



Freedom in Forgiveness

May 21-27, 2023

MAIN POINT

God's forgiveness of us is the determining factor in how we forgive others.

INTRODUCTION

Can you think of a recent experience with road rage? Share it with the group.

When are you (or others you've seen) most tempted to succumb to road rage? Why?

How does road rage demonstrate a lack of forgiveness?

As our discussion about road rage shows, it's easy to fall into a pattern of unforgiveness. Jesus' parable of lost sons will help us take a good look at our relationships and attitudes and, if needed, confront the need to forgive others as we encounter the incredible forgiveness we have received from God our Father.

UNDERSTANDING

In [Luke 15:1-2](#), the tax collectors and sinners—two groups hated by the Pharisees and scribes—approached Jesus. The outcasts drew near to listen to Him while the religious experts voiced their irritation—they were complaining. The scribes and Pharisees cringed over Jesus' friendship with the “wrong kind of people.” These religious experts could not stomach Jesus' meal with sinners. They had already concluded that they were “better” based on their own performance and legalistic mentality. In response to the religious leaders' attitude toward His actions, Jesus shared parables designed to paint a picture of God's character and show the leaders their error. Today we pick up with the second parable of a father and his sons.

READ [LUKE 15:11-24](#).

Put yourself in the place of the father in this story. How would you have felt?
What would you have done in response to your son's request?

What was the son saying about how he valued his father?
Why do you think the father gave his son what he asked for?

In your spiritual journey, what do you identify as your time in a “far country”?
Where are you right now in your spiritual journey?
What about those that are closest to you?

What does this scene teach us about how repentance works with forgiveness?
What is required of us (the son) in repentance?
What does God (the father) do?

God requires godly sorrow over sin, not worldly sorrow that consists only of shame and brings about no change in our lives. Godly sorrow is characterized by a commitment to turn from that sin and turn back to God alone. Scripture puts repentance and faith together as two aspects of the one act of coming to Christ for salvation. When we turn to Christ for salvation,

we turn away from the sin from which we are asking Jesus to save us.

**What was the focus of the father in his son's return?
What does this tell us about God's character?**

The father eagerly received his son back into his arms. He did not scold the son for his time squandering his inheritance. Instead, he focused on the return of his son and joyfully received him. Likewise, God's love is eager. He is waiting, ready to forgive. God's focus is on the sinner, not the sin, and He joyfully receives us back into fellowship with Him.

In the story of the prodigal son, how might the father's actions upon receiving back his son have helped the son forget about his past mistakes?

**Why is "not looking back" essential to accepting forgiveness?
What happens if we say we accept God's forgiveness but can't turn away from the shame and guilt of the past?
What do you think this communicates to God?
How might it affect the way we forgive others?**

READ [LUKE 15:25-32](#).

**What was wrong with the older son's attitude and approach to God?
How are his actions like those of the religious leaders in verses [1-2](#)?**

**How did the father offer grace to the older son as well?
What does this teach us about God?**

God is eager to forgive us that we may have intimacy with Him. This parable is an example of how to humbly approach God with sorrow over our sins and accept the forgiveness and restoration He offers. The result is a deeper relationship with God and a desire to forgive others as we journey through life. This can only happen when we recognize our need for God's forgiveness and our status as forgiven people, something Paul explains in detail in [Romans 5:6-11](#).

READ [ROMANS 5:6-11](#).

**Would you be willing to die for a "good" person that you knew?
How about one that you did not know?
Does that change things for you at all?
How was Christ different (v. 7b)?**

God redeemed us when we were at our worst. We were utterly helpless to earn our righteousness. God showed His unmatched love for us in Christ's death. Paul described the timing of Christ's death as "while we were still helpless" and "at the right time." Christ did not die for us when we were worthy of being saved. He died when we were wicked. Paul focused on the greatness of grace by pointing to the fact that it is illogical for someone to die for another person, especially an unrighteous person.

**Why did we need to be reconciled to God?
What separated us from Him?
Does the word "enemies" really seem appropriate?
Why or why not?**

**How did Jesus accomplish this bringing us back to God?
What impact does this have on our relationship with God? With others?**

The sin in our lives means that we need to be reconciled to God. Our sin separates us from God. In light of the great work that Jesus did, Christians are called to rejoice in God as forgiven people and praise Him for the grace they received. Paul emphasized that Christ's sacrifice was the demonstration of nothing less than divine love for sinners. God's plan of redemption was a demonstration of grace through ultimate forgiveness.

APPLICATION

**What gets in the way of you receiving God's forgiveness?
What can you do differently to be better positioned to receive restoration?**

What things in your life lead you to focus more on your own works of righteousness than the forgiveness you have received through Christ?

**Who in your life needs to experience God's forgiveness and restoration?
How can God use you to share with them how to be a follower of Christ?**

PRAYER

Thank God that He graciously gives what we cannot earn or work for. Pray that God would continually remind you of His grace, so that you may trust Him more and grow in your forgiveness of others. Pray that God would guide your actions daily, particularly as it relates to forgiving those who wrong you.

COMMENTARY

[LUKE 15:11-32](#)

15:11-12. Jesus turned to the family setting for this parable to illustrate why He associated with sinners. A younger son demanded his share of the estate and got it. There is no indication of why he wanted it or why the father so quickly gave it to him. The younger brother's portion was only a third of the estate if the entire estate were divided. By law, the older brother got a double portion ([Deuteronomy 21:17](#)). Although this well-known parable (vv. 11-32) is usually called the parable of the prodigal son, the other son and the father are also important characters.

