

# Make a Lasting Impact 1) Impact of Forgiveness

Luke 15:1-10 • October 6, 2019 • Sermon Series on Luke 15-17



Anyone can make an impact. But it's hard to make a lasting impact. Take the world of music for example. Even if someone has a published song, it's just one of over 100 million published songs worldwide. And the number is growing fast. Today it is estimated that there are about 1000 published songs uploaded to the various music streaming services each hour. That equals a million newly published songs every six weeks. Do they all make an impact? A song may be popular for today, but who will still be listening to it one-hundred years from now? Even the most popular artist today may be tomorrow's forgotten song. Not everyone is a musician, but we all have a chance to make a lasting impact on this world. This month we'll be looking at the lasting impact which God intends for us to make. Today we consider one of most powerful tools for making a lasting impact: forgiveness.

Luke reminds us at the start of chapter 15 how without forgiveness there is separation. There was a group of people meeting with Jesus who were often left outside in the cold. They are labeled in Luke's time as "tax collectors and sinners." This group would have included those who by their life were publicly known as immoral. The tax collectors were suspected and most often guilty of cheating people. They were despised in ancient Israel because they worked for the Roman government. The sinners referenced here would have included men and women known for their dealings with the sex trade business, the local drunkards, and suspected thieves or cheats. They were the outsiders on the fringe of society.

But Jesus was breaking the separation between himself and this crowd. He wasn't joining with them in anything immoral. It doesn't say that he approved of anything those people had done. Nor was Jesus saying they were upright and good people. But he was eating with them. By this he was showing that he did not desire there to be any separation. This action drew the ire of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. They were the religious instructors and spent much of their energy enforcing the law of God. They began to mutter among themselves against Jesus. They couldn't believe that Jesus wanted to break down the barriers of separation!

So, did the Pharisees and teachers of the law have a valid point? Why should Jesus welcome and eat with such people? Without forgiveness there is indeed separation. When someone falls into any type of sin it will cause harm and create division. Families are divided when one person refuses to talk to a family member because of unforgiven sin. Marriages crumble when one spouse lets a sin that separates them continue to grow into a rift that tears the marriage apart. Even whole churches crumble and divide over sin which separates. Sin does create division!

Scripture reveals just how big an impact our sins have. It causes division in the worst way. That division includes us and our God. Scripture reveals that we have a bigger problem than the guilty consciences, broken families, broken marriages, and broken lives caused by our sins. It has separated us from our God. It brings death and eternal separation in hell. The angels of God ought to look down at every one of us and say, "There's one who ought to be tossed outside the kingdom and away from our Holy Lord God!" God ought to say, "I never want to see your face again."

But notice the difference between these two groups of people in Luke 15. Why were the tax collectors and sinners gathering around Jesus? They weren't just coming near to him because they wanted another drinking buddy, or because Jesus was joining in anything dishonest. They were drawing near because they wanted to hear the gracious and welcoming words which Jesus shared for sinners. The Pharisees and teachers only gathered around Jesus to criticize and critique him. One group yearned for the separation to end, another feared it.

God doesn't want that separation to exist between us and himself. Jesus teaches us here about forgiveness and its profound impact. He uses a few parables in Luke 15 to teach his point about the impact of forgiveness. The first is about a lost sheep and the second about a lost coin. Both parables present the same basic situation: someone or something precious has been lost. When someone falls into sin and has turned away from God they are not viewed as trash or garbage to him. They remain precious to him and he cares about them. If you have a friend or family member who has abandoned all love for God and lives for themselves, remember that God has not abandoned his love for them. To him that person is still precious even though they have been separated from him. God cares about the lost. And it doesn't matter how it happened. Whether the person wandered willfully and foolishly away from God like a lost sheep or was foolishly misplaced or overlook the way a church can overlook someone, they are lost but precious still. He cares.

He desires to recover and searches for the lost. The shepherd Jesus mentions leaves behind his flock and risks everything to find his lost sheep. That's what God desires for those who wander from his flock. He desires decisive action to regain the lost. And just like a woman overturning and cleaning her whole house to find a lost coin, he desires his church make every effort to recover the lost. God cares. And he searches.

And the search continues until the lost is found and recovered. To relate this to the work of Christian it means going after the lost as long as possible in order to bring them back to Christ. It means that you make every effort to reach the lost until that person is brought to repentance and faith in Christ. Repentance occurs. Forgiveness is spoken. The sinner is restored to faith and peace with God. That is the end goal. The business of the church is not to simply proclaim the law. The church is in the business of forgiveness. God cares. God searches. He recovers and forgives.

And the end result of each parable is rejoicing. Can't you see the picture painted by Jesus when just one person repents and receives forgiveness? The picture is far bigger than what meets the eye. We can see the person who repents being hugged. We see the tears of joy at forgiveness spoken. We see the smile and the friendship restored. But open your eyes to see the bigger impact. God smiles. The angels in heaven rejoice. Can you see the picture of the heavenly armies of the Lord Almighty cheering another victory as one sinner repents and is brought back safely into God's kingdom? He rejoices!

