

**Explanatory Notes:****FAMILY POSSESSIONS:  
TROUBLE OR BLESSING?****Series title:** Family Possessions: Trouble or Blessing?**Topic:** Family Rights and Inheritance of Possessions**Table of Contents:**

Message 1: Family Possessions: Trouble or Blessing?

Message 2: The Bible and Possessions

**Message #1: FAMILY POSSESSIONS: TROUBLE OR  
BLESSING?****Galatians 5:13-26, CEV**

In the USA the distribution of possessions among children after the death of their parents can be a cause of great conflict and argument. Sometimes children who respected and loved each other fall into an ugly contest as they try to divide the possessions fairly. In some cases the conflict is so serious that the children would be better off if they received nothing.

The rules, written or unwritten, are usually well known. This does not eliminate conflict. In the USA most people have written wills that designate which child gets which possession when parents die. But those legal documents do not eliminate the possibility of big family fights between the children who inherit property and possessions.

Customs and laws relating to family lands and possession vary greatly throughout the world. Distribution is not always equal. Often male members of a family receive more than females. Often firstborn children receive more than the others. When this happens, the children who receive less often feel deprived and cheated. They become jealous of the brother or sister who received a larger share.

So, no matter what the customs are, family inheritances can

**Property and rights:**

There is much emphasis on our rights these days. This is good. The "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" is an important document. All nations who wish to become members of the United Nations are required to agree with it. Regarding property, this declaration says, in Article 17:

*(1) Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others.*

*(2) No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.*

Most Christians would accept these two principles. But their application might vary from nation to nation and from tribe to tribe.

**Producers:**

A Bible story on greed and property is that of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21:1-29. This story shows the greed of King Ahab and Jezebel for the land of a common man, and God's judgment of their cruel greed. It also shows the courage of Elijah, the true prophet of God. This story is long enough for one message. Let the story tell itself. Only add explanations that are necessary for your listeners.

lead to a lot of conflict between brothers and sisters. Here is the advice the Bible gives to people who quarrel with each other for selfish motives:

*My friends, you were chosen to be free. So don't use your freedom as an excuse to do anything you want. Use it as an opportunity to **serve each other with love. All that the Law says can be summed up in the command to love others as much as you love yourself. But if you keep attacking each other like wild animals, you had better watch out or you will destroy yourselves.***

*If you are guided by the Spirit, you won't obey your selfish desires. The Spirit and your desires are enemies of each other. They are always fighting each other and keeping you from doing what you feel you should. But if you obey the Spirit, the Law of Moses has no control over you.*

*People's desires make them give in to immoral ways, filthy thoughts, and shameful deeds. They worship idols, practice witchcraft, **hate others, and are hard to get along with. People become jealous, angry, and selfish. They not only argue and cause trouble, but they are envious.\*** They get drunk, carry on at wild parties, and do other evil things as well. I told you before, and I am telling you again: No one who does these things will share in the blessings of God's kingdom.*

**God's Spirit makes us**

**\*Producers:** note that 8 of the 15 items on this list of the 'works of the flesh' have to do with our relationships with other people. We have put these 8 items in **boldface print**. So do most of the fruit of the Spirit. Because of the nature of this message, you will want to draw attention to these items and save the other items for another message.

*loving,  
happy,  
peaceful,  
patient,  
kind,  
good,  
faithful,  
gentle,  
and self-controlled. There is no law against  
behaving in any of these ways. And because we  
belong to Christ Jesus, we have killed our selfish  
feelings and desires. God's Spirit has given us life,  
and so we should follow the Spirit. **But don't be  
conceited or make others jealous by claiming to be  
better than they are.***

Galatians 5:13-26, CEV

We will never be in complete control over our lives. We will either be under the control of God's Holy Spirit or we will be under the control of our selfish desires. When we let our selfish desires have their way, they fill our lives with hatred and immorality. We fight and attack each other like animals.

But God's Spirit produces peace and love within us when we let him control us. We become kind and patient and faithful and gentle with other people.

Here is an illustration of how family members can work together in love when the Holy Spirit controls their hearts. It is about three sisters and the way they divided their mother's possessions after she died.

