

Small Group Studies

Walking in Forgiveness

By Bill Scheidler

Leader's Guide

Walking in Forgiveness

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Section 1 - Receiving God's Forgiveness

Week 1 - God—The Forgiving God

Introduction

Victorious Christianity is Christianity based on an understanding of the issues of forgiveness and how they relate to our life as believers. This includes God's forgiveness of us, our forgiveness of those who have wronged us and our forgiveness of ourselves.

What do we know about God that serves as a foundation to our understanding of forgiveness?

1. God is omniscient or all-knowing.

This means the following:

- ❖ He sees all that occurs in every place and keeps watch upon the evil and the good (Pro. 15:3).
- ❖ He knows everything that occurs in nature (Ps. 147:4; Mt. 6:8; 10:29).
- ❖ He knows the ways of man (Ps. 33:13-15; Pro. 5:21).
- ❖ He knows all of the deeds and experiences of man (Ps. 139:2-3).
- ❖ He knows all of man's words (Ps. 139:4).
- ❖ He knows all of man's sorrows (Ex. 3:7).
- ❖ He knows our thoughts (Ps. 139:1-2).
- ❖ He knows for all eternity what will be for all eternity (Acts 15:18).

Known to God from eternity are all His works. Acts 15:18

[Ask, "How does your understanding of God being all knowing affect your relationship to God? Are you comforted or disquieted by the fact that God knows everything about you including your thoughts?"]

2. God is a forgiving God.

In this revelation of God we would like to focus not on what God knows but on what God does not know. To do this we would like to look at a part of God's nature and one of His titles that can bring real strength and freedom to us as believers. That revelation is of God—The Forgiving God.

[Ask the group to share any wrong images of God that they had when they were growing up.]

Unfortunately our picture of God is often that of an angry judge waiting to bring judgment down on us for our faults. The truth is quite different. There are many verses that present God as a God of mercy and forgiveness. Many of these verses challenge some of our concepts of our holy God.

Supporting Verses:

[Look up the following twelve passages one by one. Assign someone to read the passage and after each passage ask the group, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?" After members of the group finish making their observations, the leader can share additional observations that may have been overlooked.]

a. Exodus 34:6-7

And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation."

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

Observations:

When God revealed Himself to Moses, the first thing that God wanted Moses to know about Him was that He is a merciful and gracious God. Not that God simply overlooks sin in our lives, but God wants us to know that He is approachable as a loving heavenly Father.

b. Nehemiah 9:17

They refused to obey, and they were not mindful of Your wonders that You did among them. But they hardened their necks, and in their

*rebellion they appointed a leader to return to their bondage. But you God are **ready to pardon**, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in kindness, and did not forsake them.*

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

Observations:

Even though man is stubborn and rebellious toward God, God is not like us. He is not about to forsake His people and is eager to forgive them the moment they come to their senses and come back to Him.

c. Psalm 32:1-5

*Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, **my bones grew old** through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

Observations:

Keeping our sins internalized does nothing for our personal health and well-being. As soon as we open up to God in repentance God is eager to extend forgiveness to us.

d. Psalm 86:1-5, 15

*Bow down Your ear, O LORD, hear me; for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am holy; You are my God; save Your servant who trusts in You! Be merciful to me, O Lord, for I cry to You all day long. Rejoice the soul of Your servant, for to You, O Lord, I lift up my soul. For You, Lord, are good, and **ready to forgive**, and **abundant in mercy** to all those who call upon You...¹⁵ But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth.*

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

Observations:

God is ever ready to forgive when we but call upon Him.

e. Psalm 103:1-18

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, Who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. The LORD executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the children of Israel. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in mercy. He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him, and His righteousness to children's children, to such as keep His covenant, and to those who remember His commandments to do them.

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

f. Psalm 130

Out of the depths I have cried to You, O LORD; Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, that You may be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in His word I do hope. My soul waits for the Lord More than those who watch for the morning--Yes, more than those who watch for the morning. O Israel, hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities."

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

Observations:

If God was in the habit of keeping track of all of our sins and iniquities there is not one of us that could stand before Him. But God is a God of forgiveness who is abundant in mercy.

g. Isaiah 55:7

*Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will **abundantly pardon**.*

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

Observations:

There is such a thing as receiving pardon and then there is "abundant" pardon. This word could also be translated "thoroughly" pardon.

