



Forgiveness

B O O K

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CONTENTS

Week 1 <i>June 14</i>	<i>Page 3</i>
God's Love for Us	
A. God loved us first.	
B. God loved us in spite of everything.	
C. God showed His love for us.	
Week 2 <i>June 21</i>	<i>Page 7</i>
The Greatest Commandment and Our Response to it	
A. We love God because He first loved us.	
B. The second greatest commandment	
C. God loved us – We love God – God loves others – So do we.	
Week 3 <i>July 19</i>	<i>Page 11</i>
God Forgave Us so We Forgive Others	
A. The commandments of Jesus	
B. Jesus teaches us to be like Him and forgive others.	
C. To refuse to forgive others is to reject God's grace.	
Week 4 <i>August 9</i>	<i>Page 14</i>
Can We Love Others and not Forgive Them?	
A. Putting others first.	
B. The role of pride and self.	
C. The "Golden Rule"	
Week 5 <i>August 16</i>	<i>Page 17</i>
Common Misconceptions about Forgiveness	
A. I must be able to forget.	
B. They can't be allowed to "get away with it!"	
C. The role of feelings and emotions.	
Week 6 <i>August 23</i>	<i>Page 20</i>
The Beatitudes	
Exegesis	
EXERCISES	Forgiveness Exercises



GOD'S LOVE FOR US

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

1 John 3:1

You might wonder what love has to do with forgiveness, if so don't feel bad, it's a common question. What you will discover as this study moves forward however is that love has everything to do with forgiveness, and forgiveness has everything to do with love. The truth is that we really can't separate one from the other!

In the Bible, the story of forgiveness and the story of love go hand-in-hand. Why did God send Jesus to die for forgiveness of sins? Because He so loved the world! (John 3:16) Think about your own life, don't you find it easier to forgive your loved ones than you do a complete stranger... or someone you really don't like very much? I think you would agree that this is the case. Yes, maybe love has quite a lot to do with forgiveness after all!

In the verse above, John is telling us that God has so much love for all of us that He considers us His own children; that's a lot of love! Look at the next sentence. It isn't just that God "considers" us to be like His own children, in Christ we really *are* His own children because we have been born again of His Spirit; yes, His love for us is very great indeed.

Having been reborn of God, those of this world can't always figure us out. Some might think we are just crazy people always talking about loving others, following Jesus and forgiving people who have hurt us, and by the standards of this world we probably really are crazy. But for us, having been reborn into God's household, these kinds of things become second nature as we grow in our faith.

The whole reason for this study of forgiveness is to foster growth in each of us. It is a journey of sorts, more than just the accumulation of knowledge. It is a journey of discovery and understanding, a journey of insight, faith and freedom. When we reach the end of this journey, we might even discover that forgiveness is not merely a teaching, a doctrine or a moral value, for it is a release of things that bind us, hold us back and weigh us down. In fact, I think we will discover that forgiving others will release us from bondage to our pasts that has held us back far more than we ever suspected.

God loved us first

From the very beginning, God loved Mankind. He created a beautiful environment for us, He breathed His own life into us and He gave us dominion over the earth. Yet as we know, something happened; Adam and Eve rebelled against God and from that point forward they were at odds with Him. In the fullness of time, God sent His Son Jesus to repair that relationship that had been so badly damaged by rebellion in the Garden. God's love was so great; He was willing for His only Son to die for the redemption of humanity.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. John 13:1

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. 2 Thessalonians 2:13

With this sampling of verses it becomes clear that God loved us first, before humanity had any cause to love God.

God loves us in spite of everything

In spite of everything that had happened between humanity and God, God continues to love us. He loves us in good times and in bad, even when we are having all kinds of problems, God still loves us, for His love cannot be shaken.

No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God. John 16:27

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

*“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”*

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:35-39

And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 1 John 4:16

God showed us His Love

God didn't just sit back and pine for us, He didn't just bemoan the fact that we rebelled, but He did something about it: He sent His Son to redeem Mankind, in spite of everything that had happened.

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. 1 John 3:16

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. John 4:9-10

Isn't this interesting? God loves us, and then He made a loving response to the situation that separated Him from us. He took extreme measures to forgive us. Yes indeed, there is a strong relationship between love and forgiveness.

