

“Forgiveness”

Beneath the Surface: Deepening Our Relationships—Part 4

INTRODUCTION

God has called us to forgive one another just as He has forgiven us. (Matt 6:14) Forgiveness is the decision to release a person from an obligation based on an offense. That offense may have been intentional or not, it might have come in one of many forms. Whatever the cause, a debt was incurred and you have the power to hold the other person accountable, or to release them from that indebtedness. At the same time we must endeavor to seek forgiveness when we give offense. But unforgiveness damages us in addition to damaging our relationships with God and others. True forgiveness does not come easily, but it is possible because it reflects God’s Spirit in us. This study considers what the Bible tells us about forgiveness and how we can apply it to deepen our relationships.

Ice Breaker (Optional): Briefly share a time when someone forgave you or someone else that made a lasting impact on you.

Study Questions (45 MIN)

Relationship Rifts

Q1. Read Genesis 3:8-10

When one person offends another it creates a “relational rift.” This rift, or separation, can be seen in the story of Adam and Eve after the fall. In Genesis 3:8-10 how did their offense of disobedience to God affect Adam and Eve’s relationship with God? Another symptom of a relational rift can be guilt. What is the source of guilt described in Romans 2:15? What do you think can happen when we continually ignore our conscience and deny our guilt?

The Blame Game

Q2. Read Genesis 3:11-13; Proverbs 28:13; 1 John 1:9

Relational resolutions are strengthened through humility, but pride will deepen the divide. Humility is shown when we graciously accept responsibility for our actions, especially when we are in the wrong. What did Adam and Eve do instead (Genesis 3:11-13)? What does Proverbs 28:13 teach us about such behavior? God can always be trusted to forgive us when we come to him in repentance (1 John 1:9), but we know people are not always so gracious. Do you find that most people accept your apologies, or do you find that more tend to hold a grudge? What might make you reluctant to accept an apology?

Seeking Forgiveness

Q3. Read Romans 2:1; Matthew 7:3-5; Psalm 51:17

There are many steps to conflict resolution. Most involve accepting difficult truths. What does Romans 2:1 reveal about our right to judge others? In what

way might our judgment of others reflect our own hypocrisy? (Matthew 7:3-5) The first step toward resolution of relationships is an honest self-evaluation. How do you think this might result in a broken and contrite heart? And in what way is such a heart a sacrifice we make to God?

Granting Forgiveness

Q4. Read Ephesians 4:32; Matthew 6:14-15; Matthew 18:21-35

We serve a God of mercy and forgiveness, and that is what He longs to see reflected in us (Ephesians 4:32). Refusing to grant forgiveness may feel like we are wielding power over our offender or protecting ourselves. But in what ways does this actually harm us? Forgiveness does not come naturally, and we may have to forgive someone much more than once. Peter asked Jesus about forgiveness and received a sobering response. Not only would he be called upon to forgive more than he thought possible, what was the ultimate consequence of insincere forgiveness (Matt 18:35?) What are some things that make it difficult to grant sincere forgiveness, and how do you overcome them?

Wrap-Up

The importance of forgiveness is evident from Scripture. God himself is our model of mercy and forgiveness, and He calls us to extend forgiveness to others. True forgiveness begins with an honest self-evaluation where we can recognize the many offenses we ourselves are guilty of and the extent of the forgiveness we have received from God. In the light of that truth, we can humble ourselves to ask forgiveness where we have offended others, and extend forgiveness to those who have offended us. In doing so we reap deep benefits of healthy relationships with others and with God.

Memory Verse

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.
Ephesians 4:32 ESV

Prayer (20 MIN)

Ask your group to pray for you regarding one area where you can apply this study in your life: _____

Pray for your group members’ needs: (see back for more notes) _____

Challenge: If God has brought to mind someone you need to restore a relationship with, make contact this week and begin the process of sincere forgiveness.