It is erased, not like a blackboard that you can faintly make out what was erased. It was taken away, not like a piece of paper on a pad that can be traced over and restored. It was deleted, not like a message on a computer that can be dug up later by experts. When God forgives or pardons us, that sin and all remembrance of that sin is gone, never to be retrieved again.

h. Micah 7:18-20

*Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because **He delights in mercy**. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old.*

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

Observations:

God actually delights in showing mercy. This is the fun part of His job.

i. Matthew 9:1-8

So He got into a boat, crossed over, and came to His own city. Then behold, they brought to Him a paralytic lying on a bed. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." And at once some of the scribes said within themselves, "This Man blasphemes!" But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, "Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Arise and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins"--then He said to the paralytic, "Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house." And he arose and departed to his house. Now when the multitudes saw it, they marveled and glorified God, who had given such power to men.

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

Observations:

Sometimes the need to know that are sins are forgiven is greater than being freed from physical discomfort. Jesus knew that there was something internal that was troubling this man. He knew for this man his internal healing was more important than his physical healing.

j. Acts 13:38-39

Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

k. Ephesians 1:3-8

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace

which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence.

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

I. Colossians 2:13-15

And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

[Ask, "What does this verse teach us about God's desire to forgive us?"]

Observations:

God did an interesting thing when it came to our sins. The devil is the accuser of the brethren and wants to bring all of us under condemnation in order to keep us paralyzed in relation to the purposes of God. However, to remove the teeth from the devil, God forgave us our sins. Now the devil has nothing to use against us unless he can deceive us into believing that we are not forgiven.

[After reading all of the verses, ask the group, "Has the reading of all of these verses in any way changed your image of God and how He relates to you? If so, in what way?"]

Wrap-up:

In all of these verses we have seen that God is a forgiving God. He is a God of love, mercy and compassion Who is eager and even anxious to forgive His people.

So much did God want to convince us of this that He sent Jesus to preach remission of sins. Jesus likewise sent the apostles to tell men that their sins could be forgiven.

The good news of the Gospel is not that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Man's conscience bears witness to that. The good news is that there is forgiveness of sins.

Week 2 – The Nature of God's Forgiveness

Review Previous Lesson

What is the nature of God's forgiveness?

God has a unique ability that none of us possess. Along with all of His superhuman abilities, He is actually able to purposefully forget. The God Who is all-powerful, everywhere-present and all-knowing does not know everything.

The nature of God's forgiveness is seen in the phrases that He uses to describe His forgiveness.

When God forgives our sins, He—

1. Remembers our sins no more.

Jeremiah 31:34b

"For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

[Ask group, "Does this mean that God cannot remember sins that He has once forgiven?" How does this affect the way you relate to God? How would it change the way you interact with people if you knew that they could not remember one bad thing that you had ever done?]

2. Removes our sins as far from Him as the east is from the west.

Psalms 103:12

As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

"As the east and the west can never meet in one point, but be forever at the same distance from each other, so our sins and their decreed punishment are removed to an eternal distance by his mercy." -*Clark's Commentary*

"They are so removed that they cannot affect us anymore. We are safe from all condemnation for our sins, as if they had not been committed at all."

-*Barnes' Notes*

"...so as no longer to affect our relations to Him." -*JFB Commentary*

3. Casts our sins into the depths of the sea, never to be retrieved again.

Micah 7:19b

You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

"...perhaps there may be some allusion to the Egyptians drowned in the Red sea; and what is cast into the sea, especially into the depths of it, is irrecoverable, not to be fetched up again, nor does it rise more; and so it is with the sins of God's people, forgiven for Christ's sake, even 'all' of them; for they have all been bore by Christ, and are covered, blotted out, and pardoned, not one remains unforgiven." -*John Gill's Exposition of the Bible*

Even in our world when you want to dispose of something so that it can never be retrieved, you go to the deepest part of the ocean where no man can survive and drop it there.

The nature of God's forgiveness is reflected in the definition of the word "forgive."

