

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY SESSION 4: GRACE & FORGIVENESS

MEETING TIME

Please use these pages for notes and to record your thoughts

FOLLOW-UP HOMEWORK

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S ASSIGNMENT

LESSON PART 1

1 John 1:8-10 (NIV)

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

7:30 PM (10 MINUTES) IN-CLASS EXPERIENCE

7:40 PM (10 MINUTES) LESSON PART 2

Matthew 18:23-35 (NIV)

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

“The servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

“But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denari. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’

“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened.

“Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

7:50 PM (10 MINUTES) REFORMED PERSPECTIVE

8:00 PM (5 MINUTES) ASSIGN HOMEWORK

HOMEWORK SESSION 3: GRACE & FORGIVENESS

FORGIVENESS VS BITTERNESS WORKSHEET

The homework for this week is to find a time when you can get alone and work through the worksheet “Forgiveness vs. Bitterness.” You should plan on this taking at least an hour. This worksheet is from Neal Anderson’s *Steps to Freedom*, and is the third step in his process. The worksheet is pretty self-explanatory and does a good job of describing the nuts and bolts of forgiveness. If you find that this activity is too difficult for you, or if it brings up issues that you need help dealing with, please don’t hesitate to call me. This can be a very difficult activity for some—especially for those who have been hurt badly. They may need to do some counseling to work through the process of forgiving and letting go of the hurt. Feel free to refer anyone who contacts you to the pastor for further follow up and care.

CONTINUE TO READ AND STUDY SCRIPTURE

As a reminder, here was the assignment from the first week. We will continue with this study practice throughout the 40 day experience.

- Choose a book of the Bible that you would like to study and that you would enjoy continuing after the 40 day experience
- Study that book at least 15 minutes every day:
- Start with the first logical unit (certainly less than a chapter—maybe only a few verses)
- Fill out a Bible Study sheet completely for that unit before moving on to the next. You may stay several days on that one unit. It's not how much you read, but how much what you read becomes a part of you.

Move to the next logical unit and repeat

CONNECT WITH ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER

- Pray for your accountability partner this week
- Contact you accountability partner about half way through the week
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ADMINISTRATION

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{ Step 3: Bitterness vs Forgiveness }

We need to forgive others so that Satan cannot take advantage of us (2 Cor. 2:10, 11). We are to be merciful just as our heavenly Father is merciful (Luke 6:36). We are to forgive as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:31,32). Ask God to bring to mind the names of those people you need to forgive by expressing the following prayer aloud:

Dear Heavenly Father. I thank You for the riches of Your kindness, forbearance, and patience knowing that Your kindness has led me to repentance (Rom. 2:4). I confess that I have not extended that same patience and kindness toward others who have offended me, but instead I have harbored bitterness and resentment. I pray that during this time of self-examination You would bring to my mind those people that I have not forgiven in order that I may do so (Mat. 18:35). I ask this in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

As names come to mind, make a list of only the names.

At the end of your list, write "myself." Forgiving yourself is accepting God's cleansing and forgiveness. Also, write "thoughts against God." Thoughts raised up against the knowledge of God will usually result in angry feelings toward Him. Technically we don't *forgive* God, because He cannot commit any sin of commission or omission. But you need to specifically renounce false expectations and thoughts about God and agree to release any anger you have toward Him.

Before you pray to forgive those people, stop and consider what forgiveness is and what it is not, what decision you will be making, and what the consequences will be.

In the following explanation, the main points are in bold print:

Forgiveness is not forgetting. People who try to forget find they cannot. God says, He will remember our sins "no more" (Heb. 10:17), but God, being omniscient, cannot forget. Remember our sins "no more" means that God will never use the past against us (Ps. 103:12). Forgetting may be the result of forgiveness, but it is never the means of forgiveness. When we bring up the past against others, we are saying we haven't forgiven them.

Forgiveness is a choice, a crisis of the will. **Since God requires us to forgive, it is something we can do.** But forgiveness is difficult for us because it pulls against our concept of justice. We want revenge for offenses suffered. But we are told never to take our own revenge (Rom. 12:19). You say, "Why should I let them off the hook?" That is precisely the problem. You are still hooked to them, still bound by your past. **You will let them off your hook, but they are never off God's.** He will deal with them fairly, something we cannot do.

