

Forgiving Others¹

Praise:

Begin to prepare your heart and mind for the study by listening to and/or singing the worship songs from the services. Choose two or three songs from the following list:

Jesus Saves – Tim Hughes

Lay Me Down – One Sonic Society

Holding Nothing Back – Tim Hughes

Blessed Assurance – Elevation Worship

Overcome – New Life Worship

Furious – Jeremy Riddle

Stronger – Hillsong United

The Stand – Hillsong

In Christ Alone – Kristyn Getty

Prayer:

Following the praise music, pray for understanding of the scripture, enlightenment that the Holy Spirit may guide your understanding, discernment that you may see how this lesson applies to you, and courage to surrender those things that hinder your spiritual growth.

Preparation:

(5-10 min)

1. Write on a piece of paper three sentences that describe or summarize the message, “Forgiving Others.”
2. Take turns reading aloud your respective summary. After all have presented, discuss the descriptions/summaries for the remaining few minutes (of the 10 total).

Reviewing the Scriptural Basis:

(5 min)

Read aloud the following scripture while allowing different participants to read each verse. As the verses are read, silently reflect on them and what they mean for you.

Colossians 3:13-15 (NLT)

¹³ Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

Breaking it Down

(30 min)

Break into smaller groups of three or four people. Read the key segments of today’s message, and answer together the questions related thereto.

The Healing Power of Christ

Before we journey into this sixth lesson in our sermon series, “The Healing Power of Christ,” let’s take a look at what we’ve studied thus far. We’ve learned that through Jesus’ work on our behalf, we have been set free from the power of sin, and we’ve been provided a way to be made whole and well in every area of our lives. Recall the words from the prophet Isaiah, “...by His wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5) We have also learned that sin is our greatest problem; therefore, forgiveness is our greatest need. Having received God’s forgiveness, we are, in turn, to

forgive others who have hurt us. As Paul states it in his letter to the Colossians, “Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.” (Colossians 3:13b NLT)

The primary symbol of our Christian faith illustrates this two-dimensional forgiveness. When Jesus gave His life on the Cross, He restored us into a right relationship with God, but He also provided a way for us to be reconciled with *others*. So, not only is there is a vertical dimension (we are reconciled to God) to forgiveness, but there is also a horizontal dimension (we are reconciled with others). We can look at the Cross of Calvary the same way—there can be no cross without both a vertical and a horizontal construction.

As we begin this lesson, we’ll discover that it is the healing power of Christ that compels us to forgive others.

Forgiving Others

In the New Testament, Luke is one of the gospel writers first to record Jesus’ final words from the Cross; he writes, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34 NLT) By His dying words, Jesus emphasized the importance of forgiveness. Even throughout His earthly ministry, Christ proclaimed God’s forgiveness to sinners, but He also consistently encouraged His followers to forgive one another. Lesson four of this series taught us that, because we are all sinners, we need to receive God’s forgiveness. Likewise, we need to *forgive others* because every one of us has been hurt by someone, at some time. It may be a friend who has betrayed us, a parent who has abused or neglected us, a spouse who has abandoned us, or a boss who has mistreated us. If there is a certainty in life, beyond death and taxes, it is that others will do us wrong. When that happens, the scars left by those experiences can often be as painful as the original wound. Yet, through His dying words spoken from the Cross, Jesus demonstrates the only way to overcome our hurts, hang-ups, and habits, as well as the bitterness that festers from failing to let go of them, is **forgiveness**. Jesus made a choice to forgive, and that is a choice each of us must make if we want to receive the healing power of Christ.

Jesus’ words and example show us that forgiveness is not just the best way to deal with hurts inflicted on us by others; it’s the only way if we want to be made whole and well. As we’ve done throughout this series, we’re drawing some valuable insights from John Baker’s book, *Life’s Healing Choices*. It has been the primary resource of these messages and lessons, and we’ll continue this study, “Forgiving Others,” in the same manner.

Why should we forgive others?

Whether we think they deserve it, choosing to forgive those who have hurt us is paramount to our healing. The reasons for forgiving others are many, but let’s look at three of the key reasons and the benefits we’ll receive by understanding and making the choice to forgive.

1) Because God has forgiven us.

In the Book of Matthew (18:21-35), Jesus tells a parable about an unforgiving servant. This particular servant owed millions of dollars to the king; it was a debt the servant was in no position to repay, and he pleaded with the king to give him more time to pay the debt he owed. The king had pity on the servant and forgave the entire debt. Later, when a fellow servant owed money to the forgiven servant, the forgiven servant refused to show mercy to the debtor, grabbed him by the throat, and demanded payment. When the king found out what had happened, he was incensed and had the unmerciful servant, the one whom the king had forgiven,

thrown in prison and tortured until he paid his debt in full to the king. Jesus is teaching us that an unforgiving heart is an unforgiven heart and is subject to torment until the debt is paid in full.