This is what happens when forgiveness is offered! The impact is profound, and it outlasts all else. There's a pedestrian bridge in Menasha Wisconsin, about a mile from where I had been serving as pastor in May of 2015. A man there opened fire and shot at a young family, killing a father and his eleven-year-old daughter. His wife said that his dying words to the shooter were reportedly "I forgive you." A lasting impact stands there today on that bridge with a memorial plaque about forgiveness found in Jesus. You no doubt recall the shooting that took place last May here in Payson. It was just a mile from my home. The shooter escalated an argument, pulled out his pistol, and opened fire. He shot the other man three times. That man was a Christian. His words of forgiveness to the shooter will no doubt have a bigger impact than any of the bullet wounds which he is still recovering from. You probably heard on national news this week about the man, Brandt Jean, who forgave the former police officer, Amber Guyger, the woman who shot and killed his brother. She had walked right into his apartment and shot and killed his brother even though he was totally innocent. Regardless of what your opinions might be on the actions of the judge, jury, or the political commentaries, the brother's words of forgiveness are regarded by all as the most remarkable thing. The man mentioned the full forgiveness that was found in Christ Jesus. The loss of his brother will impact him for the rest of his life. But his words of forgiveness in Jesus will have a lasting impact for all who heard across our nation for countless years to come. Forgiveness always will outlast all else!

I could also point to the timeless examples of forgiveness in Scripture such as Joseph who forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery, and Hosea who forgave his wife's adultery along with many others. All such examples of freely given forgiveness flow from the one true God. From him we find the greatest expression of forgiveness. God did this in Christ for us. We were completely rebellious and lost. We willfully turned aside from our God and deserved to remain lost. God had every right to disassociate himself from us. Instead he did the unthinkable and unbelievable. It surprised the teachers of the law and caused them to mumber against him. He tore down the barriers of sin. Jesus cared. Jesus searched us out. Jesus found us and recovered us. He did more than forgive. He won our forgiveness by taking upon himself what we deserved. He was nailed to the tree and cried out, "Father, forgive them." That was the beginning of every barrier of sin crumbling down. That is what Jesus lived and died for. And because he rose to life, we know that the impact of those words is eternal. His words of forgiveness echo today from heaven and around the world. They echo in my heart and in yours. All barriers of sin have been removed forever between us and our God. Forgiveness has the greatest impact for us!

This forgiveness produces a lasting friendship. There is nothing more powerful you can do to restore and build up a friendship than to forgive. Forgiveness removes all separation and animosity. It destroys all division. It is what allowed the sinners to eat with Jesus and it is what allows us to also eat with him. Forgiveness restores the broken family. It binds up the faltering marriage and restores it. It heals the heart. And it even leads to joy in place of grief and pain.

That's the impact we now share with this world. We care because Jesus cares. We search because our God longs to look for the lost. We find and recover with words of pardon and peace because our God has given us those words. We rejoice because we know what the angels know: God is pleased, and a sinner is restored to him. We have a lasting friendship. The person who discovers the joy of forgiveness has a joy with us and God which will never end.

Making a lasting impact isn't something you will always see right away. J.S. Bach wasn't always regarded as a world-famous composer. At the time of his death his music was already considered old fashioned by many. Some pieces like the Brandenburg concertos, now world-famous pieces, had even failed to land him a job during his lifetime. He died thinking he might have left only a passing impact on the world of music. Yet today he is one of the most highly regarded and influential figures in the history of modern music. There isn't a single accomplished musician who doesn't at least recognize his name or have heard music influenced by him. Have you been to a wedding? That's probably Bach you heard. How about the haunted houses? That might be a piece by Bach you're hearing. Electric guitar solo? There's some Bach behind some of those riffs too. He also wrote hundreds of sacred cantatas. He never would have guessed his music would reach the stars! Yet when NASA first sent out items decades ago into far reaches of space, who whose music would you find sent into the far reaches of the galaxy? Bach. His religious music is still causing agnostics to listen to the gospel message and ponder the wonders of Christ Jesus. Bach didn't see his impact, but he made a lasting impact on the world far beyond his lifetime. So it is with the impact a Christian makes with their life-song. When you share forgiveness you share the most powerful tool for a lasting impact for good. You may not see it, but right away when a sinner repents and receives forgiveness, the angels in heaven are bursting into rejoicing! It will last for years and perhaps even for eternity.

Next week we'll continue reading on in Luke's gospel to find more things which leave a lasting impact. Today we've seen how forgiveness echoes now far beyond this world and will echo for eternity to those who seek it and receive it in Jesus' name. It is a song of the gospel and it rings out with the tune of forgiveness. That forgiveness causes the angels in heaven to rejoice. God himself is delighted. And the saints on earth also rejoice. That is the impact of forgiveness for those who know and share Christ.