You say, "You don't understand how much this person hurt me!" But don't you see, they are still hurting you! How do you stop the pain? **You don't forgive someone for their sake; you do it for your sake, so you can be free. Your need to forgive isn't an issue between you and the offender; it's between you and God.**

Forgiveness is agreeing to live with the consequences of another person's sin. Forgiveness is costly. You pay the price of the evil you forgive. **You're going to live with those consequences whether you want to or not; your only choice is whether you will do so in the bitterness of unforgiveness or the freedom of forgiveness.** Jesus took the consequences of your sin upon Himself. All true forgiveness is substitutionary, because no one really forgives without bearing the consequences of the other person's sin. God the Father "made Him who knew no sin to be

sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). Where is the justice? It's the cross that makes forgiveness legally and morally right: "For the death that He died, He died to sin, once for all" (Rom. 6:10).

How do you forgive from your heart? You acknowledge the hurt and the hate. If your forgiveness doesn't visit the emotional core of your life, it will be incomplete. Many feel the pain of interpersonal offenses, but they won't or don't know how to acknowledge it. Let God bring the pain to the surface so He can deal with it. This is where the healing takes place.

Decide that you will bear the burden of their offenses by not using that information against them in the future. This doesn't mean that you must tolerate sin; you must always take a stand against sin.

Don't wait to forgive until you feel like forgiving; you will never get there. Feelings take time to heal after the choice to forgive is made and Satan has lost his place (Eph. 4:26,27). **Freedom is what will be gained, not a feeling.**

As you pray, God may bring to mind offending people and experiences you have totally forgotten. Let Him do it even if it is painful. Remember, you are doing this for your sake. God wants you to be free. Don't rationalize or explain the offender's behavior. Forgiveness is dealing with your pain and leaving the other person to God. Positive feelings will follow in time; freeing yourself from the past is the critical issue right now.

Don't say, "Lord, please help me to forgive," because He is already helping you. Don't say, "Lord, I want to forgive," because you are bypassing the hard-core choice to forgive which is your responsibility. Stay with each individual until you are sure you have dealt with all the remembered pain -- what they did, how they hurt you, how they made you feel (rejected, unloved, unworthy, dirty, etc.)

You are now ready to forgive the people on your list so that you can be free in Christ, with those people no longer having any control over you. For each person on your list, pray aloud:

Lord, I forgive (name) for (specifically identify all offenses and painful memories or feelings).

DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY SESSION 4: GRACE & FORGIVENESS

OVERVIEW

This week's meeting will look at one of the results of Christ's work on the Cross: forgiveness for our sins. We want participants to understand that our sins are forgiven completely, and since our sins have been so freely forgiven we ought to forgive those who have sinned against us. The In-Class Activity will help the participants experience the reality of their sins being forgiven. The homework will give participants an opportunity to consider who they might need to forgive.

PREPARING FOR THIS WEEK'S SESSION

It will be important to pray for the participants—it is likely that this week will be a very meaningful week, as well. It might also be a difficult week for some. It is not unusual for people to feel that their sins are so big that they can't be forgiven. In addition, the section on forgiving others may bring up very significant past hurts. So, pray for the participants.

Of course, go through the lesson and become familiar with it. You might also begin praying for yourself, that God would open your eyes to your own need for grace, mercy, and forgiveness and remind you of those whom you need to forgive.

Contact the participants to encourage them to persevere.

SUPPLIES NEEDED FOR THE MEETING

- Pens or pencils and sheets of paper for the In-Class Activity
- Paper shredder (ideally one that not only shreds the paper into long strips (that could be taped back together) but cross cuts them into smaller pieces)
- Name Tags
- Participant Guides
- Bible Study sheets (several will be included in the Participant Guides, but you will need extras for those who will need more than 4 for the coming week.
- Signup Sheets (to pass around in case not all slots are filled, and to remind those who have signed up of their assignment for next week.)

MEETING TIME

7:00 PM (10 MINUTES) WELCOME AND GATHERING

- Name Tags
- Focus Activity
- Prayer

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Welcome! We are now half way through this 40 day experience. How are things going? Is there anything that stands out? Allow several to answer.

Are there things that you were hoping might happen, or that you hoped would be addressed, but haven't been so far? Is there an area of your spiritual life in which you would really like to see more growth? Again, allow several to answer then segue into the prayer.

PRAYER

Last week we spent time thanking God for what he has already accomplished during this time. Tonight we want to start our meeting by asking God to accomplish even more. I'm going to give you some time to be in silent prayer. I'd like you to close your eyes and hold your palms up, signifying that you are willing to accept God's provision and direction. Psalm 139:23-24 says, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." So right now we are going to open ourselves up to God and ask him to search us and to begin to work in us in order to make us into the people that he wants us to be. Let's pray. Give several minutes for the participants to pray silently. None of us like silence, so the temptation will be to go on quickly—but take time to allow God to work. When enough time has passed pray that God will accomplish his will in our lives.

