

A PEOPLE MADE NEW

THE FORGIVEN LIFE



OUR REPENTANCE, GOD'S FORGIVENESS

Big idea

Come to the Father and repent, because he is the God who forgives. He welcomes us home with mercy and makes room for us at the table.

DISCOVER

Read Luke 15:11-32

As we listen, notice who are the main characters in this story. Is there anything specifically that do you notice about each?

- What does the younger son request (v12)?
- What does the younger son realise about himself? And what does he decide to do?
- What do you think the word "repent" means? How might we see repentance in the younger son's decision to return to his father?
- What do we already know about the father? (verses 12 and 17)
- What is the father's response to the son's return? (v20-24)
- What does this tell us about how God responds to us when we repent?
- Read Psalm 103:10-12. What do we learn about God's character from these verses? Is there a time when you have received God's forgiveness which has left an impact on your life? If appropriate, share this experience with the group.

Is the elder brother's response reasonable? (verses 29-30) Do you think that he really knows his father? (verse 29) Why?

Why do you think Jesus mentioned the elder Son? Why is he important for the story? (Luke 15:1-2)

NURTURE

Do you feel you can identify more with one son or the other? Both sons needed to repent and to know God's forgiveness. Do you know what it means for you to repent and know the forgiveness of your Heavenly Father?

Some questions to ponder:

- Have you turned to Christ in repentance and faith? Have you (do you – it's not just a one off) turned from your sin, and turned to God?
- Do you know the joy of God's forgiveness?
- Are you tempted to take God's grace and forgiveness for granted?
- Have you taken your place at the table of repentant sinners, bound together by the forgiveness of God, A People made New?

FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER

Big idea

Jesus has forgiven us more than we could ever repay, and that kind of mercy slowly reshapes how we treat other people.

A note before you begin...

Forgiveness does not mean pretending something didn't hurt. It does not mean staying in an unsafe situation, ignoring bullying, or letting someone keep harming you. Forgiveness is about not letting revenge, bitterness, or payback become the boss of our hearts. Sometimes the most faithful next step is telling a safe adult and getting help.

DISCOVER

Read Matthew 18:21–35

As we listen, notice who receives mercy, who refuses mercy, and what Jesus wants us to see about forgiveness.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you in this story?
- Look at verse 21. What question does Peter ask Jesus? What do you think he is really wanting to know?
- In verse 22, how does Jesus answer Peter? Do you think Jesus is giving an exact number, or making a bigger point?

Parable Questions

- What does the king show us about God?
- Compare verse 26 and verse 29. What do you notice about what both servants say?
- What does the first servant not understand about the mercy he received?
- Why do you think it is sometimes easier to receive forgiveness than to give it?
- Why do you think Jesus cares so much about forgiveness in community?
- What is the difference between forgiving someone and pretending what they did was okay?
- What part of the story feels uncomfortable or challenging? Why?

NURTURE

Two Hands Activity

Ask everyone to hold out both hands.

"Imagine one hand is receiving forgiveness from God.
The other hand is offering forgiveness to others."

You don't need to answer these out loud, have a think through:

Hand One: Receiving Forgiveness

- Where do I need to remember that God has been kind to me?
- Is there something I keep feeling ashamed about?
- Do I believe God actually wants to forgive me?
- Am I trying to pay God back, instead of receiving grace?

Remember: The king forgave the debt because he had compassion. That is what God is like. He is not waiting for you to magically fix yourself before you come to him.

Hand Two: Offering Forgiveness

- Is there someone I am holding anger towards?
- Am I replaying what they did over and over in my mind?
- Do I want them to hurt because they hurt me?
- What would it look like to give that hurt to God instead of carrying it by myself?

Remember: Forgiving someone does not mean you have to trust them straight away. It does not mean you have to be best friends. It does not mean you stay silent if someone is hurting you. But it does mean we ask God to help us release revenge and let him be the judge.

ARE THERE TIMES WHEN WE SHOULDN'T FORGIVE?

Big Idea

Forgiveness is part of the life Jesus calls us into, but it must never be used to minimise harm or pressure people back into unsafe relationships. Forgiveness can happen in our hearts, while reconciliation requires repentance, safety, and rebuilt trust.

DISCOVER

Many psychologists agree that 'Forgiveness' and 'Reconciliation' are not the same thing.

1. Forgiveness happens inside one's own skin, whereas reconciliation is between two people.
2. Forgiveness is both a decision not to 'get back' at someone and can also include an emotional component. It is not dependent on the other person. Reconciliation is about restoring trust in a relationship.
3. We can forgive without reconciling. Sometimes we might need to separate ourselves from a dangerous person or situation. While we are called to be extravagant in offering forgiveness, we must still be discerning in reconciliation when there is a possibility of ongoing exposure to harm.

NURTURE

Discuss

- In our passage today Jesus says, in Matthew 7:6, "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs." What do you think that means?
- Paul says in Romans 12, "As much as it is up to you, live at peace with all people." In what sort of situations might you forgive but not reconcile?
- How can we forgive even when reconciliation may not be possible or safe? Why should we try to forgive, even in these situations? (Colossians 3:13)
- Jesus also tells us not to judge others (vs 3-5). Rather than judging others, what should we focus on instead?
- Is there someone that you have been holding onto anger and a desire to get back at them? How could you forgive them instead?
- Spend sometime praying that God will help you to forgive as you have been forgiven.

