

GLIMPSE

High Standards

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When my older sister and my younger brother and I were literally growing up, every now and again my mother would back each of us into a particular door jam and make a pencil line showing how much taller we were than the last mark. We were measuring up. My dear mother would then get a yardstick and announce how many inches we were and how many more we had extended ourselves since last time. The ruler told us how good we were, at least my mother told us that growing taller also indicated that we were growing tall in goodness. That made us feel quite good until she would reveal to us how in other areas we were shrinking.

The "ruler" has two meanings. One is the king or dominator. The second is the measuring stick. Both can be powerful influences, positive and negative. When the measuring device becomes the dominating force in our lives, that is when the ruler becomes the Ruler, and it can never be growthful. It will always be a measuring-down experience.

I recently was praying with the Elder Son, from the story of the Prodigal Son, from the 15th chapter of Luke's Gospel. Enough of praying with the younger son, he gets a lot of attention, but the Elder Son, now there's a study! He had done all things well and measured up. He walked around with the ruler and exercised judgment of himself and upon his do-no-good brother. He appears not to be a happy person, being dominated by what ruled him. Was it fear of his father's displeasure that kept him doing just the right things? Was he, perhaps, in recovery from having left home years before and his father welcomed him back and so he had to be ever so good to pay his father back? Perhaps he did not want his younger brother to know about that prodigal-past.

In my contemplations of this Elder-me, the righteous son does not go into the house where the celebration of the returned-son is going on. Those of us, who walk around outside of things and keeping a safe distance, suffer a sadness of separation. We do not measure up enough, according to our own standards, our own

ruler which has become the Ruler over our behavior. The father tries to remind the sad-son of all the gifts he had given his older son which he had not given to the younger. The son did not consider these gifts, but repayments for his own perfectional performances. He had become quite a good judge of others actions and their motivations. This takes a certain distance. Suspicion, prejudice, severity need this separation to be accurate, at least according to the one doing the measuring. It is difficult to be harsh when up close. It is just a glimpse, from up close.