

FORGIVENESS

- Introductions
- Suzanne open in prayer

The last time we met, Kim led us in a discussion about sexual purity. Have you had any thoughts about that? Questions? Comments?

- Did you get a chance to do your Purity Plan?
- Do you have an accountability partner? Who?
- When was the last time you talked to that person?
- How are you doing with your sexual boundaries?

When Kim, Suzanne, and I considered the needs of this group and what we'd like to talk with you about this summer, we decided it might be a good idea to focus on healing. So, we came up with the idea of calling this the "Summer of Healing" for Girls Only. We thought a good place to start would be with the topic of Forgiveness. It is really difficult to heal from whatever you're going through without letting go and forgiving the people that have offended or hurt you...

So, I'd like to start tonight's discussion by asking if you know anyone who is perfect. **Are you perfect?** The Bible reminds us that "everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard." Romans 3:23 – That's just it: none of us is perfect. That is the reason for the whole Gospel story. Adam and Eve abused their free will, and sin entered this world. We are born with a sinful nature that leads us astray. We sin, and that causes us to be separated from God. God is a just God. That means that he can't just let sin go. We have offended Him, we have hurt Him, and because He is just, He demands some payment for the wrong we do. But, because God is so loving and so full of grace, He has given us a way out – a way to be made right with Him. God had mercy on us, and He offered His only son to die to pay for the sin we do so that we don't have to die. Jesus' blood shed and death paid the debt we created when we disobeyed God. He, Himself, in His mercy and grace, gave us the payment for the debt we owed Him. There would have been no way for us to pay, ourselves, except to die and be separated from God forever. But, we don't have to die because Jesus died in our place.

I just want to pause and ask if this is the first time any of you have heard of this awesome Truth. This is the message of the Gospel, the Good News. I want to make sure we understand it, because it is key to our discussion tonight.

Last month, Kim gave us many Scriptural references that reassured us that our sins have been forgiven – forever. The Bible is full of this Promise. If you'd like more encouragement in this area, I invite you to contact me, Suzanne, or Kim – we'd be glad to review some of the many verses that tell us God has, indeed, forgiven you.

- Take a moment and consider: **What does forgiveness mean to you?**

The definition I will be working from tonight is that *forgiveness* means “canceling a debt that is owed to us.” That means we don't demand or expect someone to be punished. We don't demand or expect someone to pay us for what they did.

- Now I'd like to invite you to **think of someone who might need your forgiveness**. Is there a specific person that has offended or hurt you? Maybe it's a guy, maybe a friend, maybe a parent or a sibling... maybe it's that you're having a hard time forgiving yourself for something. Try to think of someone specific... Got one? O.K. Now write their name down in the corner of your paper. You don't have to share it with us, but I'd like you to keep this person in mind as we continue our discussion tonight.

As a framework for our discussion about forgiveness, I'd like us to read the Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor, which is found in [Matthew 18:21-35](#).

- **Is there anything that strikes you in Jesus' teaching about forgiveness?**
 - **What does (70 x 7) mean?** It's a way of saying that we shouldn't even keep track of how many times we forgive someone. We should always forgive someone who is truly repentant, no matter how many times they ask.
 - Notice in v. 27, the king totally forgave his debt; he didn't expect to be repaid.
 - The unforgiving debtor owed the king way more money (millions) than his fellow servant owed him (a few thousand).
 - Debt was taken very seriously in those days. If someone couldn't pay, they and their family could be sold or they could go to jail in hope that he would sell of his land to pay or that relative would pay off the debt... if not, he could stay in prison forever.
 - **What do you think Jesus meant when He said “if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart?”**
 - **Any thoughts on what He means in all of verse 35?**

It's time to think back to that person you wrote down – the one who needs your forgiveness. My guess is, you didn't know that person would offend you the way they did. You didn't choose to have them hurt you. However, you do get to choose your response to what happened. You do get to choose whether or not you will follow Jesus' teachings and example and forgive those who have hurt you.

