



March 29 - Forgiveness

WEEKLY READING: LUKE 14-18

TODAY'S PASSAGE: LUKE 15:11-32; ROMANS 5:6-11

MAIN POINT

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

PASSAGES:

LUKE 15:11-32

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

[11] And he said, "There was a man who had two sons.

[12] And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

[13] Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.

[14] And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

[15] So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. [16] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

[17] "But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!'

[18] I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

[19] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'"

[20] And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

[21] And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

[22] But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

[23] And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

[24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

[25] "Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

[26] And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

[27] And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.'

[28] But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,

[29] but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.

[30] But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!'

[31] And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

[32] It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'" (ESV)

ROMANS 5:6-11

[6] For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

[7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—

[8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

[10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

[11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (ESV)

BACKGROUND

Luke 15:11–32

Luke 15 is set within a larger moment where Jesus is being criticized by the Pharisees and scribes for welcoming sinners and eating with them (Luke 15:1–2). In response, Jesus tells three parables—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son—all aimed at revealing God’s heart toward the lost and confronting the self-righteousness of Israel’s religious leaders. The cultural backdrop is important: in a first-century Jewish context, family honor was central, and a younger son asking for his inheritance early would have been seen as a deeply shameful rejection of his father. Likewise, a dignified patriarch running to greet his son would have been unexpected and even socially inappropriate.

The inclusion of both a rebellious younger son and a dutiful but resentful older son reflects two groups in Jesus’ audience—open sinners and outwardly obedient but inwardly prideful religious leaders—setting the stage for a contrast between human expectations of righteousness and the grace-filled nature of God’s kingdom.

Romans 5:6–11

Romans 5:6–11 comes within Paul’s broader argument in the book of Romans that all people, both Jews and Gentiles, are under sin and can only be made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ (Romans 1–4). Writing to a diverse church in Rome, Paul addresses an audience familiar with both Jewish law and Greco-Roman ideas of virtue, honor, and justice. In that world, love and sacrifice were typically reserved for those deemed worthy, and legal language such as justification would have been understood in terms of a courtroom declaration.

Against this backdrop, Paul emphasizes the surprising nature of the gospel: God acts on behalf of those who are undeserving and unable to save themselves. Themes like sacrifice, reconciliation, and deliverance from wrath would have resonated with both Jewish sacrificial systems and Roman concepts of justice, helping Paul explain how God’s righteousness is upheld while sinners are brought into a restored relationship with Him through Christ.

CHRIST CONNECTION

Luke 15:11–32

The father in this parable reflects the heart of God, but Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of that grace. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus makes it possible for rebellious sinners to be fully forgiven and restored to a right relationship with the Father. While the son returns in repentance, it is Christ who has made that return possible by bearing the cost of our sin. This passage points us to the gospel truth that no matter how far we have wandered, God welcomes us back through Jesus, not as servants, but as restored sons and daughters.

Romans 5:6–11

This passage clearly reveals the work of Jesus at the center of the gospel. While we were still weak, sinful, and opposed to God, Christ died in our place, securing our justification and reconciliation. Jesus’ sacrificial death satisfies God’s justice and demonstrates His love, making peace between God and humanity. Because of Christ, those who trust in Him are not only forgiven but brought into a restored relationship with God, with the assurance that the same Savior who died for them will also bring them safely into eternal life.

LIFE GROUP - THE FLOW

- 15 minutes – Conversation and relationship-building
- 15 minutes – Year of Prayer guided prayer time
- 5 minutes – Introduction (icebreaker, activity, or illustration)

- 35 minutes – Study and apply the Bible
 - 5 minutes – Optional activity
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YEAR OF PRAYER – GROUP PRAYER (15 min)

If your group is large enough, have members break into groups of 2-3. They can pray out loud through these prompts as you lead. If your group is not big enough to split into groups, encourage members to still pray out loud.

Always pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your time of prayer.

Father God, as in every time that we gather, we do so to hallow Your name—to honor Your name to bring glory to Your name. We acknowledge that You are Elohim (The Strong Creator God) –You are Jehovah (The Relational God) – You are Adonai (Master over All). We praise you for being our Elohim, our Jehovah and our Adonai.

If you have words of Worship or Adoration, lift those to the Father now. (pause)

We thank you for these additional names of the One True God—for allowing us a greater understanding of Your Character and Your Attributes. We Love you Lord.

As we are still in the Father's presence, ask the Holy Spirit to search your heart and reveal to you any unconfessed sin. In the quiet of this moment confess and repent of that sin, knowing that the Lord is faithful to forgive your sin and restore you to a right relationship with Him. (Pause) Hebrews 8:12 reminds us that God will be merciful toward our iniquities and remember our sins no more.

In this quiet moment thank God for this promise. (ever so slight a pause)

Father God, we want to express words of thanksgiving for your ongoing goodness to us. We can all pray in agreement that your faithfulness to us is never ending. Thank you for the realization of Your promise when You said You would never leave us or forsake us.

Please share your words of Thanksgiving now. (pause)

Now we turn our focus to petitions and intercessions. I ask, Father, that You guide us in using our time wisely. You tell us to number our days. Help us make every day matter, may it count for Your kingdom purposes. You've given each of us 1440 minutes in each new day. May we begin each day by giving it back to you, allowing you to guide our steps.

Do you have petitions or intercessions to share? If so, offer them up to the Lord now. (pause)

Have group members start with those we are Asking God to Save:

Friends –

Family –

Co-workers –

Others –

Then have group members share Prayer Requests

Father, I pray for each person present-- Give each of us ears to hear what You desire for us to learn—acknowledging that in all things we are desperate for Your intervention in our lives, drawing us ever closer to You day to day. We love You and desire to be pleasing in Your sight, as Your children. All that we have prayed, has been prayed in faith, believing and in agreement. We ask these things in the mighty name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

INTRODUCTION (5 min)

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

- 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?

