

FORGIVE

WEEK THREE:

Misunderstood Forgiving

This week's message explores different models/views on forgiveness that are popular today. Those that refuse to understand the costliness of grace (as shown by the Cross) distort the reality of what forgiveness entails. As opposed to forgiveness being blind, transactional, therapeutic, weaponized, or withheld, forgiveness is a reflection of God's own forgiveness of us in Jesus. In Jesus, we see that forgiveness is costly, sacrificial, and restorative. The Gospel grants us

both humility (because of how we have sinned against God) and assurance of His full forgiveness and restoration of us.

WEEK 3 VERSES:

- Matthew 6:12
- John 13:35
- Exodus 34:6-7
- Matthew 18:22-25
- 1 Timothy 1:15
- Galatians 6:14

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

Aaron discusses three specific secular approaches to forgiveness that contrast with a Gospel understanding: **1) cheap grace, 2) little grace, and 3) no grace.** The "cheap grace" approach blindly forgives in an effort to help the person that was wronged feel better—it ignores or minimizes the cost of forgiveness. The "little grace" approach makes forgiveness conditional on the perpetrator earning it. Lastly, the "no grace" model refuses the idea of forgiveness, believing forgiveness condones wrongdoing. The Gospel challenges each of these approaches with the reality of a costly grace given to us in Jesus; true forgiveness is a reflection of this gift.

Vertical

- How does the Cross shape your view of the costliness of grace?
- How are you both poor and wealthy in Christ? Do you identify with one more than the other?
- Who has the power to absolve people?

Internal

- In what ways have you been on the receiving end of either cheap, little or no grace?
- Which type of grace do you usually offer to others?
- How are you tempted to put yourself at the center of forgiveness?
- What is typically your motive behind forgiveness?

Horizontal

- Why is it important that forgiveness is not just about making ourselves feel better?
- What is your best explanation for why the world needs forgiveness?
- What would it look like to offer true forgiveness that understands costly grace?

Action Steps

- Reflect on how you are both poor and rich in Jesus. Thank God for His rescue of you from sin.
- If your forgiveness hasn't looked like true forgiveness in the past, consider how God is leading you toward true forgiveness as modeled/inspired by Him.
- Pray for those who have yet to receive and understand the abundance found in Jesus.
- Review and work through this week's additional resources: "Approaches to Forgiveness" exercise, and "A Study on Culture & Forgiveness."

Secular Approach to Forgiveness	Characteristics of this Approach	How the Gospel Challenges This Approach
Cheap Grace Approach	Cost of wrongdoing doesn't need to be acknowledged; anger is ignored/minimized; forgiveness is quickly embraced by victim to feel better; sin goes unchallenged	Grace is costly, because of the priceless nature of Jesus' sacrifice. Anger can reflect God's own heart for justice/righteousness. Forgiveness centers on Jesus, rather than ourselves. Sin is never to be tolerated/ignored.
Little Grace Approach	Forgiveness is seen as conditional and transactional; forgiveness can become means of control; victim seeks to wound perpetrator; justice is centered on the perspective of the victim	Forgiveness is never earned, but given as a gift. Jesus died because no other person could fully atone for the debt of sin. Forgiveness reflects God's love and seeks to restore wrongdoers.
No Grace Approach	Forgiveness is seen as unnecessary and unhealthy; forgiveness is refused so as not to "condone" injustice; revenge is normalized	Forgiveness is crucial due to the way it mirrors God's own reconciliation with us. Forgiveness never condones wrongdoing, but points to Jesus, who offered Himself so that we might receive grace.

For this next section, think about relationships/incidents in your own life where you have suffered at the hand of another. Which of the models above best fits your own approach to forgiveness in this scenario? For each, consider how the Gospel speaks to that situation.

Name of Person Who Wronged You	Write down your feelings, expectations, and motives toward this person	Which of the above approaches to forgiveness do you have?	How does the Gospel speak to this scenario?	How is God calling you to move forward?

A STUDY ON CULTURE AND FORGIVENESS:

1. Pick one area of culture to focus on, such as social media, politics, art, music, film, television, sports, education, business, etc. Choose an area you engage with regularly.
2. Spend time intentionally observing and reflecting on how forgiveness does or does not show up in that area of culture. You may want to take notes as you notice specific examples over the course of several days or weeks. Consider things like:
 - How are wrongs, conflicts, or offenses handled?
 - What kind of language is used to talk about forgiveness or lack of forgiveness (e.g. cancel culture)?
 - Who is encouraged or expected to forgive, and who is discouraged from forgiving?
 - What conditions are placed on forgiveness being granted?
 - What underlying values or worldviews shape the practice of forgiveness?
3. Based on your observations, reflect on what model(s) of forgiveness seem to predominate. Does it align more with *cheap grace*, *little grace*, *no grace*, OR does it reflect true, costly, Biblical forgiveness? Look for examples that fall into each category.
4. Consider more deeply who is harmed when forgiveness is not rightly understood and practiced in this area of culture. Does it breed bitterness, pride, isolation, inequality, revenge? How might it impact people's hearts and relationships? Who benefits from the status quo?
5. Make an effort to find examples of Biblical forgiveness being displayed, even in subtle ways, within this slice of culture. These examples, though rare, provide a counter-narrative. Reflect on what enables people to forgive Biblically in an unforgiving environment.
6. Ask yourself: based on what I've observed, how can I personally be a minister of reconciliation in this part of culture? How can I forgive others Biblically here, bear wrongs patiently, and point people to Christ's grace?
7. Pray for God to increase your humility, free you from bitterness, and empower you to extend grace. Pray for cultural influencers in this area to have a revelation of true forgiveness found in Jesus.
8. Journal your reflections from this study, including any specific action steps God is leading you to take (people to forgive, conversations to have, habits to change, etc.). Revisit your journal to remind yourself of what God is teaching you.
9. Repeat this practice occasionally with other areas of culture you engage in so you can continue growing in discernment and Biblical forgiveness. Be encouraged that even small acts of grace can have big ripple effects in an unforgiving world.

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