

Forgiveness Msg 3 – How Can I Forgive Myself?
 Sermon preached by Dr. Rick Mandl
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Welcome . . .

We've been in a series on forgiveness.

We've looked at

- FINDING FORGIVENESS
- FORGIVING OTHERS

Today we're looking at what is a difficult subject for a lot of people . . .

FORGIVING MYSELF

Grab your Bibles and open up to our scripture for this morning. . .

Luke 15:11-24

As you're turning there, let me share with you something that's happening in our nation's capital on Monday.

I don't know if you saw the story, but MONDAY (tomorrow), golfer Tiger Woods will visit the White House where he will be awarded the

Presidential Medal Of Freedom

If you're not familiar with the award, it's **Our Nation's Highest Civilian Honor** and it's awarded to **individuals deemed to have made special meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors.**

If it seems strange to you that a golfer would be receiving this award, just know that Tiger Woods is not the first, he's actually the fourth.

Part of what has propelled Tiger Woods to be presented this award is the fact that **Americans love a great comeback story.**

Tiger Woods is **one of the winningest golfers of all time.**

He has **81 PGA Tour victories** and has **amassed more than \$118 million dollars** in career earnings.

But, for Tiger Woods **the timeline between his fourth and his fifth win at the Master's was 14 years**, and during that time he experienced

- a humiliating public breakup with his wife,
- an addiction to pain killers,
- an arrest for a DUI,
- four back surgeries, including a spinal fusion,
- surgery on his knees,
- and as a result of all of this, having to relearn his golf swing and his golf game.

As I was reflecting on his story, I thought back to something that two news commentators said about Tiger Woods nine years ago – something that one said about his faith, and something that one said about his golf game. . . .

Video Clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DBNw5vWkx-c>

The prediction about Tiger coming back and winning the Master's came to pass last month

As to whether Tiger has found forgiveness through his faith, or whether Tiger has been able to forgive himself, I don't know the answer to those questions.

What I do know is that **we love a comeback story**, so I'd like us to look at one of the greatest of all time that's found in Luke chapter 15

READ Luke 15:11-24

Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. 12 The younger son told his father, 'I want my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons.

13 "A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and

there he wasted all his money in wild living. 14 About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. 15 He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. 16 The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything.

17 “*When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will go home to my father and say, “Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, 19 and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.”’*

20 “*So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. 21 His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.[b]’*

22 “*But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. 23 And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, 24 for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.*

Let's pray together.

Father, we thank you for this story and the reminder that no matter how far we might run from You, we can always return home.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're in a series on FORGIVENESS

And today considering the question "How Can I Forgive Myself?"

Before we get too deep into that question, let me tell you that Forgiving Yourself is not something that Bible talks about a lot.

And when I say it doesn't talk about it a lot, what I mean is it doesn't talk about it at all.

And yet it's still something that a lot of people struggle with.

And I think you'll see why, when we get into this story of the PRODIGAL SON.

Jesus shared this story as the third of three stories that he shared about things that were lost.

A lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son. . .

Let me ask you. . .

“What does it mean to be a prodigal?”

You ask that question and someone might tell you that. . .

“A prodigal is someone who's really smart at a really young age.”

And you'd have to tell them, “No, that's a PRODIGY, not a prodigal.”

Someone else who is familiar with this story might say **“A prodigal is someone who runs away from home.”**

Certainly, in our story, you can see that as the younger son departs.

Someone else might say **“a prodigal is someone who turns their back on their family or on their faith”**

We see that in our story.

Another might say

“A prodigal is someone who wastes money on lavish lifestyle.”

All these are partially correct.

But I want to give you the definition I like best which is that

“A prodigal is someone who leaves a better way of life for a lesser way of life.”

In other words, it's . . .

Saying "no" to the best and saying "yes" to the less.

That's what we see in this story.

From a Theological point of view, the parable of the Prodigal Son is a divine drama that illustrates all of humanity's decision to turn their backs on God, to sin against God, and to ultimately leave what is best for us.

What is BEST for us in this story is represented by the word "***HOME***".

This story is an illustration of our need to find forgiveness, because we have all sinned against God.

Partway through the story, the son makes a decision to return home.

And the way to return home to his father is clear.

It's the same with us.