Questions for Understanding

1. What does this lesson tell you about the nature of God?
2. God loves us first, and then did something to bring us back into relationship with Him. What does this tell you about the relationship between love and forgiveness?
3. Since God loved Mankind, and Mankind was in rebellion against God, what do you think God could have done with us that would show His love, but that wouldn't result in forgiveness?
4. In your view what should your response be to His amazing Love?



THE GREATEST
COMMANDMENT AND
OUR RESPONSE

The Greatest Commandment and Our Response to it

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

1 John 4:9-12

What an amazing story this is on so many levels; that God loved us so much He sent His Son to die for us. I wonder how often any of us slow down enough to just let that sink in. We weren't deserving, we hadn't earned His favor; far from it! We were living in open rebellion against God, and yet He loved us that much.

That wasn't the end of the story, not by a long shot. Through his great love for us, He forgave our sins, setting them aside entirely and entered into an intimate relationship with us. The real question here is how we should respond to his love. For those of us who really grasp the significance of what He has done for us, it is only natural that we would develop and deep love for God, yet even that isn't the end of the story! We "ought to love one another" is John's conclusion. Still, there is more at work than we might think at first: when we love one another, God is living in us, and in our love for one another, God's love is made complete.

How is this so? It really isn't very complicate, for God loves us and in response we love Him back. God also loves our brother and sister, and when we do the same for His sake, His love dwells within each of us and throughout the entire Body of believers, completing to cycle of His great love.

We love God because He first loved us

Let's begin our lesson with a little review. ..

John states this about as clearly as it can be stated in 1 John 4:19: "We love because he first loved us." Paul puts it slightly differently: "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

That our love for God comes from His love for us would seem to be an established fact in Scripture. Thus, it is the greatest of all the commandments: Love God.

The second greatest commandment

The second greatest commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:37-30

He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Luke 10:27

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." Mark 12:29-31

We all know these verses, most of us know them by heart, but why are they so important? The answer to this question really isn't so difficult if we remember that God first loved all of us and sent His Son to die for *all of us* and not just for you or me. That God would want us to share His love with our neighbor makes all kinds of sense, just as a parent would want their child to share the parent's love for his or her siblings. In the New Testament, this love for our neighbor is carried forward as our love for one another within the church in a special way.

God loved us – We love God – God loves others – So do we

This is the cycle that makes God's love complete in us. My brother or sister may not always be lovable, but because God loves them and I love God, I decide to love them too, in spite of their faults, for are their faults really that much greater than my own? John makes this entire cycle clear in an amazing passage, 1 John 4:7-21 and I hope you will read it in class. Some of the other verses relating to this are listed below:

John 13:34-35; 14:21; 15:17; 17:23	Ephesians 1:15; 4:2	1 Peter 1:22; 2:17; 3:8; 4:8
Romans 5:5; 8:28, 35; 12:10; 13:8-10	Colossians 1:4; 2:2; 3:14	1 John 2:10; 3:11, 14; 4:7-21
1 Corinthians 8:3	1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9-10	
Galatians 5:13-14	2 Thessalonians 1:3	

This is a theme that carries throughout the entire New Testament, and it is also the very core of all Christian Theology. If you want to really take a wide view of the subject, it is also the primary purpose of Church and can be summed up in the words of Jesus: "Make disciples."

Questions for Understanding

1. What is God showing us in this discussion about His nature?
2. Do you suppose that God's love for us is a mere emotion, or is it something much deeper than that?
3. If God can command us to love one another, is this love a feeling or a choice?
4. Since this is a class about forgiveness, is it likely that we can love others yet refuse to forgive them?

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GOD FORGIVES US, WE
FORGIVE OTHERS

God Forgives Us, We Forgive Others

Read Matthew 18:21-35

This passage is often called “The Parable of the Unmerciful Servant” because that servant who had received mercy (forgiveness) by the Master, refused to show mercy (forgiveness) to his fellow servant, and he experienced consequences as a result. This is one of the quintessential teachings of Jesus, along with the Golden Rule and loving your neighbor. The whole message of the parable is to teach His followers that since they have received God's forgiveness for their sins, they should in turn forgive others.

Is there a familiar pattern here? Think of the love pattern we've seen in the first two lessons: God loved us, we respond by loving Him. God loves others, and expects us to do the same out of our love for God. The forgiveness pattern mirrors this: God forgave us, and He expects us to forgive others out of our love for Him.

