

discipleship essentials

Essentials for Spiritual Leadership Study Guide

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

LESSON 1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF FORGIVENESS

INTRODUCTION

This lesson is part of a Disciple Essentials module titled Forgiveness and Reconciliation. It can be difficult to accept God's forgiveness in our lives and extend forgiveness to others. Forgiving others goes against our natural inclination. But as we allow God to change our hearts and minds, we can experience reconciliation with God and with one another. This module explores the Biblical foundations of forgiveness, the process required for reconciliation, and how to promote living at peace with one another. It also examines forgiveness as it may be required between individuals or members of a community.

The Study Guide is intended for an individual to look deeper into a specific lesson on their own. The lessons can be used in conjunction with other Discipleship Essentials materials, such as the video and audio productions found on www.discipleshipessentials.org.



FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

LESSON 1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF FORGIVENESS

WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

This lesson examines forgiveness as taught in the Bible. This includes God forgiving us, His command that we forgive one another, and the reasons why forgiveness is needed.

JUST SO YOU KNOW...

When someone hurts us, forgiveness seems impossible. When the pain of an incident or a broken relationship just won't go away, it feels as though we are being hurt over and over again. And yet, Jesus taught so much about forgiveness! This lesson isn't easy. As you read about forgiveness, you might find God brings to mind someone you need to forgive, or someone you need to ask forgiveness of! If you have been through difficult circumstances and have yet to truly forgive those who hurt you, you may need time to fully respond to what you read about in God's Word. Pray before starting that God will make you aware of how you can respond with forgiveness, and demonstrate gratitude for how you have been forgiven.

GETTING STARTED

1. Are there limitations to what you are willing to forgive? What could someone do to you that you would find impossible to forgive?

2. Has God forgiven all of your sins? How do you know you have been forgiven by God?



STUDY

❖ **WHAT IS FORGIVENESS?** The Bible can be summarized as the story of God’s relationship with His creation. This relationship between us and God has been strained and broken by sin. Sins are intentional transgressions (doing wrong) against another, and against God. They are not simply mistakes or acts of ignorance; therefore, people are without excuse. This sin and broken relationship is the source of all evil in the world today, which God offers to restore by means of forgiveness. In order for us to extend forgiveness to others, we must understand what forgiveness is.

- How would you define ‘forgiveness’?

Some ideas about what forgiveness is according to God’s Word:

- **Forgiveness means Release:** The simplest definition of forgiveness is to give up our right to hurt someone because they have hurt us. We release our claim on vengeance and do not hold the offence against them any longer. Even though there may be consequences to their sin, we release the offending party, freeing them from moral debt to us.
- **Forgiveness begins Restoration:** When we have a good relationship with someone that is later broken by an offense, forgiveness is required in order to restore the relationship. It is repairing something broken to a state of renewal. It is welcoming someone back into friendship with us.
- **Forgiveness is not the same as Reconciliation:** While you can choose to forgive someone who hasn’t asked for it and who may not even be in your life any longer, reconciliation requires two people to mutually come together to fully repair a broken relationship. Forgiveness would be the first step in that direction.
- **Forgiveness Requires a Change:** When we extend forgiveness to someone, it requires a change in our behaviour, not just the words, ‘I forgive you’.

Read Luke 6:27-28. Jesus identifies 4 things that we must do when we truly forgive someone. What are they?



Jesus tells us to love – which requires that we put someone before ourselves through supportive actions, to do good – which requires acts of kindness, service and mercy, to bless and not curse, which requires us to say good about the offending party rather than bad things or wishing punishment, and finally to pray for God to forgive them for the restoration of relationship.

- What are some ways that you could demonstrate love, do good, bless and pray for someone who has offended you?

Read Matthew 5: 38-38. Answer the following questions.

- What are some culturally acceptable ways that we try to harm those who harm us?

- What change in behaviour was Jesus asking His disciples to make, especially as it relates to our enemies and those who hurt us?

- Do our enemies require our forgiveness? If they are forgiven, are they still our enemies?

- Consider all that God’s Word says about forgiving others. Read the following verses and write down what you learn:

Romans 8:29	
2 Corinthians 3:18	



Romans 12:2	
Colossians 3:9-10	

- ❖ **GOD'S FORGIVENESS OF US:** God desires that His creation is restored to relationship with Him, and that the bond between Creator and creation that was broken by sin be restored. This comes through His forgiveness. When we understand the forgiveness God offers us, we are able to forgive others.
- **God's forgiveness comes at great cost:** Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. During Old Testament history, forgiveness could only be achieved through specific burnt offerings. Then Jesus Christ came into the world to offer His life as a sacrifice for our sin. The cost of forgiveness was immense (Hebrews 9:22-26).
 - **God's forgiveness is something we all need:** Not one of us can claim to be without sin. Every person alive is in deep need of forgiveness, whether or not they are aware of it (Romans 3:23).
 - **God's forgiveness addresses our sin problem:** Regardless of what we think our greatest problem in life is, our sin problem is greater. It has broken our relationship with God and is destroying our relationship with others. Only God's forgiveness can fix our sin problem (1 John 1:9).
 - **God's forgiveness addresses our guilt problem:** When we are aware of our sin, we carry a weight of guilt that can stop us from productively and joyfully achieving our purposes. God's forgiveness brings peace, allowing us to live free of our guilt (Romans 5:1).
 - **God's forgiveness is not automatic:** Forgiveness is freely given at the moment of salvation, through confession and repentance. But for the Christian, fellowship with God is hindered by sin, though our salvation is secure. Ongoing forgiveness and fellowship with God is dependent upon regularly confessing our sins (1 John 1:9).
 - **God's forgiveness is eternal:** This forgiveness is not temporary, nor does it occur only once. It is as eternal as God Himself (John 5:24, Acts 2:38).
 - **God's forgiveness is for our past:** When we ask for forgiveness for past sins, God's forgiveness applies to all that we have done (Micah 7:19).
 - **God's forgiveness is for our present:** When we sin, we know we can ask God immediately for forgiveness because Jesus Christ has paid the penalty (1 John 2:1-2).