When we make the decision to return to God, God lays out very clearly how we can do that.

The clear path of returning to God is through Jesus Christ, God's only Son.

As we look at this parable, my prayer is that you would open your mind to the possibility that you just might find yourself as one of the characters in this story.

Would you open your mind to the possibility that you just might be the Prodigal Son or the Prodigal Daughter who needs to return home to the loving father?

Would you consider, for just a few moments with us, God is indeed a loving Father who desires to restore this relationship with you ... Who wants to forgive you,

... Who wants to wipe your slate clean,

... Who wants to welcome you fully back into the family even though you may have turned your back on Him?

Would you consider, for just a few minutes, that maybe you have exchanged the best in order to pursue something less?

Would you just consider that God has a better life for you and it is available to you when you return?

I hope you will open up your minds to these possibilities as we explore this today.

How do I forgive myself?

Step one. . . the starting point is that

1. Recognize My Need

If you don't recognize your need for forgiveness, you're never going to receive forgiveness.

You won't get it from God, you won't get it from others, you won't get it from yourself.

The story of the Prodigal Son begins with an unusual request.

A son comes to his father and asks for his share of the inheritance or the family estate.

The unusual thing about the request is that the father was still living.

A number of years ago reporters were questioning **Prince Charles** about the prospect of him one day ascending to the throne of England and becoming king, he stopped the conversation cold when he said to the reporters,

"Gentlemen, may I remind you that you are speaking of the death of my mother."

The son in our story doesn't seem to have the same respect for his parent that Prince Charles did.

The son in our story goes to his father and says,

"I want my share of the inheritance and I want it now!"

The son in our story, is in effect saying, **"Life is short! I've got places to go, and things to do, and people to see."**

And I don't have time to hang around here at home and wait for you to die so that I can do it.

I want what's coming to me and I want it now.

An UNUSUAL request.

A DISRESPECTFUL request.

And yet, SOMEWHAT STRANGELY a request that the father granted.

He divided his wealth between the two sons, and gave the younger son his share.

And the younger son takes what he's been given, and he takes off.

He moves to a distant land - - probably a land as far away from home as he can find.

But it's not long before things begin to go south.

He runs out of money, and at the same time his money runs out, so do his friends.

And he takes the only job he can find which was slopping pigs.

And he's so hungry, he's yearning even to be able to eat the slop that he's feeding to the pigs.

And I love what verse 17 says . . .

"When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger!' Luke 15:17

Circle those words. . .

"he finally came to his senses"

I love that because it paints the picture here that what he'd been going through was a sort of a temporary insanity.

He'd been "out of his mind"

And now he's coming to his senses and seeing things as they really are.

He sees the pigs that he's feeding eating better than he is and it's like something clicks.

He thinks about the home that he left, the father he wanted so much to get away from and the family that he abandoned.

And he realizes that even his father's hired men have food to spare and here he is, his father's son starving to death."

He realizes that he had SAID GOODBYE TO THE BEST and traded it for something less.

The **PIGSTY** in this story is a picture of **the DECEITFULNESS OF SIN**.

When we begin to think about leaving God's best and going after something less, at first, it seems attractive and enticing.

And it was that way for the Prodigal Son.

At first, he enjoyed the freedom of his new life away from the father.

He had money to burn . . . and he could do whatever he wanted without restrictions.

But when he came to his senses, he saw that he had traded the best for life in the pigsty.

God, sometimes, allows us to find ourselves at that point simply so we'll experience the wake-up call, and come to our senses and realize that there is more to this life than what we are experiencing.

The great thing about this story is that it doesn't end in the PIGSTY.

The Prodigal Son, not only RECOGNIZED HIS NEED.

He also

2. Realized That There Was Nothing He Could Do Where He Was To Change His Situation

If anything was going to change in his situation, two things needed to happen.

He would need to TURN AWAY from something, and he would need to TURN TOWARD something.

He would need to turn away from life in the pigsty and he would have to return home to his father, the one he had turned his back on.

Look at verses 18-19

He makes a decision. . .

Those first 7 words are key.

"I will go home to my father

For this Prodigal Son to find forgiveness, he needed to do something more than RECOGNIZE his need for forgiveness.