So easy to comprehend, yet so tough to put into practice!

The commandments of Jesus

I heard a great story about a very young associate pastor who went around the church full of enthusiasm and “wisdom.” He seemed to have a knack for reciting the commands of Christ and then finding people who aren't measuring up to them and rebuking. The senior pastor noticed this and gave his youthful subordinate a research assignment: Go through the gospels and list every command Jesus gave. Not teachings, not parables, but imperative tense commands only and have your report on my desk by 5 pm Friday. The young man thought this would be a piece of cake and set about making his list. After a day or two, he became discouraged; this wasn't a piece of cake after all.

Jesus taught many things and gave us many principles to follow, but He gave very few imperative tense commands. The young associate pastor never quite completed the assignment, but he did learn his lesson, to the relief of those around him!

The commands that Jesus actually gave can be summed up this way: Love God, love your neighbor as yourself, love your brothers and sisters, forgive your brothers and your sisters and make disciples. Of course, “make disciples” encompasses all of His commands and teachings in one act of love and mercy.

Jesus teaches us to be like Him and forgive others

Jesus' earthly ministry was nothing if not an expression of love; for in all that He did and said He demonstrated God's love for us in action. He took away pain and suffering, granted forgiveness of sins and taught the Truth of God's Word. He provided us with our model for living life as He went along, a model that if we follow will be very pleasing in God's sight. Time and again Jesus brought a message of mercy saying that the time for God to judge had not yet come. If we are truly His followers, His love, mercy and forgiveness will be our hallmarks, for in this, the people around us will see Christ through us.

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. Matthew 6:14-15

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

To refuse to forgive others is to reject God's grace

This is a tougher concept to grasp, for it comes down to a judgment call: At what point will our refusal to obey His commands become a rejection of our covenant relationship with God? We know that when we sin, God will forgive us when we acknowledge our sins. Yet if we deliberately keep on sinning in the same way year after year, and continue to refuse repentance when will God say that's enough? Theologians have been arguing about this for centuries, so we aren't likely to settle it here, but there is one thing that is very clear, and that is that if we receive God's

grace in forgiving *our* sins but we refuse to forgive those who have sinned against us, we are rejecting the very grace we have received ourselves. Here are a few of the verses on this subject, no doubt you can add more to this list.

And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. Mark 11:25

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned.

Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Luke 6:37

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us.

And lead us not into temptation Luke 11:4

Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 2 Corinthians 2:7

Questions for Understanding

1. What is God showing us about His nature in these verses?
2. What is God showing us about the way He values every single human being in these passages?
3. What is God showing us about our own values and motivations in these passages?
4. What is God saying to you in this lesson and what will you do about it?

A decorative graphic consisting of several small, stylized leaves or petals arranged in a semi-circular arc to the left of the text.

CAN WE LOVE OTHERS
AND NOT FORGIVE

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Philippians 2:1-4

In these verses, Paul tells us what our love for one another looks like in practice. Before we go too much further, we need to consider what this love really is, because it has nothing to do with our emotions or feelings, after all how can an emotion be commanded? The English language lacks the vocabulary to make distinctions between different kinds of love. For example, the love a person has for a spouse is of a different sort than the love they might have for a child, a sibling, their country or for pizza. Greek, the original language of the New Testament, on the other hand, has five different words that reflect five different kinds of love, and the one used in all of these verses is the word *agape*, which is a godly and totally selfless love that puts the other first in all things. It has nothing to do with feelings, but rather involves a conscious decision to put others first.

Notice Paul's emphasis on "*being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.*" This is what our love for others should be like. Going further, he says, ". *Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.*" Can you see the concepts of selflessness and humility at work here? Our love for one another must be selfless in its nature, because it is the exact opposite of "selfish ambition" and "vain conceit". Our love for one another needs to be like the love that Jesus showed for us; He is our role model. Paul went on to describe our new attitude in the rest of this passage: Read Philippians 2:5-11 now and note that after He humbled Himself and completed His mission on earth in perfect obedience to the Father, He was rewarded with glory and honor. After reading the passage, discuss as a group how His example relates to our everyday life.

Putting Others First

As you are no doubt aware, the passage above is one of many that teach us about putting others first, living selfless lives, humility and serving others in the New Testament epistles. Jesus also taught these things often, through direct statements, parables and preaching. Consider these passages that are sometimes misunderstood...

