

FORGIVE **WEEK ONE:**

Can We Even Learn What It Means To Forgive?

This message marks the first in a series of 11 messages on the topic of forgiveness—inspired by Tim Keller’s book *Forgive*. As we progress through the series and come to understand what forgiveness looks like in our own lives, we have to start with a broader exploration of what forgiveness even is—renouncing revenge and being open to reconciliation. Many people—inside and outside the Church—have different opinions of what forgiveness is, but we must come to understand how it is portrayed in Scripture.

WEEK 1 VERSES:

Matthew 18:21-22

Matthew 9:2-8

Mark 2:5

1 Corinthians 1:18

WHAT I LEARNED ABOUT GOD’S
FORGIVENESS OF ME & WHERE
I FEEL LED TO EXTEND/SEEK
FORGIVENESS TO/FROM OTHERS...

It’s important to recognize there is always a cost to forgiveness. Forgiveness addresses a reality of wrongdoing that has implications for others—it goes hand-in-hand with God’s own perfect justice. His forgiveness of us acknowledges the cost of our sin and the necessity of it being atoned for. The starting point of our forgiveness toward others is recognizing that God has first forgiven us through the resurrection. Through recognizing this vertical dimension of forgiveness (God to us), we understand that forgiveness is not natural to humans, but a miraculous reflection of the heart of God.

Vertical

- Why do you need God’s forgiveness?
- In what specific ways has God forgiven you?
- What has been the cost of your own sin?
- What are the effects of God’s forgiveness on your own life?
- What is your deepest need?
- What does God’s forgiveness say about His character?

Internal

- Where have I seen or experienced forgiveness in my life?
- What is my deepest wish? Is it truly what I need?
- What is the biggest problem with myself?
- What areas do I try to hide from others because I’m ashamed or afraid of what they would think of me?
- Do I view myself as worth forgiveness from God or others?

Horizontal

- How have you experienced forgiveness, or a lack of forgiveness, with others?
- What kinds of actions from others have led to a desire for revenge?
- How does forgiveness toward others feel unnatural?
- Where do you feel God is calling you to pursue forgiveness/restoration?
- What would it mean if the Church were marked by a spirit of forgiveness?

Action Steps

- Pray for a relationship that is yet to be restored.
- Thank God for His forgiveness of you and reconciliation with Him.
- Pray for Element—that God would move in His people through this series to bring about restoration and reconciliation.
- Review and work through this week’s additional resource: “Forgiveness Principles”

RESOURCE:

FORGIVENESS PRINCIPLES

1. The difficulty of forgiveness lies in that it is unnatural—it is not the nature of things.

It is counterintuitive to our basic human instincts and nature. A holy God's forgiveness was a mystery (before the coming of Christ), as God Himself proclaimed in Exodus 34:7. Forgiveness is therefore always a wonder and surprise, and it needs to be accounted for rather than ever taken for granted.

2. The dynamic of forgiveness is the atoning death of Christ.

The work of Christ provides satisfaction for sin through the self-substitution of God. This is what makes forgiveness possible (from both God and humans) despite its difficulty and unnaturalness. Our forgiveness of others is based on and empowered by (theologically, motivationally, and practically) God's forgiveness of us through the cross.

3. The fading of forgiveness comes because of the inadequacy of contemporary forgiveness models, which lack the vertical dimension. Christian forgiveness

- (a) differs from the therapeutic model because it seeks justice and reconciliation;
- (b) differs from the merited or transactional forgiveness model because it offers internal forgiveness;
- (c) differs from the modern antipathy toward any forgiveness because it shows us the need for it, the costliness of it, and the power of it.

4. The history of forgiveness is rooted in the Bible.

While all cultures have some idea of forgiveness, the dominant ideas about it in the world today derive from the Old and New Testaments. The loss of orientation to forgiveness today has to do with both the decline of Christian faith and the distortion of the concept within the churches.

5. The definition of forgiveness is to renounce revenge and be open to reconciliation.

Revenge is being satisfied by another person's unhappiness, especially that was inflicted by you. To forgive is to

- (a) name the wrong truthfully as indeed wrong and punishable (rather than merely excusing it) but also to
- (b) identify with the perpetrator as a fellow sinner, to
- (c) release the wrongdoer from liability from personal payback by absorbing the debt oneself (rather than merely pardoning), and finally to
- (d) aim for reconciliation and the restoration of the relationship that was broken by the wrong.

6. The dependencies of forgiveness.

- (a) Internal or attitudinal forgiveness is not dependent on the response of the perpetrator. It can be done in any circumstances.
- (b) The work of actual reconciliation is dependent on the wronged person doing internal forgiveness and the repentance of the perpetrator.

7. The resources for forgiveness are twofold:

- (a) poverty of spirit—and the humility that comes from knowing our salvation is by sheer grace, not merit, and
- (b) wealth of spirit—and the assurance of love that comes from knowing our salvation is by sheer grace, not merit.

From *FORGIVE*, by Timothy Keller

FORGIVE

RESOURCE:

Forgiveness Prayer

Working with other people (sinners), there will be times when you are sinned against and hurt. We hope and pray you seek out reconciliation in a biblical manner. One tool to help is the following Forgiveness Prayer. We hope it is useful in your time of healing.

Forgiveness Prayer

As you work through your need for forgiveness and forgiving others, the Holy Spirit may convict you that it's time to forgive someone who has sinned against you. The following forgiveness prayer can be used as a template to guide you in your own prayer to God. You may adapt this one, or read it as your own prayer, filling in the specific offense and name of the one you are forgiving.

The prayer is based upon the following passages of scripture:

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:27 -28,35b -36)

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Eph 4:31 -32)

...God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. (Rom. 5:8,10)

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord (Rom 12:17 -19)

Prayer

Father, thank you that in Christ you have forgiven me even in my worst sin. Even while I treated you as an enemy, you showed me your love and mercy at the cross and made me your friend. Because you have forgiven me so generously, and by your Holy Spirit who unites me to Christ and makes it possible for me to forgive like you, I now forgive (name) who sinned against me by (name the offense).

I relinquish any entitlements I've claimed against (name) to punish, withhold forgiveness, or seek revenge. I know that I may never see this offense made right in my eyes in my lifetime, but I entrust it and myself to you, knowing that you are the one who judges justly.

Please free me from any bitterness toward (name) that I have allowed to take root in my heart. Help me continually walk in forgiveness toward (name) from this point forward. As I walk in forgiveness, grant me wisdom to know when and how to trust (name). I pray that you would help (name) to know your love and forgiveness. Help me to delight in whatever kindness you show to (name). Help me also to show kindness: loving, blessing, and doing good toward (name) as you provide opportunities.

FORGIVE