

BRIEF PERSPECTIVE ON FORGIVENESS & GRACE

Offering forgiveness can seem easy when a person asks forgiveness for something that we feel is trivial or that we conceive is not really their fault. However, it can be extremely difficult if you feel wronged by someone and even more so when they intentionally seek to hurt you; how can you forgive the man who murdered your husband or the woman who molested your son?

Our default setting is to hold on to grudges and demand justice for ourselves, but Jesus' words on the cross reflects a way of life that contrast with this attitude when he says,

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34, NIV)

He is not demanding justice for himself but is actually praying for the well being of his enemy.

Often the reason we won't forgive is because we want the person who wronged us to suffer. We believe that withholding our forgiveness and being bitter towards them will somehow punish them. We want to hold the power of justice in our own hands.

Forgiveness means surrendering this attitude to God - trusting that He is just and will do what is right.

More often than not, forgiving others brings release not only to them but to ourselves as well.

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WARMING UP

1. What things do people do that really get under your skin or make you mad?
2. What makes forgiving so hard to do? Has there been anyone you have had a hard time forgiving?

INTO THE PASSAGES

Read Matthew 18:21-35

3. Why do you think Peter asked this question (v21)?
4. According to Jesus, up to how many times should we forgive someone? Does he actually mean up to 77 times (or 490 times depending on what translation you read)?
5. If someone offended you or wronged you 77 times in the same week, do you think you could forgive them each time?
6. How is the attitude and actions of the king contrasted with the attitude and actions of the servant who owed him money?
7. How does this parable relate to us and God? (Who does the king represent? Who do the servants represent?) Why should we forgive others? (See also Colossians 3:13)
8. What does verse 35 mean? If we don't forgive others does that mean we are not forgiven by God?

MOVING FORWARD

Forgiveness is not something we find easy to do, especially when someone has really hurt us. We need to be careful not to condemn people, who are struggling to forgive someone, or make them feel rejected by God. At the same time we need to be open to God, understanding that He has forgiven us a lot more than we care to acknowledge or possibly realise and that we are called to follow his example of grace in forgiving others.

Forgiveness can be a process where over a period of time you need to surrender your bitterness/hatred/anger to God again and again, trusting that He knows best. True forgiveness comes when we can pray blessing for the person we've been wronged by.

If you need to forgive someone, start praying for them; for their well being. Pray also for God to give you strength to surrender the desire for justice to him knowing that He is truly just.

LIFE TOGETHER

Colossians 3:12-14 illustrates how we as God's people should live. Being able to "bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances [we] may have against one another" is a demonstration of God's grace that will speak volumes to people looking in.

Are there people in church you have an issue with that needs to be resolved - if so ask for help and prayer from a friend to be able to be reconciled with that person.

How can we live as a community that demonstrates grace?

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These notes are primarily for the Into the Passage portion, and are to be used just as guidelines or commentary notes. Most of them are my own thoughts, so take that with a grain of salt. Let the Word of God lead you to truth, not these notes.

INTO THE PASSAGES

Read Matthew 18:21-35

3. Why do you think Peter asked this question (v21)?

There isn't any clear indication why he asked this question. Some commentators speculate that perhaps some of the other disciples may have been envious of his perceived special position in the group (the way he spoke on their behalf all the time) and they were saying something against him.

Whatever the case it does seem that Peter was continuously being wronged/hurt by an individual or party and that he wanted to know how long he had to keep forgiving them; surely there must be a limit to the amount of grace you can offer?

4. According to Jesus, up to how many times should we forgive someone? Does he actually mean up to 77 times (or 490 times depending on what translation you read)?

Jesus doesn't mean a literal 77 times. It means that we keep forgiving as long as it is required. He then goes on to tell the parable to help demonstrate his point.

5. If someone offended you or wronged you 77 times in the same week, do you think you could forgive them each time?

The king had compassion the servant did not.

6. How is the attitude and actions of the king contrasted with the attitude and actions of the servant who owed him money?
7. How does this parable relate to us and God? (Who does the king represent? Who do the servants represent?) Why should we forgive others? (See also Colossians 3:13)

The answer to the previous question might seem obvious (The king had compassion the servant did not) but do we get the point of the parable? We can so easily be like the servant not realising that our own great debt has been written off and go around treating others the way we ourselves don't want to be treated. Bert said in his sermon, "we want grace for ourselves but justice for everyone else."

We should forgive because such great forgiveness/grace has been shown to us.

8. What does verse 35 mean? If we don't forgive other does that mean we are not forgiven by God?

We see from reading the whole of scripture that forgiveness for sins comes from believing in Jesus, and accepting the forgiveness he bought for us when he died in our place on the cross.

God's forgiveness to us is not conditional on our actions but forgiveness brings a releasing and this verse refers to this. 'The release that we give to others when we forgive them is the same release we receive from God' (paraphrase from the sermon).