Transition:

"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."

STUDY AND DISCUSS (40 min)

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Teaching Toolbox:

The "Draw Out, Don't Call Out" Method

In most groups, a few people tend to talk often while others stay quiet. As a leader, your goal is to gently create space for everyone to participate without putting anyone on the spot.

Affirm and Redirect

When someone shares a lot, affirm them briefly, then open the floor:

"That's really helpful—thank you. What do others think?"

This keeps things balanced without shutting anyone down.

Invite, Don't Pressure

Instead of calling directly on someone, give a gentle invitation:

"We'd love to hear from someone who hasn't shared yet."

This allows quieter members to contribute without feeling forced.

Normalize Short Responses

Let the group know that responses don't have to be long or perfect:

"Feel free to share briefly—just a sentence or two is great."

This lowers the barrier for participation.

Create Space

After asking a question, allow a few seconds of silence before speaking again. Silence often gives quieter members time to gather their thoughts and jump in.

Tip: Over time, aim for balanced participation rather than equal participation. Not everyone will speak every time, but everyone should feel invited and valued.

PASSAGE 1: LUKE 15:11-24

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:11-24.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

[11] And he said, “There was a man who had two sons.

[12] And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them.

[13] Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.

[14] And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need.

[15] So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. [16] And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

[17] “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!

[18] I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you.

[19] I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”

[20] And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.

[21] And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

[22] But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.

[23] And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.

[24] For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.

Commentary

Use the following commentary to help your group gain new insights into the Scripture, background, historical setting, and theological truths found in these verses.

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 (Deut. 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 (Lev. 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.

Guide Discussion

Leader Note: You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students.** 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?
2. **Discuss.** What was the son saying about how he valued his father? Why do you think the father gave his son what he asked for?
3. **Discuss.** What was the focus of the father in his son's return? What does this tell us about God's character?

4. **Deeper Dive.** 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?
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PASSAGE 2: LUKE 15:25-32

READ THE PASSAGE : HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ LUKE 15:25-32.

Luke 15:25-32

[25] “Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing.

[26] And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant.

[27] And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’

[28] But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him,

[29] but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends.

[30] But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’

[31] And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

[32] It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.”

Commentary

Use the following commentary to help your group gain new insights into the Scripture, background, historical setting, and theological truths found in these verses.

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.

Guide Discussion

Leader Note: You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.

1. **Good for Students:** Why do you think the older brother was so upset about his younger brother coming home?
2. **Discuss.** 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?
3. **Discuss.** How did the father offer grace to the older son as well? What does this teach us about God?
4. **Deeper Dive:** The older brother struggled to celebrate forgiveness. Are there areas in your life where it's difficult to extend grace or forgiveness to someone else? How does remembering God's grace toward you change the way you should respond? *Optionally, you can ask instead: Where might God be calling you to extend grace or forgiveness this week?*

Transition to Passage 3:

Say: "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."

PASSAGE 3: ROMANS 5:6-11

READ THE PASSAGE : HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ROMANS 5:6-11.

Romans 5:6-11

- [6] For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.
- [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—
- [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.
- [10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.
- [11] More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.
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Commentary

Use the following commentary to help your group gain new insights into the Scripture, background, historical setting, and theological truths found in these verses.

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 (see Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 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 (see 1 Thess. 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.

Guide Discussion

***Leader Note:** You do not need to cover every question. Use the questions that best help your group engage with the passage.*

Good for Students: Would you be willing to die for a “good” person that you knew? How about someone you did not know? How was Christ different?

Discuss. Why did we need to be reconciled to God? What separated us from Him? Does the word “enemies” seem appropriate? Why or why not?

Discuss. How did Jesus accomplish this bringing us back to God? How should this change the way we relate to God—and the way we treat others?

Deeper Dive: If God loved us and reconciled us to Himself while we were still sinners and enemies, how should that shape the way we treat and forgive others?

Wrap up:

Say: "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."

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY (5-6 min)

Choose one of the following activities if time allows.

FIRST OPTION: "GRACE VS. FAIRNESS" (GROUP INTERACTION)

Time: 5 minutes

Supplies: Whiteboard (optional)

Instructions

Draw two columns:

"What feels fair" and "What reflects grace"

Ask the group:

**In the story of the older brother, what would have felt fair?
What did the father actually choose to do?**

Write answers as people respond.

Then ask:

Where do we see this same tension in our lives today?

Examples may include:

- forgiveness after being hurt
- showing kindness when it's undeserved
- letting go of bitterness

Say something like:

"Romans 5 shows us that God didn't treat us as 'fairness' would demand—He gave us grace. The question is: will we do the same for others?"

SECOND OPTION: SONG REFLECTION – "FORGIVENESS" OR "JESUS PAID IT ALL"

Time: 5-6 minutes

Supplies: None

Instructions

Play the song as a group (or read a portion of the lyrics).

Then ask:

- What stood out to you in these lyrics?
 - How does this song reflect what we've seen in Luke 15 or Romans 5?
 - How should God's forgiveness toward us shape the way we forgive others?
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FINAL TAKEAWAY & PRAYER

After discussion concludes, read the takeaway statement:

Following Jesus means trusting Him enough to surrender our lives daily, believing that the life He offers is better than the one we try to hold onto.

Either pray something like the guide below, or invite someone in the group to close in prayer.

Lord, thank You for Your grace that we could never earn or deserve. Help us to remember daily how much You have forgiven us, so that we would trust You more and extend that same grace to others. Guide our hearts and actions this week, especially in choosing forgiveness when it's hard. In Jesus' name, amen.