The mother, Rachel, died at age 99. She had a will and designated the second oldest sister, Charlotte, to be the "executor" (administrator) of the will. The mother had a nice apartment with many wonderful possessions that she had collected through the years. So Charlotte and her two sisters went together to decide who would receive what from the apartment full of their mother's possessions. They all loved and respected each other even though they had lived separate lives for many years at great distances from

each other.

- Virginia is a retired librarian, a widow with no children.
- Charlotte is a retired Lieutenant Colonel of the U.S. Army, who never married.
- And Dorothy is a tutor and a former missionary. Her husband is a widowed minister with three children.

So, a person might ask, how could these three sisters divide their mother's possessions without disagreement and argument? Well, they did. And how was that?

- They loved and respected each other. They even respected each other's differences.
- While sorting out their mother's possessions they talked about their childhood together and the meaning associated with each possession.
- They honored each other's different outlooks on the possessions. They expressed their preferences openly, but not with selfish words like, "I've always wanted that and I think I should have it!"
- The experience of dividing the possessions became a new family memory, a memory of each other and of their mother. It was not a time of competition to get what each of them wanted for themselves.
- Dorothy, the youngest, received the most possessions, but she was very careful to write each thing down and its value, so that the final financial accounting would be fair. Then she paid her sisters for the extras she got.
- Before their mother died, Charlotte moved closer to take care of her. Charlotte had spent much of her own money doing this, and a great part of her time. So Virginia and Dorothy made sure Charlotte received a generous share of their mother's money. They did this to honor Charlotte fairly for her sacrifice and her loving voluntary service.

It would have been easy for the sisters to allow greed, competition, personal preferences, and desires for "Mother's things" to become the dominant emotion between them. But these three women showed that the Holy Spirit was producing his fruit in their lives.

What do you think? How does this story help us as we deal

with possessions and inheritance rules in our society?  
 What can we do as Christians to maintain love in situations where conflict develops and threatens to destroy love and respect?

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## **Message #2: A Bible Story About Dividing Family Wealth**

**Luke 15:11-32, CEV.**

In some cultures, parents decide long before they die what inheritances they will give their children. In some cases, the parents even distribute part or all of the inheritance to their children at a young age.

This process is not always fair to all the children. One day an American missionary in Pakistan visited the home of a dear friend and fellow-worker named Yaqub. His house was very small, just two rooms, a small veranda and a small outside kitchen house. Yaqub and his wife showed the American the inside of his house for the first time. With considerable pride and enthusiasm Yaqub showed him a curtain that divided the house into two parts.

The missionary asked him, “Why is that curtain there?” Yaqub said, “Oh, that divides the house. That part is for my oldest son, Inayat.” The missionary was shocked. Inayat was only 15 years old. Yaqub had three other children living with him and his wife in that small house. He explained, “You must understand that Inayat is the son in whom we place our hopes. He will support the family, my wife and myself in future years. It is our prayer and hope that he will be very successful in school and get a very good job. That is why one-third of our house is his.” That was a big surprise for the missionary, who placed great emphasis on equality in his family.\*

Jesus told a story about a family in which the division of possessions caused quarrels and problems. This is the story:

*Jesus also told them another story:*

**\*Producers:** here are some verses on fairness from the New Testament.

**1. People of all kinds are equal in God’s eyes if they have faith in Jesus:**

*Faith in Christ Jesus is what makes each of you equal with each other, whether you are a*

*Once a man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, "Give me my share of the property." So the father divided his property between his two sons.*

*Not long after that, the younger son packed up everything he owned and left for a foreign country, where he wasted all his money in wild living. He had spent everything, when a bad famine spread through that whole land. Soon he had nothing to eat.*

*He went to work for a man in that country, and the man sent him out to take care of his pigs. He would have been glad to eat what the pigs were eating, but no one gave him a thing.*

*Finally, he came to his senses and said, "My father's workers have plenty to eat, and here I am, starving to death! I will go to my father and say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son. Treat me like one of your workers.'"*

*The younger son got up and started back to his father. But when he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt sorry for him. He ran to his son and hugged and kissed him.*

*The son said, "Father, I have sinned against God in heaven and against you. I am no longer good enough to be called your son."*

