

Jesus once told a parable about a son who left home, squandered all his money, and then returned feeling ashamed. Within this parable are key points that you can learn from and apply to your life regarding forgiveness. This week, Pastor Andy talks about forgiveness from the context of the Parable of the Prodigal Son in his sermon entitled "Forgiveness in a World Stripped of Grace," which is Part 2 of the six-part series "To Forgive...Divine."

There are three characteristics of prodigals. In the parable, "The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them" Luke 15:12. The son was not content and felt compelled to look elsewhere for significance, which is the first characteristic of a prodigal. Shortly after, he decided to go out, "explore," and look elsewhere for his freedom, which is a second characteristic.

When the son finally came to his senses, he felt so ashamed that he rehearsed what he planned to tell his father, saying "I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants'" Luke 25: 18-19. The younger son failed to understand forgiveness, which is the third characteristic of a prodigal. When the father saw his son coming, he ran to him and, without letting him finish his rehearsed confession, called to his servants to prepare a feast. The forgiveness that comes from God is just like the loving forgiveness that the father had for his younger son.

The older son, however, did not feel the same way his father felt toward his younger brother and demonstrated three temptations with which Christ followers can struggle. When he learned the reason for the celebration, the older son became angry. You may have experienced times that you felt you had done everything right but were still wronged, as in the saying, "nice guys finish last." That reaction is due to the temptation of resentment. Another temptation is the tendency to "write people off." The older son demonstrated this when he told his father, "But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!" Luke 15:30. He acted as if, somehow, this was his father's son, but that he was not his brother. He then acted on his anger by not attending the celebration. The parable says, "The older brother became angry and refused to go in." Luke 15:28. The brother showed a failure to understand forgiveness, which is the third temptation.

Forgiveness has three ingredients. Forgiveness is unconditional, and forgiveness is costly. Without hesitation, the father ran to his son while he was still a long way off. He did not base forgiving him on any condition, but he willingly received his son back no matter the cost. Forgiveness is also total. Once the son decided to return, the father did not hold anything back from him. His father restored him to his position in the household as his son even though he had rejected his father and then squandered his inheritance.

Perhaps you've had times in your life where you looked elsewhere like the prodigal son did. Maybe you have had a hard time forgiving someone you felt has done you wrong. The good news is that forgiveness can happen. In a world stripped of grace, the forgiveness that comes from God is possible. Are you willing to embrace and experience that type of forgiveness?