- **God's forgiveness is for our future:** Even though we should avoid sin, we will find ourselves in need of God's grace and forgiveness in the future. We can be sure God's forgiveness will be there for us if we ask Him (Hebrews 7:25).
- **God's forgiveness can be trusted:** We can trust God's forgiveness because we can trust His character. God is unchanging, so when He forgives us, our redemption is secure. It is based on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and nothing can undo it! (Hebrews 9:11-12).
- How would you summarize God's forgiveness for us?

❖ **FORGIVING OTHERS AS WE HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN:** Now that we have seen that God intends us to forgive others, and freely offers us his forgiveness it is time to examine how one is dependent on the other.

- **Read Matthew 18:21-35.** Peter thought he understood Jesus teaching on love and forgiveness. The tradition of Rabbis taught that one should forgive an offender three times. Peter thought that extending forgiveness to seven times was showing generosity.
- What did Jesus say in response to Peter's question?

- In Jesus story, who was taking forgiveness lightly? How did he demonstrate a lack of gratitude?

- What lesson can we learn from this story? How are we like the servant whos debt is forgiven?



- ❖ **WHY FORGIVENESS IS DIFFICULT:** Even though we know we must forgive others, it can be incredibly difficult and take time before we can do it. Some offences are very painful to recollect. We need to be aware of the barriers to forgiveness that could stand in our way. Here are some possible difficulties we may encounter.
 - **Concern that the wrongdoer will escape the consequences of their actions, or will not be punished**
 - To forgive is not necessarily to free someone from the natural consequences of their actions, but it is to release them from your judgement and entrust them to God's. But God teaches us that it is not our place to carry out vengeance and retribution because we are all sinners and would only judge imperfectly. God is perfect, and we must let Him judge and deliver consequences and punishments as He so desires.
 - Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30, 1 Thessalonians 5:15
 - **Concern that we will have to lie and pretend we weren't hurt deeply**
 - Seeking forgiveness and reconciliation is necessary because we were hurt, and/or a relationship was damaged. When we discuss how we have been hurt and the offender repents, we must offer forgiveness. Pretending we were not hurt or that there was no offence is not being truthful.
 - Luke 17:3-4
 - **Concern that forgiving is giving permission to continue in sin**
 - When we release someone from their debt or let go of our right to retribution for what they have done, we must be careful not to dismiss the seriousness or the impact of sin. Forgiveness is not saying that what happened was acceptable; rather it is choosing to stop the cycle of anger it arouses in us. It takes courage and character to forgive, and rather than being permissive of evil, forgiveness stands for what is good. We must identify, confront and hold others accountable for sinful behaviour.
 - Matthew 18:15-17
 - **Concern that forgiveness will allow us to be hurt again:**
 - Jesus taught that forgiveness is powerful. But it can be difficult to allow someone back into our life who once hurt us. It takes an act of grace to put ourselves in a position where we might be hurt again. If we forgive the offender but they remain unrepentant, we should pray for them and commit the situation to God. But when someone asks forgiveness of us, we must give it.
 - Matthew 5: 38-42
- ❖ **WHY DO WE FORGIVE?** God does not want us to be enslaved by our own emotions. When we let go of resentment, hate, and hostility, we are free to love and help others in their relationship with God. We can move on with our lives and live in freedom. Forgiveness restores broken



relationships, and sets free those in emotional bondage. God's best plan for our lives includes living a life free of anger and hatred towards others.

- From what you have learned in this lesson – what are the reasons it is necessary for us to forgive others?

- Consider whether there is someone you need to work on forgiving, or you need to ask forgiveness from.

SUMMARY

- ❖ Forgiveness is the act of giving up our right to hurt others because they have hurt us. It means releasing them from debt, restoration of relationship, and requires a change in behaviour on our part.
- ❖ God offers us forgiveness for our sins when we are repentant. We can trust that once we have repented, and asked for forgiveness God will no longer hold our sins against us and our relationship with God can be restored.
- ❖ We must forgive others as God has forgiven us.
- ❖ Forgiving others is difficult for many reasons, and we must understand our hesitations and address them when seeking forgiveness.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. There are many issues which may make it difficult to forgive another person. What would you say to someone who asked you how to forgive:

- someone who has died?

- someone who may hurt you again?

- someone who has broken your trust?

- someone who refuses to talk to you?

- someone who is not sorry for what they have done?

2. When we are offended or abused, our natural response is to protect ourselves. Sometimes we use the past sins of others as a weapon – bringing them up over and over in order to hurt, or try to shield ourselves from future harm by insulating ourselves from new relationships. Both of these responses can be harmful. Read [Psalm 91](#) together. Compile a list of the dangers mentioned, and the ways God promises to be our protector.