

Week Five

Sending out the Invitations

Day One

When Life Hurts

Day Two

Unavoidable Truth

Day Three

What Forgiveness Isn't

Day Four

Don't Throw Mud If You're Wearing White!

Day Five

Stinky Feet

This Week's Key Verse:

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. Genesis 50:20 NAS



My Reflection in His Eyes

Day One ~ When Life Hurts

*As for you, you meant evil
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Weddings can bring out the best and worst in people. They are graced with beauty but often also laced with tension. In our day to day living we will find people who are everything from delightful to difficult and everything in between. Sometimes the wounds inflicted by others begin to feel as if they define who we are. Christ's example of forgiveness is our key to freedom. Like a bride sends out wedding invitations, forgiveness is our way was of sending out invitations to celebrate the Lord's love in our lives.

Take a moment and think about the individuals in your life. Do you act like a gracious princess in your relationships or a "bridezilla"?

One story in Scripture seems to most strikingly capture the difficulties in relationships and the path to overcome them. Read Genesis Chapter 37.

How old was Joseph when he had the first dream? _____

What might Jacob have done to stir up some of the sibling rivalry?

What was the first thing Joseph did that might have set his older brothers off?

Week Five - Sending Out the Invitations

How did the brothers respond to Joseph?

What happened to Joseph in the end?

The story goes on to tell us that Joseph remained a devout follower of God and that the Lord blessed him in everything he did. Through unfair imprisonment, slavery and trials this young man's faith was proved. Eventually, thirteen years later, he was elevated to a political station nearly equal to that of Pharaoh! God gave him foresight through the interpretation of a dream to understand that a drought was coming and how to prepare for it. All the nations came to Egypt after their food had run out, including Joseph's brothers. In an intensely emotional encounter Joseph's forgiveness is put to the test. God's love wins out. The family is reunited. God was allowed to move freely in Joseph's circumstance and through it used Joseph to save many people and his own family. Read Genesis 50:17-21.

How did Joseph respond to his brothers?

What adjectives are used to describe Joseph's emotional response and interaction with his brothers?

My Reflection in His Eyes

The woman who discipled me wisely said that when hurtful words or circumstances come you have two choices. You can get angry and hard and be useless to God and yourself until you are broken. Or, you can break when it hurts and let God heal you. As my dad would say, “You can take the hard way or the easy way.” Usually the “easy” way isn’t initially easy, but in the end, it proves to be the better route.

Joseph chose to let God have his life and do whatever He wished through whatever He saw fit. Look over your life. Those painful places—have you let God have them to do whatever He wants with them? Spend some moments in prayer and journal your heart to God.

My Reflection in His Eyes

Day Two ~ Unavoidable Truth

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Yesterday we looked into the life of a man who surrendered his entire life, including the places of his greatest pain, to God. Forgiveness is the key to unlocking God's power in every area of your life. Today we will take a survey of what the rest of God's Word has to say about this forgiveness issue. Read and paraphrase the following verses:

Matthew 6:12

Matthew 6:14-15

Luke 17:3-4

Read Matthew 18:21-35. Circle every word that denotes forgiveness or mercy in one color and then all the words pertaining to debt in another.

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times

Week Five - Sending Out The Invitations

seven. For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. When he had begun to settle them one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made. So the slave fell to the ground and prostrated himself before him, saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you everything." And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt. But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him saying, "Pay back what you owe." So his fellow slave fell to the ground and began to plead with him, saying, "Have patience with me and I will repay you." But he was unwilling and went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed. So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved and came and reported to their lord all that had happened. Then summoning him, his lord said to him, "You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, in the same way that I had mercy on you?" And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him. My heavenly Father will also do the same to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart." (NIV)

Jesus told this parable at a time when there were more slaves than freemen in the Roman Empire. We might not be slaves, but we can certainly relate.

How much did the slave owe his master? _____

How much did the one slave owe the other? _____

A talent was a value of money. According to Barnes Notes, one talent was equivalent to about three thousand shekels and one shekel was worth about fifty cents. Now the one slave owed the other one hundred denarii. The denarius (singular form of denarii) was a common coin that, according to Barnes' studies, would be equal to about fifteen cents. So the one slave owed about fifteen dollars, compared to the debt to the master of about \$15,000,000!⁴ Now there's a picture for ya!

My Reflection in His Eyes

If I were to take an honest account of all my sins and count up the debt, I am afraid there would be no end to it. When I get stuck on the offenses of those around me it is like choking that person and throwing her/him into prison (or wanting to) for a fifteen dollar favor. When you owe that much and have been released of the debt, you ought to be able to cast a little grace in another's direction.