He needed to REALIZE that whereas he was the one to blame for his being where he was - - in the PIGSTY

He needed to REALIZE that there was nothing he could do to improve his situation.

If that was going to happen it would require help from someone else.

It would require the help of the one that he turned his back on when he left home.

The son has a speech memorized. . .

He's got it all planned out as to what he's going to say to his father upon his return.

"Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you,

Notice, within this speech, he's got some things right and some things wrong.

He's got it right when he says that his sin had not just been against his father, but also against the God who had placed his father in a position of authority over him.

He's not minimizing the seriousness of the sin he committed.

He sinned against heaven, and he sinned against his father.

He got that right.

HE GOT IT WRONG when he tried to guess as to what might be the best that could be waiting for him when he returned home.

Look at what he was asking for. . .

Please take me on as a hired servant.”

Why did he think that was the best he could hope for?

I am no longer worthy of being called your son.

It's that feeling of UNWORTHINESS that keeps a lot of people from ever receiving the forgiveness that Jesus Christ offers.

Maybe it's because they have done something they thought was unforgivable.

Maybe it's because they think they've committed a particular sin too many times to be forgiven.

It's almost as though they are saying, "**I know that when Jesus died on the cross, he died for the sins of the whole world. . . it's just that I'm not really sure that he knew about mine.”**

If you're tempted to think that way, then ask yourself this question.

When Jesus died on the cross, how many of your sins (including the ones you commit over and over) were in the future?

Answer: All of them!

We surprise ourselves by the things we discover about ourselves and our potential to sin.

But those things don't surprise God.

He knew about them . . . each and every one. . . and Jesus died for them.

Maybe you've never thought about it this way, but when you say "**I can't forgive myself**" particularly if you're saying that as a Christian, what you're actually saying is . . .

'Even though Jesus forgives me, there's another God above Jesus whose opinion matters more – and that God is me!"

We're rewriting scripture.

1 John 1:7 says, “The blood of Jesus cleanses us from every sin.”

And what we're saying is . . .

“The blood of Jesus cleanses us from every sin, except for mine, because mine is somehow different.”

The Prodigal Son didn't let an ability to forgive himself stop him from getting what he desperately needed, which was the forgiveness of his father . . .

He . . .

RECOGNIZED HIS NEED

REALIZED THERE WAS NOTHING HE HAD THE POWER TO DO where he was to change his situation. . .

And so he

RETURNED HOME TO RECEIVE THE FORGIVENESS THAT COULD ONLY COME FROM HIS FATHER.

It would have been easy for the Prodigal Son to stay in that Pig Sty and simply keep reciting the mantra "**I'm not worthy**" - - "**I'm not worthy**."

A lot of people who can't forgive themselves get stuck right there and move no further.

But to his credit he not only thought about going home, he went there.

It was his decision to make, and he made it.

In our story, the father didn't force the son to stay home even though he knew that leaving home was a bad idea.

When the son gets in trouble in a foreign land, the father didn't chase after him and force him to come home.

The decision to return home is the son's decision to make.

The father can't make it for him.

You see, God loves us way too much to take away our freedom.

Just as we have the freedom to choose to turn our back on God and go our own way, we also have the freedom to choose to return home and come back to God.

It is our choice, and God can't make that choice for us.

In our story, our hero is eating with the pigs and he makes his decision.

Verse 18 says that he said to himself,

"I will go home to my father"

Verse 20 says that's exactly what he did

"So he returned home to his father"

Take a look at your notes and see what he found when he got there.

The son returns home and the Bible says in verse 20,

"And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son

. . . and gave him a big lecture and condemned him."

Is that what it says?

Not even close.

What it does say is

. . . he embraced him, and kissed him

When you make the decision to return to God, you need to know this. . . .

God is not mad at you.

God is not mad at you.

Like the father in our story, God runs to you and He welcomes back.

You say well, "**I turned my back on God.**"

That may be true.

But He's not mad at you.

You say, "**I said some things that are against God.**"

That may be true, but God's not mad at you.

God is the loving Father who operates toward us with grace and He is willing to offer that forgiveness to us.

Yes, the son admits that he has done wrong, but the father receives him and welcomes him back.

It's the same way with your Heavenly Father.

