

FORGIVE

WEEK SEVEN:

Restoration of Community

This week's message on biblical forgiveness focuses on how forgiveness aims to restore community. God's forgiveness of us individually is meant to be reflected in our own relationships with other broken people. Scripture calls us to rebuke those who sin against us, but also to forgive endlessly. This combines confronting wrongs while being willing to reconcile when the other party is willing.

WEEK 7 VERSES:

Luke 17:3-4	Mark 11:25
Romans 3:10	Acts 7:60
Hebrews 10:4	Matthew 18:15
Hebrews 10:10	Matthew 5:38-42
Luke 22:19	Judges 15:3, 11, 7
Mark 11:25	Matthew 5:43-48
Luke 17:3-4	1 John 4:19

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

The Passover shows that all are guilty and substitution is the only way to satisfy justice and love—Jesus' death is that substitution for us. Mark 11 and Luke 17 give a nuanced view - we can forgive inwardly even without the offender's repentance, yet full reconciliation requires their repentance. These passages show how forgiveness entails an inward attitude and an outward action. Both are vital—inner forgiveness alone risks enabling harm, while outward forgiveness alone risks being transactional. Forgiveness promotes justice by confronting evil out of love, like Jesus' command to love our enemies. This distinct love reflects God's gracious love toward us. Restoring community requires learning to live in the grace we've received.

Vertical

- How does understanding our own forgiveness and acceptance by God empower us to forgive others, even enemies? What makes this so difficult at times?
- Why is it important that forgiveness is not just an individual, inner experience but also has a community/reconciliation aspect? What does this teach us about God's purposes?

Internal

- Why are both inward (attitudinal) forgiveness and outward forgiveness important?
- What aspects of broken community do you consider beyond forgiveness or repair? How does the Gospel challenge that view?

Horizontal

- What could it look like to forgive someone who hasn't repented or asked for forgiveness?
- When have you enabled harm by forgiving without confronting wrongdoing?
- What boundaries are still appropriate when forgiving someone who remains dangerous or unrepentant? How do we balance grace and truth?
- How can our group practice confronting sin graciously but truthfully?

Action Steps

- Spend time in prayer, thanking God for His extension of reconciliation through the Cross and ongoing restoration by the Holy Spirit.
- Consider who God is calling you to pursue reconciliation with.
- In cases where the other person has not repented, consider what consequences/boundaries are healthy.
- If possible, pray for your "enemies"—those who have wronged you. If you feel unable/unwilling to at this point, ask God to continue to soften your heart.
- Review and work through this week's additional resources: "How do you reconcile?", and "What to do when someone refuses reconciliation?"



MEDIATION REQUEST
This form is for those looking for relational assistance in the midst of conflict or working through reconciliation.

RESOURCE:

HOW DO WE RECONCILE?

We can look at Matthew 5 and Matthew 18 as two different approaches—Matthew 5 is what you do when you believe you have (or may have) wronged someone else, while Matthew 18 is what you do when you believe someone has wronged you. But it is also possible to look at these passages as giving us two stages of the normal reconciliation process, because seldom does just one party bear all the blame for a tattered relationship.

Almost always, reconciliation is best done by *both* repenting *and* forgiving—by both admitting your own wrong and pointing out the wrong of the other. If we put these two approaches together, we can create a practical outline like the one that follows.

When You Have Sinned Against Another (Matthew 5)

- Begin by confessing anything you may have done wrong.
- Begin with yourself. Even if you believe that your own behavior is no more than 5 percent of the problem, start with your 5 percent! Look for what you have done wrong, and collect the criticism.
- Start by listing whatever you think you have done wrong and by asking the other person to add to the list (of what he or she thinks you have done wrong or contributed to the breakdown in the relationship).
 - Example: “I’m here because I don’t like what has happened to our relationship (or—if the term applies —“our friendship”). It appears to me that there is a problem between us; am I wrong?” Or “Here is what I believe I have contributed to the problem—where I’ve wronged you and contributed to the relationship problem. From your perspective, how else have I wronged you or contributed to the relationship problem?”
- If you are almost totally “in the dark” about what went wrong, you may have to simply offer to listen.
 - Example: “It appears to me that there is trouble between us and I have offended you. Am I right? Please tell me specific ways I have wronged you. I am really ready to listen. Honest.”
- Listen well to the criticism you’ve invited—what is clear and specific? Eventually (to do so too quickly may seem defensive), ask for as many specific examples as possible.
 - Example: If they say, “You are bullying,” you need to discover what actual words or actions or tones of voice strike the other person as “bullying.”
- Pray silently, asking God to give you wisdom and to sense his love for you. Assume that He is speaking to you through this whole thing (even through a flawed person) and is showing you ways you should be more careful or change.
- Beware of being defensive. Don’t explain yourself too quickly, even if you have a good answer or can show the person he or she was mistaken. Be sure that you don’t interrupt or keep the person from expressing frustration. Show sympathy even if you were misunderstood.

