

BIG IDEA

As we forgive, we are forgiven.

WHAT DOES GOD WANT ME TO KNOW?

Think of a time when you were forgiven and didn't deserve it. How did it make you feel?

Spend the first 10-15 minutes of your Life Group discussion searching the Bible for scriptures about forgiveness. How many did you find?

Encourage your group members to use whatever resources they have for this activity. Some will know how to use the concordance in the back of their Bibles, others will have access to look-up features in their Bible app. Others may use an internet search engine like Google to see what they can find. Of course, notes taken from the message this week will be a huge help as well.

Have each member of your group read *at least* one passage. What themes or patterns are you noticing?

Throughout the entire Bible, God is consistently seen as a forgiving God who is willing to have mercy on Israel (and us) after egregious sin. New Testament passages highlight not only God's willingness to forgive us, but his desire for us to be forgiving to others.

Revisit the main passage from this week's message, **Matthew 18:23-34**. Why might Jesus have told *this* story to teach his followers about forgiveness?

Jesus was a master story-teller, and his parables were always compelling and meaningful. The listeners would have been shocked to hear that the servant who was forgiven such a great debt turned around and refused to forgive his debtor. Jesus told us this story so that we could see how shocking it is when his followers refuse to forgive others and how seriously the Father takes forgiveness.

WHAT IS MY INITIAL REACTION?

If God only forgave you to the extent that you forgive others, what debts would you still owe to him? Is this a trade-off you are willing to make?





LIFE GROUPS

SERMON COMPANION

What are the perceived benefits of unforgiveness? Why do we choose unforgiveness despite the clear command from Jesus to be merciful and forgiving people?

One reason why many people choose unforgiveness (over forgiveness and its benefits) is because of the perceived power that unforgiveness gives us:

- The power to hold something over another's head. We can now use the other person's failures and weakness to manipulate them.
- A sense of superiority over the other person. This "benefit" fuels self-righteousness, judgment and a false sense of holiness. We feel that we are somehow better than the person who hurt us.
- A weapon. Withholding forgiveness is just like carrying around a loaded gun. This weapon is triggered by emotions like anger, jealousy and resentment and looks for opportunities to remind the other person of all they have done wrong.
- Puts us in God's position. Anytime that we decide it is our job to judge and carry out punishment for the sins of others we are assuming God's position as Lord and Judge.

Ultimately, this kind of relationship debt is destructive and hurtful to all involved.

Please note: Forgiveness is challenging for everyone, but it will be even more painful for those who have been subjected to abuse. The point of this discussion is not to guilt or shame anyone into "forgiving" someone. Instead, we pray that you will lead each group member to take their next step toward becoming a more forgiving person, whatever that looks like.

Do you trust God to deal appropriately with the people who have hurt you? Would you be upset if God showed them mercy?

WHAT AM I GOING TO DO?

Spend the last portion of your Life Group discussion talking about **The Process of Forgiveness** and **How Can You Tell You Have Forgiven?** resources on page 2 and 3 of this Sermon Companion.

Keep this question in mind as you talk: *What is your refusal to forgive others costing you?*

Note: These resources are tools that you can use over and over again. Keep them handy so you can refer to them in the future when you need to practice forgiveness.





Once the group is familiar with both resources, spend five minutes reflecting. Ask everyone to make a list of the people or offenses that come to mind (areas where forgiveness is needed). Then, challenge your group members to work through the forgiveness process for one person or offense this week on their own time.

THE PROCESS OF FORGIVENESS

1. *Recognize and admit that an offense occurred or that a person sinned against you.*
2. *Clearly describe to yourself the actual offense or sin committed. Write it out.*
3. *What am I forgiving this person for?*
4. *List the effects on your life because of the person's sin against you.*
5. *Recognize that you have feelings about the sin that was committed against you. Embrace those feelings.*
6. *Acknowledge the full extent of the anger, hurt, both towards you and towards the other person.*
7. *Share the feelings with appropriate others. Grieve the anger, loss and hurt connected to the offense or sin against you.*
8. *Forgive the person.*
9. *Make a decision about what kind of a relationship, if any, you can have with the person.*





HOW CAN YOU TELL YOU HAVE FORGIVEN?

Answer the following questions:

1. Have I stopped secretly hoping they get what they deserve?
2. Have I quit talking about them to others?
3. Have I quit replaying my revenge?
4. Have I stopped frequently thinking about them and what they did?
5. Am I glad when something good happens to them?
6. Am I more open and trusting toward people?
7. Am I less angry, depressed, or resentful?
8. Have I quit blaming them for how my life has been?
9. Do I feel sorry when something bad happens to them?
10. Do I feel more comfortable with my feelings?

If you answered “NO” to two or more of these questions, it is likely that there is still some forgiveness work to be done.

At the close of your Life Group time, remind your group that you are here to support them. Make note of anyone who had difficulties with this discussion and commit to checking in with them personally before your next meeting.

