

Why God Forgives Luke 15:11-32

Forgiveness – something we all love to receive (though we rarely think we need it) but are rarely anxious to give.

Forgiveness is a big topic we will examine it in pieces. Next week we will look at forgiving ourselves which is often a difficult topic for many people. Then we will talk about how to forgive others which can be a very difficult task. Then we will answer questions on forgiveness and hear some testimonies if people are willing to share.

-- Forgiveness is a word that is misunderstood, mismanaged and often misapplied in our lives and probably most often stated more than really enacted.

No one wants to admit that they need forgiveness. It is rare that we seek it and we are often resistant to offer it. But deep down in the core of our being forgiveness is a universal need.

Context: **Luke 15** *Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ² And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

This parable is in response to the comments of the religious authorities that are listening to Jesus teach tax collectors and sinners about the Kingdom of God.

Jesus tells 3 stories about how far God will go to receive what is lost back in to the family. The third story – familiar to many – lost prodigal son. 2 sons and we will talk about both.

Read LK15:11-32

The younger son makes a request of the father that would have been unheard of in the day. Technically he is saying "Father, I want what you are going to leave me when you die." In a way it was like he said, "Dad I wish you were dead so I can start living." In Jesus story the father does not react to the request, he simply submits and divides his estate between his two sons.

The younger son goes off and blows everything in a foreign country while the older brother continues to run the family business.

Let me give you a visual image, the younger son goes to Vancouver and parties with beer, and girls and who knows what else. He gets a Harley Motor cycle, and rides up and down the street at all hours looking for fun where ever he can find it. He makes no effort to establish himself in business or to purchase property. He lives in a rented room until the money runs out. Suddenly he has no choice except to get a less than minimum wage job feeding pigs and he won't get his first check until the end of the month. He has 30 days before he can purchase his first meal and he is so hungry.

Ok, here is the quick history overview. A good Jewish boy does not ask for is inheritance before his dad is dead or at least not until he retires and is ready to trust the oldest son with all the daily decisions.

A good son would not blow all the hard earned money that his dad gave him, especially not in gentile territory on sinful things. Getting a job would not be so bad but with pigs ... Everything we hear about the younger son and the foreign country was sinful.

Meanwhile the older brother is faithful, doing all the right things, following all the rules, being the best son he can be.

There are all kinds of views on this story. For our purposes this morning we are going to stick to the simplest view. I hope you will understand your life story better in the story of one or perhaps both of the sons.

Whether we want to admit it or not we are all sinners. Perhaps some of us are less sinful than others except for one detail; **God does not see sin with a scale.** With God it is all black and white.

We all need ultimate forgiveness from our creator. Some think there is no God so it shouldn't matter. However, we all have a little nagging feeling that we need something. And all too often we just don't seem to know how to get it.

1. The Problems of the Prodigal

In the scripture the son is said to come to his senses. He realizes he could do better at home, as a servant than he is experiencing at this moment. And he thinks that he will have to listen to a lecture and eat a little crow...But at least he will have a good meal and a roof over his head.

He realizes that he has a desire to get back to something better and plans to ask for forgiveness.

For us, forgiveness comes when we realize that we have a need to improve our relationship with God. It means that we realize that we have been living our own way with no concern as to what our creator might expect. Basically, we come to our senses and realize that there must be something better available than the way we are living right now.

We often realize that when we seem to be bumping along the bottom of life.

It might be that we are out of money, or hate our job or we have some family problems or perhaps a health situation or a loss.

But generally, it is not as easy to get a handle on.

Most often we recognize that there is something wrong because we have hit spiritual bottom. Life is not satisfying and depression seems to be right there on us.

We are desperate for something to help us feel better and no one seems to be able to help us.

That is the time when you should reconsider where our relationship with God stands. Are we going our own way and give no thought to God. OR Is it simply a give me this or that relationship. Or is it something more, where perhaps we are willing to offer God some things.

To receive ultimate forgiveness we must first realize that we need to return home and hope for the best.

The prodigal is willing to settle for something less than the father's best when he heads off on his own and we are willing to settle for something less than God's best when we live a life based only on what we want.