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?" Matthew 16:24-26

Here, Jesus is talking about this same issue. Setting aside our old ways of thinking and our old attitudes, we follow Him as Christians. From the point of view of the world around us, we have "lost" our lives, for we have given up its ways to follow Jesus. Yet, we really haven't lost much of anything, for we have gained so much more than the world can imagine in its place.

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." Mark 9:35

Then he said to them, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest." Luke 9:48

Let's be honest, these verses are entirely counter-intuitive and counter cultural. They certainly do not describe the attitude of our culture, nor do they describe our natural human inclinations, but they do describe what love in action looks like, for they describe a person who is willing to be set free from the desire to be "important" and assertive as this world sees these things. Instead, they describe a person who is willing to humbly serve God by serving others without expecting anything in return. This is love in its purest form!

The Role of Pride and Self

I don't need to tell any of you what the Bible says about pride and self; you already. Instead, here's a question for discussion:

If godly love can be seen through humility and selflessness, what is demonstrated by pride and selfishness?

If a person finds him or herself in a situation where they have a real struggle forgiving another person for something they have done, hypothetically speaking, are they demonstrating godly love or could it be that pride or self may be involved?

Of course, it is certainly true that when others have sinned against us there can be many factors and variables in operation at the same, not to mention a variety of emotions. Injustice is never easy to swallow, nor is outright violence or loss. Yet when the emotions begin to subside and healing has begun to take place, there are many times when the only thing that stands between us and forgiving the other person is pride or self, and in some cases these are manifested by rage, resentment and/or a strong desire for retribution.

Hypothetically speaking, how do these emotions reflect God's teaching of love, humility and forgiveness?

The Golden Rule

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

Luke 6:31

Chances are that you learned this as a child; even if you weren't brought up in a Christian home. Since this is a lesson on forgiveness, let's get right to the point, since we are already familiar with this verse.

If you did something that resulted in pain or harm or hurt to another person, would you want them to forgive you?

OK, nobody ever says "no" to that question! Let's try another one:

Are you willing to be first and forgive others who hurt you in some way, even if they might not always forgive you?

Ah, now that one isn't quite as easy. If you said "yes," then have you already forgiven those who have wronged you in your life? Maybe we need to take a look at that one before you answer. We know that God has forgiven us for our sins when we become Christians. There are literally hundreds of verses in the New Testament that tell us so, in fact they tell us that not only has God forgiven us, but that He has taken our sins away completely. It isn't as though our "permanent record" shows that we have committed infractions, and that those infractions are "paid for". God has taken the infractions away completely; our "record" is completely clean. Thus, God's forgiveness means that there is no record of our sins any more, and that there is no penalty or repercussions either: We have been justified before God. What great news!

Then God tells us that just as our sins have been forgiven, so also must we forgive others. When we forgive another person, that means that we no longer reserve the right to punish them; there are no repercussions from us. If the person has committed a crime, there might be legal ramifications, and if they are not followers of Christ, they may have an issue with God, but we have acknowledged that we have forgiven them and have moved on. That doesn't mean that we have necessarily forgotten the incident, and it surely doesn't mean that we will put ourselves or our families into harm's way, but we will not seek to impose sanctions ourselves, and there will be no grudges. When we do this, we gain two wonderful advantages, first, we will grow closer in our relationship with Jesus Christ, and for our action is one of love and within His will for us. Second, we will have lifted a terrible burden off of our own shoulders, since we won't have the baggage of pain and emotional trauma to carry through life any more.

So, back to the question: Are you willing to be first and forgive others who hurt you in some way, even if they might not always forgive you?



COMMON
MISCONCEPTIONS
ABOUT FORGIVENESS

Common Misconceptions about Forgiveness

Read Galatians 5:13-26

A few years ago I was working with a man whose wife had left him in hopes of restoring the marriage. To keep a long story short, he had acknowledged that he was responsible for many of their problems through his own pride and selfishness, and was committed to doing his part in reconciling. Over several months, it became apparent to all that his entire demeanor and way of living was changing... for the better. Even his estranged wife commented to me how impressed she was with his progress and indicated that she would be willing to meet with both of us to discuss reconciliation.