1. The word "forgive: means "to cancel or pardon."
2. To forgive is to absolve from liability to punishment for a crime or fault committed.
3. Forgiveness is the voluntary release of a person over which one has legal control.
4. When God forgives it does not mean that He temporarily suspends punishment which He may at some later time inflict.
5. God's forgiveness is complete and it is eternal.

[After going over the above points, ask the group, "Does this biblical understanding of God's forgiveness challenge any of your previously held views about God's relationship to your sin and what might happen in relation to His future judgment on that sin?"]

The nature of God's forgiveness is reflected in the Presidential Pardon.

In the United States there is a prerogative that only the President has. It is called the "Presidential Pardon."

God's forgiveness is very much like the presidential pardon. There are five characteristics of a presidential pardon:

1. It must be exercised by one who has the power to pardon.
2. No other judge or magistrate can overturn the pardon.
3. The crime for which the pardon is granted is completely erased from all police or FBI records.
4. You can never be tried for that particular crime again.
5. That crime can never be held against you again.

In other words, it is just as if the crime never occurred. Even on a job application that asks for whether or not you have ever been convicted of a crime, you can legally say "NO!"

[Ask the group, "When you understand this, how does it make you feel in relation to God's great forgiveness and grace?"]

Wrap-up

In this lesson we have actually seen that there are things that we know that God, the Omniscient One, does not know. Unfortunately, we are able to remember our past mistakes and failures. But God cannot remember those sins that He has forgiven. Therefore, when God relates to us He does not see us through those sins, but He sees us through the righteousness of Christ.

Next week we are going to discover how to tap into or receive God's forgiveness.

Week 3 – Receiving God's Forgiveness

Review Previous Lesson

What are the conditions that we must meet to receive God's pardon?

We have learned in previous lessons that God is poised to forgive. In this lesson we will learn that there are certain conditions that we have to meet if we are to receive His forgiveness. There are certain things that act as triggers to His forgiveness.

[Before you go through these six conditions ask the group, "As a human being what do you look for from another human being who has offended you before you feel good about forgiving them? Why do you feel this way?"]

The six conditions for God's forgiveness include the following:

1. We must call upon the Lord.

The Lord is abundant in mercy to all who call upon Him. Psalm 86:5

Even though we have offended or sinned against others, we have first and foremost sinned against God. Forgiveness depends on the one who has been offended or sinned against.

King David understood this. He understood that he sinned against Uriah. He understood that he sinned against Bathsheba. But even more than that, He understood that he had sinned against God when he wrote...

Against you and you only have I sinned... Psalm 51:4

While we may have to go to others and seek forgiveness, our first step needs to be going to God. Only God can ultimately and eternally forgive sin.

2. We must confess our sin.

I John 1:9

If we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

No one can be pardoned unless there is an admission that a crime has been committed. President Reagan was asked if he would be extending a pardon to Oliver North prior to his leaving office for what was termed "Iran-gate." President Reagan replied, "There has been no verdict rendered that a crime has been committed, therefore, there is nothing to pardon."

You must admit to a crime before pardon can be given.

[Ask the group, "How do you feel when someone asks you to forgive them in a general way, that is by saying, 'If I have done anything to offend you, please forgive me'? Is it better for them to be specific about their offense? If so, why is that so important to you?"]

3. We must repent of our sin (Acts 8:22).

[Ask the group, "What do you think it means to repent?"]

To do this you must have a change of heart and mind and godly sorrow for sin. We must see the damnable nature of what we have done.

Repentance "implies an intellectual and a hearty giving up of all controversy with God upon each and every point. It implies a conviction that God is wholly right, and the sinner wholly wrong, and a thorough and hearty abandonment of all excuses and apologies for sin." -Charles Finney

4. We must be willing to forsake our sin.

Whosoever confesses and forsakes his sins will have mercy. Proverbs 28:13

God's forgiveness is not a license to sin. We cannot presume upon God's mercy. It is not like the confession booth (live it up on Saturday night; go to confession on Sunday morning).

5. We must be willing to forgive others.

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Colossians 3:12-14

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

We will come back to this later in our next section.

6. We must accept the pardon.

God is gracious, but He will not force the acceptance of His grace upon man.

