

## Lesson 5: How can we forgive others?

### Objectives:

- Discuss what forgiveness is and is not
- Explain how to forgive others – the process
- Explain why we need to forgive others, especially as Christians
- Explain the process of true repentance
- Identify those we need to forgive or ask forgiveness from

**A forgiveness story** – after domestic abuse. Why did the wife have trouble forgiving her husband? What do you think about the Pastor's wife's explanation of forgiveness?

### What is forgiveness and what it is not? Quiz – T or F

- Forgiveness is a process that may take time
- Forgiveness is not dependent on the offender apologizing first or changing his/her behavior
- Forgiveness is not the same thing as reconciliation
- Forgiveness does not mean letting the offender hurt us or other innocent people again
- Forgiveness is not saying the offense did not hurt or did not matter
- Forgiveness is not acting as if the event did not happen
- Forgiveness does not mean that we will forget what happened
- Forgiveness does not mean that we must completely trust the person again
- Forgiveness does not mean that there are no consequences for the action

### How can we forgive others?

If we think forgiving is too hard for us to do, we are right. But God can give us the strength to do all things (Phil. 4:13).

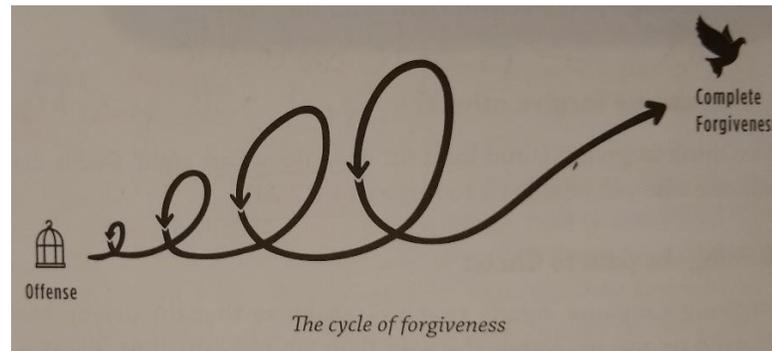
**Be honest about the pain and bring it to Jesus** – we do not minimize the pain but, like the psalmist, we are honest with God about what we are feeling (Psalm 6:2-3, 6-7). Our pain may last a long time, but we continue to bring it to Jesus, who understands the pain of being wronged by others. As Jesus heals us, then we will be able to forgive those who have hurt us.

**Release the offender to God without waiting for them to apologize** – often, we are unwilling to forgive until the offender has apologized to us, or until they have changed their behavior. However, Jesus and Stephen asked God to forgive the people who were killing them (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:59-60). When we forgive, we release the offender and our wish for their harm to God. Instead of paying the person back, we put them into God's hands (Romans 12:17-19). We let go of our own right to judge and allow God to do so, knowing that he will judge with justice and righteousness (Psalm 9:8).

**Allow time for the process** – Forgiveness does not happen all at once. We decide to forgive, but sometimes as we remember the offense, we go back to feeling bitter. When this happens, we need to continue to take the pain to Jesus and reaffirm our commitment to forgive again.

The commitment to forgive often comes before we experience any feelings of forgiveness – sometimes long before. Like the bird in the diagram below, we may circle back many times in our hearts toward the “cage” of the offense. As we forgive again and again, eventually we will feel less pain when we

remember the event. Just like the bird flies higher and farther from the cage, toward freedom, we move increasingly toward freedom each time we renew our commitment to forgive.



**Let the offender face the consequences of their actions** – if wrong has been done, someone may have to face justice and punishment, and possibly pay back.

**Determine if and when you are able to trust the offender again** - If we forgive someone, it does not mean that we trust him/her immediately. Trust has been broken and will take time to rebuild. Little by little, if behavior change is seen, we can begin to trust him/her again. But it may take a long time before we can trust completely. In some cases, it may never be safe to trust the person again. Example of Joseph and trusting his brothers again (Genesis 42 – 44).

Forgiveness can open the way for our relationship with a person to be restored. It may cause the offender to repent and reconcile. Even if we want a relationship to be restored, it requires action by both parties.

Forgiveness is a decision to release our right to pay back the offender. It is an ongoing process of reaffirming our decision to let go each time we remember the offense. It does not require us to trust the person again nor release them from the consequences of the offense.

