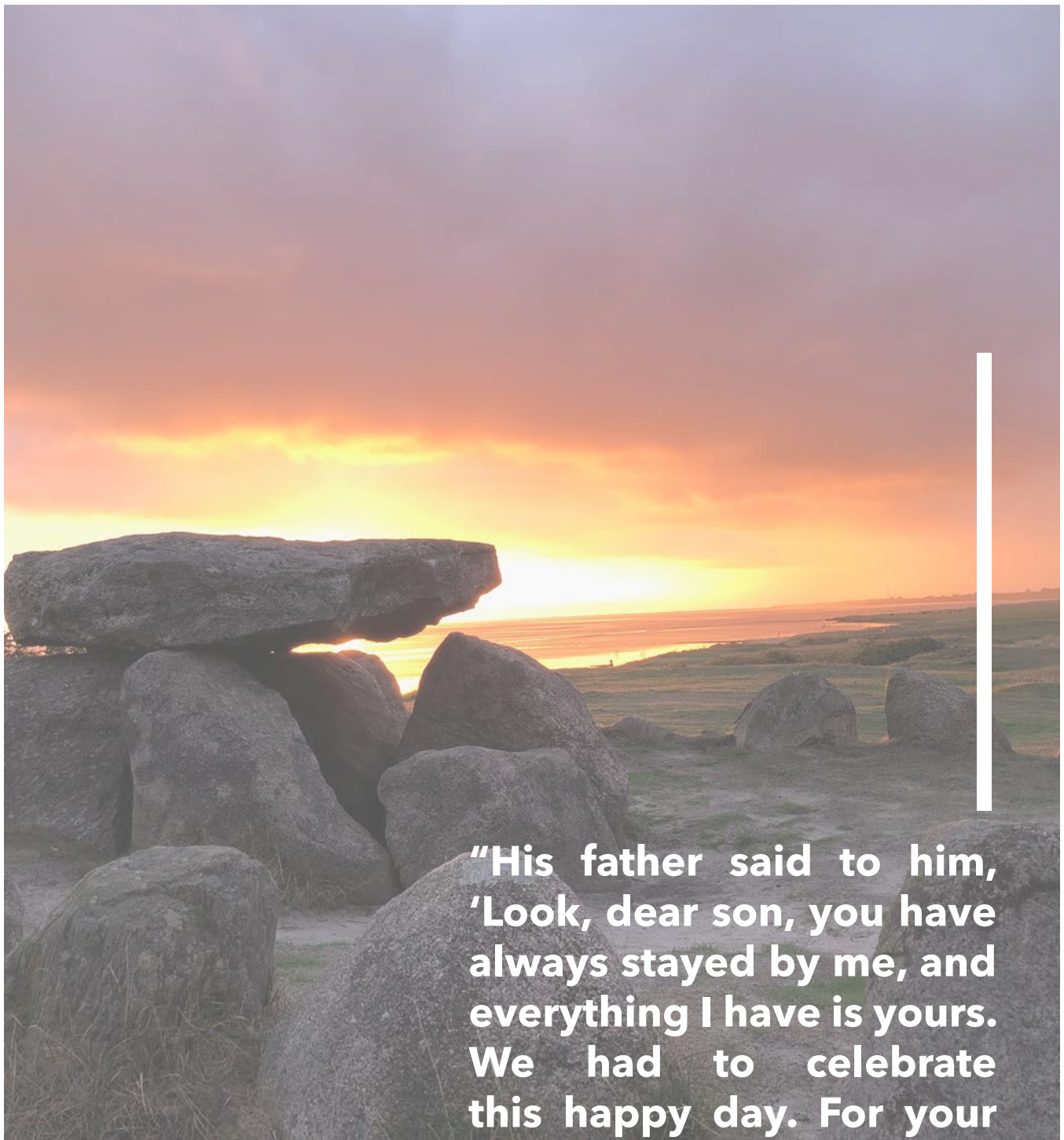




REPENTING TO GOD AND OTHERS

WEEK 5





"His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. We had to celebrate this happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!'"

-Luke 15:31-32

DAY 1 - MONDAY

LUKE 15:11-32, 1 JOHN 1:8-10, PSALM 32:5, PROVERBS 28:13

This week, we will focus on repentance through the lens of the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15, so we will read pieces of that story each day along with other passages that go with each day's theme.

