

# clean slate

## Study Guide - Week 1

### Sermon Recap

In his sermon, Josh explores the concept of unforgiveness and its impact on our lives, suggesting that starting the year fresh is possible through forgiveness. He emphasizes that unforgiveness is a heavy weight that affects our mental and emotional well-being, ultimately robbing us of the joy and fullness of life that God intends for us. Drawing on biblical teachings, he illustrates that forgiveness is not about excusing wrongs but about releasing their hold on us, enabling healing and restoration in our relationships. Josh challenges listeners to identify those in their lives who need forgiveness and take steps towards that release, reminding them that true peace comes from aligning with God's ways.

# Ice Breaker

What is one thing that you want to make sure you accomplish this year?

## Discussion Questions

▼ Josh discussed the idea of a clean slate and what forgiveness really means.

- What does it mean to have a 'clean slate' in your relationships with others, and why is forgiveness a key part of that?
- Think of a situation where you felt the weight of not forgiving someone. How might your relationship change if you were to forgive them?

## Activity

1) Have you ever struggled to let go of a hurt or wrong someone committed against you?

*NEVER      RARELY      SOMETIMES      OFTEN      ALWAYS*

2) How often do thoughts of past hurts influence your current emotions or decisions?

*NEVER      RARELY      SOMETIMES      OFTEN      ALWAYS*

3) Do you find it difficult to trust people because of past betrayals?

*NEVER      RARELY      SOMETIMES      OFTEN      ALWAYS*

4) How often do you replay arguments, offenses, or painful moments in your mind?

*NEVER      RARELY      SOMETIMES      OFTEN      ALWAYS*

5) Do you feel bitterness or resentment toward someone specific in your life?

*NEVER      RARELY      SOMETIMES      OFTEN      ALWAYS*

6) Have you ever avoided someone because of unresolved conflict or hurt?

*NEVER      RARELY      SOMETIMES      OFTEN      ALWAYS*

7) How frequently do you feel weighed down by regret or guilt about how you've treated others?

*NEVER      RARELY      SOMETIMES      OFTEN      ALWAYS*

8) Do you feel unforgiveness has impacted your spiritual life, such as prayer or worship?

*NEVER      RARELY      SOMETIMES      OFTEN      ALWAYS*

9) How often do you wish for reconciliation with someone from your past?

NEVER RARELY SOMETIMES OFTEN ALWAYS

10) On a scale of 1-10, how free do you feel from the weight of your past?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

## Discussion Questions

▼ Josh highlighted how unforgiveness can lead to anxiety and stress, and how it weighs us down.

- How does unforgiveness affect your mental health and daily lives?
- Can you identify a time when holding onto anger affected your mood or decisions?
- What steps can you take to let go of that burden?

## Read Scripture

### **Matthew 5:43-48 NIV**

<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

### **Luke 15:11-32 NIV**

<sup>11</sup> Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

<sup>13</sup> "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. <sup>14</sup> After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup> So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. <sup>16</sup> He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

<sup>17</sup> "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! <sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. <sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' <sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

<sup>21</sup> “The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

<sup>22</sup> “But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. <sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup> “Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup> So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. <sup>27</sup> ‘Your brother has come,’ he replied, ‘and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.’

<sup>28</sup> “The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. <sup>29</sup> But he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup> But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!’

<sup>31</sup> “‘My son,’ the father said, ‘you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’”

## Discussion Questions

▼ Josh mentioned that loving our enemies is part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus and to practice forgiveness. In Matthew 5:43-44, Jesus challenges us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate us.

- Have you experienced a situation where you had to let go of anger towards someone you didn't get along with?
- How did it influence your feelings about them?

▼ Josh emphasized that forgiveness is about freeing ourselves from the weight of holding onto grudges rather than letting someone off the hook.

- Reflect on a situation where you struggled to forgive. How might viewing forgiveness as a release, rather than an excuse, change your mindset?
- Do you have an example of this in your life?

▼ Josh encouraged us with the challenge to identify one person we need to forgive and take tangible steps to release that unforgiveness.

- What are some steps you can take to start living a life filled with forgiveness?
- Think of a specific person you may be holding onto resentment towards. What is a specific, tangible step you can take toward releasing that unforgiveness this week?

# Prayer 🙏

- Ask God to help you identify areas of unforgiveness in your life.
- Pray for the courage to take steps towards forgiveness.
- Request God's assistance in applying the truths discussed in this sermon throughout the week.
- Ask for strength to release any burdens you're carrying related to past hurts.