Personal Example: Share about a time someone forgave you.

Read and write a personal application for the following verses:
Ephesians 4:32

Colossians 3:13

James 2:13

My Reflection in His Eyes

Day Three ~ What Forgiveness Isn't

*As for you, you meant evil
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The path to forgiveness is often windy and long. Sometimes you think you are all done forgiving the person and then you find yourself transported back to some place along the path you had long ago considered done. When this has happened to me I have begun to wonder if I had ever forgiven them. Then the doubt begins to creep in and suggest that perhaps I will never get past this. Ever happened to you? Well its not true! Today is a new day. If that old offense rears its ugly head, forgive it anew. What was done yesterday was done. Do today what is right! Laundry, dishes and homework might need daily attention, but that doesn't discount what was done previously. Can you imagine what your history teacher would have said if you told him that you did homework last week and figured you wouldn't have to do it again, got discouraged with the daily-ness of it all and threw in the towel? If I did dishes

like that we'd soon run out of plates and forks! So too with forgiveness.

So while we can readily see that we need to forgive and forgive often, what exactly does it mean to forgive? Let's look at what it isn't first.

1. Forgiveness is not sweeping it under the rug! Read and paraphrase the following verses:

Ephesians 4:15

Romans 12:9

Week Five-Sending Out The Invitations

So we are to love in truth and sweeping it under the rug equals denial—which is not living and loving in truth!

2. Forgiveness is not making excuses

Read and paraphrase Luke 17:3

According to God's Word, what are you to do when someone does something wrong?

Proverbs 27:5

James 5:19-20

How might confrontation actually be more of a covering than making excuses?

3. Forgiveness is not allowing the person to continue the same hurt in an unhealthy sort of relationship.

Read and paraphrase 2 Timothy 4:14-15

My Reflection in His Eyes

This is an example of a relationship boundary. We put fences around our homes so that we can live together peacefully in a community. Relationships need boundaries so we can live peacefully together as well. Fences can be short, white picket fences, they don't have to be ten foot thick castle walls. We can have balance in our boundaries.

Read and paraphrase John 2:24-25

Even Jesus, whose love knew no bounds, did not open Himself to hurt anymore than what was necessary to love. As You consider what forgiveness is not and that it is still a requirement for those of us who have obtained from Jesus, pray through the Scripture prayers asking God to give you His perfect perspective on forgiveness and how He wants to work it into your life.

My Reflection in His Eyes

Day Four ~ Don't Throw Mud When You're Wearing White

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This week we have studied the life of a man who suffered the wounds of brotherly betrayal and how he opened his life to God's shaping and freeing hand. We also looked at the requirement for forgiveness. The rest of this week we will look at what forgiveness is and isn't. Sometimes we try to make forgiveness something it isn't and then we wonder why our relationships aren't working as we had hoped. For instance, forgiveness and reconciliation are two separate things. I can forgive my friend without saying a word to her, but reconciliation is a whole different subject.

So what is forgiveness like?

Let's look at a Scriptural example of Christ's forgiveness for us:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. Romans 8:1-2 (NAS)

When you forgive someone you no longer identify them with their offense and you do not obligate them to make up for it. What this really does is free up your personal growth so you aren't waiting on people to make up for things they may never acknowledge.

So if we are to cancel the debts we have against one another, how in the world do we accomplish the monumental task?

Condemnation: katakrima (kat-ak'-ree-mah); To pronounce guilty and punish ¹
Free: eleutheroo (el-yoo-ther-o'-o); to liberate, to exempt (from moral, ceremonial or mortal liability)¹

1. Forgiveness is about **Remembering!**

Week Five - Sending Out The Invitations

Read and personalize the following verses:

Ephesians 4:32

1 John 1:9-10

Ecclesiastes 7:21-22

Based on these verses, what should you remember in order to forgive?

Often, victory in the Christian life is about recognizing the two choices in front of you and grabbing God's grace to make the better choice. Here, it is the choice to remember the other's offense or your own. We usually don't prefer to recall our own, but a good stern acknowledgement to yourself that you aren't perfect and need just as much grace as that other person is the first step to freeing yourself up from those heavy chains of unforgiveness.

I was complaining to my husband about a few someones in my life. Women I loved dearly, but I was just having such a hard time with some of the things they were doing. And he so sweetly looked at me and said, "I bet you're perfectly easy

My Reflection in His Eyes

to get along with for them too, huh?” Of course I know I can be difficult and a lot to handle! I just wasn’t thinking about all that at the moment!