III. George Wilson

In 1829 George Wilson of Pennsylvania was sentenced to be hanged for robbing the mail and murder. President Andrew Jackson pardoned him but Wilson refused the pardon. Wilson indicated that the pardon was not valid unless it was accepted. The Supreme Court was called upon to decide the matter. Chief Justice John Marshall gave the following decision:

"A pardon is a piece of paper, the value of which depends upon its acceptance by the person implicated. It is hardly supposed that one under sentence of death would refuse to accept a pardon, but if it is refused, it is no pardon. George Wilson must be hanged!"

Accepting our forgiveness has to do with forgiving ourselves. Forgiveness is completed by our acceptance. If we do not accept God's forgiveness we will stay in our prison house.

We will also be coming back to this point later in our study.

Wrap-up

The Lord is anxious to forgive us. He has put certain conditions on that forgiveness for His children. It is important that we take these conditions seriously if we are going to live in the full freedom that has been provided for us in Christ.

Class assignment: Before we gather back next week walk through a review of your past and think of the ways that you have offended God. If you have never

asked God to forgive you do so this week so that we can walk in a renewed boldness in our relationship to Him.

Section 2 - Forgiving Others

Week 4 - The Importance of Forgiving Others

Review Previous Lesson

How important is it for us to forgive others?

Jesus taught that forgiving others is extremely important. Here are some of the things that Jesus said about the issue of forgiving others.

1. Jesus taught that forgiving others is not a matter of choice.

Jesus indicated that we do not have a choice in the matter of forgiving others. It is our Christian duty to forgive. It is a command of Jesus.

Mark 11:25

*And **whenever** you stand praying, if you have **anything** against **anyone**, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.*

[Ask the group, "What do you see in this verse spoken by Jesus?"]

This verse indicates that...

- We are to forgive others every time we pray to God
- We are to forgive everything.
- We are to forgive everybody.

You have to admit, this is pretty inclusive.

2. Jesus taught us that our forgiveness of others is a condition for our receiving God's forgiveness.

- ❖ He included this teaching in the Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:12; Luke 11:4).

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Matthew 6:12

[Ask the group, "Have you ever thought about this when you were praying The Lord's Prayer? Did you ever want to skip this portion? Do you ever

feel that you do not want God to forgive you the same way you forgive others?"]

"This is the invariable rule by which God dispenses pardon. He that comes before him unwilling to forgive, harboring dark and revengeful thoughts, how can he expect that God will show him that mercy which he is unwilling to show to others?" - *Barnes' Notes*

- ❖ He emphasized it again on a number of occasions (Mt. 6:14-15; Mark 11:26; Luke 6:37).

Matthew 6:14-15

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Luke 6:35-37

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

3. Jesus taught that we are to quickly forgive when those who have offended us repent.

Luke 17:3-4

Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, "I repent," you shall forgive him.

[Ask the group, "Doesn't this kind of forgiveness sound too easy? Is this how you like to forgive others? Why or why not? Could you really do this if someone actually offended you seven times in one day?]

This admonition of the Lord seems too easy, too quick. Surely we need to make people suffer a little more for what they have done. Surely we must make them wait for our judgment or our forgiveness. After all...

Wait! Is that how you want God to forgive you?

4. Jesus taught that we are to forgive without keeping accounts.

Jesus had just finished talking about offenses in the local church and how to resolve them. Peter had come with an honest question.

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."

In this context that disciples said, "Lord, increase our faith!"

And the apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith." Luke 17:5

Actually if we are forgiving the way Jesus suggested that we forgive, we cannot keep track of the number of times the offense has happened. Once we forgive it the list is cleared and we go back to number one.

When we forgive, we are not to file the offense away in a safe place to be brought out again if needed. We are to burn the file.

5. Jesus taught that forgiving others was not dependent upon their asking for our forgiveness.

Mark 11:25

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

[Ask the group, "Why do you believe that it is important to forgive people whether they ask for your forgiveness or not?]

❖ Jesus demonstrated this on the cross (Luke 23:34).

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."

❖ Stephen demonstrated this at his stoning (Acts 7:60).

Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

We do not have to wait until we "feel like it" to forgive. This is a command of God and not subject to our feelings. I am sure that neither Jesus nor Stephen felt like forgiving at the time that they extended it. None of those who were in the crowds were asking for their forgiveness.

It is not hypocrisy to forgive when you don't feel like it. It is obedience and it is the smart thing to do. We do not forgive because we feel like it; we forgive as an offering to Christ based on our love for Him. We forgive because we are those who walk in the constant awareness that we are an object of totally undeserved forgiveness. We also forgive because when we do not forgive we live in torment.

Wrap-up

In this lesson we have learned that a lifestyle of forgiveness is not an option for the believer. Next we will see some of the consequences we will reap when we choose not to forgive.

This week walk through your recent history. Are there those that you still have not forgiven? If so, make it a point to forgive every time you stand praying.

Week 5 – Withholding Forgiveness

Review Previous Lesson

Jesus taught that if we do not forgive we will experience negative fruit.

There are six consequences to us when we do not forgive others.

- 1. Our prayers will be hindered (Compare 1 Pet. 3:7).**

Mark 11:25

And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.

- 2. Our gifts and ministries will be rendered ineffective.**

Matthew 5:23-24

Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

God does not receive our gifts unless we are at peace with one another.

- 3. God may withdraw His forgiveness.**

So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses. Matthew 18:35

- 4. The sins of others will remain unforgiven (Compare: II Cor. 2:7).**

John 20:23, NLT

If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you refuse to forgive them, they are unforgiven.

In other words the negative fruit of the strained relationship will continue.

- 5. We will personally suffer and dwell in a prison house of our own making.**

Jesus told the parable of the unforgiving servant in response to the disciple inquiry about extending forgiveness to others.

[As the following story is read encourage the group to listen for lessons that Jesus is teaching us about forgiveness that they can add to the discussion after the passage is completed.]

Matthew 18:23-35

Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, "Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all." 27 Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt. 28 But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me what you owe!" 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you all." 30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?" 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

[Ask the group, "What are some things that are taught about the subject of forgiveness in this story?"]

From this parable we learn many things:

- a. There is no possible way that we could ever repay God the debt that we owe to him.
- b. The forgiveness that we received from God is totally undeserved because our debt was real.

- c. What others owe to us is totally insignificant when compared to the debt that we owed to God.
- d. By not extending forgiveness to others we demonstrate a lack of true appreciation for and gratitude concerning God's unspeakable gift to us.
- e. God is further offended when we do not reciprocate His generosity. We are viewed as a "wicked" servant.
- f. When we refuse to forgive, this implies that God will withdraw His forgiveness from us.

6. We will experience the fruit of bitterness.

Hebrews 12:14-15

Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...

When we do not forgive others physiologically and psychologically we experience some negative reactions. This has been demonstrated from a medical point of view.

- High blood pressure
- Increased levels of stress
- Hostility in relationships
- Anger and intolerance
- Increased heart rate
- Higher instance of substance abuse
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Difficulty in developing wholesome friendships
- Headaches and chronic pain
- Inability to commit to others

The big question is, "Is this where you want to live?"

Wrap-up

In this lesson we learned that it is dangerous to live in unforgiveness. It has a negative effect on our relationship to God, the other people in our lives and even our own person. Letting offenses go is a superior way to live in body, mind and spirit.

Week 6 – Extending Forgiveness to Others

Review Previous Lesson

Especially rehearse the unhealthy nature of our refusal to forgive others and let them go.

What does it mean to extend forgiveness to others?

[Ask the group to give some personal examples of how they have creatively extended forgiveness to someone.]

Extending God's forgiveness means several things:

1. It means that we express our forgiveness to them in words.

When people seek forgiveness we should extend it freely and express our forgiveness in words directly to them. It is not a matter of just being nice to them or buying them a sweet gift. The words must be said to bring a completion and finality to the act of forgiveness.

In the case where people do not come to us and seek forgiveness we should speak our words of forgiveness before God in our prayers. It usually does little good and often makes the situation worse to tell people what you forgive them when they are not convinced they have done you wrong.

2. It means that we refuse to bring the matter up to the offending party again.

[Ask the group, "What are some of the common ways we use to remind people of past offenses even though we may have said that we forgave them?"]