*But his father said to the servants, "Hurry and bring the best clothes and put them on him. Give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. Get the best calf and prepare it, so we can eat and celebrate. This son of mine was dead, but has now come back to life. He was lost and has now been found." And they began to celebrate.*

*The older son had been out in the field. But when he came near the house, he heard the music and dancing. So he called one of the servants over and asked, "What's going on here?"*

*The servant answered, "Your brother has come home safe and sound, and your father ordered us to kill the best calf." The older brother got so angry*

*Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free person, a man or a woman. So if you belong to Christ, you are now part of Abraham's family, and you will be given what God has promised.*  
Galatians 3:28-29, CEV

## **2. Followers of Jesus need to treat people as equals:**

*My friends, if you have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, you won't treat some people better than others. Suppose a rich person wearing fancy clothes and a gold ring comes to one of your meetings. And suppose a poor person dressed in worn-out clothes also comes. You must not give the best seat to the one in fancy clothes and tell the one who is poor to stand at the side or sit on the floor. That is the same as saying that some people are better than others, and you would be acting like a crooked judge.*

*You will do all right, if you obey the most important law in the Scriptures. It is the law that commands us to love others as much as we love ourselves. But if you treat some people better than others, you have done wrong, and the Scriptures teach that you have sinned.*  
James 2:1-4, 8-9, CEV

## **3. When Christ rules in people's lives, they share freely with all:**

*Everyone was amazed by the many miracles and wonders that the apostles worked. All the Lord's followers often met together, and they shared everything they had. They would sell their property and*

*that he would not even go into the house. His father came out and begged him to go in. But he said to his father, "For years I have worked for you like a slave and have always obeyed you. But you have never even given me a little goat, so that I could give a dinner for my friends. This other son of yours wasted your money on prostitutes. And now that he has come home, you ordered the best calf to be killed for a feast."*

*His father replied, "My son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we should be glad and celebrate! Your brother was dead, but he is now alive. He was lost and has now been found."*

Luke 15:11-32, CEV

*possessions and give the money to whoever needed it. Day after day they met together in the temple. They broke bread together in different homes and shared their food happily and freely, while praising God. Everyone liked them, and each day the Lord added to their group others who were being saved.*

Acts 2:43-47, CEV

If you have time in your message, you can briefly show your audience the Bible's emphasis on the equal worth of people.

Jesus told this story to illustrate how much God loves and forgives sinful people when they repent and ask for forgiveness. He gladly receives them into his family, as the father did. He does not judge them harshly, as the elder son did.

But this story also shows how our love for money can interfere with our relationships.

### **1. The Father:**

Why did he give a complete share to his youngest son when he must have known that he did not have a good plan to use it? We don't know. But we can draw the conclusion that parents should be wise as to how and when they give possessions to their children. Riches are power. And the power of money corrupts, as we see it corrupted the younger son. It does not always make people happy as so many think.

### **2. The Younger Son:**

The younger son is a good example of how wealth can corrupt us and lead us into many harmful and shameful sins.

His eagerness for wealth made him full of contempt for his father. In Jewish society, when a son asked for his share of

the inheritance while his father was still alive, this was a sign of deep disrespect. The son was saying, in effect, “Father, I wish you were dead. I love your money more than I love you!”

This young man also had big dreams of how his father’s money would make him happy in worldly, ungodly pleasures far from home. His greed led him to engage in immoral practices. The final result was humiliation. He was forced to eat the food of pigs. Pigs were ritually unclean animals.

How amazing it is that the father never stopped loving his foolish son. The son “came to his senses” and returned home fully realizing how wasteful and utterly reckless he had been.

### **3. The Older Son:**

The older son is a good example of a child who keeps the rules but lacks true love and respect for his family. He respected his father’s wealth and was a faithful, hard-working son. But he considered his rights and the possessions of his family more important than the need to restore, accept and forgive his repentant brother. He couldn’t even say his brother’s name! He could only tell his father, “***This other son of yours** wasted your money on prostitutes.*”

Both of the sons put their love for money before their love for their family. But the father knew that his sons were far more important than money. He patiently waited for his wayward younger son and he patiently pleaded with his judgmental older son.

Who are you more like? The brothers? Or the father? What do you love more? The people God has put into your life? Or money and possessions?

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