15:13-16. The younger son had no intention of returning to his family. It is impossible to know whether his foolish living included "prostitutes" (v. 30), or if that was just an angry accusation made by the older brother. The irony of the penniless younger son's new job was that pigs were unclean animals to Jews ([Leviticus 11:7](#)). He was at rock bottom in his new life.

15:17-19. It took extreme poverty and hunger to prompt the younger son to come to his senses and realize that, in spite of all he had done, the correct course of action was to return and become one of his father's hired hands. To do so, however, it would be necessary to confess that he had sinned greatly and was not worthy to be called his son. The younger brother came to his senses: The day laborers on his dad's farm had enough to eat. The sinful younger brother had forfeited his position as son. He had no more claims on his father, so he applied for a new job—day laborer. Humans have the capacity to change. We do not have to remain in the pigpen. We do not have to continue to live as sinners. We can become

responsible for our lives. We can come home.

15:20-23. Focus shifts from son to father. That the father saw his son coming from a long way off indicates that he habitually looked for his return. Perhaps the normal parental reaction to the younger son's return would be anger or at least deep disappointment, but this father's response displayed: (1) compassion, (2) love (as he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him), (3) celebration (a feast), and (4) joyful restoration of status for his son (a robe of distinction, signet ring of family authority, and sandals worn by a son, in contrast to barefoot slaves). Even the joyful welcome did not deter the son from his determined course. He repeated the plea he had rehearsed. Somehow the last line never came out; the job application as a day laborer was never made.

15:24. This is the point at which the parable ties in to the two previous stories about God's joy in saving the lost. The father's celebratory attitude depicts the way in which God the Father receives repentant sinners. This contrasts with the contempt the Pharisees and scribes (Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' day) displayed for sinners who came to Jesus (v. 2). How could the father act like this? Did he not know what the son had done? Of course, but the son had been given up for dead. This was resurrection time. He was lost. Now he, the precious treasure for which the father hunted, is home. The lost sheep is back. Certainly a lost and found son is worth much more than a coin or a sheep. What a picture of the Father in heaven. How He does celebrate when the lost are found, when sinners repent. What compassion and love He shows. Why does Jesus associate with sinners? Because heaven loves them and waits patiently for them to return and repent so the celebration can begin. Heaven's citizens are repentant sinners.

15:25-30. Instead of the story ending on a note of joy and celebration, as might be expected, the spotlight shifts to the older brother. Unlike the father's positive attitude, the older brother (1) was surprised at the return of his sinning brother, (2) was offended and jealous at the father's celebration, (3) became angry at the father's forgiving love, (4) declared his own self-righteousness, and (5) focused on his brother's sinfulness rather than his newfound repentance. Jesus' representation of the religious leaders in the character of the older brother was a scathing rebuke of their self-righteousness.

15:31-32. The rebuke of the religious leaders continues. They did not understand (1) the opportunity for a close relationship with God, (2) the generosity of His grace, (3) His joy at the salvation of sinners, or (4) the profound transformation of conversion. Perhaps most crucial of all, however, is the reminder of kinship to the sinners intended in the phrase this brother of yours. The religious leaders refused to accept their Jewish brethren, the "sinners," as the older brother in this story.

ROMANS 5:6-11

5:6. Paul introduced a third benefit of salvation—that of having God's love—in [5:5](#). In 5:6-11, the apostle developed this theme further with stirring language and comparisons. In particular, he described the vast gulf between divine love and human love. Paul set the stage for illustrating the radical difference of God's love by first stating it as a basic fact of the gospel. Paul wanted his readers to clearly understand the nature of God's love.

First, God loved us when we were helpless. This means that apart from Christ we were completely unable to make any positive move toward God. Second, Christ died for us when we were ungodly. We could claim no moral goodness so as to make the case that we might be worthy of His death. If anything, we were the opposite! Third, Christ gave His life for us

at the appointed time. The Scriptures teach us that God had salvation by the cross and resurrection in mind even before the foundation of the world ([Ephesians 1:4](#); [1 Peter 1:18-20](#)).

5:7-8. Paul could imagine a rare scenario in which someone might be willing to die on behalf of a just person or a good person. However, the greatest imaginable case of human love cannot begin to compare to divine love in which while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

5:9-10. Paul continued his discussion by making two greater-to-lesser arguments. The argument is that if a greater premise is true, then a lesser premise can be held to be certain with equal confidence, if not more. Paul had stated his “greater” premise in verse 8: God showed His love by saving sinners when we were at our worst—helpless and ungodly. Since this amazing display of divine love is true, how much more can we trust the promise that we will be saved through Him from wrath. That is, we as believers have nothing to fear about the end-time judgment because we no longer are under God’s wrath. Our sin-debt has been paid in full by a loving God who gave His only Son to die in our place ([1 Thessalonians 1:10](#); [5:9](#)).

Moreover, because God loves us so amazingly, we can trust the promise that we will be saved by His life. This wraps the totality of Christian hope in a life-changing package. The justified not only escape God’s wrath in the judgment but also are saved to experience the fullness of life as God intends. Here Paul had in mind not only a superior quality of life—life in Christ—but also longevity of life—that is, eternal life.

5:11. Paul captured the totality of the believers’ benefit as having been obtained on the basis of reconciliation through Jesus Christ. From one point of view, Christ’s sacrifice was an atonement that averted God’s wrath from those who deserved His judgment because of their sins. In this section, however, Paul emphasized that Christ’s sacrifice was the demonstration of nothing less than divine love for sinners.