Adapted from Tim Keller’s *Forgive*

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RESOURCE:

HOW DO WE RECONCILE? (CONTINUED)

- Always ask, “Is there anything else? I really want to know!” In stressful situations, it is easy for someone to hold back some of their complaints or concerns. Get them all out on the table or you will be doing this again!
- Make it safe to criticize you—support individual criticisms with, “That must have been hard; I see why you were concerned.” Look beneath the criticism for needs in the critic that may be there and with which you can be concerned.
- Respond to the criticism by repenting. Please, forgive me for _____. (This is your repentance, confession of sin.) Admit it without excuses and without blaming any other circumstances. Even if there are exaggerations, extract the real fault and confess it. Even if only 10 percent of the problem is you, admit it. Don’t just “apologize” but ask for forgiveness.
- Provide plans for changing your behavior. If you can think of something, say, “And here is what I am going to do to change so I will not do such a thing again in the future.” Ask him or her if there is anything you can do to restore trust. (If you really cannot see any validity in any of the criticism, ask if you can get back to the person later after checking with others about the criticism.)
- Avoid over-expressions of just “how terrible I feel over what I’ve done!” A confession like this can be a way to (a) relieve one of guilt feelings (the confession is a kind of atonement/punishment) or (b) get people to provide sympathy.
- On the other hand, avoid being deadpan, lighthearted, or even flip. These can be attempts to preserve pride, technically fulfill the requirement, or force the other person to let you off the hook without your showing any real contrition or emotional regret at all.
 - o Most of all, do not make a confession that is really an attack. “If I upset you, I am sorry” is in this category. It means, “If you were a normal person, you would not have been upset by what I did.” Do not repent to the person of something that you are not going to repent to God for nor take concrete steps to change.
 - » “Please, accept my explanation for _____.”
 - » “Here’s how I see it. Can you see that my motive or meaning was very different from what you inferred?”
 - » “Can you understand my point of view? Can you accept that I could have perceived this very differently and had the motives I am describing?”
 - » “Is there some way, since we see this issue so differently, that we can avoid hurting each other like this again?”

Real repentance has three aspects:

- confession to God
- confession to the person wronged
- the offering of a concrete plan for change that avoids the sin in the future (cf. Luke 3:7–14)

RESOURCE:

HOW DO WE RECONCILE? (CONTINUED)

When Another Has Sinned Against You (Matthew 18):

(If necessary) address any ways that the other person has wronged you. If you have done all of the above, very often you will find that this approach elicits a confession from the other person without your having to ask for it or extract it! This is far and away the best way to get reconciliation!

- Be clear and specific. If the other person is not forthcoming, begin: “From my point of view, when you _____, it made me feel/impacted me by _____. I think it would be far better for all concerned if instead you did this: _____.”
- Allow for explanation/clarity. “I am coming to ask you if my understanding is accurate or distorted. Correct me if I am wrong. Could you explain what happened?”
- If the other person offers an apology, grant forgiveness—but avoid using the term unless it is asked for! You can express a sentiment about letting go without using the phrase, “I forgive you”—that may sound humiliating. (Remember, God knows the state of forgiveness in your heart despite the words you use)
 - o Examples: “Well, I won’t hold this against you” or “Let’s put that in the past now” or “Think no more of it.”
- Have a loving and humble tone. Tone of voice is extremely important. Overly controlled and forced “nice” and calm may sound patronizing and be as infuriating as fury.
- Don’t resort to flattery and fawning syrupiness or fall into abusive or angry tones.
- Be aware of your body language and what it communicates to the other person.
- Attack the problem, not the person (e.g., not “You are so thoughtless” but “You have forgotten this after making repeated promises that you would not”).
- Suggest substitutes and solutions for alternative courses of action or behavior. Make sure all criticism is specific and constructive.
 - o Never say, “Don’t do this” without saying “Instead, do this.”

In the heart of the discussion, you may discover some underlying goal or need that the other person is trying to meet that could be met in more constructive ways. Keep in mind differences in culture. Another culture may consider your approach incredibly disrespectful and demeaning when you think you are being respectful.

RESOURCE:**WHAT TO DO, WHEN SOMEONE REFUSES RECONCILIATION*****If it is a person who does not share your Christian beliefs:***

Christians are commanded to seek peace and reconciliation with “everyone” (Hebrews 12:14; Romans 12:18), not just Christians. However, non-Christians may not feel the same responsibility to live in reconciled relationships. If that occurs, you must “take what you are given.” Romans 12:18ff. gives you a lot of good ideas about how to stay gracious, kind, open, and cordial to persons who still are being standoffish to you.

If it is a Christian from your church:

Matthew 18 indicates that if a person will not reconcile after repeated skillful efforts on your part, you should go to stage B—getting some other Christian friends (preferably who are respected by the other person) to go along with you to reconcile the relationship. If that does not work, at stage C you “tell it to the church” and ask the elders to speak to the person.

If it is a Christian from some other church:

If the person you are seeking reconciliation with is a Christian but from another region or another church, you should use the Matthew 18:15ff process as far as you can. However, if you are not both members of the same church, it may not be possible to go to the final step of “telling it to the church.” Again, you may have to “take what you are given” and live as cordially and as graciously as possible with someone who is not reconciled to you.

General advice:

Learn to accept the apologies/repentances you get without demanding that people admit more than they honestly believe. If they repent pretty much as extensively as you feel they should, then the relationship can be almost what it was before. If they go only halfway, then you are better off, though the relationship is weakened because you still don’t fully trust their wisdom and self-knowledge.

It is usually harder to forgive someone who will not admit any wrong and who stays haughty. Internal forgiveness may be a longer process. Use all the spiritual resources we have in our faith:

Look at God’s commands to forgive. This is our obligation.

- Remember God’s forgiveness of us. We have no right to be bitter.
- Remember that God’s omniscience is necessary to be a just judge. We have insufficient knowledge to know what others deserve.
- Remember that we are being defeated by evil when we allow the evil to keep us in bondage through bitterness! (Romans 12 tells us to “overcome” or defeat evil with forgiveness.)
- Remember that we undermine the glory of the gospel in the world’s eyes when we fail to forgive.

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