



Part I: Lesson 3

Becoming Good Soil: Experiencing God's Love and Forgiveness

Fertile Soil: Starting Your New Life with Jesus

Growing a garden is work. After the soil has been cultivated and the seeds planted, both the soil and the plants need continual maintenance, to grow toward maturity.

Relationships are like gardens. Any important relationship takes constant attention and effort. You must continually do the little things to nurture the connection. Your relationship with Jesus is like that too. Every day, we must seek to follow His example and learn to experience His grace.

YOUR GROWTH GOAL



In this lesson, you will learn four essentials for experiencing God's forgiveness and unconditional love:

- 1) Your need for God's love and forgiveness**
- 2) The foundation for God's love and forgiveness**
- 3) Your status with God versus your communion with God**
- 4) How to continually experience God's love and forgiveness.**

This is the reality; we are human. We are not perfect like Christ. There will be times when you stumble and sin, when you do things against God's will both knowingly and unknowingly. Watch a child learning to walk; before they find their feet, they are only able to take a few steps, and they fall down many times—but they get back up.

When you fail, God is always faithful; He will always pick you up. He will always love you. He is always ready to forgive you, to restore you, and to demonstrate His continuous love. Grace is always available for you.

Forgiveness is the act of pardoning someone for a mistake or wrongdoing. It involves compassion, understanding, and mercy.



Before you go any further, stop and ask God to help you understand his word, to help you experience his presence, and to become the person he wants you to be.

A PICTURE OF GOD'S FORGIVENESS: The Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-24)



This is a story that Jesus told to illustrate the nature of God's forgiveness.

Jesus [said]: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

"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. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"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! 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.' 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.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

"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. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

How did this father show compassion and love for his son? Why do you think that he had compassion on his son?

In your mind, imagine the father welcoming his son into his gracious love and acceptance, after he behaved selfishly and independently. What kind of look do you think he would have on his face? What else would he do?

With another member of your group, demonstrate how you think the father acted.

Do you think God's attitude toward you is the same or different from the father in this story?

The Bible says, "God demonstrates his love for us in that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners" (Romans 5:8).



DIGGING DEEPER: GOD'S FORGIVENESS EXPLAINED



Sin is characterized by an attitude of rebellion against God or an attitude of indifference toward God. When it comes to behavior, it is doing what we want instead of what God wants.

I. YOUR NEED FOR GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

When you have knowingly sinned, what different emotions did you feel?

In the Old Testament, Israel's King David sinned, committing both adultery and murder. Then he tried to hide his acts from others. (You can read about it in 2 Samuel 11.) Observe what he felt in Psalm 32:3-5:

When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

How did David feel when he did not admit his sins?

How did he feel after he finally admitted them?

Sin affects our relationship with God. It places a barrier between a healthy relationship.

2. THE FOUNDATION FOR GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

1 Peter 3:18 says, "For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit."

Why did Jesus suffer and die on the cross?

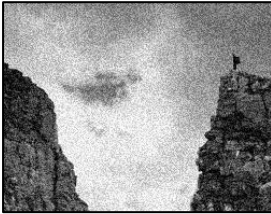
Colossians 2:13-14 says, "You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. Then God made you alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins. He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross."

What has Jesus done with your sins?

How has God removed your sins?

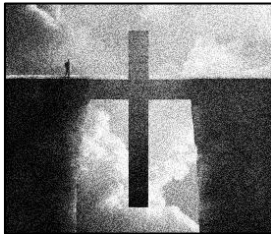
Knowing you are totally forgiven, what difference does this make in your daily life?

3. YOUR STATUS WITH GOD VS. YOUR COMMUNION WITH GOD



As we have already studied, the problem between God and man is sin. Sin separates the unbeliever from God.

But Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross and resurrection from the dead provides the remedy for this separation—**our sins are forgiven, and we are transformed into a new status with God.**



As a believer in Christ, sin has a different kind of consequence. That consequence is not in your status with God—that new relationship has been established and secured. Sin affects your communion with God. There is an important distinction between your status with God and your communion with God.