Reflection:

Pray a prayer of confession: Ask God to help you come to him honestly with a heart willing to be changed. Ask God to give you eyes to see the places where you need to confess, the places where you have missed the mark. Take some time to grieve your sin, ask for His forgiveness and ask for His power to free you from falling back into that sin.

Parable of the Lost Sons

In Luke 15, Jesus told a parable about two sons. The younger son asked for his half of the father's estate. The younger son does not want to wait for his father's death to receive his inheritance. The father granted this request and allowed the son to go off in his own way to follow his desires. Scripture says the younger son left to squander his wealth "in wild living." He thought he would find abundance in the world, but ended up hungry and poor, realizing that he missed the abundance of what he had living in His Father's house. In verses 17-18, the son realizes that in his arrogance to go his own way, he had sinned not only against his earthly father but also against his heavenly Father, God. This realization leads him to a moment of confession with the Lord, and he prepares to go back and confess his wrongs to his earthly father as well. We also see that the younger son is planning not only to confess to his father but to pay back the debt he owes. The prodigal returns home and begins his confession, but the father cuts him short before he finishes, showing that he has already forgiven him.

We see the obvious need for confession and repentance from the younger son, but there is another son in this story that is in need of confessing his sin and repenting. We often miss out on the fact that two sons in this story have lost their way. They both have barriers keeping them from the father. We often overlook the bitterness, anger, and resentment in the older brother's heart. He is fooling himself into thinking he has no sin, but 1 John 1:8 reminds us, "If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth." The older brother's pride is keeping him from confession and repentance.

Tim Keller says in his book, *The Prodigal God*:

The hearts of the two brothers were the same. Both sons resented their father's authority and sought ways to get out from under it. Each one rebelled—but one did so by being very bad and the other by being extremely good. Both were alienated from the father's heart; both were lost sons.

Keller says that one son leaned into slavishness and emptiness while the other leaned into anger and superiority, both leading them to sin and alienation from the father. Whether you relate more to the sins of the younger brother or the ones of the older brother, your first step in restoring your relationship with God is to confess and repent before Him. Don't wait; the Father is waiting with open arms.

DAY 2 - TUESDAY

LUKE 15:1-7, LUKE 15:11-20, HEBREWS 4:16, JOHN 1:16

Reflection:

What do you think it means for you to come home to Jesus?

After reading the parable of The Prodigal Son, how do you think Jesus responds when we turn to him?

Coming Home

"He came and experienced the exile that we deserved. He was expelled from the presence of the Father, he was thrust into the darkness, the uttermost despair of spiritual alienation- in our place. He took upon himself the full curse of human rebellion, cosmic homelessness, so that we could be welcomed into our true home." -Timothy Keller, The Prodigal God

Homecomings are big celebrations. They're events centered around the return of someone. Maybe it's a group of alumni returning to an alma mater. Maybe it is the return of a family member, now a hero, from military duty. Perhaps it is a loved one who returns from a long trip. Homecomings often bring to mind feelings of joy and celebration, but a homecoming can be a hard place to get to. It can be an act plagued with guilt and shame, as seen in the prodigal son.

Coming home to the arms of Jesus can be an intimidating idea. What if we are too far gone? What if the things we have done wrong are too great for His forgiveness and mercy? What if we have sinned and sought forgiveness one too many times, and He is done with us? These are the anxious questions of one considering repentance. These questions can keep many of us from turning back and looking at the face of God.

The beautifully good news that we see in His Word is that we are never too far away from His loving grace that we can't turn back around to receive it again. John describes Jesus' never-ending mercy as "grace upon grace." He never grows tired of giving His grace and mercy to us. He never closes His arms to us. He never turns away from us (even when we consistently do so to Him). Better yet, when we turn back to Him, He draws nearer to us. The step we must make is the about-face that humbly turns from the wrong, selfish, worthless ways we have walked and return to Him. He is our home; we must be willing to turn to Him and receive our homecoming.

DAY 3 - WEDNESDAY

LUKE 15:20-24, ACTS 3:19-20, 2 PETER 3:8-14

Reflection:

What is the difference between confession and repentance?

Sit with the Lord today and process the forgiveness that He offers. Ask Him to reveal anything you need to confess and repent to Him.

