

SESSION 2

FORGIVENESS

Session #2 Teaching: Steps Toward Forgiveness

Matthew 6:14 tells us *“For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.”* Forgiveness (or lack of) can be a HUGE block toward you finding your full identity in Jesus Christ. It is NOT easy, as you attempt to forgive those who have hurt you. You can often let the pain and lies of your past define your actions moving forward. Remember, your actions should come from how God identifies you. When you allow your pain and past experiences define you, you live with the identity of victim and live in unforgiveness. Instead, choose to live in who God has said you are. Forgiveness is not a simple process and entails a lot more work. Today, we will cover the continuous 8-step process of forgiving, as we need to allow it to grow in us to have victory in Christ in the long run!

Eight Steps Toward Forgiveness

1. Forgiveness should not be confused with forgetting. Forgiveness is choosing to no longer allow the pain of the past to define you or cripple you. Your past pain can be something to learn from, not part of who you are.
2. Forgiveness is your choice. Sometimes people say that they simply CAN'T forgive, but in reality, they WON'T forgive. God requires you to forgive; it is something you can do, because God wouldn't ask if you couldn't. Forgiveness seems to go against your sense of what is right and fair, so you hold on to your anger, punishing people over and over in your mind for the pain they've caused you, but you are told by God never to take your own revenge!
3. Forgive others so YOU can be FREE.
4. Don't wait for others to ask for forgiveness before forgiving them. They may never do so.
5. Forgiveness must come from your heart. Allow God to bring to the surface the painful emotions you feel toward those who have hurt you. Too often we're afraid of the pain associated with this process so we bury them deep down inside us. The deeper you push them, the more you allow it to define who you are God bring them up so He can heal the hurts.

6. Forgiveness is choosing not to hold sin against the offender. It is common for bitter people to bring up past issues with those who have hurt them. They want the offender to feel bad, but you must free them as you free yourself and let go of the past. Forgiveness is allowing justice to take place, while freeing yourself from having to be the judge, jury, and lawyer.

7. Forgiveness requires you to have mercy on others. Just as God shows YOU mercy and cancels YOUR debts, He commands YOU to do the same.

8. Focus on forgiving people for what they did and resist judging their character. Remember, how you forgive others is how God will forgive you.

Discuss or Ponder and Review Scripture:

•Do you hold on to the anger, bitterness & resentment from YOUR past? Discuss in your group.

•How do your offenses keep you from deeper relationships with Christ and others? Discuss in your group.

•Are YOU willing to forgive YOU? What does that even look like? Discuss in your group.

Prayer time:

Pray on your own, or with your group about forgiveness. Let God bring people and any frustrations, bitterness or offenses to your mind that you need to get beyond. Write them down in your journal. We also often we hold things against ourselves, punishing ourselves for wrong choices we've made in the past. Write "myself" at the bottom of your list so you can forgive yourself.

For each thing on your list above, pray the following prayer:

Lord, I choose to forgive (name of person) for (say what they did to hurt you) even though it made me feel (share the painful feelings).

When you are finished forgiving that person for all the offenses that come to your mind, and after you have honestly expressed how you felt, conclude with the following:

Lord, I choose not to hold any of these things against (name) any longer. I choose to cancel all debts owed me. I thank You for setting me free from the bondage of my bitterness toward (name). I now ask You to bless (name), in the name of Jesus, Amen.