This means that we cannot make overt comments or use subtle reminders especially when they fail you again. No statements like, "There you go again..."

3. It means that we treat the offending party as if it had never happened.

This relates primarily to the manner in which we speak to them and interact with them in the future. There are times when forgiveness is granted but

not everything can immediately return to the way things were.

Example:

When a store manager has an employee who has stolen from the company and the employee confesses and asks for forgiveness, it does not automatically mean that the employer must retain him as an employee even though has extended forgiveness.

Forgiveness does not automatically remove all consequences of the action on the part of the offender.

[Ask the group, "Can you think of any other examples?"]

4. It means that we refuse to talk to others about it anymore.

Ephesians 4:29

Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

We shouldn't have been talking to others about it in the first place unless the talk was moving toward an honest solution. But the offense should never come up in our conversation again. If others bring it up we should make sure that we let them know that all is well and proceed to shut the conversation down.

5. It means that we refuse to dwel on the offense in our minds.

When we start to think about the negatives again we need to discipline our minds to focus our attention on something else.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy--meditate on these things.

[Ask the group to share a personal success in the area of forgiving others without using names or putting anyone in a bad light.]

Wrap-up

When all discussion is over lead the group in the prayer of forgiveness and encourage the group to use this prayer at home to release those that they are still holding captive.

Prayer of Forgiveness

Lord Jesus, I come to you today in total thanksgiving for what you did on the cross for me. I confess I'm a sinner and repent of all sin, known and unknown that I've committed. I ask you to forgive me of my entire past. I realize it was my sin that nailed you to the cross. You died for me and for everyone who sinned against me. I choose, this day, to forgive _____ and ask you to come to them with the same mercy you extended to me. Please forgive me for all feelings of resentment, bitterness, and anger I had toward them as a response to my hurt. By Your grace, I release them. Thank you for extending forgiveness to me and enabling me to forgive all who have offended me.

In Jesus Name,
Amen.

Section 3 - Forgiving Ourselves

Week 7 - Forgiving Ourselves

How important is forgiving ourselves?

Forgiving ourselves is just as important as forgiving others. Paul indicated that in order for us to win the race that we are running, we must have the ability to forget some things. We have to be able to forget the past and move forward into the future.

Philippians 3:12-15

Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.

Forgetting is not a normal human ability.

The dictionary defines the word "forget" in several ways.

1. To be unable to recall something that was previously known.
2. To fail to remember.
3. To fail to do something unintentionally or neglect.
4. To fail to take through forgetfulness.
5. To lose interest in or regard for; to overlook purposefully; to disregard.
6. To leave unmentioned or to fail to think of.

Meanings 5 and 6 here reflect more of what Paul was referring to when he instructed us to "forget."

The New Testament word for "forget" means "to neglect or no longer care for."

Forgetting means that we are to no longer nurture certain things

in our mind.

1. There are certain things that we are to disregard and no longer care for in our minds.
2. There are certain things that we are not to let predominate our thinking or thought life.
3. There are certain things upon which we are not to fix our attention or gaze.
4. There are certain things that we are not to cultivate, water or feed.
5. There are certain things that we must let starve to death for lack of nourishment.

Forgetting involves the discipline of one's thought life.

When Paul talked of forgetting, he did so in the context of a runner in a race. If a runner is going to be successful he must be focused on the goal and not allow his mind to be dominated by things that can only hinder him. He cannot be thinking about where the other runners are or how far he has come or who is in the stands. He can't be focusing on what his wife said to him last night or what he will have for dinner. He has to focus on the race that is set before him.

Paul had many things to forget when it came to his personal race, including:

1. Christians that he had persecuted to death (Acts 8:3; 22:4; Phil. 3:6).
2. Blasphemy that he had uttered against the Lord (I Tim. 1:13).
3. Assisting at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58; 8:1).
4. The rejection he experienced from the other apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 8:26).
5. The many disappointments, betrayals and heartaches caused by those to whom he ministered (II Cor. 4:8-12; II Tim. 1:15; 4:10).

Any one of these things could have been cared for and nurtured by Paul and could have hindered his progress or become a snare to him. Paul was not going to do this. He was going to look ahead. He made a conscious choice.