To be entirely fair, he was not responsible for all of their problems; not by a long shot! She also had problems with selfishness and pride, along with a great need to be "right" in every situation. When we got together, the session went long; our hour together grew into 3 plus. Finally, we came to the part where both parties agreed that they would forgive one another and wipe the slates clean while looking for constructive ways to resolve their remaining issues the following week. As we were all getting up to leave, she stopped suddenly and turned to her husband and said, "I hope you understand that even though I have forgiven you and wiped the slate clean, that does not mean that there still won't be repercussions."

As it worked out, she was willing to give lip service to forgiveness, but she had no real intention of ever forgiving him for anything. As a result, their marriage ended in divorce.

I Must be able to Forget

This is a common misconception about forgiveness. How can I forgive someone when I can't forget what they did? We've seen quite a few verses on this notion of forgiveness in the first four weeks of this study. Can you recall a single one that said anything about forgetting what happened? The human mind just doesn't work that way, and let's be honest about something here: If you actually have forgotten about an event, you haven't forgiven the person, you forgot the whole thing. Most likely if someone reminded you, you'd be back to not forgiving. There are some things that are unwise to forget, especially those that involve abusive behavior. There is a big difference between forgiving and putting yourself or your loved ones in harm's way. Forgiving means that you are no longer going to hold something against a person, and that you are not going to let yourself hold on to rage, anger and resentment, nor will you seek to impose punishment on the person. It does not mean that you will let them repeat the instance again. After you forgive a person, the memory will still come back to you, but when it does, you will remind yourself that the incident is over, that you have forgiven the person and that you will let God deal with them as He sees fit, and in time, the wound will heal and the recollections will be less and less of an issue for you.

They can't be allowed to get away with it!

Forgiveness really has nothing to do with whether or not a person gets away with something. Everyone will answer to God for their actions; God is the Judge of all. We are the judges on no one, and God is very particular on that point. If we seek to judge others, we will be required to answer to God for *our sin*. In some instances, the person who has wronged us may have consequences with the law of society, and your forgiveness doesn't get anyone out of that consequence either. What factors are really behind this misconception? Here are some possibilities you might consider:

Pride, revenge, jealousy, resentment, anger, rage, control issues, embarrassment and the like. Jesus taught us that we are not to judge others, lest we be judged. Don't these kinds of feeling really just seek to justify our appointing ourselves to take God's place and hand down our own judgments and punishments to those who have wronged us? Certainly this is offensive to God.

The role of feelings and emotions

In most cases, our feelings and emotions don't help us to make the right choices when we have been wronged. In such cases anger, outrage and hurt are normal and sensible reactions, but as experience teaches us, these fade with the passing of time, and we begin to heal. We may not always be ready to forgive a wrong at the moment of its occurrence, but within a reasonable time frame, we come to the place where we can make the choice to forgive, and we should do so. If you consider our opening verses from Galatians, I think this point should be clear, after all, does unforgiveness belong in the category of acts of the flesh, or as one of the fruits of the Spirit? Again, fully healing is a process and may take time, but it is sped up considerably after we make the choice to forgive.

"Hold on a minute, what if the person doesn't ask for forgiveness?"

"If your brother or sister^Lsins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying 'I repent,' you must forgive them."

The apostles said to the Lord, "Increase our faith!" Luke 17:4-5

Some might quote this verse as "proof" that they needn't forgive if there is no repentance... and even to justify "letting them have it." Unfortunately they would have a contextual problem, however. In Luke's account, this falls into a section on the duty of a servant, you might find the full context of interest: Luke 17:1-10. I think you'll discover that Jesus didn't give you an "out" He gave you a command involving maximum humility. Matthew writes on the same question in Matthew 18:21-33 and follows with the parable of the unfaithful servant, the bottom line of which is forgive or you won't be forgiven.



THE BEATITUDES

The Beatitudes

Matthew 5:3-12

I have no doubt that you are familiar with this text; it is one of the most often quoted in Scripture. No doubt you've studied it in studies, classes and sermons many times, but have you ever consider who is the one who is not blessed? In this final lesson on forgiveness, let's take a look at this "other side" of the Beatitudes and see where forgiveness is and where unforgiveness is. After that, let's examine a question about forgiveness: Could God expect us to forgive because it is better for us and our own well-being than not forgiving would be?