This is an example to help you better understand—a parent-child relationship. The relationship between parent and child is a permanent status; you cannot be unborn. No matter what the parent does, or a child does, the status remains. In the story of the Prodigal Son, the father remained a father to his son even while the son was in rebellion.

Imagine you rebelled against your parent, destroyed something, or brought dishonor on the family. ***Would you still be your parent's child?***

What would happen to your communion (relationship) with your parent? How would it be affected?

To better understand this, examine the Scriptures that are printed below and write your answers in the chart.

Scriptural references:

- ❖ *John 1:12- Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God.*
- ❖ *1 Corinthians 1:9- God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.*
- ❖ *1 Peter 1:3-4- Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.*
- ❖ *Psalms 32:3-5- When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.' And you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

- ❖ *John 10:27-29- My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.*
- ❖ *1 John 1:9- If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*
- ❖ *Hebrews 13:5- God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”*
- ❖ *1 John 1:6-2:2- If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us. My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.*

YOUR STATUS WITH GOD	YOUR COMMUNION WITH GOD
How long it lasts? <i>1 Peter 1:3-4</i>	Is hindered by what? <i>Psalms 32:3-5</i>
Maintained by who? <i>John 10:27-29</i>	Maintained in part by? <i>1 John 1:9</i>
Can change when? <i>Hebrews 13:5</i>	Can be affected when? <i>1 John 1:6-2:2</i>

How is your status with God different from your communion with Him? Which of the above Scriptures helps you to best understand this?

How can you continue to maintain daily communion with God?



At this moment, pause, and thank God that He holds you in an unchanging status before Him.

4. HOW TO CONTINUALLY EXPERIENCE GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS

What should you do when you stumble and sin? 1 John 1:9 says you should do this, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*"

When you sin, what must you do?

What will God do when you confess your sins?

How is this Scripture like the story of the father and son that you read in the beginning of the lesson?

Confession means that we agree with God about our sin; we admit to God that we have done something wrong. When you recognize that you have done something wrong, follow these steps:

- 1) **Confess**- agree with God that you have sinned and tell him that you are sorry.
- 2) **Accept** that God has forgiven you and cleansed you.
- 3) **Repent**- change your attitude and actions by turning away from your sin and turning towards God.
- 4) **Thank** God for His loving attitude and work in you.

By turning back to God and away from your sin, **you will experience His love and forgiveness**, instead of continuing to experience guilt, condemnation, and self-punishment. Your communion with God will be restored.

BECOMING GOOD SOIL: HOW YOU CAN EXPERIENCE GOD'S LOVE AND FORGIVENESS



I. APPLYING THESE TRUTHS

Try this exercise in order to understand and experience God's forgiveness of your sins:

- In private, ask God to reveal any present sins in your life.
- Go to a patch of dirt and write in the dirt what God reveals to you. This is private between you and God, so be truthful.
- After writing in the dirt, read the promise from *1 John 1:9*, again, "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*"
- Now, wipe away what you have written in the dirt so that you can't read it anymore.
- What has happened to your sin?
- Thank God that He has forgiven and cleansed you through Jesus' death on the cross.



2. PRAYING FOR FORGIVENESS



Psalm 51:1-4, 9-13, 15-17 is David's prayer after he was caught in adultery and murder. Pray it as your own prayer of confession, when needed.

*Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.*

*Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.*

*For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.*

*Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.*

*Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

*Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
My sacrifice, O God, is [b] a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.*

From the Book of Common Prayer- this is a prayer that Christians around the world have prayed for centuries to make their confession. Pray it as your prayer, when needed.

**Most merciful God,
We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.**

3. COMMITTING TO LIVE IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Take some time with your mentor and other group members to discuss how you will apply these truths in your daily life. **Write these commitments below.**



With your mentor and other followers, pray together, asking God to guide your steps, to strengthen and protect you, and to provide for your daily needs.

Read 1 John 1:9 every day this week, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