Personal Example: Think about a time that you needed just as much grace as someone else, but couldn’t see it at first.

2. Forgiveness is about **Recognizing**

In the first three week’s lessons we studied how God sees us. This last half of the study is about applying that truth to our daily living. When I fully grasp who I am in Christ I am no longer defined by the wounds that have been inflicted on me. When I am lost in His love instead of my pain I can find enough grace and forgiveness to let go of the hurt. When I can see myself as a chosen, royal princess, a crown for the King of Kings, that high and lofty place sets me above any offense. Forgiveness is about recognizing that I am who He says I am.

Read and personalize Zechariah 2:8

The phrase “apple of my eye” refers to an object of affection. But it also means that, in this case you, are held so close to the Father that your image is reflected in His eyes. Recognize that this is your place, sister. Forgiveness comes much easier when you are held in His love. The next part of this verse also brings us to the next point.

Week Five-Sending Out The Invitations

3. Forgiveness is about **Resting**.

Rest in God's judgment.

Read and paraphrase Romans 12:19-21.

God is all powerful, all knowing and omnipresent so He can exercise His judgment a lot better than you can! Turn to Him with your hurt. Tell Him about it. And then leave it to Him. And don't think that He turns His face away in your time of need. It would take an entire week or more to study how God feels when His children are hurt. But you can rest in His perfect care of the issue—even if you can't see it! You are the apple of His eye, the Bride of Christ! Brides don't throw mud! Don't get your dress soiled with the dirt of bitterness or anger toward another. And if you have, let God wash you up, and move forward in forgiveness.

A very practical picture of forgiveness is found in the following statements from the wonderful woman who mentored me. In her book, *Ten Best Decisions a Woman can Make*, Pam Farrel gives a simple and straightforward definition of forgiveness. Pray through them concerning someone you need to forgive.

1. I forgive (name) _____ for (offense).
2. I admit that what was done was wrong.
3. I do not expect (name) to make up for what s/he did.
4. I will not use this offense to manipulate (name).
5. I will not use this offense to define (name).
6. I will not allow the offense to stop my personal growth.⁵

Week Five - Sending Out The Invitations

Day Five ~ Stinky Feet

We often have such high expectations for our fellow Christians and when they hurt us it can be hard to get past. During a once a month evening testimony service at our church, my husband was leading us in worship and we were singing the song *Peasant's Offering*. The song describes the work God has done in redeeming us and then proclaims that giving our all is nothing more than a peasant's offering. At the lyrics, "But You washed my feet," God gave me a very real picture of how dirty my feet were spiritually when He washed them. And now my peasant's offering was merely to turn around and do the same.

We are called to wash feet. When people hurt us it is no more than someone putting a dirty, stinky foot in our face. And based on Christ's example, what do you do with dirty feet? You wash 'em!

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Read and personalize 1 Peter 3:8-9

Matthew 5:39-48

My Reflection in His Eyes

While serving in ministry, a man in authority did some dishonest and hurtful things. I was really struggling because we had given everything to serve and it felt as though we had been betrayed. I prayed for God to grace me with a true desire to forgive and bless him. I prayed Scriptural blessings over him and his family. As I prayed, I felt God impress on my heart that the only thing I should say to him was that I was praying blessings for him and his family and that God loved him very much. He avoided me most of the time when we were in public. But one time the opportunity presented itself and God pushed the words out of my mouth. I cannot even begin to describe his reaction. He stammered something about how he liked that—that God loved him—and then walked away, seeming a bit stunned.

I could have picked up mud to sling it at him. I could have humiliated him in public. I could have done a lot of things. But I know what God has charged me with: the task of washing feet.

We are going to share eternity with a lot of people who have hurt us. We share common blood between us—the blood of Christ. We have to pursue and grab hold of forgiveness for one another.

Read and paraphrase Romans 12:14, 17-21

The word *bless* means to speak well of someone or something. When we ask God to bless someone we are asking for good things to come their way. Find blessings in the Scripture to pray over those who hurt you. And ask for God to change your heart in accordance with His Word as you pray it so that those sentiments might come from deep within your heart.

Week Five - Sending Out The Invitations

Read and paraphrase these blessings with the names or initials of someone you need to forgive and bless!

Psalm 23:1-3

Psalm 25:4-5

Proverbs 2:10-12

John 6:44

Ephesians 1:17-19

Philippians 1:9-11