If you take that step toward Him, **that one step**, your loving Heavenly Father will receive you back and welcome you.

Notice what the father in this story did.

He did more than just say it, but he began to take action.

Luke 15:22-24, in your notes,

"The father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began." Luke 15:22-24

The father gives the son the finest robe - a symbol of honor.

He kills the calf they've been fattening.

This is a sign of something that is important because in those days you would save the fattest calf for the best celebration possible.

And the father throws the best celebration welcoming home the son.

Then one more detail, he gives him shoes.

That doesn't say to you and me because we all have shoes, but in those days, if you were a slave, you went barefoot.

So he is saying to his son, you are returning not as a slave, but you are returning as my son and he gives him shoes.

Often overlooked, he gives him a ring.

The ring is a symbol that **the heritage between father and son** has not been broken.

In our day, we would call it a power of attorney and he has returned back with all benefit, even though he left the best life for something less, the father restored him fully and gave him all of the benefits.

It's amazing, but that's how God treats us.

Notice also, the forgiveness that this son received was. . .

INSTANT, it was **COMPLETE** and it was **FREE**

This is God. . . .

This isn't people. . . .

We don't have time today to talk about **the Older Brother**.

That's a story for another day

God, like the father in this story forgives **INSTANTLY**.

There is no begging with God.

There is no waiting around.

Forgiveness is there the moment you ask for it - It's instant

It's also **COMPLETE**

There is **no residual unforgiveness**.

God doesn't come back and say - **Remember when you did this?**

God doesn't bring up our past sins and then throw them in our face.

When God forgives, it's **one and done** and it never has to be forgiven again.

You are forgiven.

And then. . . . God forgives **FREELY**

There is no cost.

It is **absolutely free**.

There is **no way to purchase it**.

There is **no way to earn it**.

Remember, that was the son's plan. . . to **work his back toward his father's acceptance**.

I think it's interesting that as you look at verse 21 and see what he says when he meets the father,

THE FATHER ALLOWS HIM TO CONFESS . . .

HE ALLOWS HIM TO SAY "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

But **the father cuts him off before he can complete the rest of his speech**. . . before he can get to the part about

"**Make me like one of your hired men.**"

The reason he cut him off was because the father was already planning on giving the son freely all the things that the son was gonna offer to work for.

In the end, when it comes to dealing with the need for forgiveness in your life there are **Two Roads You Can Travel**.

The first is the road that the Prodigal Son traveled.

It's coming to God for forgiveness - - - Receiving His mercy and Grace.

Unfortunately, it's **the other road** that is the most traveled.

It's the road of carrying around the baggage of guilt and unforgiveness for the rest of our lives.

It's **living unforgiven**, not because God won't forgive us, **but because we are unable or unwilling to forgive ourselves**.

Or maybe saying it more accurately, **to receive that forgiveness**.

Maybe you are here today and you don't see how you could possibly forgive yourself.

You don't see how God could possibly forgive you.

You don't know how you are going to move beyond your past or get rid of the baggage you are carrying.

You don't see how God can use you in the future.

What you need to do is to remember the names of people who are in God's hall of fame.

You see, God has a hall of fame with people who He has used to do great things.

Everyone in this hall of fame has made big mistakes in their life.

Think about the people in God's Hall of Fame.

People like **Jacob** who was a liar and a cheater, yet God changed his name to Israel and he became the father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Moses was a murderer and he had an anger problem, yet God used him to bring the Israelites out of captivity in Egypt.

David was an adulterer and a murderer, and yet God made him a man after His own heart and made him the greatest kind in Israel's history.

Jonah ran away from God, and God brought him back and used him to change an entire city.

Paul persecuted and murdered Christians, yet God used him to become the greatest evangelist and church planter in the history of the world.

Peter, yes even Peter, he denied Jesus, but God used him to become the central figure in the founding of the church in the first century.

Everyone in God's hall of fame has faults, and everyone in it has big baggage and you could be the next person on this list.

All you have to do is receive God's forgiveness, forgive yourself and open yourself to God's potential for your life.

You need to allow Him to forgive you and then to forgive yourself.

Look at our last verse, it's Romans 8:1.

"So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." Romans 8:1

God doesn't condemn you, so stop condemning yourself.

Stop living in bondage.

Let's pray.