



In the Father's Arms

UNDERSTANDING FORGIVENESS IN THE SCRIPTURES

BY PASTOR DEAN NADASDY

LWML has asked us, "What's your 80?"
To answer, the *Lutheran Woman's Quarterly* offers this
Bible study from the '80s (LWQ Winter 1982).

Once there were two women who never spoke to each other. Both belonged to the same church. Everyone at church knew they didn't get along. They could sit at a meeting together and never say a word to each other. They talked past each other, walked past each other, and had been doing so for many, many years.

One day their pastor, a reconciling sort of person, suggested that the two women come to his office for an attempt at making peace. They agreed with hesitation. As the three Christians talked they were astonished to discover that the bone of contention between the two women could simply not be found. "Tell me," said the pastor, "what started this whole thing? What was the wrong done or the hurt received?" The two women looked at each other, shook their heads, shrugged their shoulders, and said, "I don't know. I can't remember."

Here were two women who received their heavenly Father's embrace in the very same church. Once in the Father's arms, though, they refused to respond to each other in the same spirit. Long ago something had been said or done and not forgiven. A lack of forgiveness turned to bitterness, the deep-rooted, hard-to-weed-out variety.

Forgiveness is one of those good graces of God meant to be received and given. Christians are conduits, not containers, where forgiveness is concerned.

Read, perhaps responsively, **Psalm 32, 51, or 130.**

Prayer: Heavenly Father, prepare our hearts and minds to look at how we have accepted Your forgiveness only to keep our own forgiveness from our brothers and sisters in Christ. We make excuses to hold on to anger and frustration over others' wrongdoing instead of forgiving and putting the best construction on everything. Lead our thoughts and words as we study Your word and gain more meaning for our lives, so we are ready to reflect Your love to others. Amen.

1. Silently read **Luke 15:11-32**, the familiar story of the prodigal son. As you read through the story, keep an eye open for clear evidence of the three primary views of sin in the Scriptures. Where in the story do you see the prodigal son involved in each of these forms of sin?

- An open act of rebellion.
- Guilt, defilement, or pollution.
- A condition of separation or bondage (original sin).

2. Now, search the story again and find in Jesus' story evidence of the following aspects of God's grace:

- The unexpectedness of God's grace, surprise.
- The warmth and tenderness of God's grace toward the sinner.
- The initiating character of God's grace.
- The extravagance of God's grace.

The "prodigal Father" (prodigal meaning extravagant) lavishes grace upon all His rebellious children in search of forgiveness. Once in the Father's arms, we are more than forgiven. We become forgivers as well. Complete the following questions by reading the passages below:

3. What is the motivation behind a Christian forgiving another person?
(**Ephesians 4:32**) _____

4. How often and in what circumstances must a Christian forgive?
(**Matthew 18:21-22**) _____

5. How does God respond to the Christian who will not forgive?
(**Matthew 18:23-35**) _____

6. When, and by whom, was the right to forgive sins given to the church? (**John 20:19-23**) _____
7. Under what circumstances may the church deny the word of God's forgiveness? (**Matthew 18:15-17**) _____
8. What happens in a church when forgiveness is not extended to everyone? (**Hebrews 12:15**) _____

Gleanings

A little boy once prayed. "Father, forgive us our debts as we forgive those who are dead against us." At times, we feel we need to forgive those who are against us as well. Describe, if you are comfortable, a time when the grace of God "stretched" you to forgive someone whose wrong against you had been serious.

9. Do we forgive because we have to forgive or because we have been forgiven? _____
10. *Lutheran Service Book* contains an order of Individual Confession and Absolution (p. 292-293). Why do you think private confession has fallen into such disuse in the church today? What are the special benefits of experiencing one-on-one confession and forgiveness? _____
11. What can be some of the results of "the root of bitterness" in a person's life? In the life of a Christian congregation? _____

12. What do you think was at the root of the elder brother's unwillingness to accept his younger brother in Luke 15? _____
13. What is often behind a person's unwillingness to follow the Father's lead and forgive someone already forgiven by God? _____

We are extravagantly forgiven by our Lord. When it is hard to forgive others, we can ask Him to help us to be reminded of the grace shown to us in our sin and failures and also to soften our hearts to share grace to others who have hurt us. Keeping ourselves in the Word and surrounded by those who model forgiveness and Christ's love help us to follow the calling of the Holy Spirit to forgive and live with others in unity and respect.

Prayer: Our extravagant Father, Your love for us is beyond compare. You have given us the greatest gift, Your Son Jesus to pay for our sins and show us the joy of living in unity with You. Help us as we live our lives on earth to be reminded of that perfect love so that we may also show grace and mercy to those who have sinned against us. Forgive us for the many times that we "have not let His love have its way, so that our love for others has failed." Give us Your words to say — words to not only forgive, but words to point others to You, the author and perfecter of our faith. In Jesus' name, Amen.



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