



THIS WEEK'S SCRIPTURES

Luke 15:11-32, Ephesians 4:2, Philippians 2:4, Matthew 6:14-15, James 4:6

REFLECTION AND STUDY

DAY 1

On Sunday we read the story of the of two hurting brothers. **Read Luke 15:11-32.** The eldest brother in the story was just as hurt and lost as the younger brother in his own way. He was full of resentment and bitterness. When we are hurt, angry, or feel betrayed, it's human nature to put up walls, to defend ourselves, run or have a fit. We want revenge, or justice, vindication. Outwardly, the older brother's life had been blameless, and he appeared loyal. It's not hard to understand why he would feel that he was treated unfairly. But the way that he reacted to his younger brother's return shows us that though he was outwardly obedient, inwardly his attitude was poisoned.

- What's the point of always doing what you're supposed to do if it doesn't earn you a few advantages?
- Do you identify more with the prodigal son or the eldest brother?

Thank God for loving us all even when we are angry and act out. Pray that God would continue to soften the harsh areas of your heart and melt bitterness and resentment away.

DAY 2

Loving angry people can be hard. As Christians, how do we cope with difficult people? Christ calls us to love selflessly and ceaselessly. How can we possibly love genuinely when it's so hard just to be around bitterness? We can't do it on our own. Our broken, sinful hearts aren't capable of scraping together nearly enough love to cover the flaws of others, especially those close to us. The only true source of compassion, strength, and love is God. If we embrace and rely completely on God's love and forgiveness for us, we can then draw from his infinite provision and begin to love others more fervently and sincerely. We must bear with each other and seek to show mercy and kindness. Pray for your own heart and pray for theirs. **Read Ephesians 4:2.**

- Who comes to mind when you think of angry and bitter people?
- Spend some time thinking about who you can love and how.

Pray and ask God to help you love those around you that are difficult to get close to. Ask for God's help to rely on His love and forgiveness and be a vessel to pass that on to others around you.

DAY 3

The eldest brother was so angry because he was focused on himself. **Read Philippians 2:4.** Most people are worrying about their own plans and aren't looking out for the interests of others. Most people don't get up in the morning and give their first thought to how someone else is doing. Most people are concerned with their own problems. If you want to be one of those rare, unselfish people, you've got to change your focus away from yourself to other people. That's not something that comes naturally, it's something you have to learn to do. Instead of grieving missed opportunities, be intentional about looking away from yourself and toward the needs of others. You'll find happiness in serving God through serving others.

- What distractions keep you from focusing on the needs of others?
- What does it mean to "forget yourself?"

Pray that your focus would be redirected off yourself and onto others. Ask God to show you how you can change your focus.

DAY 4

As the eldest son in the story remains outside the party he is bent on not forgiving his brother and even tries to convince the father to withhold forgiveness as well. **Read Matthew 6:14-15.** Forgiveness is hard, but with God's help, we can achieve it. The definition of "forgive" is to pardon or excuse. It means that we no longer blame others or are angry at those who did us wrong. We are not perfect; we all make mistakes. We will not all agree on everything all the time. We must understand that and learn to forgive those who intentionally or unintentionally hurt us. Yes, we may have a moment of anger, but we must not become slaves to anger. We need to repent for harboring bad feelings against others so that we can be set free. No matter the offense, no matter how much pain we feel, we must forgive.

- Have you made choices that hurt yourself or others?
- Who do you need to forgive?

Pray and ask God to fill you with His love for those who have offended you. Pray that you would walk in love and peace in the freedom of forgiveness.

DAY 5

Read James 4:6. Pride keeps us from receiving grace. Pride is a terrible master. It keeps us so aware of our own wounds and hurt feelings that we don't notice the pain in others, even hurts we have caused. Pride makes everything always all about Me. Pride turns misunderstandings into arguments and arguments into fights. Pride makes people sullen, brooding over the changeless past. Pride seduces you into thinking that you are innocent and have it all together. Jesus demonstrated true personal humility. This is the cure for pride—to find joy in making other people's lives better. You must humble yourself to accept God's grace that He so freely offers you.

- How has pride affected your life?

Ask God to reveal your pride and to humble your heart. Praise God for His grace and mercy.

DAY 6

Dwight L. Moody commented on how God deals with pride in us, "*God sends no one away empty except those who are full of themselves.*" All of us struggle with pride on a daily basis. We must consciously put God first when the world and most everyone in it tell us to put ourselves first. Chances are good that most of us do not see pride in our lives. It's easy to see pride in others, but very difficult to see it in ourselves. When we have exalted ourselves in pride, God does not want to punish us and bring us low, but rather to forgive and restore us. He says again and again in Scripture, humble yourselves, and I will exalt you. This gives us hope and encouragement. God takes pleasure in our efforts to humble ourselves, and he loves to bless and exalt the humble.

- Dig deep and see where pride may have a hold on you. Here are some common "symptoms" of pride: Are you fault-finding? Superficial at times? Defensive? Desperate for attention? Do you often neglect others and put yourself first?

Praise God for this week of prayer. Ask God to make you humble. Receive His grace and let it heal your heart.

DAY 7

Today is your "Sabbath" and a time for reflection. How has God been speaking to you over the week? Use what the Lord has said to you to remold and reshape your life. If you are having trouble hearing God's voice, slow down or even stop what you are doing so that the busyness of life's demands do not squelch the whispers of God's language of love upon your heart.