CLOSING THE INJUSTICE GAP

Key Verse: *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." — Ephesians 4:32*

The Reality of the "Injustice Gap"

The "injustice gap"—the figurative distance we create between ourselves and another person who has hurt us. The "injustice done to us"—whether small or life-shattering—creates a chasm in the relationship.

This "gap" is filled with a cocktail of resentment, bitterness, and fear. How have you seen this "cocktail" affect a person's physical or spiritual health?

Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation

This series has stressed that forgiveness is distinct from, and does not always include, reconciliation.

1. Reconciliation happens between two people; forgiveness happens inside one's skin.
2. Reconciliation requires a restoration of trust in a relationship where trust has been violated.

How does knowing that forgiveness happens "inside your skin" change your perspective on people who are no longer in your life?

Read: Matthew 7:6 and Proverbs 22:3.

Reflection:

- Reconciliation requires two people to be trustworthy, but forgiveness only requires one. Why is this distinction vital for someone in a "toxic" or "abusive" situation?
- How does Jesus' warning about "throwing pearls to pigs" act as a mandate for discernment in our relationships?
- The Goal: Can you forgive someone from a "safe distance"? Discuss what that looks like in practice.

The REACH Model

The REACH model, developed by Dr. Everett Worthington, provides a bridge across the injustice gap. Work through these letters together:

Step	Action	Biblical Anchor	Reflection Question
Recall	Face the hurt without "demonising" or "denying."	Isaiah 1:15-18	Why is naming the "scarlet" sin necessary before it can become "white as snow"?
Empathise	Try to understand the "why" without condoning the "what."	Luke 23:34	Jesus said, "They know not what they do." How does seeing an offender as "broken" rather than "monstrous" change your heart?
Altruistic Gift	Give a gift they don't deserve.	Ephesians 4:22-24	We are "second-order forgivers." How does remembering your own need for grace help you give this gift?
Commit	Make a "marker" of your decision.	Jeremiah 31:34	God says, "I will remember their sins no more." How can writing down in a journal that you commit to forgive someone, or sharing in confidence with a trusted friend that you have forgiven someone, help when feelings of anger return?
Hold	Realise that pain is not the same as unforgiveness.	Psalms 103:10-12	How do we stop "vengeful rumination" when an old memory resurfaces?

What part of the "REACH" model do you think is the hardest to practice when you've been deeply hurt?

Decisional vs. Emotional Forgiveness

This series distinguishes between the **Mind** (Decisional) and the **Heart** (Emotional).

- **Decisional Forgiveness:** A choice in the present about how you will behave in the future.
- **Emotional Forgiveness:** The slow replacement of bitterness with “pro-other” emotions such as compassion.

Group Exercise:

Think of a situation where you have made the decision to forgive, but your emotions haven't caught up yet.

- Does that mean you haven't "really" forgiven?
- How does the "Empathise" (E) stage of REACH help bridge this gap?

Closing Activity and Prayer

The **Challenge:** This week, write a "Letter of Forgiveness" that works through the REACH model, that you will **NOT** send. Use it as a "marker" to tell your brain: "The debt is cancelled."

Group Prayer:

- Pray for those currently in the "Recall" phase—that God would protect their hearts from being overwhelmed.
- Pray for the gift of Empathy—to see others through the lens of their own brokenness.
- Ask for God's strength to Commit to forgive not just seven times....
- Thank God for being the "First-Order Forgiver" who closed the ultimate injustice gap at the Cross.

Note for Leaders: If someone in the group alludes to their own experience of ongoing abuse, ensure they are directed to appropriate pastoral care and professional safety resources immediately. Immediately follow our safe church protocols and inform Maria.

FORGIVENESS TRANSFORMS COMMUNITIES

Big Idea

Because Christ has forgiven us, we must become a community that releases debts, is bound together by love, and is governed by his peace.

DISCOVER

Paul's vision in Colossians 3 is profoundly practical. Christ has forgiven us at great cost. Therefore, we are to forgive one another, clothe ourselves with love, and allow the peace of Christ to govern our life together.

Forgiveness is not pretending that wrong does not matter. It is giving up the right to revenge and releasing another person from the debt we feel they owe us.

When a church learns to practise this kind of forgiveness, relationships deepen, trust is rebuilt, and the peace of Christ becomes visible in the community.

Discussion Questions

- What stands out to you in Colossians 3:12–15 about the kind of community Paul says Christians are meant to become?
- Why do you think Paul grounds our forgiveness of others in the words, “as the Lord forgave you”? How does remembering Christ’s forgiveness change the way we respond to those who have hurt us?
- What is the difference between forgiveness, reconciliation, and restored trust? Why is that distinction important?
- Where have you seen unresolved hurt quietly affect a family, friendship group, ministry team, or church community?
- What practical step might God be calling you to take so that Christ’s peace can rule more fully in your relationships this week?