7:10 PM (15 MINUTES) FOLLOW-UP HOMEWORK

- Review Assignment
- Discussion Questions

REVIEW LAST WEEK'S ASSIGNMENT

Last week you were asked to find a piece of art (a painting, poem, etc.) that depicted the crucifixion and the events leading up to it. You were to find one that portrayed an aspect of the cross that you really connected with or found especially meaningful. Tonight you will share the piece of artwork that you found and explain why you found this depiction especially meaningful.

QUESTION FOR FOLLOW-UP

Allow each participant enough time to share their piece of art and explain it. Be careful not to be critical of (or make fun of) any of the artwork. Do keep folks on task so that everyone gets an opportunity to share.

7:25 PM (5 MINUTES) LESSON PART 1

As we learned last week, and as we see from the artwork that was presented tonight, God accomplished quite a bit through Christ's death on the cross. If it fits, you might make mention of some of the artwork and comments that were shared. Tonight we want to focus on four of the images that we looked at last week:

1. Jesus took the punishment that we deserved
2. Jesus redeemed us and paid the ransom to free us from sin
3. Jesus, the lamb of God, cleanses us from sin
4. Jesus' death reconciled us to God

Why do you think God did all of this for us? Give time for people to answer. Some of the answers might be:

- His great love for us
- His mercy
- He desires to have a relationship with us
- He couldn't let our sin go unpunished

Read the list of images above (1-4) again. I am thinking of one thing that is common to all four, can anyone guess what that is? (Hopefully someone will say "sin.") Each one deals with a different aspect of our sin: 1) our sin deserves to be punished and Jesus took that punishment, 2) because we sin we have become a slave to it and Jesus paid the ransom to free us from that sin, 3) our sin has made us "unclean" or "unholy" but Jesus on the cross cleans us from the stain of sin, and finally, 4) our sin separates us from God, but Jesus' death reconciled us to Him. Sometimes people talk about this as "the sin problem." God through Jesus took care of the sin problem by offering us forgiveness. How would you define "forgiveness?" Give opportunities for people to answer. Affirm each attempt at defining it. After several people have given definitions, continue. Webster's online dictionary defines it this way:

1 a : to give up resentment of or claim to requital (compensation or retaliation) for <forgive an insult> **b** : to grant relief from payment of <forgive a debt>

2 : to cease to feel resentment against (an offender) : [pardon](#) <forgive one's enemies>

If you look up "pardon" you find that it is defined as:

2 : the excusing of an offense without exacting a penalty

Do you see some similarities between these definitions and the four images from the cross? It was on the cross that God made forgiveness for our sins possible. But do we have a part to play? To answer that let's look at a section from a letter written to the early church by one of its leaders. Have someone read the scripture.

1 John 1:8-10 (NIV)

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.

(The following questions should go quite quickly) **So, according to this scripture, do we have a sin problem? Do we sin?** Allow the group to respond—hopefully people will recognize that we do.

And what is our part? What are we to do? (We are to acknowledge our sin, confess it.)

What do you think it means to “confess our sins?” (Be honest with God about it, agree with him that it is sin, and ask for his forgiveness.)

How often should we do this? Once a month? Once a week? (Whenever we recognize that there is sin we have not acknowledged.)

And what is God’s response? (He forgives us.) Always? (Yes.) According to this scripture are there any exceptions or sins too big for God? (No.)

7:30 PM (10 MINUTES) IN-CLASS EXPERIENCE

Pass around blank sheets of paper and pens or pencils. **Tonight we are going to do a little activity to remind us how large is our sin, and how enormous is God’s forgiveness. What I would like you to do is to take a few minutes to write down some of your sins, past and present. You had better stick to the large ones; we don’t have time for all the little ones, too.** (That’s a joke; make sure they understand that :^) **No one will see your list, so be honest. If you are afraid that someone might be able to see your list, use code—you and God will know what it means. The main thing is to do an inventory, to acknowledge your sins. As you make the list, ask God to forgive you and cleanse you of that sin.** Give them about 5 minutes to complete the list. Warn them when there is just 1 minute left.

Call the group together and bring out the paper shredder. **Here’s what we are going to do. Each of us will fold our list in half and then shred our list of sins. This shredder not only cuts the paper into strips, but cross cuts those strips so that there is no way to reconstruct your sheet. When the list is shredded we, as a group will say, “(the person’s name), your sins have been forgiven.”** Allow everyone to shred their list and each time lead the group in saying that their sins have been forgiven.

Is there anyone who would like to comment, or share their experience of this activity? If there is anyone, allow them to share.

7:40 PM (10 MINUTES) LESSON PART 2

One time Peter asked Jesus, “How often should I forgive my brother?” In response Jesus told this parable.

Matthew 18:23-35 (NIV)

“Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

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“This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.”

