



Cords of Love

*I threw down my gloves and walked away.
“Let Dad finish the work himself,” I thought.*

An old log sits on my back porch. Over the years it has served as a stool for me or other family members to sit on while enjoying the evening sun. At times it has been used as a stand for one of my wife’s potted plants. But mostly, the purpose of that log is to remind me of the value of hard work, correct choices, and the patient love of a father.

In the fall of 1972, we moved from the city to a small town in the Nevada (USA) desert. One of the first things my dad did was remove the gas furnace and install a wood-burning stove. He informed us that if we wanted to keep warm through the winter, we would cut wood.

The most common firewood in that part of Nevada was mesquite, a thorn-covered, shrub-like tree with dark brown wood that is so dense that it can make a chain saw throw sparks. Turning it into firewood was hard, dirty work. There were sharp thorns to contend with, joint-numbing vibrations from the chain saw, and logs that could weigh as much as 80 pounds (36 kg) each. The desert’s notoriously extreme climate made the chore even less pleasant. It always seemed to be hot or cold, with little moderation.

Time to Gather Firewood

One cold Saturday morning, my father informed me that we would need several more cords of wood to get us through the winter.

I looked through the window at the pile of wood in our backyard and argued that we had enough wood to get us through the winter—at least enough to put the chore off for another day. I reminded him that there was going to be a good football game on TV that day. And wouldn’t we both enjoy that?

Not persuaded by my argument for procrastination, my father loaded the chain saws and other equipment onto our truck while I waited inside by the fireplace, hopeful that a taste of the cold morning air would dampen his enthusiasm for the job.

It didn’t.

He beckoned me from the back door, and I gave one last pitch, arguing to wait at least until later in the day when it would be warmer. My father lowered his brow and locked his eyes on me, his way of letting me know that he was losing patience.

I put my coat on and shut the door behind me with an angry grunt. I climbed into the pickup and turned the radio to my favorite station, then settled into a well-practiced teenage sulk, a mood I maintained until we arrived at the mesquite patch about 30 minutes later.

A Few Painful Moments

I begrudgingly got out of the truck and slipped on the oily work gloves. As I moved through the thicket toward the dead tree my father had begun cutting, a thorn caught me in the forehead. In my haste and fury, I grabbed the offending branch and punctured the leather glove with another thorn that ended up embedded a half-inch into my palm.

My father saw what had happened. He stopped working and advised me to put ice on my hand





As I reached the apex of the hill, the thrill of a spectacular view and easy descent turned into horror.

for a few minutes. But I didn't want his sympathy. "We didn't have to be out here today!" I hollered. "In fact we shouldn't need to cut wood at all!"

Although he remained calm, I could see that I had pushed my father about as far as I could. He suggested that I sit in the truck to cool down, which I gladly did. But as I sat there, I didn't cool down. I hated being out there on a cold, miserable day, and I resented the fact that he had removed a perfectly good furnace from our home over everyone's objections—even my mother's. My teenage sense of fairness told me that it might teach him a lesson if he had to cut a load of wood by himself.

Looking for the Easy Way Out

I looked at a small hill to the east. I knew home was over that hill—an easy hour walk, I figured.

At first my conscience wouldn't allow me to leave. I climbed out of the truck and headed back to the work site. But when my father began instructing me to pick up wood, move a branch, and get oil for the saw, my defiant attitude returned. I threw my gloves at his feet and told him to finish the job himself. I would be walking home.

He stared in disbelief for a moment, then nodded his acknowledgment and got back to work. I had been hoping for a stronger reaction—one that would justify my act of rebellion. Nevertheless, I turned and headed home on foot.

It took me longer than I expected to get to the base of the hill, and by the time I got there, it was looking more

like a mountain. I glanced back and could see my dad still laboring with the firewood in the distance. For a brief moment, guilt got to me and I thought of turning back. But pride pushed me forward.

The walk turned into a climb. The hill was far steeper than I had originally judged, and the loose rocks beneath my feet made the ascent rather treacherous. I fell several times, bruising my knee and opening up a gash on my right hand, making the injury from the thorn seem minor by comparison.

As I trudged up the hill, I began to notice that it was no longer cold. The sun was beating down on the blackish rocks, and sweat was dripping off the end of my nose. I stopped to catch my breath. My original estimate of an hour to get home had already passed, and I was only half-way up the "hill." But I moved on, stopping every so often to wipe my brow and catch my breath.

I looked back and could see that the truck was a mere speck now. I smacked my dry lips together. I was now far enough that I could see the top of the hill. It was just a few hundred feet away, and I knew from there it would be all downhill. I moved forward, suddenly excited by the prospect of being at the top.

Where My Pride Had Led Me

As I reached the apex of the hill, the thrill of a spectacular view and easy descent turned into horror as I realized that the small mountain I had just climbed wasn't the sole obstacle between me and home. There were two more mountains, each at least as big as the one I had just climbed.

I looked back and could no longer see my father's truck. However, the dust trail rising in the distance told me that he had finished and was on his way home.

I sighed and my shoulders dropped. The promise of an easy walk home—an easy way out of a simple chore with my father—had already turned into a long, miserable journey. The realization of what I had done hit me hard and suddenly. I dropped to my knees and asked Heavenly Father to forgive me for my rebellion, for acting so horribly toward my father, and to help me make it home. Then,

without any other options, I returned to the slog home.

I spent the rest of a long day trudging up and down hills and over desert terrain. During that trek, the guilt of abandoning my father tore at me. I also reflected on what my choices had caused me to miss out on: I would have already been home with my dad with a full load of firewood, plenty to drink, and probably even time to watch the last half of the football game that had seemed so important to me that morning.

By the time I stumbled into our driveway late that afternoon, I was dehydrated and near exhaustion. The anger I had exhibited toward my father earlier in the day was now turned on myself.

Home at Last

I trudged up the front steps, anxious to express my regret and ask my father for forgiveness. However, when my mother met me at the door, she informed me that my father had been home only long enough to unload the firewood. He explained to her what had happened and then left again—to spend the rest of the day looking for me.

Although I was a 14-year-old boy who abhorred displays of emotion, I fell into my mother's arms and wept openly. My tears were not for what I had been through but for what I had put my father through, for my poor choices, for my wanton disobedience. I spent the next several hours praying for forgiveness and asking that my father make it home safely.

My father made it back home just after dark, and I ran to embrace him as he walked through the door.

"Feet hurt?" was all he said. I nodded, and we sat down to a quiet dinner.

Without either of us saying so, I knew that he had forgiven me, and he knew

that I had learned a valuable lesson about diligent work and obedience—the very lesson he had been trying to teach me.

Over the years, that day has become ingrained in my memory, perhaps because it taught me the value of hard work and of making correct choices. But more than that, for me that one eventful day encapsulates so much of Heavenly Father's plan of salvation: God-given agency, temptation with the false promise of an easier way, the possibility of incorrect choices, the consequences of rebellion, repentance, and a patient and forgiving father.

Today, as I sit on my log, enjoying the evening sun, I am grateful for a loving and forgiving father and for a loving and forgiving Heavenly Father. ■

Without either of us saying so, I knew he had forgiven me.

