

Forgiveness

Previewing the Issue

Jesus had a unique way of telling stories that would capture the human attention, and focus it on the issue at hand. Here we find Him addressing the issue of forgiveness.

“The kingdom of God is like a king who decided to square accounts with his servants. As he got under way, one servant was brought before him who had run up a debt of a hundred thousand dollars. He couldn’t pay up, so the king ordered the man, along with his wife, children, and goods, to be auctioned off at the slave market.

“The poor wretch threw himself at the king’s feet and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ Touched by his plea, the king let him off, erasing the debt.

“The servant was no sooner out of the room when he came upon one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars. He seized him by the throat and demanded, ‘Pay up. Now!’

“The poor wretch threw himself down and begged, ‘Give me a chance and I’ll pay it all back.’ But he wouldn’t do it. He had him arrested and put in jail until the debt was paid. When the other servants saw this going on, they were outraged and brought a detailed report to the king.

“The king summoned the man and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave your entire debt when you begged me for mercy. Shouldn’t you be compelled to be merciful to your fellow servant who asked for mercy?’ The king was furious and put the screws to the man until he paid back his entire debt.”

Probing the Scriptures

☐ What about the above story irritates you? Why?

☐ If you were a witness to this, what would your reaction be?

The above story comes straight from the pages of the Bible. It is a parable. A completely fictional story told by Jesus to illustrate a life point. Often times we find ourselves in these parables.

☐ If you were to identify with one of these characters, who might you be? How would you compare yourself?

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☐ Which character do you believe represents God? In What ways?

☐ In what way have you been forgiven a debt that you could not repay?

☐ How should that affect your view of God? Of your fellow human beings?

Jesus tells this story in response to a question posed by one of his followers.

Matthew 18:21-22

At that point Peter got up the nerve to ask, "Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?"

Jesus replied, "Seven! Hardly. Try seventy times seven."

☐ Have you ever had anyone wrong you in the same way seven times? What was it? How did you feel?

☐ Would it be hard or easy for you to forgive them seven times? Why?

☐ Was Jesus impressed with Peter's generous offer? Why do you say that?

- ▣ What do you think Peter's response would have been to Jesus' suggestion to forgive someone 490 times (7 X 70)?

- ▣ How many times have you let God down in one particular area? What is the area? How do you respond?

- ▣ Does it bring you comfort to know that he has commanded us to forgive so generously? Why?

Perusing other Pages

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When we are wronged in some way, our natural inclination is to fight back, to get even. Needless to say, this reaction, though thoroughly human, is almost always in error. "Forgiveness," said Epictetus, "is better than revenge, for forgiveness is the sign of a gentle nature, but revenge is the sign of a savage nature."

A dramatic example is the experience of a Hungarian refugee—to protect his privacy we'll call him Joseph Kudar. Kudar was a successful young lawyer in Hungary before the uprisings in that country in 1956. A strong believer in freedom for his country, he fought Soviet tanks in the streets of Budapest with his friends. When the uprising failed, he was forced to flee the country.

When Kudar arrived in the U.S. he had no money, no job, no friends. He was, however, well educated; he spoke and wrote several languages, including English. For several months he tried to get a job in a law office, but because of his lack of familiarity with American law, he received only polite refusals.

Finally, it occurred to him that with his knowledge of language he might be able to get a job with an import-export company. He selected one such company and wrote a letter to the owner. Two weeks later he received an answer, but was hardly prepared for the vindictiveness of the man's reply. Among other things, it said that even if they did need someone, they wouldn't hire him because he couldn't even write good English. Crushed, Kudar's hurt quickly turned to anger. What right did this rude, arrogant man have to tell him he couldn't write the language! The man was obviously crude and uneducated -- his letter was chock-full of grammatical errors!

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Kudar sat down and, in the white heat of anger, wrote a scathing reply, calculated to rip the man to shreds. When he'd finished, however, as he was reading it over, his anger began to drain away. Then he remembered the Biblical admonition, "A soft answer turneth away wrath." No, he wouldn't mail the letter. Maybe the man was right. English was not his native tongue. Maybe he did need further study in it. Possibly this man had done him a favor by making him realize he did need to work harder on perfecting his English.

Kudar tore up the letter and wrote another. This time he apologized for the previous letter, explained his situation, and thanked the man for pointing out his need for further study. Two days later he received a phone call inviting him to New York for an interview. A week later he went to work for them as a correspondent. Later, Joseph Kudar became vice president and executive officer of the company, destined to succeed the man he had hated and sought revenge against for a fleeting moment -- and then resisted.

Bits & Pieces, March 31, 1994, pp. 12-15.

Processing Together

- Begin your group time by making a list of things that only God can do.

- Now make a list of those things that God does that we also can do.

- Did forgiveness make that list? You've heard the old expression: "To forgive is Divine." What is meant by that expression?

- Are there times when forgiveness is NOT the right thing to do?

- Do you believe that there is a difference between forgiving someone for the way they've treated you, and disassociating yourself from that person?

☐ How do you draw that distinction?

In Christianity, we find our basis for forgiveness in the character and makeup of God. We forgive because God first forgave us. Our forgiveness though did not come without a price. God did not merely pass over our wrongdoing. He made sure that justice was served. He dealt with our offenses by sending Jesus Christ into the world. By Christ living the life no man or woman could live (a life of perfection), he became the only person that didn't need forgiveness from God. And he became a perfect substitute for the human race. God is now able to forgive us, because our sins have been dealt with by Christ's death on the cross.

Christians have a ritual that we have participated in for the past 2000 years to commemorate the death of Christ. You are invited as a group to participate in this practice.

Communion

☐ The Bread

- ◆ Reading of the selected Bible passage (Isaiah 53:3-6)
- ◆ Offer a prayer of praise to God
- ◆ Break the bread and pass the elements
- ◆ Read 1 Corinthians 11:24
- ◆ Take the elements

☐ The Wine

- ◆ Reading of the selected Bible passage (Matthew 27:33-42)
- ◆ Offer a prayer of gratitude to God
- ◆ Pass the cup
- ◆ Read 1 Corinthians 11:25
- ◆ Drink the elements

☐ The Affirmation

- ◆ Reading of the selected Bible passage (Mark 15:33-39)
- ◆ Pray together in a group as though you were in conversation with God and one another

Putting it into Practice

☐ Is there something in your life that you need to seek forgiveness from God for?

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- ▣ Is there someone in your life that God is asking you to forgive? A friend... a parent... a spouse? What is the issue? Ask the group to hold you accountable to handle it this week.

- ▣ Is there someone in your life who you need to go to and ask them to forgive you?
