

The Prodigal, part 3
Learning to Forgive
Luke 15:25-32

- I. For the last two weeks, we've been looking at the Parable of the Prodigal.
 - a. When you look parable up in the dictionary, you discover something interesting – three very different meanings of the word prodigal.
 - i. First, “exceedingly wasteful.”
 - ii. “Extremely generous, extravagant.”
 - iii. Finally, “To drive forth or push away.”
 - b. Three very different definitions that seem to converge in this story.
 - i. We spent some time with the “exceedingly wasteful” younger son who squandered his inheritance.
 - ii. We met the “extremely generous and extravagant” father who welcomed him back with open arms and restored him to the family.
 - iii. Today, we look at the older brother, who at the end of the story “drives forth and pushes away” his father and his brother.
- II. It's important for us to look closely at the story of the older brother.
 - a. He is the character in the story that we distance ourselves from the most.
 - i. We see ourselves in the wandering brother.
 - ii. We see God in the extravagant father.
 - iii. But we fail to see that we are all too often the older brother.
 - b. His unwillingness to forgive and his misunderstanding of God's grace push him away; drive him away from his father and brother.
 - i. We don't want to see that in ourselves.
 - ii. We see that in others, but we like to think better of ourselves – think again.
 - c. But seriously, it's hard to forgive.
 - i. When you get hurt, or stepped on, or stepped over – it's hard to let that go.
 - ii. Forgiveness is okay, but we want justice first. [Then forgiveness is easier.]
 - d. I don't think God ever intended that forgiveness be easy.
 - i. It certainly wasn't for Jesus – and yet he forgave us.
 - ii. From the cross he said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” – **Luke 23:34**.
 - e. Instead, forgiveness is hard.
 - i. It's doesn't come naturally.
 - ii. But we can learn to forgive.
 - iii. It's a matter of changing the way we think.
 1. Changing the way you act without changing the way you think is a waste of time.
 2. The Bible says that you should, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” – **Romans 12:2**.
 3. The way you think determines the way you feel and the way you feel determines the way you act.
- III. In learning to forgive, **remember that God's goodness is abundant**.
 - a. We talked about this a lot last week – God's love, God's goodness, God's reach is beyond your comprehension.
 - i. God's goodness exceeds your ability to comprehend it.
 - ii. **Ephesians 3:20** – “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine.”

- b. That's important for us to remember because it affects how we approach the whole notion of forgiveness.
 - c. Let's look at it like a simple propositional statement (an "if-then" statement).
 - i. If God's goodness is more abundant than we can imagine.
 - ii. If God's goodness is expressed to us in grace and forgiveness.
 - iii. Then God has more than enough grace and forgiveness for all of us.
 - d. Makes sense – so why do we get our nose so out of joint about forgiveness.
 - i. Perhaps because we approach forgiveness like it's a scarce commodity.
 - 1. Afraid that God will run out.
 - 2. Afraid that every time God forgives someone else there's less for us.
 - 3. Afraid like the Psalmist: "True, he struck the rock, and water gushed out, streams flowed abundantly, but can he also give us bread? Can he supply meat for his people?" – **Psalm 78:20**.
 - ii. Because when God forgives we're worried that there might not be a fatted calf for us and our friends – who really deserve it after all.
 - e. And perhaps because we're afraid that God's forgiveness of that truly despicable person will somehow tarnish God's forgiveness of us – who really aren't that bad.
 - i. But just as God's goodness cannot be outdone, God's goodness cannot be tarnished.
 - ii. There is always enough of God to go around – God is an inexhaustible supply.
 - f. APP: How do you react when God blesses someone else?
 - i. Especially someone who has hurt you; betrayed you or someone you love."
 - 1. Does it seem unfair? Does God seem uncaring?
 - 2. Or do you feel that God's overlooked your pain?
 - ii. Remember that God's goodness cannot be tarnished.
 - iii. God's blessings don't run out; God's forgiveness, God's goodness is an infinite resource.
 - iv. Don't drive God away because he chooses to forgive them – there is plenty of forgiveness to go around.
 - v. Learning to forgive means understanding that God's forgiveness is abundant.
- IV. **Realize that forgiveness connects you** to others.
- a. The older brother says some very interesting in **verse 30**: "But when this son of yours."
 - i. Did you catch that?
 - ii. Not my brother, but this son of yours.
 - b. His unwillingness to forgive separates him from his brother and from his father.
 - i. At the beginning of the story it was the younger son who left the family.
 - ii. Now the older son "leaves the family" by separating himself in this way.
 - c. I have a good friend from high school who has let her unwillingness to forgive separate her from her family.
 - i. She doesn't talk with her family often. They don't get along – never seemed to.
 - ii. She calls her dad "the DNA donor."
 - iii. Do you hear echoes of a comment like "this son of yours" in words like that?
 - iv. No wonder that the separation that exists in her family has persisted all this time.
 - d. By contrast forgiveness connects you to God and other people.
 - i. That's the message in the words of the father, "This brother of yours."

1. You can't just "leave the family," he's still your brother.
 2. You are still his brother and I am your father.
 - ii. Forgiveness isn't just about "righting wrongs" its about mending relationships.
 1. We were made for relationships – we can't exist without them.
 2. And while many say that "I'm sorry" are the hardest words in the English language.
 3. I'm thinking "I forgive you" are every bit as tough.
 - e. APP: Who are you feeling insolated from? Who that was once close, feels like they're at a distance?
 - i. A family member, a friend, a spouse, a parent.
 - ii. As you think of those names ask yourself, "Is there unforgiveness in this relationship?
 1. Has there been an "I'm sorry" that you haven't received?
 2. Has there been an "I forgive you" that you can't speak?
 - iii. The cause of your isolation from that person, that family member may very well be your unwillingness to forgive.
 - iv. Learning to forgive means letting go and saying "I forgive you."
 - v. Learning to forgive means reconnecting yourself to God and others.
- V. **Recognize that God is calling you to forgiveness.**
- a. The father doesn't let the older brother off the hook.
 - i. He says, "This brother of yours." – **verse 32**.
 - ii. You're still a part of this family and you need to act like that matters.
 - b. God isn't letting you off the hook either.
 - i. God is calling you to forgive.
 - ii. And there really can't be an excuse for not forgiving.
 - c. Jesus puts it rather strongly in Matthew.
 - i. **Matthew 6:14-15**: "For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."
 - ii. I've looked really hard and I can't find any loopholes here.
 1. Trust me I've looked, because forgiveness is one area of my life that God has been pushing me on lately.
 2. And I've been trying to find something in Scripture that will prove to God that I'm right!
 - d. But God knows that this is too important – unforgiveness tears me away from other people and limits what I trust God to do.
 - i. It cripples you and stunts your spiritual growth.
 - ii. It limits God's ability to us you because you're not open to God's power.
 - e. Learning to forgive means answering God's call to live a life of forgiveness.
 - f. APP: Who do you need to forgive?
 - i. And what is keeping you from forgiving?
 1. That question I can answer.
 2. The only thing that is keeping you from forgiving is you.
 - ii. The biggest block to forgiveness in your life is not the other person – it is you.
 - iii. What can you do this week to move toward forgiveness?
 1. Do you see the need for forgiveness?
 2. What concrete steps can you take to move closer to it?
 3. What steps will you take?

- VI. Learning to forgive is much easier (and at the same time much harder) than you think.
 - a. God's goodness is more abundant than you know.
 - b. Forgiveness is what connects you to others.
 - c. And God is calling you to a life of forgiveness that leads to your blessing.