Each of us has people who have wronged us. Perhaps they have belittled us, or have been mean to us. Maybe they have continued to harass us over a period of years. Or maybe they stole from us—caused us financial harm. Maybe they caused us to lose our job. We have just gone through an in-class experience where we were able to recognize how much we have been forgiven. In light of that recognition, what should we do about those who have hurt us physically and emotionally? Allow people to answer each of the questions, spending most of the time on “Why is it hard to forgive?” We will not try to give a response, or even help people see that they need to forgive. That will take place in the homework. We want people to have addressed the topic and to be thinking about it in the upcoming days.

Is that easy to do?

As Christians, do we have a choice about whether or not we forgive others?

Why is it so hard to forgive?

When the time is up for this section, mention that some of the issues that were brought up will be picked back up in the homework.

7:50 PM (10 MINUTES) REFORMED PERSPECTIVE

Invite the person who has prepared tonight’s reformed perspective to present what they have found

8:00 PM (5 MINUTES) ASSIGN HOMEWORK

- Worksheet “Forgiveness vs. Bitterness”
- Continue to read and study Scripture
- Connect with accountability partner

HOMework SESSION 3: GRACE & FORGIVENESS

FORGIVENESS VS BITTERNESS WORKSHEET

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CONNECT WITH ACCOUNTABILITY PARTNER

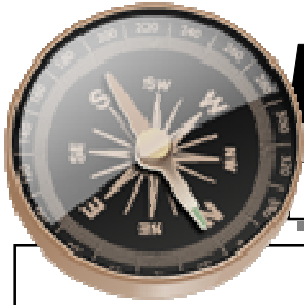
- Pray for your accountability partner this week
- Contact your accountability partner about half way through the week
- Ask how their daily Bible reading is going and share your experience with it
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8:05 PM (10 MINUTES) ADMINISTRATION

Remind those who have signed up of their assignments for next week. Give the location and have the host give simple directions. If there are still spots to be filled on any of the sign-up sheets, pass them around again.

Make any adjustments needed in the accountability partners that may occur if someone new has come or someone has dropped out of the experience.

8:15 PM (10 MINUTES) BREAK/REFRESHMENTS



Awesome Bible Study

Scripture Passage:

CAST *List the characters. Are they speaking parts or extras? Do they just watch or participate in the action?*

Hint: Imagine yourself directing this in a movie. What are the facial expressions of the actors? What would the actors look like? Who would you choose to play the main character? How many extras would you have to hire?

SETTING *Where does the action take place? What specific clues are you given about the setting?*

Hint: If you are the director where would you find a suitable location for the scene? What would it look like?

TIME *What time of day is it? What day of the week? Time of the year? Period in history?*

ACTION *Summarize what happens in the passage.*

Hint: Use short sentences. Summarize. Try to just get the main idea and movement of the passage.

STRUCTURE *Is there anything about the way the passage is laid out, or the story is told that is unusual or gives us clues to its meaning? What is the literary context?*

Hint: Look at the summary that you just wrote. Is there any pattern in the subjects or words used? Is there a theme or thought that runs through the whole passage? Is there something that all the characters know about but is not stated?

OTHER OBSERVATIONS *What other things do you notice?*

QUESTIONS *What questions does the passage raise in your mind? Can you find out the answer to any of them? Are there questions about history or culture that if they were answered, you might be able to understand the passage better?*

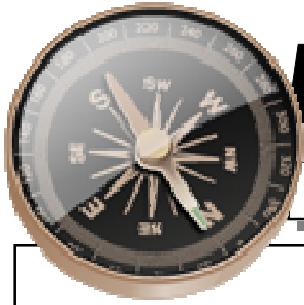
Hint: Now is the time to look in Bible dictionaries, atlases, commentaries, etc.

KERNEL STATEMENT *In one or two sentences write down the main message that the passage is meant to communicate.*

Hint: Try to write this from the perspective of the one writing the passage.

APPLICATION *How can I apply this to my own life today?*

Hint: Possibly write it in prayer form asking God to make this true in your life.



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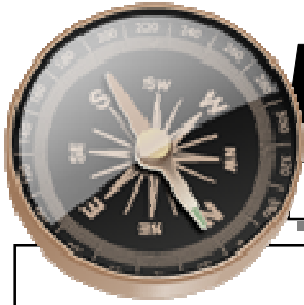
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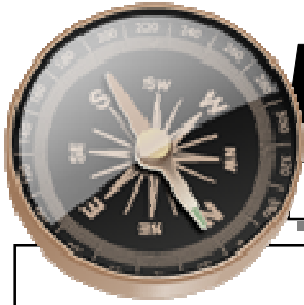
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