

Session Four



Forgive One Another

The story of the prodigal son reveals that nothing stirs the passion of God quite like seeing his kids in the pigsty. Nothing moves his hand such as seeing his desperate sons and daughters drooling for corncobs but longing to be home. And when they do come home, they receive the same response as the prodigal received: forgiveness and acceptance. Regardless of what we've done, when God sees us make a turn toward home, he runs to receive us. It is in this context that Paul urges each of us to follow suit: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32 NKJV).

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Opening Reflection

Who is on your “list”? You know the list. Many of us have one, even if we’re not conscious of it. The List of People Who Have Hurt Us. Who is on yours? Perhaps your list includes old friends, siblings, or parents. Maybe you no longer speak to some of the people on your list, or you avoid them, or you’re holding a grudge against them.

It is natural to feel angry with someone who hurt you. What is not so natural is to forgive. Yet forgiveness is one of the greatest callings of the Christian life. Paul said as much to the believers in the church in Ephesus: “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32 NKJV).

We often withhold forgiveness for fear of letting the wrongdoer off the hook. We are a society of right and wrong, checks and balances, justice and punishment. If we forgive someone who said that thing to us or did that thing to us, it feels unfair. We reason to ourselves that people should have to pay for what they’ve done to us.

But the gospel tells a different story. When Jesus died on the cross, he created a new way. His ultimate act of forgiveness for our sins allows us to forgive others—not because they deserve it, but because we have been forgiven. This is why

Paul says to forgive “as God in Christ forgave you.” In light of the cross, forgiveness is less an act that lets our offender off the hook and more a response to the forgiveness that we have received.

When we fully grasp the depth and breadth of God’s grace and mercy toward us, forgiveness—while still difficult—at least becomes possible. And so does happiness. After all, how happy do we really feel when we are angry with another person? How happy do we feel when we are harboring a years-old grudge? Withholding forgiveness takes a toll on our happiness. Forgiveness rids us of the grudge, the angst, the tension, and frees us to feel happy again.

As you work through this session, think about who you need to forgive in your life. Also think about how you’ve been forgiven. And thank God for the grace he has given you to give to others.

Talk About It

Begin your group time by inviting anyone to share his or her insights from last week’s personal study. Next, to get things started, discuss one of the following questions:

- What do think about the phrase “forgive and forget”? Are they words to live by or a pipe dream? Why?

—or—

- When was the last time you forgave someone? Why did you need to forgive this person?

Hearing the Word

Invite someone to read aloud John 13:12-17. Listen for fresh insights as you hear the verses being read, and then discuss the questions that follow.

¹² So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them (NKJV).

What is one key insight that stands out to you from this passage?

In what ways did that represent a new insight?

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What knowledge does Jesus say will make us blessed? Why would we be blessed for knowing these things?

Video Teaching Notes

Play the video segment for session four. As you watch, use the following outline to record any thoughts or concepts that stand out to you.

Forgiveness is an important principle to grasp, because we have all suffered harm at the hands of another person. The hurt is deep. And it is real.

We need to be realistic about forgiveness. It does not pardon the offense, excuse the misdeed, or condone it. It is simply deciding not to allow the hurt to harden us, numb us, or take our joy.

Jesus knew he was sent from heaven and destined for heaven. He was certain about his identity and destiny, which allowed him to serve his disciples and wash their feet.

How Happiness Happens Study Guide

Jesus repeated the foot-washing on every set of feet. He didn't exclude a single follower—not even the feet of Judas, who would shortly betray him.

Jesus forgave his betrayers *before* they betrayed him. And when we think about it, he has done the same for us.

The story of the prodigal son reveals that regardless of what we've done, when God sees us make a turn toward home, he runs to receive us.

Paul urges you to extend grace not because your offender deserves it but because you've been doused with it. So start the process of forgiveness with a few small steps:

- Decide what you need to forgive

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Ask why it hurts

Take the pain to Jesus

Either tell your offender or pray for your offender

Conduct a funeral

Jesus wants you to take up the towel. Fill up the basin. And wash one another's feet.

Group Discussion

Take a few minutes with your group members to discuss what you just watched and explore these concepts in Scripture.

1. In your own words, what is *forgiveness*? How do you know if you have forgiven someone? How do you know if you haven't forgiven someone yet?
2. Read Ephesians 4:32. What verb tense did Paul use when he instructed us to forgive one another? Why is this significant?
3. Read Matthew 18:21-22. Considering the verb tense in Ephesians 4:32 and Jesus' instruction in this passage, how and when are we to forgive others?
4. Have you ever been forgiven by another person when you didn't deserve forgiveness? If you feel comfortable, share that experience with the group.

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After years of issue after issue with our children, whether we spoke it or not, we seemed to feel like we had gotten the bad end of the deal. This wasn't fair, we hadn't signed up for this, and who could we blame? After more years of jail, courtrooms, and judges—which was a new experience for us—we basically wanted to say, "We're done." Something's got to turn. I would tie our experience in with forgiveness and say the beauty for us has been to see that sticking with it day to day—offering our children the same umbrella of forgiveness that God has offered to us—has helped us in living with them and loving them. We live under a covering of forgiveness. Forgiveness just falls into that category of love. It's what Christ did for us, and so it's how we choose to love our kids.

JEFF & CAROL, FROM THE VIDEO

5. How did Jesus show forgiveness when he washed the disciples' feet? How did the father in the parable of the prodigal son show forgiveness?
6. Grace is a critical component of the Christian gospel, but it can be a hard concept to grasp. How would you personally define *grace*?

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7. Do you feel like you've experienced grace from God? Why or why not?

8. How did Jeff and Carol show grace to their two children? How does this parallel the grace that we have received from God?

Closing Activity

To apply today's study, complete the Scripture exercise below:

- *Fill in the blank with the name of someone whom you need to forgive:* "Bear with each other and forgive _____ Forgive as the Lord forgave you" (Colossians 3:13).

- *Fill in the blank with anything you are currently holding against someone:* "And when you stand praying, if you hold _____ against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25).

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- *Fill in the blank with the name of a person whom you've repeatedly had to forgive: "Even if _____ sin[s] against you seven times in a day and seven times come[s] back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them" (Luke 17:4).*

If you feel comfortable, share with your group what this experience was like for you.

Closing Prayer

Close your time by spending time with your heavenly Father. As a group, pray through the following contemplative prayer:

God, we thank you for giving us the opportunity to study your Word. Thank you for the grace and forgiveness you have showed us through Jesus.

We confess that we have not always been quick to forgive and that we hold on to anger and grudges. Forgive us for not forgiving others.

Jesus, we bring to you the pain that others have caused us. We ask you to heal us and show us the path to forgiveness. [Spend several moments in silence.]

Now we lift up the name of our offenders in prayer. Bring them peace. Bring them joy. Give them what they are lacking in their lives. [Spend several moments in silence.]

We recognize that we can only forgive others when we know that we are indeed forgiven. Help us understand the forgiveness and grace you have shown to us. Allow us to feel joy in that forgiveness as we go about our week.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.