This is a realization that his dad was generous, kind, compassionate, and likely his best chance. He also realizes that his own way of doing things was not working. Ask yourself: “How might I be contributing to my being stuck and am I willing to change?” You are not simply a victim because you are stuck or feeling stuck. Often those who feel spiritual stuck in a rut are likely asking themselves the wrong questions or perhaps refusing to change what they know to be bad habits like the older brother. The older brother measured everyone else by his own ideals of work and reward. He refuses to go and participate in his brother's homecoming. In the end he is miserable and remains unhappy. Yet, we should note that the thing frustrating him most was himself and his perspective. The Father pleads with him, reaffirms his relationship with him, but explains his gratefulness that his younger brother has returned safe and sound—which brings great joy to the father.

It is the Father's perspective that we are to notice most. We are to see his longing for both of his boys to be at home with him and to know the same joy for one another. The Father is celebrating the younger son's return because there is not better place to be than with the Father. Jesus wants us to know that same joy. But that's hard to do if we are standing next to the older brother in our self-imposed solitude.

Secondly, if we want to get unstuck something must be done to unstuck it. We must take some action. If we want to get out of the mud, we may have to ask for help. If we want to get dug out of the snow, we will

have to go outside and start shoveling. If we want to get out on the road, we will have to summon the courage to go. If we want to stop eating with the pigs, we have to do more than blame the world. A change in our actions will be necessary. This is not a surprise. If we want to be healthier, we have to choose to change our eating habits, exercise all year long-not just in January. This takes more than a new year's resolution. Resolutions only set us up for a deeper rut most of the time because typically most start and then quit and feel even worse than when they started. Getting unstuck requires us to leave the pig pen forever and go home. It requires us to be more watchful of what we do, what we eat, get ourselves up and to the gym, and if you are physically able to get to the doctors, to the grocery store, to the movies etc. then get to church. If you are lonely be proactive and talk to someone. If you hurt find something that brings some joy. Leave the 'pig pen of stuck.' Sitting around waiting for the world to change just keeps one stuck. Find something that can give you some momentum.

Finally, be around someone that won't let you stay in the pig pen. The Father was amazing with the older brother going out to him in order to help him. His pig pen was his pride. Yet the father appeals to him as a son. Who may be the one in your life that can challenge you like no one else? Who may be that one who will call out your excuses and tell you truth? That's the one you need.

If you want to be unstuck, it starts with a willingness to be unstuck. At some point it means getting dug out. It means getting moving. It means welcoming a little help. It means laying claim to Your faith. It's Philippians 4:13 stuff. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Everyone gets stuck. In Christ we don't have to stay stuck.

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John 3:30