



## FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER: WEEK 10

God tells us to forgive one another. That's a tall order. We understand how and why to be kind and compassionate to one another. It's the loving thing to do, after all. But forgive someone who has hurt me deeply? That's another story. What if they don't deserve it? What if they didn't ask for my forgiveness? What if I tried but I can't forget it? These are questions that all of us have asked over the years. I mean, honestly, who hasn't been hurt? Hurt is universal because we are all human and imperfect beings, whether or not we are believers, and are usually self-centered and self-focused, which leads us to act selfishly. Our memory verse for the week gives us the how and why. In Ephesians 4:32, Paul tells his readers to "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as in Christ God forgave you." Let's talk about this, shall we? Make sure you begin with prayer and ask the Spirit to soften any rough spots in your heart that have been caused by unforgiveness.

1. Let's read Ephesians 4:30-32. Why are we told to forgive others? According to verse 30, if we don't "put it away," what are we doing?
  
2. According to the verse above, is the command to forgive based on whether or not the offender is sorry? What about if they don't deserve it? What is the command based on?

Some people are shocked when they get hurt by someone “in” church, as if people who attend church are sinless. Sadly, believers frequently hurt one another and don’t always love others well. As a pastor’s wife, I can’t even begin to tell you how many times I’ve heard that someone doesn’t fellowship anymore because they were hurt. (I always wonder about the people they’ve hurt??) It’s easier to love, serve, or encourage one another, but when people fail us, forgiving one another is difficult. One author named Megan Hill pointed out that our responsibility to practice the one anothers in Scripture does not cease if others break the rules. Wow. Heavy. She also pointed out that usually when we are hurt, we tend to think about ourselves first ... our rights, our pain, our loss, etc. It can be all consuming. But Paul’s words actually direct us to think about ourselves, but not in the self-pity way, but to remind us of how much we needed forgiveness because of our own sins, and what Christ did for us. **Isaiah 53:5** tells us that “He was wounded for our transgressions; He was bruised for our iniquities.” Paul reminds us of that same truth in Romans 4:23-25. But the prophet Isaiah also reminds us that Christ was “despised and rejected by man, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.” (Isaiah 53:3) We rejected His forgiveness.

3. How do we often try to “limit” the terms of our forgiveness or make it conditional? (Read Matthew 18:21-35.) What does this parable teach us?

4. Does God limit His forgiveness? What do the following verses say about that? Read Matthew 26:28, Psalm 103:3, 12, Colossians 2:13-14, and Hebrews 10:17-18.

So, we think of ourselves, we think of Jesus, and we think of the offender. Jesus came to reconcile us to Himself, as well as reconcile one another. The work of Christ changes everything. Forgiveness isn't just about cancelling a debt, it appears to involve caring about the well being of the offender, for whom Christ died. If I'm called to meet his needs, consider his interests, and count him more significant than myself, to truly love one another, I must forgive Him.

5. If the offended holds on to resentment, bitterness, and unforgiveness, who does that affect the most? Who is the one in prison and still in pain? How can forgiveness set someone free from anger? How can it restore peace and hope?
  
6. Does forgiveness mean that the offender is freed from suffering consequences, as in a "pardon," or that they deserved it, or that reconciliation is always possible? Does it mean you are forgetting or excusing the harm done to you?
  
7. Have you ever been guilty of holding on to unforgiveness? How did it affect you? What did it do to your spiritual well-being? What can it do to your spiritual health if unforgiveness remains in your heart?

8. How can offering grace and forgiveness draw the offender to Christ?
  
9. Does it matter if we “feel” like it or want to? Read Matthew 6:14-15 and Mark 11:25-26. Explain how forgiveness is a “choice” rather than a feeling.
  
10. Often people don’t want to forgive because the offender didn’t ask to be forgiven. Look at Jesus’ example in Luke 23:34. What did He say? Also read Psalm 86:5.

I read that forgiveness is a function of our wills, not our emotions. In Ephesians 4:31 (right above our memory verse), Paul says to “get rid of all...” and then proceeds with the list. The word for “get rid of” in the Greek is *airo*, which means to “carry off or take away.” When we forgive someone, we “let go” of the offense, or carry it away. We don’t automatically forget the pain or the memories of it, but we continue to choose to put our minds back on Christ and how He forgave us, because none of us deserve to be forgiven. It’s an act of God’s grace. But it’s not easy. Actually, it’s impossible in our own flesh. We need the power of the Holy Spirit and the love of Christ dwelling in our hearts to do this.

11. How can forgiveness heal relationships? Don McMinn called forgiveness “The oil that lubricates strained relationships. Without it, all relationships will spiral downward until they are broken or impaired.” What do you think he means? Do you have an example from your own life? Do some of your relationships need some “oil” of forgiveness?

President Lincoln once was asked how he was going to treat the rebellious Southerners when they had finally been defeated and returned to the Union of the United States. The questioner expected that Lincoln would take a dire vengeance, but he answered, "I will treat them as if they had never been away." Unbelievable. Way to go, President Lincoln!

- 12.** What are some of the physical effects that harboring unforgiveness may bring to a person? (Do this before you read the next question!!)

I read an article from the Mayo clinic about the effects of holding on to grudges, resentment, and bitterness, and, ultimately, unforgiveness, as well as the benefits of offering forgiveness. I think it's fascinating that it affects our physical health as well as our spiritual and emotional well-being. They say forgiveness can lead to:

- A. Healthier relationships
- B. Improved mental health
- C. Less anxiety, stress, and hostility
- D. Fewer symptoms of depression
- E. Lower blood pressure
- F. A stronger immune system
- G. Improved heart health
- H. Improved self esteem

- 13.** Have you seen any of these to be true in your own life after forgiving someone and "letting it go"? How has forgiveness allowed you to move forward?

The Mayo Clinic goes on to list some of the negative effects of holding a grudge:

- A. Bring anger and bitterness into new relationships and experiences
- B. Become so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't enjoy the present
- C. Become depressed, irritable, or anxious
- D. Feel at odds with your spiritual beliefs
- E. Lose valuable and enriching connections with others

**14.** How does forgiveness take commitment and practice?

**15.** If you are holding on to an offense, ask the Holy Spirit to help you see and acknowledge the power and control the person or the situation has over your life and ask the Spirit to help you release it to Him, the One who wants you to cast your cares on Him! (1 Peter 5:7)

**16.** How can trying to see the situation from the offender's perspective help you develop empathy or compassion?

**17.** Obviously, prayer is key, but how can journaling or counseling also help you if you feel "stuck"?

**18.** How can forgiveness be a process?

I read something very helpful once. Sometimes we fear if we forgive, the person may never change because they are “let off easy” so to speak. But we need to remember that getting another person to change isn’t the point of forgiveness. It’s something we do because the Lord commands us to. Forgiveness can change our own lives by bringing us peace, joy, and healing, which comes from not only releasing the control that “thing” or person has over you, but as a result of obedience to the Lord.

**19.** On a scale from 1 to 10, how good are you at “forgiving”?

**20.** What’s your biggest “take away” from this week’s one another? Any thoughts you’d like to share? Any changes you need to make?

**21.** It would be wrong if, before we go, I didn’t ask ... is there someone YOU have offended and need to ask forgiveness from? What’s stopping you? Do it today. And spend time thanking the Lord that God, in Christ, has forgiven us!