# Rewatch the sermon 📺

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## Bible Reading Plan - Week 1

### Day 1

*Luke 15:11-32*

The parable of the prodigal son beautifully illustrates the transformative power of forgiveness. The younger son, after squandering his inheritance, returns home, not expecting acceptance but hoping for mercy. Instead, his father embraces him with open arms, celebrating his return with joy. This act of forgiveness is a powerful reminder of God's unconditional love and grace toward us, no matter how far we may stray. The father's response teaches us that forgiveness is not about keeping score but about restoring relationships. The older son's struggle to forgive highlights how resentment can hinder our ability to celebrate grace in others' lives. This parable invites us to reflect on our hearts—are we like the forgiving father or the resentful brother? True forgiveness requires humility, love, and a willingness to let go of pride. As recipients of God's boundless forgiveness, we are called to extend the same grace to others. In forgiving, we reflect the heart of our heavenly Father.

- Are there areas in your life where you struggle to extend forgiveness, and how might reflecting on God's grace help you take a step toward reconciliation?
- Do you identify more with the father's willingness to forgive or the older brother's reluctance, and why?
- How does embracing forgiveness bring freedom and restoration to relationships in your life?

- Ask God to soften your heart toward those who have wronged you, to help you forgive as He has forgiven you, and to fill you with His grace and love so you can reflect His character to others.

## Day 2

*Ephesians 4:17-32*

This passage calls us to live as transformed people, reflecting the new life we have in Christ. In this passage, Paul emphasizes the importance of putting away bitterness, anger, and malice, replacing them with kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Forgiveness is not just a suggestion but a command rooted in God's forgiveness toward us through Christ. When we hold on to unforgiveness, it hardens our hearts and disrupts our relationship with God and others. However, forgiving others frees us from the chains of bitterness and allows God's peace to reign in our hearts. Paul reminds us that forgiveness is an act of grace, reflecting God's character and His work in us. By forgiving, we embody the love and mercy Christ showed on the cross. Are there areas in your life where you need to let go of anger and extend forgiveness? As recipients of God's endless grace, we are called to share that grace with others, fostering unity and love in the body of Christ. Forgiveness isn't easy, but through God's Spirit, it is always possible.

- Who in your life do you find it hardest to forgive, and why?
- How can reflecting on God's forgiveness help you in your attempts to forgive others?
- What steps can you take today towards forgiving someone?
  
- Pray for a heart that is willing to forgive those who have hurt you and seek God's strength to overcome any barriers to forgiveness.

## Day 3

*Colossians 3:1-17*

This passage calls believers to set their hearts on things above and live in a way that reflects their new identity in Christ. Among the virtues Paul highlights is forgiveness, which is rooted in the forgiveness we have received from the Lord. Just as Christ has forgiven us fully and unconditionally, we are called to forgive others. Forgiveness is part of putting off the old self with its anger and malice and putting on the new self, marked by compassion, kindness, humility, and love. When we choose to forgive, we reflect Christ's character and allow His peace to rule in our hearts. Forgiveness is not about forgetting the wrongs done to us but releasing them to God and choosing not to let bitterness take root. It fosters unity within the body of Christ and brings healing to broken relationships. Are you harboring resentment that you need to lay down before God? As God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, may we clothe ourselves in forgiveness, letting His love bind us together in perfect harmony.

- How can you promote forgiveness in your relationships or church community?
- Choose one person from your community who you need to extend forgiveness to.
- How does your understanding of forgiveness impact your relationship with God?

- Pray for unity and healing in your community through forgiveness and ask God to reveal any areas where you need to seek or extend forgiveness.

## Day 4

*Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-42*

These passages challenge us to love our enemies and forgive those who hurt us, reflecting the radical love of God. Jesus calls us to go beyond human expectations, extending grace and mercy even to those who don't deserve it. Forgiveness in these passages is not passive but active, requiring prayer for those who mistreat us and a heart willing to let go of resentment. This kind of forgiveness mirrors God's perfect love, who shows mercy to the ungrateful and wicked. By forgiving, we reflect our identity as children of God, living out His kingdom values. Jesus also reminds us in Luke 6:37-42 to avoid judging others harshly, instead examining our own hearts first. Forgiveness is an act of humility, recognizing our need for God's mercy and extending it to others. Is there someone you need to forgive, even if it feels undeserved? As we love and forgive like Christ, we grow in His likeness and become a testimony of His grace to the world. Through the Spirit's power, we can love and forgive even when it feels impossible.

- Think of someone you consider an enemy—how can you start the process of forgiveness with them?
- What does it mean to you to love someone who has hurt you?
- How can praying for someone who has wronged you lead to healing?
- Ask God for the strength to love those who wrong you and pray for a heart that reflects His love in difficult circumstances.

## Day 5

*Matthew 18:21-35*

In this passage, Jesus teaches about forgiveness through the parable of the unforgiving servant. Peter asks how often he should forgive, and Jesus responds with an extraordinary number, illustrating that forgiveness has no limits. The parable contrasts the immense debt forgiven by the king with the servant's refusal to forgive a far smaller debt. This disparity highlights the magnitude of God's grace toward us and the expectation that we extend that grace to others. Forgiveness is not about keeping count but about reflecting God's mercy. When we withhold forgiveness, we demonstrate a failure to understand the depth of our own forgiven sins. This parable challenges us to examine our hearts—are we quick to accept forgiveness but slow to give it? True forgiveness frees both the giver and the receiver, fostering healing and reconciliation. As we reflect on the cross, may we be inspired to forgive others as God has so freely forgiven us.