Let's think about forgiveness a little more. Usually when we think of forgiveness, we tend to think, "Well, I guess everything will just be o.k. now. We'll forgive that person, s/he'll go on their way, and that's it." And, we don't want to forgive because we are led to believe that the other person will think we are just excusing what they've done. But, that isn't the way forgiveness works.

Forgiveness DOES NOT mean:

- That the other person was right in doing what they did,
- That you have to trust the other person again,
- That the debt they created will no longer affect us or cause us pain, or even
- That your relationship will be restored (reconciliation).

Forgiveness DOES mean that we will no longer require payment from the one who has wounded us.

God's Word consistently states that if we really love someone the way that Jesus loves us, we will be willing to forgive that person. As children of Christ, we have experienced God's *undeserved favor*, His grace. God gave us this grace because He loves us. 1 Peter 1:18-22 explains it like this...

God expects us to forgive others because He forgave us. Forgiveness is not *excusing* the wrong behavior, but it is recognizing the person, forgiving him/her, and loving him/her in spite of his/her sin – just like Christ did for us. Ephesians 4:31-32 says, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you."

The way I try to look at it is this – I am free not to forgive. God's grace will cover all of my mistakes. But, if I am truly trying to follow Christ, I owe it to God to obey Him. It is the least I can do in response to the sacrifice and salvation He has given me. So, I am also free to forgive. It is my choice. If I refuse to forgive someone else, it's like I'm telling Jesus that the debt He paid for me (and the person who offended me) wasn't enough.

There are other good, and Biblical, reasons to forgive someone:

- Forgiveness may break a cycle of retaliation and lead to mutual reconciliation.
- Forgiveness may make the person who has wronged you feel ashamed and change his/her ways.
- By contrast, repaying evil for evil hurts you just as much as it hurt the other person. Even if the other person never repents, forgiving him/her will free you of a heavy load of bitterness.

Let's think about the Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor again. The debt in this story was monetary. But, when someone offends or hurts us, the debt could occur in several areas: emotional, physical, spiritual, relational.

▪ **What makes it difficult to forgive?**

Fresh wounds Happened many times Jealousy Person isn't sorry

Feel rejected, unloved, betrayed, taken advantage of

▪ **What makes it easier to forgive?**

Time Person not part of your life Sincere repentance
See a change Remember what Christ did

- Think again about the person who needs your forgiveness. **What kind of payment would be fitting for the debt owed to you?**

That leads me to the big question – **How do we forgive?**

I believe that we are only able to forgive others by God's grace. Sometimes we just can't do it on our own. We have to come before God, thank Him for the way He has saved us, and ask Him to open our hearts to forgive the ones who have hurt us.

Let's consider this illustration as a way to help us forgive:

Imagine that you and the one who offended you are standing in a courtroom. God is sitting in the judge's seat, and Jesus is standing between you and your offender. The charges have been read, and God asks your offender one question: "How will you repay this debt?"

Your offender, looking into the eyes of God, shamefully but honestly answers in a small voice, "I can't."

Then God looks at you and asks you one question: "What will you have me do to this person?" **(What would you say?)**

"Very well, God says. He motions to the officials in the courtroom. They walk toward you and your offender, but instead of taking your offender away, they take the arm of Jesus.

"What's going on?" you ask. Your offender looks astonished as well.

God answers, "Before this trial, your Advocate came to me and told me He wanted to pay the debt for your offender. I agreed that whatever you asked me to do to your offender, He would have done to Him."

Your heart is filled with a wave of grief and anger it has never known before. You begin to protest.

Then God, with tears running down His face, looks at both you and your offender and says, "You are both free. Your Advocate, My Son, has paid the debt for the sin and the cost of forgiveness. Go, and live in peace."

Stunned, you both leave the courtroom.

- **What would you be thinking at this point?**