

Small Group Discussion Guide – “You Asked for It” Pt. 3: Forgiveness & Offense – Freedom from Bitterness Without Compromising Truth

Big Idea: Forgiveness is choosing to release resentment and personal vengeance to God. It does not mean forgetting, excusing, restoring trust immediately, or abandoning healthy boundaries.

Key Passage: Matthew 18:23–35

Icebreaker

Why do you think forgiveness can be so difficult, especially when we've been deeply hurt?

Transition: “Tonight we're looking at why Jesus calls us to forgive, what biblical forgiveness actually is, and how we can forgive without pretending the offense didn't happen.”

Why Should We Forgive?

Read: Matthew 18:23–35

- **What stands out to you most about the contrast between the mercy the servant received and the mercy he was unwilling to give?**

Read Colossians 3:13

- **According to Matthew 18:23-35 and Colossians 3:13, how should God's forgiveness of us affect our willingness to forgive others?**

Read: Hebrews 12:15

- **How can bitterness affect more than just the person who was hurt?**
- **What is the difference between experiencing anger over an offense and allowing that anger to become bitterness?**

Leader takeaway – We forgive because:

- **God has forgiven us.**
- **Bitterness affects others.**
- **Bitterness ultimately affects us.**

What Forgiveness Is—and Isn't

Forgiveness is NOT:

- **Forgetting** – We may remember what happened without continuing to live under its control.
- **Excusing** – Forgiveness doesn't mean saying the offense was acceptable.
- **Automatically trusting** – Forgiveness and trust are different. Trust is rebuilt through demonstrated trustworthiness.

Read: Ephesians 4:26–27

- **Why is it important to distinguish forgiveness from forgetting, excusing, and trusting?**
- **Can someone genuinely forgive while still maintaining healthy boundaries? Why?**

Key principle: Forgiveness does not compromise truth.

Someone can say: “What happened was wrong, and I choose not to allow that wrong to control my heart.”

How Do We Forgive?

Review these six steps from the sermon:

- 1. Decide to trust and obey God.** – Forgiveness begins with a choice, not necessarily a feeling.
- 2. Honestly appraise the offense.** – Ask: “What happened, and how did it affect me?”
- 3. Confess bitterness or resentment to God.** – Be honest about what is happening in your heart.
- 4. Give the offense and offender to God.** – Romans 12:19 – “Never take your own revenge... ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”
- 5. Bless the offender.** – This does not necessarily mean returning to a close relationship. Sometimes blessing happens from a healthy distance.
- 6. Repeat.** – Sometimes old hurts resurface. Choosing forgiveness again doesn't mean the first decision wasn't genuine.

Discuss:

- Which of these six steps do you think is easiest for you? Which is hardest?
- What does it practically look like to “give the offense and the offender to God”?
- Why is forgiveness ultimately an act of trust in God?

Personal Application

Give everyone a quiet moment to reflect. **No one needs to share anything they aren't comfortable sharing.**

Ask participants to consider:

- Is there an offense I'm still carrying?
- Am I confusing forgiveness with trusting the person again?
- Is there a boundary I need to establish?
- Have I surrendered my desire for revenge to God?
- Is there someone I need to forgive?

Ask the group: What is one practical step you can take this week toward freedom from bitterness?

Examples:

- Pray honestly about the offense.
- Forgive someone specifically before God.
- Stop rehearsing the offense.
- Release the desire for revenge.
- Establish a healthy boundary.
- Seek wise counsel.
- Ask someone for forgiveness.

Closing Prayer: “Father, thank You for forgiving us and showing us mercy. Help us forgive those who have hurt us. Give us courage to acknowledge the truth about what happened without allowing bitterness to control our hearts. Help us distinguish forgiveness from forgetting, excusing, and trusting. Give us wisdom to establish healthy boundaries where necessary. We release our desire for revenge and place justice in Your hands. Heal the wounds we carry and help us walk in the freedom that comes through forgiveness. In Jesus' name, amen.”

Final Thought

Forgiveness doesn't say the offense didn't matter. It says the offense doesn't get to control me, and I trust God with justice.