

Topical Lesson

Forgiveness – Seriously?

To the Teacher: Forgiveness is an issue every one of us, including our teens, face on almost a daily basis. The topic of forgiveness is clearly covered in scripture but learning how to put it into practice effectively is a whole different issue. We pray that through clearly separating the truth from the lies about forgiveness and by sharing some practical tools we may all be strengthened and encouraged to walk in forgiveness – seriously. (For more background listen to “Forgiveness” by Bob Hamp at freedom.gatewaypeople.com.)

Concept: Forgiveness

Objective/Goals:

- The students will grasp the need to forgive.
- The students will gain understanding of what forgiveness is and is not.
- The students will gain simple tools to help them forgive.
- The students will experience the process and healing power of forgiveness.

Plan Ahead:

- Covering this lesson in prayer is critical.
- Go through the process of forgiveness yourself so you can effectively lead.
- Make copies of the prayer handout and have helpers available for this activity.

Launch Out: Forgiveness – Seriously?

It seems like every time we hear the news, lately, someone has been killed – and often by a friend or a family member. As the trial takes place and family members are interviewed, we often hear one of two phrases as they talk about the perpetrator: “We have forgiven them.” Or “We will never be able to forgive them.”

What does forgiveness really mean? Is it even right to forgive someone who has done something like that? How could you possibly ever begin to forgive someone who has hurt you or a loved one? What does the Bible say?

In today’s lesson we are going to try to answer some of these questions. We will search and find out what the Bible says and discover a lot about forgiveness and how to do it.

Does anyone know The Lord’s Prayer? ... Do you remember the part about forgiveness?.. Let’s say it together: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” (Matthew 6:12)

Hmm... If I get that right, we are asking God to forgive us in the same way that we are supposed to forgive others. Now that is downright scary!... I want Him to totally forgive me of everything when I mess up; but I don't necessarily want to forgive people who have hurt me!... Maybe God didn't really mean it that way... Let's look at another scripture.

Matthew 6:14 says, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you."

Well, I guess that answers our question. There is no doubt that God wants and expects us to forgive anyone who has hurt us. That seems so terribly unfair! What if the other person isn't even sorry or keeps on doing the stuff that hurt us?

Let's look at this in several layers. That might help us understand.

First, there is God's layer. He sent Jesus to pay for all of our sins, so in God's eyes we are clean – forgiven. It is a work that is already done for me and for the person who hurt me.

So why do I have to forgive them?... Anger and bitterness result from unforgiveness and can actually cause damage to the cells in my brain and in my body. A lot of medical research has been done that documents this. The truth is – God knows that for me to be healed from the hurts, I have to let them go and give them to Him. Forgiveness is the only way. That is my layer – my part. But I can't even do that in my own strength.

Why is it so hard to forgive?... Perhaps it is because I am confused about what forgiveness is and what it is NOT. Let's look first at what it forgiveness is NOT.

Forgiveness is NOT:

- Denial – "Well, it wasn't that bad." (Truthfully, it really hurt me)
- Repression – "I'll just not think about it." (Actually, it remains in my heart and mind)
- Letting them off the hook – We are just putting them on God's hook. He is so much better at taking care of these things than we are.
- Forgetting – We may never forget what happened, but forgiveness brings healing and wisdom to our heart. It does not mean we have to be friends with that person or even trust them again.
- Being a Doormat – Letting them continue to hurt us. Because forgiveness gets rid of bitterness and anger, it brings healing to my our mind. The Lord will then show us healthy ways to respond and set boundaries.

Please understand that if you are in an abusive situation – bullying or abuse of any kind – reporting it and getting help is critical for your wellbeing. It is part of acting wisely and drawing healthy boundaries.

So, OK – Jesus paid the price; I don't have to like them or let them keep on hurting me; I just have to give it all to God. So how do I do that? I have tried to forgive before, but then I see the person and all sort of bitterness or hurt wells up inside of me. What did I do wrong?

Really, it may not be what we did wrong, but rather what we didn't do.

