

Forgiveness

This month, we observe the brutal death of Jesus, His innocent blood so freely poured out, and the power of God that emptied a tomb and conquered death. That same power that raised Jesus from the grave is the power that lives in us. His power enables us to do (what feels) impossible. It is often incredibly difficult to consider forgiving someone who hurt, offended, or wronged us. I don't know about you, but I want justice, restitution, or, in my pre-Jesus days, I wanted payback.

Yet, Jesus tells us that unless we forgive others their sin, He will not forgive us (Matthew 6:14-15). We must first forgive. Not only does He tell us to forgive, but when Peter, his disciple, asks him how many times we must forgive, Jesus replies 70 times 7 (Matthew 18:21-22). Some scholars reference that this was Jesus telling Peter that forgiveness has no limit. I want to suggest that not only do we have to forgive over and over, but for some of the most grievous acts of sin against us, forgiveness is an ongoing process. This means that though we have resolved to forgive someone who has hurt us deeply, the memories of that hurt come back, and we find ourselves forgiving the same offense, the same offender again, reminding our souls of the ongoing work that forgiveness takes.

The Greek word for forgiveness translates as "to let go," for example, when a person does not demand payment for a debt. This is powerfully explained in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matthew 18:21-35) and the consequence when we do not forgive or "let go."

Friends, we are all sinners who cannot pay our debt to God, but God has graciously given us Jesus. In Jesus, we have forgiveness for our debt. In Jesus, we have grace, mercy, and compassion. Let's extend that same grace, compassion, and mercy that has been so extravagantly given to us to those who have sinned against us.

Week 1

Talking to God

Ask God to show you people in your life who you need to forgive.

Going Deeper

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

This scripture requires something on our part before we can receive forgiveness. It requires us to first forgive the sin *against* us by someone else. An exchange happens in our obedience to send our debtors away free, expecting no restitution. When the grace so extravagantly given to us is freely given to others, we are forgiven and set free.

Take Action

If there is someone you need to forgive (if geographically possible and you feel safe), go to them, and have a conversation with them to let them know you forgive them. It might help to share a little about the offense; most likely, they don't even know or remember that they hurt or wronged you.

Please do not text; your words are powerful. Use them, and send them away debt free.

If your forgiveness is towards someone who has caused you physical harm, please talk to your pastor about how you can outwardly express the forgiveness you are extending to that person. It may be writing a letter (and never sending it) or a phone call, but talk to your pastor first.

Week 2

Talking to God

Thank God for His mercies, grace, and kindness in Jesus through the forgiveness of our sins.

Going deeper

Psalm 32:5

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.

Our confession of sin declares our depravity and desperate need for forgiveness. Our confession also invites Jesus into our brokenness to transform us, heal us of our sins, and He sets us free. When we try to cover up our sins or stay silent about them, we are left miserable in our convictions (Psalm 32:3-5). Freedom comes in confession and repentance.

Take Action

Take some time, and sit with God. Confess to Him your sins, however little or big. Confess any hidden sin or patterns of sin. He will forgive you. *Contact your pastor if you are experiencing habitual sin patterns and want to talk to someone.*

Week 3

Talking to God

Ask God to show you how to build up others around you and help you create a culture of kindness.

Going deeper

Ephesians 4:29-32

29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. 32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Bitterness and anger can not take root when we forgive, truly forgive. Forgiveness breeds grace and kindness. We create a culture of kindness when we speak life and build others up. We do not build with flattering words; we build them up with God's truth, and forgiveness builds that foundation that we build on. When we encourage and teach people, we create an atmosphere

for them to be strengthened, enabling them to endure and find meaning and hope in difficult times. We are building them up *towards* God.

We grieve the Holy Spirit when we slander those who have sinned against us. Instead, make the most of every opportunity, expressing our deep gratitude for the grace and forgiveness given to us by extending that same grace and forgiveness to others.

Take Action

Create a culture of kindness in your home or workspace that benefits those experiencing the kindness and those far off hearing about it.

Week 4

Talking to God

Ask God to give you wisdom and Godly discretion in your conversations, especially when you've been offended or hurt.

Going Deeper

Proverbs 17:9

Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.

Love covers a multitude of sins. Love can take an enemy and make them a friend. Love brings freedom. Love is described in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8a (ESV) Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.

When we are offended or hurt, let's pray and ask God for His love to lead and guide us.

We often want to call a friend to “process” a wrong when we are hurt. When we do this we can turn hearts and create division when we tell people who do not need to know about the incident. When we do this we are betraying the relationship and it can do irreparable damage.

Rather, let's do what Jesus tells us if someone has offended us, go to them and tell them, just the two of you (John 18:15) Talk to them in kindness, in truth and in love. Be patient and let God's perfect love empower you to do what might feel impossible, forgive, over and over again forgive.

Take Action

Take a moment and check your heart. Have you repeated an offense to someone other than the person who offended you? Do you need to repent? If so, do it. Jesus is gracious to forgive you. Let God's perfect love lead your conversations, even the difficult ones.