Paul also summarized Jesus' teaching about forgiveness in his letter to Colossians when he wrote, "Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others." (Col. 3:13b NLT) When we consider how readily available is God's forgiveness and how easily He grants it, we'll learn to extend forgiveness to others. It's definitely a practice, one that doesn't come naturally or easily to us. However, as with any practice, the more we do it, the more "automatic" it becomes.

1. When, where, and how did you come to realize that God has forgiven you?
2. What obstacles—if any—did you have to overcome before feeling secure in God's forgiveness?

2) Because resentment doesn't work.

A quick Internet search will turn up several synonyms for *resentment*, most notably, "bitterness." *Bitterness* is known in the Bible as spiritual poison; it roots itself in our lives and corrupts not only ours, but the lives of others around us. Specifically, Hebrews 12:15b (TLB) cautions, "Watch out that no bitterness [i.e., resentment] takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives." We may resent others for what they have done to us, but it's not beneficial to healing our hurts, hang-ups, and habits at all. If what scripture tells us isn't enough, let's look at other "practical" reasons for why resentment doesn't work in allowing us to forgive others.

a) Resentment is unreasonable.

St. Augustine is credited with the quote, "Unforgiveness is like drinking poison and hoping the other person dies." Substituting the word, "resentment," for "unforgiveness" yields the same result: it's unreasonable and irrational...and, simply put, it's a huge waste of energy.

b) Resentment is unhelpful.

"Resentment cannot change the past, the problem, or the person who hurt you." (p. 170) Accordingly, the logical conclusion is that holding onto resentment is of no help to healing our hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Moreover, refusing to forgive someone who has hurt us is unhelpful inasmuch as it allows our hurt to go on and on.

c) Resentment is unhealthy.

Harboring resentment is like picking at a scab; the more we pick at it, the longer it takes the wound to heal. It's senseless to think a hurt can be healed with persistent picking. The healing comes from the act of forgiving others for the wounds they caused us; forgiving others breaks the cycle of pain and restores our spiritual and physical health.

1. Describe how you've been affected by resentment, either your own or someone else's.
2. What have you suffered because of feelings of resentment or bitterness?

3) Because we will need forgiveness in the future.

Jesus taught us to pray: "Forgive us our sins, as *we forgive those* who sin against us." (Matthew 6:12 NLV, emphasis added) If we honestly consider this petition from "The Lord's Prayer," what we're asking God is, in principal, to forgive us to the same extent that we forgive every person who has hurt or wronged us. Let's think about that in practice... If we have not forgiven another, how can we genuinely seek God's forgiveness for *our* sins?

Jesus was the only One without sin. By nature, we are prone to sin; therefore, we know without a doubt that we will need forgiveness in the future. Jesus' words in Matthew 6:14-15 (NLT) further underscore this concept, "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins." Suffice it to say that all of us need (and will need) God's forgiveness; thus, we need to forgive others.

1. Why do you think Jesus said that we will be forgiven to the extent we forgive others, and what are the implications of praying this petition?
2. How does our unforgiveness toward others block the flow of God's forgiveness into our own lives?
3. What does forgiveness look like to you? How would you describe it, and then share an example of how you've demonstrated it.

How do we forgive others?

One of the recurring themes throughout this study is that receiving the healing power of Christ is a process. It is a process of recognizing our need, of letting go, of making changes, etc. Forgiving others is no different, and we learn—and ultimately choose—to forgive others when we observe a few necessary steps in the process.

1) We reveal our hurt.

When it comes to dealing with our hurts, we have several options. A common tendency is to *repress* them or *suppress* them. An uncommon (and more healthy) tendency of dealing with our hurts is to *confess* them and admit that a wrong has been committed. When we forgive someone, we no longer have to repress or suppress the hurt that person caused. Forgiveness begins when we acknowledge, "What that person did was wrong, and it hurt." People who have hurt you in the past will continue to hurt you (whether consciously or subconsciously) until you reveal your hurt. Simply put, "there is no closure without disclosure" (p. 172). Admitting your true feelings about the wrong that was done is a key step in the healing process.

1. How is denial a barrier to healing?
2. Why is it so hard to admit that we've been hurt or wronged?

2) We release the offender.