Teacher Introduces Main Scripture:

One of the keys to receiving healing through forgiveness is found in our scripture for today. You might say it is our third layer. The answer is found in 1 Peter 5:7 – “Cast all your cares on Him because He cares for you.”

We are going to walk through an example of how to do that, and then we are going to practice it in our small groups. By the way, today, our small groups are going to consist of you and God. (Distribute handouts)

Now, let's take a look at our handout. I am going to read through the prayer and give you examples of how you might fill in the blanks. Then you will have the opportunity to do the same – privately – just you and God.

Prayer: Lord, I choose to forgive Carrie (Cary) for making fun of me, for talking about me behind my back; for breaking her(his) promises to me and for using my research for her(his) history paper. But Lord, the things she(he) did really made me feel angry; betrayed; like a fool for trusting her(him) as my friend; it made me feel like I didn't count for anything; stupid; a sucker

Please take these things from me now and help me to see that you placed all those offenses on you (your) Son, Jesus, on the cross. Because of the work Jesus did, I can now forgive myself and others in His name and through His power. I release those negative thoughts and hurts and place them at your feet, Jesus. I forgive and bless those who have hurt me.

Thank you for cleansing me and healing me through the power of your Holy Spirit. I receive all your blessings for my life and give You all praise, honor and glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Small Group Activity

Remember, someone does not have to apologize for us to forgive them. Forgiveness is really about our heart and our healing, not about the person who hurt us. God will take care of the rest.

Does anyone have any questions?... (Answer as you are able. If possible – let the students spread out some.) OK, let's go to a quiet place in our mind and I will pray as we begin this activity.

As we pray you might see a face or remember what someone did. All of us have more than one person we need to forgive, but today we are going to teach you the process. Then, as the days go by, you can continue this journey of forgiveness with others as the Holy Spirit reminds you of them. Remember, we are silent. This time is just between you and God.

Pray: Lord, I ask that by the power of your Holy Spirit you would reveal to each of us someone you would like for us to forgive today. Lord, help us to be specific and to cast our cares on you. In Jesus' name I pray.

To the teacher:

Please observe the students and give them adequate time to work through this. Have helpers available to pray with anyone having an emotionally difficult time.

Looking forward:

Thank you for being honest and real with God today. He really does want us to come to Him with our thoughts and feelings as well as our pain.

- After going through this ministry time, does anyone have any questions?...
- Without being too specific, would anyone be willing to share what God did for them through this time?...

Take Away:

Please remember that while the act of forgiveness takes only a few minutes, the healing of our heart may take a little longer. Be patient and keep laying your hurt at Jesus' feet. Healing beyond your wildest imagination will come if you trust Him.

Going Forward:

Keep asking the Holy Spirit this next week to show you people you need to forgive and then, again, go through the prayer on your handout. Be ready to be surprised, but be willing to listen to His voice.

Teacher Summary:

Today we have discovered that the Lord - wants us to forgive - for OUR sake – so that we can be healed in our heart and our mind. Forgiveness is not just a word, but a process. If we don't partner with the Lord, it is impossible to truly forgive. If we don't place our hurts at His feet, our hearts may never heal. The handout takes us through the complete process.

Teacher ends with prayer: Lord, Jesus, this whole lesson has me thinking very differently about forgiveness. I confess that I have held anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness in my heart. I realize now that I had no right to do that. You paid a high price that all of us might be forgiven. Help me, but by the power of Your Holy Spirit that dwells in me, to obey and walk in forgiveness each and every day – seriously. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Handout

Prayer of Forgiveness

(tab over "Lord" to line up paragraph)

Lord, I choose to forgive _____ for
_____. But Lord, the

things she (he) did really made (make) me feel

Please take these things from me now and help me to see that you placed all those offenses on you (your) Son, Jesus, on the cross. Because of the work Jesus did, I can now forgive myself and others in His name and through His power. I release those negative thoughts and hurts and place them at your feet, Jesus. I forgive and bless those who have hurt me.

Thank you for cleansing me and healing me through the power of your Holy Spirit. I receive all your blessings for my life and give You all praise, honor and glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.