

Small Group Discussion Guide

Restoring Broken Relationships: For the week of March 27 - April 2, 2022

Main Thought and Scriptures:

(Break into groups of 3-4. Discuss for 30-40 minutes)

The stress of a two-year pandemic has affected relationships of all ages. Fear, loss, isolation, and separation have led to strained and broken relationships. Adopted coping mechanisms have led to unhealthy, impulsive and irresponsible connections, while leaving many questioning if these relationships can be salvaged. In Luke 15:11-31, Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son teaches us how to respond to offense so relationships can heal and be reconciled.

(Note: Feel free to read Luke 15:11-31 before continuing with the guide)

Release control. (v. 12)

- Let go and prayerfully place the other person in God's hands.
- The prodigal son's father does not use guilt, obligation, or a harsh tone with his son. Control and coercion only increases tension and division. De-escalation and a gracious release increases the chances for a safe return. People often remember how we last made them feel when they ponder mending the breach.

Allow for the passage of time to ripen perspective. (v. 13-19)

- Trust the boundaries of space and time to present new revelations. Consequences can often produce a resolve to repent. This applies to everyone: us, the other party, and others.
- As we ponder and pray, God often speaks and works.

Look for the evidence of genuine repentance. (v. 20-21)

- True repentance involves both confession and action - word and deed. The prodigal son confessed with remorse and did a total "about face" in direction. The change in his heart caused a change in his actions - he returned, confessed, and repented.
- The father's loving reception suggests that a work had also happened in his own heart.

Establish trust to close the gap. (v. 22-24)

- The father responded to the evidence of his son's repentance by reciprocating trust. Despite the risk, he chose to demonstrate trust by restoring and rewarding his son's repentant return.
- **Distinction:** Forgiveness is to be given unconditionally; trust requires a fulfillment of conditions. You can forgive without trusting.
- **Distinction:** Forgiveness is to be given immediately; trust is earned gradually over time.
- Someone has to extend trust first for without the gift of trust, no relationship can be restored.

Know that not all relationships can be restored. (v. 25-30)

- The older brother held on to resentment and refused to forgive and trust. Eastern custom of the day called for the older brother to receive a double portion of the inheritance. His max amount had been reduced by his younger brother's premature claim.
- This fueled a jealous anger which revealed the older brother's performance-driven motive and unwillingness to restore his relationship with his younger brother.
- Remember, "You can change you, but you can't change them."

All reconciliation begins with depending on God.

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:4-9 ESV)

- Separated from God because of our sin nature, we are first to be reconciled to Him by his mercy and grace.
- Once reconciled to God we can ask him to change the hearts of all involved—only He can do this. This enables mercy and grace to flow from us to others just as the prodigal son's father did.

Discussion Questions:

(select those that best apply)

- Share what is God speaking to you most from the main thought, scriptures, and the weekend sermon.
- Share about a time when you experienced God's healing and reconciliation in a broken relationship. What did God teach you and how is that relationship doing now?
- Are there any strained and broken relationships in your life right now that God has pressed on your heart to seek healing and reconciliation in? How is Jesus' parable of the prodigal son transforming the way you view the other person and your relationship with them?

Prayer:

(Break into groups of 2-3 to pray for 10 Minutes)

- Pray for one another to seek God and trust His direction in the healing and reconciliation of broken relationships.
- Pray that the healing and reconciliation we experience with others would lead to their salvation and ongoing discipleship.