Before we jump in, let's all be on the same about the term "blessed". The Greek word rendered "blessed" in the English is *makareos* which means "happy." So, where the text says "Blessed are..." it means "Happy are..." in common English.

5:3 *"Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

For a person to be called "poor in spirit" they must be humble, loving and gentle. Those who are not poor in spirit would include those who are proud, boastful and arrogant. If you think about it, being proud and arrogant requires a great deal of effort. You must always be right, you must always meet a challenge head-on, and you can never endure an insult or slight.

5:4 *Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

People who mourn are capable of forming relationships. They love other people and can allow themselves to grieve their loss when those people are gone, but someone who does not mourn has no such relationships. They have set themselves apart from loving human interactions and cannot mourn for they do not feel warmth. These must be lonely and miserable people.

5:5 *Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

The meek are very much like the poor in spirit. They are gentle and humble and they do not strive for fame and fortune, they don't need to be the center of attention enforcing their will on other people. Yet those who are not meek must do all of these things. Imagine the burden they must carry! At a social gathering, they feel the pressure to impress, to entertain, and to know all. They can never let their guard down, lest someone should outshine them. If someone were to wrong them, what you would get is drama that lasts weeks if not months.

5:6 *Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

Those who hunger and thirst with righteousness will be filled with it, but what about those who don't? They will not find righteousness, they will not find God's way nor will they receive mercy. Once again, they have cut themselves off from that which is right, pure and good and do not follow God's ways. What a miserable lot they have chosen for themselves!

5:7 *Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

The merciful show mercy to others; they forgive those who wrong them, but those who are not merciful hold grudges. They can't bring themselves to forgive even a small slight, for they are much too self-important for that. Try to imagine the load they force themselves to bear in holding on to their anger, resentment and pain as they struggle through life. Imagine the pressure and energy it would take to exact revenge for anyone who might offend them.

5:8 *Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

The pure in heart are people who have no guile; they are innocent and do not carry with them intrigue and manipulative desires to control other people. Now imagine the opposite, those people who are always scheming. They are always on the lookout for someone to take advantage of; they are conspiratorial and manipulating and must always carry of the burden of possibly being found out for what they really are. I wonder if they sleep well at night.

5:9 *Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

Peacemakers are pretty obvious, and so are their opposites. They are ultra-confrontational, looking for trouble, discord and controversy. They care nothing for other people, for they are only interested in having their way in all situations. They can never be wrong, they can't admit a mistake and they can't even relax without abusing someone. They make enemies where ever they go, and must always be looking over their shoulder; what a life!

5:10 *Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

In order to be persecuted for righteousness, one must be righteous, and also possess the courage to do what is right even if it isn't popular. On the other side of the coin, we have those who neither do what is right nor possess the courage to stand up for it. These live in fear, tossed to and fro with the winds of popular opinion, going along with the crowd and hoping they don't have any problems. They must worry quite a lot, for they know they do wrong, but what would others think if they didn't go along?

5:11-12 *"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

The one persecuted for Christ is a follower of Jesus who has a bright future, and a present that is full of His power and grace, but what of his oppressors? They have no hope, they do serious wrong and await their doom. They are so filled with foreboding that they must silence the Truth, killing and injuring as they go, only increasing their guilt.

Let's stop to think: Of the nine "blessed" people mentioned here, which one is the one that refuses to forgive others who wrong them? Of the nine not blessed ones, which would be the kind of person who forgives freely? Let's face it, it's hard to conceive of people that Jesus would call meek, poor in spirit, peacemakers and righteous as being people who would refuse to forgive, don't you think?

With that in mind, which group of people carry the emotional baggage around with them through their lives? Which group sleeps at night? Which group has the higher stress levels and which has the lower? Finally, which group has the joy of life and the eternal rewards to go with it, and which has no joy and is destined for destruction?

Could it be that God expects us to love and forgive one another because that is better for our own health and peace of mind? Is it possible, even likely, that God has given these commands because He knows that the only one who will be punished or hurt by our unforgiveness is the person holding the grudge?

How do you suppose that carrying the burden of unforgiveness will help to grow and mature your relationship with Jesus Christ?

OK, these things are all obvious, and I'm sure I haven't told you much of anything that you didn't know already, so maybe now is the time to simply commit ourselves to forgiving those who have wronged us in the past, to go before our Lord in prayer and ask his forgiveness and for His help in taking away our rage, anger and guilt from the past. Maybe we also need to remind ourselves

that when these old emotional patterns try to come back that we will repeat that they are over, done and gone and return to Jesus' feet in prayer. Yes, maybe it's time to really live like the new creation that we are in Christ!



