

# Session 3 – Forgiveness and forgiving others

## Aim:

This session we want to understand the importance of and put into practice the words in Jesus' prayer with his followers: "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us" (Luke 11:4)

### 1) Forgiven – the journey

- a) Who we were: see Ephesians 2:3  
Who are the 'us' that Paul refers to? What tense is that verse in?
- b) What God has done: see Ephesians 2:4-5  
What do the words 'grace' and 'mercy' mean?  
How has God saved us and how has he dealt with Satan? See 1 John 3:8
- c) Who we are now: see 2 Corinthians 5:17  
We are no longer sinners, but we are God's children.  
Look at Ephesians 5:8 and Colossians 1:13  
Can you be both light and darkness? Can you live in both kingdoms? Saints (holy people) are just ordinary people whom God has saved (i.e. you and me).  
Remember how the father in Luke 15 treated his returning son.

### 2) Forgiven – the facts

- a) God forgives our sins as a past event: see 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. God has forgiven us.
- b) God forgives our sins as an ongoing confession. Despite being forgiven, we go on sinning and need to be forgiven again and again. Why do we go on sinning? But see also 1 John 1:8-9. How can we learn to live in the victory that Christ has won? See Romans 6:10-12
- c) God forgives our sins, but doesn't always erase the consequences. See David in the Old Testament as an example. Look at David's prayer of confession (see Psalm 51), but look too at the consequences of his sin (see 2 Samuel 12:13-14). What was God doing in David's life to allow these things to happen to him?
- d) God forgives our sins, but we don't always forgive ourselves  
David was forgiven by God, but he struggled with accepting God's forgiveness. When David's sons fell into the same sins as their father, David found it impossible to deal with his sons and it led to murder, rebellion, civil war and almost the downfall of David's kingdom. David was forgiven, but he struggled with accepting God's forgiveness.  
Why is it important that we hold onto the truths of who we are in Christ?  
Encourage yourselves with the words of Psalm 103:11-13

### 3) Forgiving Others

- a) God forgives us our sins, but we don't always forgive others. Look at the following verses: Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21-35; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13.  
Why is it often so hard for us to forgive others?  
What sorts of things are we most likely to find hard to forgive?  
What happens when I don't forgive? See 2 Corinthians 2:10-11  
Forgiveness is an act of love. What does that look like? See 1 Corinthians 13:4-7)  
Forgiveness is a choice, and leaves God to deal with the person (see Romans 12:19)  
(See separate sheet "What forgiveness is not" and "What forgiveness is".)

### 4) Steps to forgiving others

- Ask God to bring to your mind the people you need to forgive by praying aloud the following prayer:

*Dear Heavenly Father, I thank you for the riches of Your kindness, forbearance and patience towards me, knowing that your kindness has led me to repentance. I confess that I have not shown that same kindness and patience towards those who have hurt or offended me. Instead, I have held on to my anger, bitterness and resentment towards them. Please bring to mind all the people I need to forgive in order that I may now do so. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

On a separate piece of paper, list the names of people who come to mind. Starting with the first person on your list, make the choice to forgive him or her for every painful memory that comes to your mind.

For every painful memory you have for each person on your list, pray:  
*Lord, I choose to forgive ..... (name the person) for ..... (what they did or failed to do), which made me feel ..... (verbally tell the Lord every hurt and pain He brings to your mind).*

After you have forgiven each person, pray:  
*Lord, I choose not to hold on to my resentment. I thank You for setting me free from the bondage of my bitterness. I let go of my right to seek revenge and ask You to heal my damaged emotions. I now ask You to bless ..... (name the person). In Jesus' name. Amen.*

DESTROY THE LIST OF PEOPLE YOU HAVE WRITTEN

### **What total forgiveness is not:**

(Source: Total Forgiveness by R T Kendall)

- 1) Approval of what they did – God never approved of our sin, but he has forgiven us.
- 2) Excusing what they did – we do not cover up for them or excuse their behaviour.
- 3) Justifying what they did – there is no way that evil can be right: God never justified evil and does not require us to.
- 4) Pardoning what they did – we cannot release an offender from the consequences of their sin. E.g. the guilty rapist should not be exempt from punishment. He needs to pay his debt to society and ensure society will not live in fear of him.
- 5) Reconciliation – forgiveness and reconciliation are not always the same. Reconciliation takes two people, and the person you forgive may not want to see you.
- 6) Denying what they did – living in denial is to refuse to admit or come to terms with the reality of a bad situation. “This person actually did this or said this” and then forgiving them. But this oftentimes can be painful.
- 7) Blindness to what happened – blindness is a conscious choice to pretend that something never happened; repression is unconscious and involuntary. Both can be psychologically damaging.
- 8) Forgetting – to forget may not be realistic; it might even be impossible. Love doesn’t erase our memories.
- 9) Refusing to take the wrong seriously – we cannot truly forgive until we see the actual thing we are forgiving, and how serious it is. There is no sin too great for God to forgive. But he equally knows exactly what it is we’ve done and what he is forgiving.
- 10) Pretending we are not hurt – it is ridiculous to think we should have to keep that stiff upper lip – when we have been betrayed, molested, unjustly criticised or injured.

### **What total forgiveness is:**

(Source: Total Forgiveness by R T Kendall)

- 1) Being aware of what someone has done and still forgiving them – total forgiveness is only fulfilled when we know what someone has done without any denial or covering up for them – and yet still refusing to let them pay.

- 2) It is a choice to keep no records of wrong – we keep records to use them; to prove what happened; to wave it before someone who doubts what actually happened. When we develop a lifestyle of total forgiveness we learn to erase the wrong rather than file it away in our mental computer.
- 3) Refusing to punish – when we give up the natural desire to see them ‘get what’s coming to them.’
- 4) Not telling what they did – it may be necessary and therapeutic to tell someone about your own hurt, but telling a person with the purpose of hurting another’s reputation or credibility is but wanting to punish them.
- 5) Being merciful – mercy is not getting what we do deserve and God is merciful to us. So when we show mercy we are withholding justice from those who have injured us.
- 6) Graciousness – (gentleness or moderation in Philippians 4:5 “Let your gentleness be evident to all.”) – the opposite to the attitude that one’s rights should be upheld at all times. It means choosing to withhold some facts you know to be true but could damage the person in any way.
- 7) It is an inner condition – it takes place in the heart (Matthew 12:34 – “For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.” Reconciliation is not always essential to total forgiveness. If it takes place in the heart, one does not need to know whether one’s enemy will reconcile.
- 8) It is the absence of bitterness (Ephesians 4:30ff) – there is no bitterness: a) when there is no desire to get even or punish; b) when I do or say nothing that would hurt their reputation or future; c) when I truly wish them well in all they seek to do.
- 9) Forgiving God – our bitterness is often aimed at God. For all the unhappy things he has allowed to happen to me, I affirm his justice. He is God. For those who struggle with God’s right to allow evil there still must be a genuine forgiveness on our part, not because he is guilty, but for allowing evil to touch our lives. One day we will say, “He has done all things well.”
- 10) Forgiving ourselves – there is no lasting joy in forgiveness if it doesn’t include forgiving myself.