Think for a moment, where have you been settling?

What are you going without so that you can live your way?

What is it that keeps you from returning home?

Do you fear that you can't go home? You may say—look, I may have gone my own way, but I'm not exactly working in a pigpen. That's probably true. You say—well, I'm not exactly starving to death either, how do I relate to this son?

I think that we relate to the younger son when we have a hunger that we can't seem to solve. Maybe it is a want but we don't know what for. Like when we stop at the refrigerator and just look inside and don't find anything.

I want to suggest that unexplained feeling is the need for God, the desire to feel welcome at home again.

Consider this, what brought you to church on this morning?

Might it be that something inside of you is searching for something better, a better life? Do you want to find a deeper peace? Do you want to belong to something?

When you wake up to the realization that you need God, you realize that God has already done all that He needs for you to come home and experience that better life.

The prodigal made a conscious decision to walk away from his bad situation. He recognized that he has sinned against heaven and his father. He knew that he needed to return home.

We also need to return to God. The first step is recognizing our need but we also have to take action. We have to start our journey toward home.

Think about this. The Father did not force the younger son to stay home. He did not withhold the resources just because he was wiser than his son and knew it was a bad idea.

The father also does not force the son to come home when he hits bottom in the foreign land. The decisions to leave and to return home are the son's to make.

God loves us too much to take away our freedom to go our own way. We all have a choice and God won't make the choice for us. God gives us the choice in our spiritual journey.

For us to receive forgiveness from God, we have to ask. That would just sound too simple though. We tend to think that the journey back to God is difficult and long after all we have been going our own way for years.

Don't let your human logic interfere with God's reality. The Journey back to God is not a long one. It is only one step.

It's not about being perfect. We need to be aware that this step is the first one in a lifelong journey.

Confession and repentance are crucial but we are then called to follow Jesus in everything in our daily lives. Jesus never asked anyone to pray a prayer, He call people to follow Him which means learning to think and act like Jesus 24/7 in everything we do.

2. The Problems of the Perfect Son

He does not own his resentment and rebellion. Counting on his works to maintain a relationship. The relationship is maintained for what he can get out of it. He is counting on doing his duty as the way to inherit and he is angry with the younger brother for not being faithful and still receiving his Father's love.

Perhaps that is why so many times churches want people to clean up before they come to God. The older brother wanted no part of restoring the younger brother. Yet all he really needed to do was keep doing what he was doing and love his brother in the process. All he had to do was walk into the party.

It's not about making radical changes in our lives so that God will forgive us.

We don't have to get rid of sin in our lives first.

We don't have to overcome all of our addictions or our bad habits.

We don't have to have a special vision or special invitation to come back to God.

But we do have to take the one step. We have to ask for forgiveness.

The story continues, "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

According to Jesus, the father does not offer a lecture. There is no, "I told you so!" He instead, runs to welcome him and hugs him and gives him a kiss. That is one step toward God and God will close the distance that separates us from our heavenly father. Jesus life and death is about the removal of walls that separate mankind and God. The crucifixion of God's Son is an example of how far God was willing to go to close the gap and to offer forgiveness.

-- Here's the point of God's forgiveness

God is reaching out for you.

No matter what your life is like.

No matter what you've done.

No matter how far you have traveled from God, or who you are.

God is still reaching out to you. It is never too late to come home to God. It is never too far. God never stops reaching out to you.

God is not mad at you or me. God celebrates when one of his children takes the step. Not only is he not mad, he is also welcomes us back into the family. The story says it this way, "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it.

Why God Forgives Luke 15:11-32

1. Why do you think forgiveness and the need for it is a topic that is so avoided in our society?

2. How do we see the attitudes of the younger son played out in our society?

3. The younger son was driven back to the father by extreme need. We know that this type of situation can drive people to God. What can we do to help people see their need before they are in such desperate situations?

Share some scriptures that would help you do this.

4. Why was the older brother so angry? How can this attitude be lived out in the church today?

5. Share some scriptures that might help a "good person" see their need to confess sin and ask for God's forgiveness.