EXERCISES

FORGIVENESS EXERCISES

FORGIVENESS

FORGIVENESS IS NOT:

- Condoning = a justification of the offense
- Excusing = the offender had a good reason for committing the offense
- Forgetting = the memory of the offense has simply decayed or slipped out of conscious awareness
- Denying = an unwillingness to perceive the harmful injuries that one has incurred
- Reconciliation = the restoration of a relationship

FORGIVENESS IS:

- a willingness to abandon one's right to resentment, negative judgment, and indifferent behavior toward one who has unjustly hurt us
- while fostering the **undeserved qualities** of compassion, generosity, and even love toward him or her

BURDEN OF GUILT – ROCKS

Carry the Rocks until the end of the course.

SATISFACTION WITH LIFE SCALE

Below are five statements that you may agree or disagree with. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Total the responses for all items.

1 = Strongly disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Slightly disagree

4 = Neither agree nor disagree

5 = Slightly agree

6 = Agree

7 = Strongly agree

___ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

___ The conditions of my life are excellent.

___ I am completely satisfied with my life.

___ So far, I have gotten the important things I want in my life.

___ If I could live my life over, I would change nothing.

Scores

30-35 Extremely satisfied, much above average

25-29 Very satisfied, above average

20-24 Somewhat satisfied, average for American adults

15-19 Slightly dissatisfied, a bit below average

10-14 Dissatisfied, clearly below average

5-9 Very dissatisfied, much below average

GENERAL HAPPINESS SCALE

For each of the following statements and/or questions, please circle the point on the scale that you feel is most appropriate in describing you.

1. In general I consider myself:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not a Happy Person

A Very Happy Person

2. Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Less Happy

More Happy

3. Some people are generally very happy. They enjoy life regardless of what is going on, getting the most out of everything. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

*Not at
deal
all*

A great

4. Some people are generally not very happy. Although they are not depressed, they never seem as happy as they might be. To what extent does this characterization describe you?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

*A great
deal*

Not at all

Scoring instructions

To score the test, total your answers for the questions and divide by 4. The mean for adult Americans is 4.8. Two-thirds of people score between 3.8 and 5.8.

An Exercise to Assist You in Overcoming Resentment

This exercise offers you a healthy way to deal with resentment. Since this exercise helps to dissolve resentment, it will also help you in forgiving others and in forgiving yourself.

You can use this exercise by itself or in conjunction with these [steps to forgiveness](#). Please note that the first few steps of this exercise were inspired by an exercise that Louise Hay shares in her book, *You Can Heal Your Life*.

1. Centering and Preparation

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths and when you feel relaxed, imagine yourself in a special place. This special place can be anywhere that your imagination takes you, perhaps somewhere in nature or to a special forgiveness room that you can return to again and again when doing forgiveness work.

2. Envision Someone to Forgive

In the spirit of overcoming resentment and forgiving others, think of someone who you resent in some way or someone who has upset, hurt or offended you. See this person sitting in front of you, at a distance that feels comfortable to you.

If for any reason it is not comfortable for you to invite this person into the special place that you have created with your imagination, envision them behind a wall of glass or in a room across from yours or see them on the TV screen, be creative and do what feels good to you.

3. Visualize Good Things Happening

When you see this person clearly, visualize good things happening to him or her. Imagine them doing things that they enjoy and envision them having meaningful life experiences.

See this person smiling and happy. Hold the image for a few minutes and then let it fade away.

Now take a moment to do the same for yourself. See and feel good things happening to you.

See yourself smiling, happy and at peace. Feel how good this feels.



You can close your session with gratitude here or you can follow the rest of the steps below.

4. Share What's in Your Heart

Feel the energy of your heart. To do this, focus on the feeling of gratitude. While in this heart centered space, notice if there is anything that you want to say to this person. Acknowledging and Speaking your truth in a heart centered way can assist you in overcoming resentment.

Note that speaking your truth simply means to speak the truth of what's on your mind and heart, be honest about what you are thinking or feeling...don't hold back, let it all out. You can do this in a heart centered way by imagining the words coming from your heart and speak with as much compassion and kindness as possible.