He made it for the sake of his call and no one else could do it for him.

Forgetting means adopting the attitude of Joseph.

Genesis 41:50-52

And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

1. Joseph had to learn to forget his toil.
 - a. The word here used for "toil" literally means the following:
 - Heavy weary labor to the point of exhaustion.
 - The produce of labor.
 - Weariness, trouble, vexation.
 - Sorrow
 - b. The toil that Joseph had to forget involved bad experiences and betrayals.

There were times when it seemed that all of life was against him.

- His brothers sold him into slavery.
 - Potiphar's wife made false accusations against him.
 - Potiphar (whom he had served faithfully) put him into a common prison.
 - The butler broke his promise to him to put in a good word for him.
2. Joseph had to grow from the negative experiences and become fruitful.

Joseph had pressed on in every situation. He didn't blame God or others for his plight. He saw the hand of God in his circumstance and believed that God had a purpose for his life. He became fruitful in the land of his affliction.

3. Joseph's naming of his children indicated the work had been done.
 - a. His first child he named Manasseh (forgetting).

- b. His second child he named Ephraim (doubly fruitful).

When he did see his brothers again, he had the power to retaliate but he did not (Gen. 45:1-8; 50:19-20).

Genesis 50:19-20

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."

Wrap-up

All believers have things that they are to leave in the past. For some it may be some good things or past accomplishments. For these people they are living in the past and find their identity in those days gone by. It is time to look to the future because there is so much yet to do for the Lord.

For some it may mean forgetting some of the bad or even horrible things that they have done. They have asked the Lord to forgive them now it is time to close their ears to the voice of the devil and receive God's unconditional love. It is time to forget the past and walk into a future that is full of hope and goodness.

[Ask the group, "What is it that the Lord wants you to put behind you? What is it that you are to forget, no longer care for, no longer feed and water? What is it that you are to leave behind?"]

Spend some time in prayer.

Next week we will be studying the results of living a life of forgiveness.

Week 7 – Walking in Freedom through Forgiveness

Review Previous Lesson

What are the results of forgiveness?

[Before looking at the five results of forgiveness, ask the group, "When you have operated in forgiveness, what were some of the results in your own personal life?"]

When forgiveness is granted and received it brings forth some wonderful results. These results include:

1. Justification

Acts 13:38-39, NLT

"Brothers, listen! In this man Jesus there is forgiveness for your sins. Everyone who believes in him is freed from all guilt and declared right with God--something the Jewish law could never do"

In other words we are justified before God and man. We can go forward "just as if" nothing had happened.

2. Clearing of the Conscience

2 Corinthians 7:10-11

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

In other words we can be healed from within and the past does not need to leave it a lasting mark on us.

3. Joy

Psalm 51:12

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit.

This means instead of bitterness there can be joy. The joy of our salvation returns.

4. Restoration/Healing

Acts 3:19

Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord...

The Amplified Bible says it this way, "That the times of refreshing, or recovering from the effects of the heat, of reviving with fresh air—may come from the presence of the Lord."

The word "refreshing" from the Greek means "a cooling off or refreshing, recovery of breath, refreshment of one's spirit, revive" (Thayer).

This means that our relationship with God and our relationship with others are restored back to where they were prior to the offense.

5. Love for God

Luke 7:36-48

Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. 37 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, 38 and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." 40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." 41 "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." 44 Then He turned to the woman and said

to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. 45 You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little." 48 Then He said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

There is no sin so gross nor so often repeated that it cannot be forgiven. Jesus admonition about forgiving "seventy times seven" reflects the heart of God when it comes to forgiveness. God's forgiveness extends to such things as abortion, divorce, homosexuality, adultery, fornication, stealing, child abuse, failure in business, failure in parenting and failure in ministry.

Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth that they all came from troubled backgrounds (I Cor. 6:9-11).

Such were some of you...

Jesus reminded us that those who have been forgiven much, love much (Luke 7:47).

Those who have been forgiven much, love much.

Wrap-up

Open it up for testimonies of God's healing through forgiveness especially during the course of this study.

Pray for those who still need grace to implement what they have learned.