Repenting leads to Refreshing

Seeking forgiveness from God and others begins when we admit we have missed the mark. This act of confession turns to repentance when we begin to feel genuine regret and remorse, understanding that our sin has consequences. At times, this requires us to admit that our sin has caused pain and suffering for ourselves and possibly others. Forgiveness comes when we are pardoned from that offense. This doesn't make the offense insignificant or take the consequences away; forgiveness just shows mercy to the offender.

In the Prodigal Son parable, the younger son left home with his share of the inheritance and wasted it. When he lost everything, he went home to ask his father for forgiveness. Before he reached home, his father ran out to meet him and hosted a large celebration. The father in this parable paints the picture of how much God loves us and how when we sin and ask for His forgiveness, He is quick to give it to us. He is ready to receive us and lavishly celebrates our return. This should be a marker of how we, too, are to offer forgiveness to others because it is so lavishly extended to us. Peter says in Acts 3:20..."repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away," and it goes on to say that, "times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord." When we confess and repent, God is faithful to forgive sin; He remembers it no more; it is forgotten. The fruit of the forgiveness of our sins is that "times of refreshing shall come." He offers refreshing freedom for us as He wipes away our sins. This is not a pass to continue our sinful patterns, but rather a pardon from our sin that hopefully leads us to pursue a different path—ideally, a path growing in righteousness and holiness rather than a path of continuing in sinful patterns. As 2 Peter 3 reminds us, the goal is to "make every effort to be found living peaceful lives that are pure and blameless in his sight," but even when we fail, the Lord is patient with us.

In addition to seeking forgiveness from the Lord, there may be times that we have to go beyond just asking the Lord for forgiveness and ask others in our life for forgiveness as well. We must first confess our sins and repent to the Lord, but if we have hurt others, it is often beneficial for us to repent and ask others for forgiveness. The prayer is that others will be able to offer forgiveness as well.

"We repent in proportion to our belief in the forgiving love of Christ. We rejoice in the fullness of Jesus' absolution in proportion to our repentance of sin and our hatred of evil. You will never value pardon unless you feel repentance. You will never taste the deepest portion of repentance until you know you are pardoned. The bitterness of repentance and the sweetness of pardon blend in the flavor of every gracious life and make up an incomparable happiness. Repentance is the clearing away the rubbish of the past temple of sin; holiness builds the new temple which the Lord our God shall inherit. Repentance and desires after holiness never can be separated." - Charles H. Spurgeon

DAY 4 - THURSDAY

LUKE 15:11-32, MICAH 6:8, EPHESIANS 4:31-32

Reflection:

Today is going to be a challenge. Today in your reflection time, think about what forgiveness means. Ask God to help you see what forgiveness truly looks like. Ask Him to help you know what it could do for your life. Tell Him why you have struggled for so long to forgive, remember His consistent presence and willingness to forgive you, and ask Him to move your heart towards reflecting Him by forgiving those around you.

Now, open your hands and heart for God to show you whom you need to forgive today. Be willing to receive that name and face and let go of that wrong. Pray for forgiveness for that person and freedom from their hurt or wrong towards you by forgiving them for what they did. Be willing to follow up with a pastor, friend, or mentor to seek greater help and guidance in doing this merciful act.

Forgiving the Wrong

Being forgiven by God is beautiful. The first half of this story of the prodigal son focuses on the beauty of seeking and receiving forgiveness. The second part of this story, though, looks at forgiving and the two different responses we can make. We look first today at the father's forgiving response and then tomorrow at the older brother's unforgiving response.

Forgiving one who has wronged you is one of the most challenging acts you will ever do, but it's one we are all called to and called to daily. We are called to be people of mercy. We are called to be people who reflect the very consistent nature of God Himself, who forgives freely. Now, we may think, "of course, but that is God; I am me. I am hurting, and forgiveness is not easy." To that, I would say you are right. Ten-fold, but part of receiving God and living for Him means that we carry the heart of mercy, graciousness, and forgiveness that He carried.

We're all carrying hurts and burdens. We're all harboring pasts filled with the wrongs of others. These past hurts, and burdens add up, weigh us down, and can inevitably lead us away from seeing God's forgiving and merciful face if we allow it. Unforgiveness can cloud our hearts so fully that we can get to the place of not receiving His grace and mercy for ourselves anymore (even though He is sitting ready to give it). As we see with the father who forgives in this story, there is freedom in forgiveness. There is a celebration in mercy. There is life in the letting go.

