

FORGIVENESS

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Take a minute to pray for God to guide you as you study...

Not too long ago, I was driving on the interstate heading back from a meeting in downtown Atlanta. I had gotten up super early that morning, and now, I was headed up to Chattanooga. It had been a long day, and I was tired! As the miles clicked by, my eyelids got droopy to the point that I fell asleep! Yes, I had fallen asleep at the wheel! As I was drifting off into dreamland, I felt my car get jostled, and I instantly woke up! When I opened my eyes, I could see a car right in front of me that was definitely in my lane. I wasn't sure what had happened. Had I hit him? Had he hit me? Who was at fault? Well, I didn't know, because I was asleep. But, I wasn't going to let him get away with a hit and run, so I sped up and waved him over to the shoulder. We both slowed down and parked on the side of the road. I got out of my car and started asking questions. "What happened?," I asked. He wasn't really sure either, so we kind of looked at each other in confusion, until a woman walked up behind me. She had parked behind me and had seen the whole thing. It turns out that she was this man's wife. She had seen me drift over the line and bump the rack that was on the back of his vehicle. She thought I hadn't seen the rack and just accidentally hit it. Well, it was obvious that I was at fault, so I said, "I'm so sorry!" He instantly replied, "It's no problem at all. I forgive you."

Being forgiven feels **GOOD!** It's something that we all crave when we mess up. It's something that is needed in order to move through the mistakes of life. And yet, although we all want forgiveness, we often times don't want to forgive others! Isn't that funny? The thing that we want so much is one of the hardest things to give others.

The Bible talks a lot about forgiveness, and as we discover how forgiveness is part of being a disciple, I'm praying that you see it's importance in your life too. First, let's see it from our perspective, receiving forgiveness from God, and then we will see our responsibility as disciples to give it to others.

1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will _____ us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

This may be the most important verse that you read today, because it makes forgiveness so simple. When we tell God how we have sinned and how we don't want to sin anymore, then He forgives us! It's that simple! But God doesn't just forgive us...He takes it a step further. He cleans us. He makes us pure again. He takes His righteousness and covers us with it.

Isaiah 1:18: "'Come now, let us settle the matter,' says the LORD. 'Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.'"

Even though we are filthy with sin and don't deserve forgiveness, God takes our scarlet-tainted, crimson-covered, sin-filled lives and makes them white as snow and as clean as wool! Doesn't that just make you love God even more? He's a God that is eager to forgive and itching to cleanse us.

But if that weren't enough, He does something else with our sins when He forgives us...He gets rid of them forever! You know the saying, "Forgive and Forget?" Well, that's exactly what God does. Our sins, once forgiven, are forever forgotten and never are to be held against us.

Isaiah 43:25: "I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and _____ your sins no more."

He says it again in Hebrews...

Hebrews 10:17: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember _____."

And to put greater emphasis on how He gets rid of our sins, David tells us...

Psalms 103:12: "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."

Do you know how far the East is from the West? It's as far as you can go! It's opposite ends! And that's how far God

throws our sins once forgiveness happens. They are gone! They are never to be remembered. They are forever forgiven.

The prophet, Micah, describes God like this...

Micah 7:18-19: "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and _____ the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have _____ on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."

God is a compassionate, forgiving God that freely forgives and demolishes sin and obliterates our failures. He throws our sin into the depths of the sea.

Do you know how deep the sea is? There is one part of the sea called the Mariana Trench. It's the deepest point in the ocean, and it's almost 7 miles deep! Let's put it this way, if Mount Everest were put upside-down into this trench, it would still be a mile underneath the surface! And God takes our sins and throws them to where no one can get them, no one can see them, no one can remember them. They are GONE! Now THAT is forgiveness!

BASIC POINT

Because God so freely forgives us, we should freely forgive others!

So here's the kicker: because God so freely forgives us, we should freely forgive others! After reading all those verses about a God that LOVES to forgive, you would think that we would instantly be moved towards forgiving others too. And here's the thing, God really DOES want us to forgive others too. Listen to some of these verses to hear God's desire for us to forgive others.

Colossians 3:13: "Bear with each other and _____ one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

It's almost like because God forgave and continues to forgive us, we too have an obligation to forgive others!

It gets even a little more pointed than that as you can see the importance of forgiving others when it comes to how God views your heart and how He forgives us.

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 their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”

Disciples forgive! Period! That’s part of being a disciple. We forgive others because God forgave us. Since disciples always desire to be more and more like God, forgiving others is a part of that journey.

Paul puts our journey of forgiving others in these words as he describes the life of a disciple.

Ephesians 4:31-32: “Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, _____ each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Forgiving others as God forgave you? That’s powerful! That’s what disciples do...forgive others because we’ve experienced the forgiveness of God in our own lives. We forgive, because He forgave us!

Now, we pause here and make a shift in this lesson as we go straight for our hearts. Here’s the reality: many of us struggle with the idea that God truly forgives. Some of us wonder if we have sinned too much, or we’ve done something so bad that it is too bad for forgiveness. Some of us live in a cloud of guilt because of what we’ve done. I believe guilt comes from the Devil. God gives us conviction about how we’ve acted and how we’ve sinned, but guilt is something that I believe Satan burdens us with in order to keep us depressed. He doesn’t want us to rejoice in the grace and forgiveness that comes from a God that freely forgives and fully forgets. So, may this next verse be a powerful verse that speaks to your heart and your life and frees you from the feeling like you are unforgivable.

Romans 5:20: “...where sin increased, grace increased all the more...”

Doesn’t that give you courage? Doesn’t that tell you a lot about God? Although we were/are sinners, although we are unworthy to be righteous, although we don’t deserve grace, God freely gives it and freely forgives! Isn’t that the best news ever?

And as a disciple who has received grace and forgiveness, it is our turn to forgive others. Just like Paul says, that as sin increased, grace increased too, we need to be all the more ready to forgive others no matter what they do. That takes some major heart-work! That takes a close relationship to Jesus in order to forgive others! That takes a “you first, me second” attitude. That takes a true disciple’s heart that wants to bring others into a close walk with Christ.

As you continue on your journey with Jesus, discovering what it looks like to be a disciple, may you feel God’s forgiveness in your life, and may you find forgiveness for others.

FUNDAMENTAL QUESTIONS

1. What makes asking for forgiveness so hard?
 2. Why is it sometimes hard to forgive others?
 3. (Thought question for yourself) Are you having a hard time asking forgiveness for something in your life? What can you do that will help you ask God to forgive you?
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LESSON 10: FORGIVENESS