The Greek word used in the New Testament that is translated, *forgive*, means to "release someone from a debt they owe." Furthermore, the person who grants forgiveness has "legal or actual control" over the debtor. In other words, the forgiver takes control and makes a conscious choice to release the perpetrator from liability (i.e., "I release you... I let you go..."). In contrast, as long as forgiveness is withheld, the wrongdoer is in control. Forgiveness says, "I'm not going to be controlled anymore by what 'so-and-do' did. I am choosing to let it go." This is what Jesus demonstrated when He forgave those responsible for His suffering and death. Furthermore, Jesus shows us that forgiveness does not have to be necessarily communicated to the offender. For example, not everyone whom Jesus forgave from the Cross heard what He said. According to the New Testament writers, our sins caused Jesus' death as much as those who actually drove the nails into His hands and feet. So, when He spoke the words from the Cross, "Father, forgive them," Jesus was including us in the "them" and *all* those who were not present at His crucifixion. This illustrates that we, too, can forgive someone without actually saying it directly to the person. Jesus was set free from the shackles of other people's sinful choices, and we can be, too. French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, wrote, "Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you." When we follow Jesus' example of forgiveness, we learn how to release the offender.

1. How does unforgiveness keep the wrongdoer in control?
2. What are some lessons we learn from God's forgiveness, especially the forgiveness Jesus offered on the Cross?
3. Who is someone you need to forgive? How will it affect you and your relationship with that person if you forgive him/her? How will it affect you and your relationship with that person if you *don't* forgive?
4. When do you think it's essential to communicate forgiveness to the offending party?
5. When do you think it's beneficial not to communicate forgiveness verbally?

3) We replace our hurt with God's peace.

Releasing the offender might seem like a risky investment to make, but the dividends are immeasurable. "When we learn to release our offenders and allow God to be in charge of settling scores, then we will discover the wonderful blessing of His **peace**." (p. 175, emphasis added) Oftentimes, when we've tried to get even with our offenders (read: take revenge), our attempts backfire. Romans 12:19 (NIV) instructs us, "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." We can be released from our instinct for revenge because we know—and we trust—that God will right all wrongs in His own perfect judgment. *That* is where we find peace.

1. In what ways does forgiveness seem like we're letting the other person "off the hook"? How would you counter that position?
2. How does knowing that God will ultimately "settle the score" bring you a sense of peace about wrongs that have been committed?
3. Describe a time when you forgave someone and your hurt was replaced with God's peace.

In Closing:

We all have our burdens to bear...those hurts, hang-ups, and habits that prevent us from receiving the healing power of Christ and inhibit us from forgiving others. Forgiving others for their wrongdoings against us is not an easy choice to make, especially when emotions are raw and when the hurt is buried so deeply within us. Yet, we know from this lesson's selected text that forgiving others really is our only option: "Make allowances for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so *you must forgive others...*" (Colossians 3:13 NLT, emphasis added). Forgiving others is an act of obedience; it requires unyielding practice. But, as we'll discover through the process, we'll experience the healing power of Christ and receive the peace that only He can give.

Close in Prayer:

Lord, thank you for this study that Craig has been sharing with us. It hasn't been easy, and it has forced us to look at a lot of things we had no desire to revisit—hurts we thought too ugly to own, hang-ups we felt too ashamed to disclose, and habits we felt powerless to overcome. As we continue to work through this process, we pray that You will continue to work Your healing power in our lives. Some of us don't know how to forgive, Lord, so we pray for Your mercy, Your guidance, and Your grace...that we can eventually extend forgiveness to our offenders and rejoice in the peace that only You can give. It is in the precious name of Jesus we ask these things. Amen.

The Blessing (say this as a group):

“Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Luke 6:37c-38 NIV)

Action Items for the Week Ahead:

Review the key points of today’s message and the scriptures related thereto. In the week ahead, reflect upon those scriptures, and consider the following:

1. PRAY about it: Ask God to guide you to any wounds from the past that still exist in your life. Ask Him to help you forgive anyone who has hurt you.
2. WRITE about it: Make a list of those who have harmed you, what each person said or did, and how the hurt has made you feel and affected your life.
3. SHARE about it: Tell someone you trust about the list you make and what you plan to do about each person and situation. With their help, develop a plan of action for offering forgiveness. Consider using the “empty chair” technique or the “unmailed letter” approach (described in *Life’s Healing Choices*, p. 174) with your accountability partner.

ⁱThis sermon series, “The Healing Power of Christ,” is based on the book, *Life’s Healing Choices*, by John Baker. ©2007 by Richard D. Warren and John E. Baker. All quotes used in this discussion guide are taken from this book and annotated accordingly.