"When we come back to forgiveness, God is always involved there in many ways. Unforgiveness is always ultimately unforgiveness against God. When we don't forgive, we really are saying, "God, you let me down. You handed me this situation here and just left me with it." Also, if we forgive, it will only be because God has enabled us to do it. It will be throwing ourselves upon God. It's the only way we can forgive..." -Dallas Willard From Forgiveness to Blessing

DAY 5 - FRIDAY

LUKE 15:11-32, LUKE 15:25-32, EPHESIANS 4:30-32,
COLOSSIANS 3:12-15, LUKE 6:27-28

Reflection:

Pray the prayer at the bottom of the page as you continue to ask the Lord to reveal people that you need to show grace and forgiveness to.

When Offering Grace & Forgiveness is Hard

In the story of the Prodigal Son, we see a heart of unforgiveness in the older brother. Forgiving someone who has hurt or wronged us can be incredibly hard, especially if the person who hurt us doesn't admit wrongdoing or seems unrepentant. In those situations, it's good to remember that when we forgive, it is in order for God to free us from the prison of bitterness, resentment, and anger. Forgiving is, of course, easier said than done. Forgiveness of someone doesn't mean condoning or justifying an event or their behavior.

Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting. It also doesn't always mean opening ourselves back up to have the offender in our lives. Forgiveness is choosing to let go of the bitterness, anger, and resentment or the need for revenge—to eliminate the suffering, not the wrongdoing. The offender might not deserve our pardon, but we deserve to be at peace. We can't change the past. We can do nothing to remove the harm others might have caused. However, not forgiving damages us—we see our lives through a lens of vengeance, hostility, resentment, anger, and sadness. Forgiveness is hard and can often be a courageous choice, especially when it feels like you or someone you care for has been mistreated. But the truth is, it's good (and biblical) for us to extend forgiveness. And when we release the offense into the hands of God, we can begin to make room for healing in our hearts.

Here are three essential ideas about our words when we are struggling to forgive:

- › Speak with honor in the midst of being dishonored.
- › Speak with peace in the midst of being threatened.
- › Speak of good things amid a bad situation.

We have an enemy, but it's not each other. Truth proclaimed and lived out is a fiercely accurate weapon against evil. Lift your hurt and honest feelings to the Lord through written or verbal prayer. Here's one to get you started:

Lord, I don't know all the details entangled in this issue. But You know all. Therefore, You are the only one who can handle all. There are a lot of things my flesh is tempted to seek – fairness, my right to be right, proof of their wrongdoing, to make them see things from my vantage point – but at this point, the only thing healthy for me to seek is You. You alone. I'm going to be obedient to You and let You handle everything else. In Your Name, Amen.

Adapted from *UnInvited* by Lysa Terkeurst

DAY 6 - SATURDAY (REFLECTION DAY)

LUKE 15:11-32

Reflection Notes and Questions:

Repentance is the act of turning around. When we repent, we turn back to God. That means we turn back to face the problems, the sin, and the mistakes we have made. Repentance is one of the hardest things for a Christian to do, but it's a gospel practice that allows us to return our eyes to our Savior, seek His forgiveness, help, and mercy, and it's a practice that begins to welcome in real change to our lives.

As we wrap up week 5 of this study, reflect on what it looks like to repent to God and others. Spend some additional time walking through what it looks like to be forgiven by God and what it needs to look like for us to forgive those around us. Follow the reflection practices below:

- › Write down what you learned about who God is this week.

- › Why is repentance such a difficult practice for us? How can you begin to foster this practice in your life?

- › One of the most challenging practices you were invited to this week was the practice of forgiving those who have wronged you. This isn't a quick practice, but it's also one we can't kick down the road and ignore. Repentance turns to face the wrongs we have experienced and done ourselves. Take time to turn to God today and seek a plan of forgiveness with Him for those who have wronged you.

DAY 7 - SUNDAY

REST DAY

Use today to rest, pray, and catch up on any of this week's reading you missed. Use today as a rest and preparation for your heart towards next week's time with God in this study.