So, if there is something you want to say to the other person, imagine yourself doing that now. Imagine them hearing and receiving your words. Imagine what they would say to you if they were able to respond from a heart centered, loving space.

While you may never have this conversation in your physical reality, now that having it on the inner planes of reality can be just as effective in setting yourself and the other person free, energetically.

5. Affirm Your Progress

If you are having a hard time with this, keep affirming to yourself that "I am willing to let this resentment/unforgiveness go." Continue to imagine good things happening for the other person and for yourself.

Otherwise, affirm your progress by stating an affirmation such as, "I no longer hold resentment towards you. You are free and I am free and so it is. For this, I am grateful."

6. Give Thanks

As you continue the feeling of gratitude, take a moment to mentally give thanks to any divine assistance you may have had during this time of forgiveness and overcoming resentment.

Thank yourself for taking the time to do this important forgiveness work and mentally thank the other person for the opportunity to learn how to forgive and to let go of resentment.

When you are ready, gently open your eyes and return to your physical space.

Forgiveness Exercises: Inventory

To do this forgiveness exercise, choose a quiet, comfortable place where you will be free from distractions. Give yourself at least an hour to complete this exercise from beginning to end. You will need some paper and a pen. You may use this exercise by itself or in conjunction with [these Steps to Forgiveness](#).

1. Make a list of names

To begin the process of forgiving others, write down the name of every person (even if they are no longer living) who has irritated or offended you in some way. If that hurt or upset is still with you, their name goes on the list.

You will be amazed at the memories that come to you. People may come to your mind that you haven't thought about in years.

Feel free to include your pets on the list if that feels appropriate to you. Also, be sure to put your own name on the list to forgive yourself for regrets that you may have. Keep writing names until you can't think of anyone else to add.



2. Spend some time forgiving each person on your list

Look at the first name on your list, close your eyes and then (as Doreen suggests) hold the image of each person in your mind and tell him or her, "I forgive you and I release you. I hold no unforgiveness back. My forgiveness for you is total. I am free and you are free."

Once you say the affirmation, feel the truth of these words in your body. Feel how good it feels to let go. Continue to do this with each person on your list.

3. Notice how you feel and write about your experience

After you "speak to" the last person, pause for a moment to notice how you feel. You can write about your experience if you wish.

4. Express and feel your gratitude

If you followed [these Steps to Forgiveness](#) and asked for spiritual assistance, this is a good time to give thanks for the support that you received.

FORGIVENESS ROCKS



Genesis 42-44

I hardly know a person that has experienced as much torment and disaster and pain as Joseph did in the Bible. To be subject to human trafficking by the evil of your own brothers. Even more to be blamed a rapist by an immoral woman even though you're the innocent one. But now Joseph stood as a pharaoh and his heart could have been easily filled with utmost bitterness and revenge toward his brothers and this immoral woman. He was a man of power now -and power can make a man unstable.

But Joseph's integrity was never shaken. He never embraced bitterness, but embraced the conflicts God brought him through for the greater good. Indeed, "all things work together for the good to those who love God..."

When Joseph saw his brothers for the first time in many, many years I can only imagine the adrenaline that rushed through him. Were they old enemies or old friends? What I love about Joseph is that he used his power and authority, not to punish his brothers vengefully, but to test them repentantly. And sure enough, through a series of radical tests he discovered his brothers were truly sorrowful and repentant of their evil toward Joseph. And it was at that time that Joseph revealed himself and took care of them and brought them into the land of Egypt to be ministered to through the great famine. Forgiveness satisfied Joseph far more than vengeance ever could have.

Forgiveness is always a power the people of God have to use for the greater good. Forgiveness rocks. Forgiveness saves. Forgiveness liberates. Too often Christians backbite each other rather than use the privileged power of forgiveness to heal each other. Actually, forgiveness isn't just our privilege and power -it is our responsibility. "Forgive one another as Christ forgave you", the apostle Paul stated. Standing outside of forgiveness is standing outside of God's will and God's pleasure. It's sin to the core.

If Joseph could forgive his evil brothers, how much more can we forgive those who do evil to us? Even more, if Christ could forgive us of our great debt of sin against Him, how much more can we forgive this who are indebted to us?

Forgiveness will rock your world. Unforgiveness will destroy it.