- How does reflecting on the magnitude of God's forgiveness in your life challenge your perspective on forgiving others?
- Are there any "debts" you are holding onto that you need to release in light of the grace you've been shown?



- What steps can you take to cultivate a heart of forgiveness, even when it feels difficult or undeserved?
- Ask God to help you fully grasp the depth of His forgiveness and to give you the strength and grace to forgive others with the same mercy and love He has shown to you.



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## Want To Go Deeper? - Week 1

### Historical Context

The Parable of the Prodigal Son, found in Luke 15:11-32, is one of Jesus' most well-known teachings. Understanding its historical and cultural background can enhance our appreciation of its message. Here are some key points:

1. **Cultural Context of Inheritance:** In the Jewish culture of Jesus' time, inheritance was a significant matter. Typically, the eldest son would receive a double portion of the inheritance, while the younger sons would receive less. Asking for one's inheritance while the father was still alive was highly disrespectful and equivalent to wishing the father dead. This request would have been shocking to Jesus' original audience.
2. **Jewish Views on Family and Honor:** Family honor was paramount in Jewish society. The younger son's actions in the parable—demanding his inheritance, leaving home, and squandering his wealth—would have brought shame not only to himself but also to his family. The father's willingness to grant the son's request and later to welcome him back would have been seen as extraordinary and counter-cultural.
3. **The Role of the Father:** The father's response to the prodigal son is central to the parable. In a culture where honor and shame were critical, the father's decision to run to his son, embrace him, and celebrate his return would have been seen as undignified and unexpected. This act of

grace and forgiveness highlights the father's love and mercy, which Jesus uses to illustrate God's love for sinners.

4. **The Significance of the Pig Pen:** For a Jewish audience, the son's descent into feeding pigs would have been particularly disgraceful. Pigs were considered unclean animals according to Jewish law (Leviticus 11:7), and working with them would have been seen as the lowest of lows, emphasizing the son's fall from grace and his desperate situation.
5. **The Elder Brother's Reaction:** The elder brother's reaction to the father's forgiveness of the younger son reflects the attitudes of the Pharisees and religious leaders, who often criticized Jesus for associating with sinners. The elder brother's resentment and refusal to join the celebration serve as a critique of self-righteousness and a reminder of the need for grace and forgiveness.
6. **Jesus' Audience:** Jesus told this parable to a mixed audience, including tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and scribes (Luke 15:1-2). The parable addresses both groups: the prodigal son represents sinners who repent and return to God, while the elder brother represents those who are self-righteous and judgmental.

Understanding these cultural and historical elements helps to illuminate the radical nature of the father's forgiveness and the broader message of God's grace and mercy toward all who repent, regardless of their past actions.

# Greek Word Study

## aphíemi

Original Word: **ἀφίημι**

Part of Speech: Verb

Transliteration: aphíemi

Pronunciation: ah-FEE-ay-mee

Phonetic Spelling: (af-ee'-ay-mee)

Definition: To send away, to leave, to forgive, to permit, to abandon

Meaning: (a) I send away, (b) I let go, release, permit to depart, (c) I remit, forgive, (d) I permit, suffer.

Word Origin: From **ἀπό** (apo, meaning "from") and **ἵημι** (hiemi, meaning "to send" or "to let go")

Hebrew Counterpart: **נָשָׂא**, **nasa**: To lift, bear, carry, take away, forgive

Usage: The Greek verb **ἀφίημι** (aphíemi) is a versatile term used in the New Testament to convey the act of sending away or letting go. It is most commonly translated as "forgive" in the context of releasing someone from a debt or offense. The term also encompasses meanings such as leaving behind, permitting, or abandoning. In the context of forgiveness, it reflects a conscious decision to release someone from the burden of guilt or obligation, embodying the grace and mercy central to Christian doctrine.

Cultural and Historical Background: In the Greco-Roman world, the concept of forgiveness was often tied to legal and financial transactions, where debts could be canceled or pardoned. The New

Testament writers, drawing from Jewish traditions, expanded this concept to include moral and spiritual dimensions. Forgiveness became a hallmark of Christian ethics, reflecting God's forgiveness of humanity's sins through Jesus Christ. The cultural backdrop of honor and shame in ancient societies further underscores the radical nature of forgiveness as taught by Jesus, who emphasized reconciliation and restoration over retribution.

## Deeper Application

**Practical Steps to Forgiveness:** Josh challenges listeners to identify someone they need to forgive and take tangible steps toward forgiveness. Investigating practical methods and spiritual disciplines that aid in the process of forgiveness, such as prayer, journaling, or seeking counsel, can be helpful for those struggling with unforgiveness. Commit to exploring one of these options this week.