### **Why should we forgive other people?**

**Rope Skit** – Choose an offense against Sam or Samantha – bind the person who offends with a rope or long cloth. Imagine what happens when he/she tries to take a walk; eat supper; go to work; prays; goes for a hike. Can tie someone else on as well if another hurt/loss/offense; add several people to demonstrate the difficulty of carrying around the bitterness wherever they go. He/she can't escape his thoughts and feelings about the person and offense. Forgiveness is a gift that we have received from God, and one that we should also pass along to others (Matthew 18:21-35).

**Read Ephesians 4: 26-27 and 31-32; Hebrews 12:12-15.**

**Forgiveness frees us from anger and bitterness.** If we do not forgive an offense, we become slaves of anger and bitterness which can begin to destroy us; we can suffer with headaches, stomach ulcers, or heart problems. We may become violent and evil, just like the one who offended us. Forgiveness releases us from all this. This bitterness can be passed on to our children, resulting in revenge and violence between groups for generations. Only forgiveness can break this cycle of revenge.

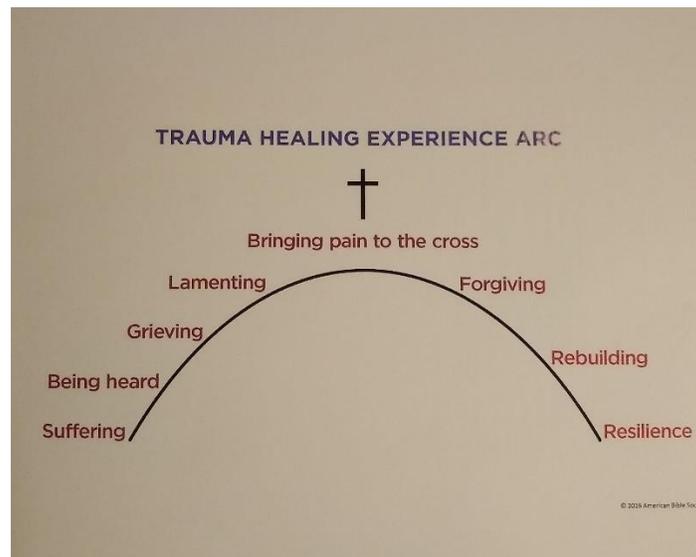
**Forgiveness shows that we understand how much God has forgiven us.** When we understand how much we owe God because of our sins, and how he has forgiven our debt through Jesus, we will want to extend the same forgiveness to others. Share in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:12).

### **What if we are the ones who have caused the offense?**

- 1) How can we repent?** We allow God's Spirit to show us how much our sin hurts him and others; this may make us sad and even weep (James 4:8-9). 2 Corinthians 7:10 NLT - "For the kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation. There's no regret for that kind of sorrow. But worldly sorrow, which lacks repentance, results in spiritual death." We take responsibility for what we have done and clearly state our sin; and we listen to the person we have hurt express the pain we have caused. We seek God's forgiveness of our sin and accept it as well as asking forgiveness of those we have offended without defending ourselves, blaming them or demanding that they trust us again right away (James 5:16). If we have repented, we will show it by the way we act.
- 2) How can we forgive ourselves?** Some people continue to feel guilt, shame, and regret even after doing all they should to repent and make restoration. If our feelings make it seem that God is far away, we can talk to God about this. We can ask him to help us experience the truth that he has forgiven us and has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west (1 John 1:9; Psalm 103:2-3, 12). Sometimes we will need other people to help us with this process, like a pastor, a counselor, or a trusted friend. The process may take time and the roots of our struggle can be deep. Gradually, our feelings can change to match the truth that we know in our head.

Sometimes end with a Forgiveness Ceremony.

### **Looking Back and Looking Forward**



Healing from heart wounds is a process. We have learned several parts of that process – remembering God's love, expressing our pain through words and art, grieving, lamenting, bringing our pain to the cross, and forgiving. When our wounds are deep, we may need to use the things we have learned

several times and allow time for God to continue healing our hearts. These are also things we can do when we face new difficulties in our lives. As we practice these things, we will be able to rebuild our lives and be better able to face suffering in the future. This is called RESILIENCE. We will have good days and bad days – it is all part of the journey. And as we learned in our time together, we can talk to God at every step.

Small Group Sharing – **How does God use suffering in our lives?**

- God comforts us in our suffering so we can comfort others (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)
- God works so that good comes out of evil (Genesis 50:18-20; Romans 8:28, Romans 11:33-36)
- God uses suffering to strengthen our faith (Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2-4)
- God uses suffering to point us to the new heavens and new earth (Revelations 21:1-5)

Discuss options for a way forward. Close in prayer.